

POLITY

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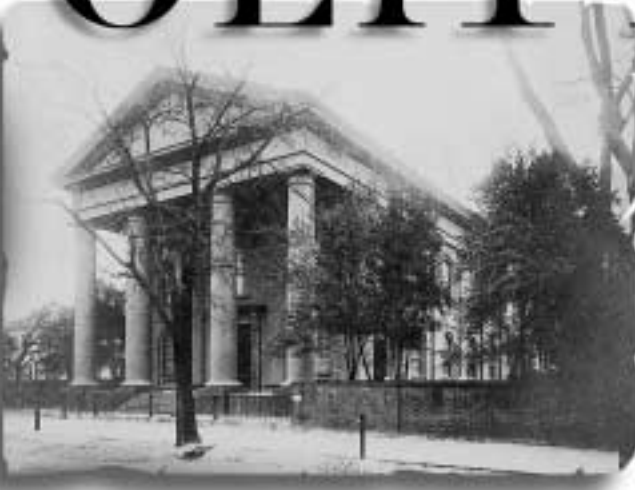
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A Collection of Historic Baptist Documents

POLITY



**Biblical Arguments on How
to Conduct Church Life**

Edited by
MARK DEVER





Church order and the ceremonial of religion,
are less important than a new heart;
and in the view of some,
any laborious investigation of questions
respecting them may appear to be needless and unprofitable.

But we know,
from the Holy Scriptures,
that Christ gave commands on these subjects,
and we cannot refuse to obey.

Love prompts our obedience;
and love prompts also the search which may be necessary
to ascertain his will.

Let us, therefore, prosecute the investigations which are before us,
with a fervent prayer,
that the Holy Spirit,
who guides into all truth,
may assist us to learn the will of him whom we
supremely love and adore.



—*John Leadley Dagg*

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Editor's Preface

In this book, we begin again a conversation. We rejoin a discussion largely abandoned a century ago. It is a discussion about what the Bible teaches about how we as Christians should organize our lives together in churches.

For years, many have assumed that the Bible has nothing to say about such matters. Others have simply forsaken careful investigation and argument about these matters, preferring instead simply to do what others do, or what is popular, or whatever seems to work.

But generations before us believed and preached and argued and published differently. They believed that God had revealed in Scripture all that we need for every aspect of our Christian lives, not least of which is the life we are called to live together in our churches.

This collection of books can be read in different ways. It can be read as a whole, in order, watching something of the chronological development of arguments. It can be read in its various parts, finding one of the manuals of particular interest, or use. Some who are pastors may even decide to reprint portions and use them in your own church. This volume can be read through the indices in the back, finding a certain topic, or a biblical passage.

This volume is to be a treasury for researchers and for pastors, for professors and for church leaders. Volumes out of print for a century or more are again made available, voices long gone again lifted, arguments once common returning to instruct the minds and burden the hearts of new generations of readers.

The volume is a collection of ten works printed from 1697 to 1874. They are arranged in chronological order, with each author's life treated briefly by Greg Wills in his introductory essay, and with the article from William Cathcart's 1881 *Baptist Encyclopedia* inserted as a kind of contemporary introduction before the piece itself.

This book is an attempt to reintroduce some old discussions in our midst. It is a collection largely of 19th century musings on what the Bible teaches about the church, and how that should be practically worked out in our midst. The authors do not all agree with each other on every point nor do we agree with them in every particular (W. B. Johnson, for example, clearly writes under the social prejudices of his day). All these authors, though, are agreed that the Bible should instruct us on how we live out our lives together

in churches, in everything from admitting members to practicing corrective discipline.

We have chosen to reprint not one, or even two, but ten documents, stretching over a period of almost 200 years, but concentrating heavily on works from the first three-quarters of the 19th century, when Baptist churches were flourishing, along with printed arguments about how they were to be run. Manuals which are currently in print (e.g., Brown, Pendleton, Dagg) have not been included. Instead, an effort has been made to find and incorporate other earlier books and treatises which were influential in shaping the church life of an earlier generation.

This work has been in constant danger of falling between two stools—of trying to be serviceable for the purposes both of the professor and of the pastor, of the academy and of the church. The concern for academic rigor has encouraged our reading and re-reading, carefully selecting and historically introducing the pieces included. And yet our over-riding concern for the recovery of these treasures for the church has led us to some other decisions. Some spelling has been modernized. We have re-typeset, and thus re-paginated all the works. We have produced an amalgamated table of contents, and a set of indices to the volume as a whole. Our desire is that the professor and the student would find this a helpful compendium; the pastor and church member an enlightening conversation partner in Biblical explorations. Whether we have achieved either of these goals it is up to the reader to determine.

In an undertaking so large it is impossible to thank all of those who have aided the effort. This effort has been financed by a few anonymous contributors, and by a partnership of three churches: the First Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, Alabama; Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D. C.; and Cornerstone Baptist Church, Elgin, Texas.

A number of people have been particularly helpful in thinking through this collection and making it a reality. Chris Vizas, Rhea Thornton, Tom Harrison, Tom Ascol, Jim Elliff, Bruce Keisling, Sean Lucas, Tom Nettles and Paul Roberts have all provided needed assistance. The other modern authors—Greg Wills and Al Mohler—have been my conversation partners on these matters for the better part of two decades. Greg Gilbert and Shannon Mitchell labored diligently over the manuscript to insure accuracy and readability. Rachel Croft provided needed faithful staff support. Finally, a special word of thanks must be given to Matt Schmucker, the director of the Center for Church Reform, who has done everything from edit copy to help find finances for the project to help see this vision of the church lived out at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C.

May God always be reforming all our churches according to the Word of God, to the glory of God alone. Amen.

SECTION I

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS

The Noble Task: The Pastor as Preacher and Practitioner of the Marks of the Church

By Mark Dever

If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.

—I TIMOTHY 3:1

The Puritan divine Thomas Taylor observed that “the carriage of the saint through this life is like the journey of a traveler going home through a strange country.” One of the more salutary effects of travel is the energizing of our minds by sights and sounds which are strange to us. Travel increases our understanding, and broadens our sympathies.

Travel also affects our understanding of home. However many things we may learn in our travels, none are so interesting as those things which we see for the first time when we return home. We may think that all has changed, when in reality only we have.

In 1831, two French aristocrats, Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville were sent to America by the French government to inspect the American prison system. For nine months, these friends travelled in what still seemed the New World. De Tocqueville published an account of his trip in 1835, which was soon translated into English and became something of a phenomenon as the book *Democracy in America*. De Tocqueville’s reflections on his tour around the country showed Americans themselves in ways which they had never seen before.

Perhaps inspired by de Tocqueville’s journey, in the Spring of 1835, the Reverend Doctors F. A. Cox and J. Hoby came on deputation from the Baptist Union in England to the United States and Canada to examine the state of their Baptist brethren across the sea. They published their report in April, 1836 in London under the title “Baptists in America.” On their travels, they landed at New York, journeyed down the east coast, attended the triennial convention meeting in Richmond, headed back up into New England

through upstate New York into Canada, and finally made their way down the Ohio valley.

What they found when they came was a widely scattered group of brethren in the midst of a deep and often acrimonious struggle over the issue of slavery. The churches, particularly in the south, were composed of both black and white members—that was almost always to say, slave and free members.

When Dr. Cox preached at the First Baptist Church in Richmond, he was struck by the three divisions of the 2,000-plus congregation seated before him—"the white population occupying one side, the black, the other, and ministers of the gospel from distant parts, crowding the centre."¹ The following day, he visited the Virginia Baptist Seminary in Richmond, which had just begun four years earlier, and which already had 60 students in it, all without previous education, and all preparing for the ministry. The four year program included Latin, Greek, mathematics, logic, rhetoric, natural and mental philosophy, theological, and other pastoral studies. These studies, along with three hours of manual labor daily, were taken to be sufficient preparations for the ministerial life of Virginia Baptists in 1835.

At the Triennial convention, they saw such towering ministerial persons among the Baptists of the time as J. B. Jeter, W. B. Johnson, Spencer H. Cone, and a noted guest, the Presbyterian minister W. S. Plumer. When a report was given on Indian missions, a Cherokee pastor was presented to the convention. The assembled brethren questioned him, through a translator, and rejoiced at the satisfactory answers he gave. The Methodist and Presbyterian pulpits of the city were given over to the visiting Baptist ministers.

Cox and Hoby found that many of the Baptist ministers were ill-educated (often to the delight of their hearers). Baptists (being strict congregationalists) had no such thing as denominational standards for those wishing to serve as pastors of their congregations. So the number of Baptist pastors could be much more quickly increased in frontier areas than could those of Presbyterian or even Methodist churches. Nevertheless, the number of churches still far exceeded the number of ministers and, therefore, it is not surprising to find that ministers frequently served more than one church at a time.² They were poorly paid,—though still better paid, thought Cox and Hoby—than Baptist ministers in England. Though work and sufficient support were widely to be had, the number of what we would today call bi-vocational pastors was very high. Many if not most preachers in Baptist churches on Sunday mornings could be found working a second job as a

¹F. A. Cox and J. Hoby, *Baptist in America* (London: T. Ward and Company, 1836), 32.

²E.g., Mr. Lindsey Coleman, pastor of churches around Charlottesville, VA in the 1830's, Cox and Hoby, *Baptist in America*, 38; cf. *Ibid.*, 300, 495.

laborer, or plowing their fields through the week. This was the life of Baptist ministers in America as it was found by two English visitors in 1835.

We today must admit that the founders of our churches, institutions, and indeed of our convention of churches are strangers to us, as much if not moreso than were transatlantic visitors two hundred years ago. Not merely for the fact that few of us know much about any of these founders—though that is true—but more simply, because they would seem strange to us, were they to appear today and be folded into our offices or our homes, and, no doubt, into our churches this coming weekend. Can you imagine any of the writers in this volume at your church this Sunday? They would seem strange to us, and we would seem probably even more strange to them.

Much, of course, would not be strange. Essentially, we recognize the same Bible, preach the same cross, and hope in the same resurrection. More particularly we continue to meet on Sundays, sing, pray and preach, to vote as congregations and to baptize only confessing believers.

But much, too, would be different. Leaving aside simple technological changes like microphones, taped accompaniment, electrical guitars, air conditioning and overhead projectors, others changes, too, would be significant.

Some changes that in retrospect look like not much more than technological changes, were given greater import at the time. For example, controversy raged in the mid-nineteenth century about whether indoor baptistries should be built. Before you say that this is ridiculous because our distinction as Baptists has never been so much about where one is baptized, but about who is baptized, you must stop and remember that we have fought pitched battles about how one is baptized. So would an indoor baptism be sufficiently like the baptisms in the New Testament? As always, the main force holding back the acceptance of indoor baptisms was not theological concern, but the simple objection to novelty, “We’ve never done it that way before.”

Still other controversies raged throughout the Baptist family. The Campbellite controversy over what we called baptismal regeneration devastated many Baptist congregations in the Ohio and Tennessee River valleys. Questions over whether preachers should be paid for preaching divided still other Baptist churches from their sister congregations. Landmarkism won the day in many churches in the middle part of the country; and dispensationalism among many ministers, too.

And in the nineteenth century, Baptist life greatly changed. Nationally, Baptists organized for missions and then split into sectional conventions. State conventions arose, with denominational papers assisting and being assisted by them. Urbanization began in earnest. Average baptismal age began to lower, even as the average age for earning one’s own living

³Greg Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1875–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16.

increased. Landmarkism, indoor baptisms, hymnals with music and altar calls came in; Calvinism and church discipline went out. Choirs and American flags had not yet widely arrived by the end of the century.

We forget how much ground the 19th century covers. We tend to associate Isaac Backus (1724–1806) with the 18th century and E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) with the 20th century, and yet both were a part of the 19th—Backus had what were perhaps his most celebrated years, and Mullins lived most of his life in the 19th century.

Today, in churches where the pastor is seen, as one Baptist professor put it several years ago, as the “anchor man in the television show of life,” what would the assembled ministerial authors think about us and what we understand as our message and our responsibilities?⁴ What would they think of how we structure our churches and practice our lives together as Christians? What would they think of what we say, and what we do? In these essays, and in this collection of re-printed works, we travel back to then and them so that we can understand our times and ourselves better.

THE PASTOR’S ROLE

What were pastors to do? What was their role understood to be? Pastors were to preside over the sanctioned worship of God. Fundamentally, that meant that they were to teach orthodox doctrine and to oversee the purity of the church. Preaching and the ordinances were what Baptist ministers were about. This is much of what Baptists ministers said and did in the days in which these pieces were written.

What is the essence of “the noble task” which belongs to the minister? The answer given to that question reflects an understanding of the church. One popular English minister has recently taught that “‘Church’ is a collective noun. We know about collective nouns: one sheep is a sheep, but a whole gang of sheep is called a ‘flock.’ One cow is a cow, but a whole bunch of cows is a ‘herd.’ One goose is a goose, but a whole band of marauding geese is called a ‘gaggle.’ So it is with ‘Church.’ One Christian is a Christian, but a number of Christians gathered together is called a ‘Church.’”⁵ Is that all a church is—a gaggle of Christians, a small group Bible study, or a chance meeting of believers in the produce section at the local supermarket?

Historically, Baptists would strongly disagree with this loose understanding of the church. They would line up far more closely with the French reformer, John Calvin, who wrote that “Wherever we see the Word of God

⁴Darold H. Morgan, “Changing Concepts of Ministry Among Baptists,” in *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land*, ed. W. R. Estep (Fort Worth: Evans Press, 1976), 141.

⁵Steve Chalke, *More than Meets the Eye* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), 111.

purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."⁶ So Baptists have understood the Bible to teach that "the noble task" involved correctly preaching the Word and correctly administering baptism and the Lord's Supper—more correctly, in fact, than Calvin did.

REFORMATION ROOTS

In some ways, the basic social fact to come out of the theological turmoil of the reformation of the 16th century was that the church was not co-extensive with the state. This was a revolutionary realization. It upset both states and churches, and its consequences rumbled through every European nation that embraced the reformation.

In Great Britain, those dissenting from the state church had various views on the relation of the church to the state. The largest groups—the so-called "three old denominations"—were the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists and the Baptists. They were largely at one with their Anglican brothers, except for matters of church government, including especially the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Presbyterians and Congregationalists agreed with the Anglicans, over against the Baptists, that the children of church members were to be baptized (though they restricted that privilege more than the established church had done). Baptists advocated the idea that only believers themselves were the proper subjects of baptism. Congregationalists and Baptists agreed that the church's final government was entrusted to the assembled local congregation. Presbyterians thought that it resided in a series of courts, and supremely in the national general assembly, with elected representatives from the churches. The Anglicans continued to defend their traditional Episcopalian government, though usually by arguing that church government was a matter of theological indifference, and that it was the responsibility of the secular government to order it.

Though these arguments may seem obscure, they, in fact, had much to do with bringing about real changes in the way people understood and lived out their Christian faith. Once baptism had been recaptured as something for believers alone, that forced the issue on churches that others were also raising—who decides who is admitted to church membership?

Baptists were the thorough reformers, who knew that they were called to follow the biblical pattern of church life, and so "display the glory of a true church and its discipline," as Benjamin Keach put it.

At the heart of these churches is, of course, the ministry of the pastors. The pastors are the ones who are usually most involved in understanding the

⁶John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 11 (Philadelphia: The Minster Press, 1960), 1023.

Bible's teaching on the church and in interpreting it to the congregation. Understanding their role is helpful to understanding the churches they led.

So what exactly was the understanding of the ministry of the generation of the pastors who wrote, read and practiced the kind of churchmanship shown in the pieces reproduced in this volume? Their role had two main components, reflecting these two marks of the church—preaching, and presiding over the life of the church (as we see it symbolized in baptism and the Lord's Supper).

THE PREACHING OF THE MINISTER: THE RIGHT PREACHING OF THE WORD

Of course, basically, these Baptist ministers were preachers.

Spencer Cone (1785–1855), popular Baptist pastor in New York City, said to young preachers that “There are two courses before you as a preacher: make yourself familiar with classic authors, study the popular taste, bring forth well-written essays, use the Bible as a fine collection of texts, and fill up your sermons from other sources; or Give yourself chiefly to the study of the Bible, bring forth the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or forbear, ‘Present the Word.’ In the first course you will make yourself popular; in the other you will be useful to the souls of men, and please God. Take your choice.”⁷ In fact, Cone suggested that the Baptist minister should be greeting every morning with the practice of Bible reading, meditation and prayer until a passage strikes him, and that he should then fashion it in his mind into a sermon ready to be given whenever he might be called upon to do so that day. He said that young preachers should learn how to preach in the same way that country girls learn to milk—try constantly till success.

As Cox and Hoby traveled south, they noticed that not only did the weather become hotter, but so, too, did the preachers. Our journalists noted, “While the most finished compositions may tend to refine the taste and instruct the understanding, those which have less pretension to accuracy, but come at once from the heart, if not unstudied yet unpolished, seem conducive to the greatest moral effect.”⁸ “The style of preaching is plain and energetic—less instructive, perhaps, than impassioned.”⁹ Throughout the 19th century, Baptist preaching shifted from being more extemporaneous, imaginative, and emotionally charged to being more careful, controlled and polished. But more than the manner of preaching changed.

The preaching matter of sermons from earlier centuries may seem some-

⁷Edward W. Cone and Spencer W. Cone, *The Life of Spencer Houghton Cone* (New York: Livermore and Rudd, 1856), 420.

⁸Cox and Hoby, *Baptist in America*, 492.

⁹*Ibid.*, 496.

what strange to many today. The content of many of the sermons bore much more in common with English Protestant sermons of two centuries earlier, than they do with many sermons preached by Baptist ministers in America in our own times.

Writing in 1854 to his good friend Spencer Cone, John Dagg asked if his views had changed with reference to “the doctrines of grace.” Cone wrote back with typical clarity, “not a jot.”¹⁰ But what was true of Cone at mid-century was not true of increasing numbers of Baptist ministers.

Though the situation in the North was somewhat different,¹¹ in the South, the dominance of Calvinism among Protestants (with the marked exception of the Methodists) continued well into the nineteenth century.¹²

¹⁰Cone and Cone, *Life of Spencer Houghton Cone*, 468.

¹¹In 1830, W. T. Brantly, Sr. (1787–1845), sensing this move away from the stricter Calvinism of John Gill, wrote, “The temper of our institutions in the present day, is most practical, and this we cannot regret; but in the hurry of practice we may forget the respect due to principles; in the ardor of anticipation, we may overlook dependence and humility; in those expansive charities which look out for the salvation of all men, we may fail to bestow a becoming consideration upon that mercy which insures the salvation of some. We may possibly become so anxious to draw our fellow men into the folds of Christ, by our own election, as to forget the election of grace,” Brantly, “The Doctrines of Grace,” *The Columbian Star*, 1 (August 8, 1829), 91. By the account of Basil Manly, Jr., Newton [Mass.] Theological Institute by the early 1840’s had a large proportion of its students (perhaps even a majority) who were Arminian. Francis Wayland wrote to J. W. Alexander a letter dated Nov. 10, 1854, in which he stated, “I agree with your Presbyterian doctrine very well on most points. . . . I differ from you in some respects. You make the gospel system more rectangular and closely articulated than I. You see clearly, where I only have an opinion,” quoted in Francis and H. L. Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Francis Wayland*, vol. 2 (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1867), 175. In light of this kind of evidence, Tom Nettles’ statement that “the last half of the nineteenth century saw an almost imperceptible and very gradual alienation from thoroughgoing Calvinism on the part of Baptists in the North . . .,” (Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 48.) seems understated, and perhaps inaccurate. Calvinism was waning in the north both before the second half of the nineteenth; and by the second half of the nineteenth century, a great many Baptists in the north would have self-consciously thought of themselves as non-Calvinists. See David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptist* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), 140. “A few persons may now be found in most of our congregations, who are so well informed, and who pay so much attention to the preaching they hear, that they are able to detect any unsoundness in the doctrines advanced; but this is not so generally the case with the great mass of our members as it was in a former age. At present, the modes and manners, and the eloquence of their ministers, engage more of the attention of our people, than their doctrinal expositions; and most of all, they look for those attractions which are pleasing to young people, and which will collect large assemblies, and enable them to compete with their neighbors in numbers and style. With this end in view, nothing that will sound harsh or unpleasant to very sensitive ears must come from the preachers; the old-fashioned doctrines of Predestination, Total Depravity, Divine Sovereignty, etc., if referred to at all, must be by way of circumlocution and implication. . . . As a general thing, now, our people hear so little in common conversation, in their every-day intercourse with each other, on doctrinal subjects, before, at the time, and after they become church members, and are so much accustomed to vague and indefinite references to them, that, different from former years, they have but little desire to hear them discussed. Indeed, many of them should sit very uneasy under discourses in which the primordial principles of the orthodox Baptist faith should be presented in the style of our sound old preachers of bygone years,” *ibid.*, 142–143. On this whole question, see Wills, *passim*, but esp. 106–108; Paul Harvey, *Religious Cultures and Social Order* (University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 152.

¹²R. T. Kendall observes that “the Southern Baptist Convention was born into a Calvinistic climate, and this theological atmosphere pervaded Southern Baptist ideology in its infancy,” R. T. Kendall, “The Rise and Demise of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention” (Th.M. thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973), 1.

This is evidenced by the theologians they read, the pastors' and professors' writings, the denominational journals and indeed by many of the written remains of early and mid-nineteenth century Baptists.¹³

In genteel Charleston, Richard Furman (1755–1825) was the beloved pastor of the First Baptist Church from 1787 until his death in 1825. His theological system was strongly Calvinistic.¹⁴

Jesse Mercer (1769–1841) was a prominent Baptist pastor, polemicist and educator in Georgia. In 1829 a friend of Mercer's, the Rev. Cyrus White, had been "accused of propagating arminian sentiments."¹⁵ Mercer was clearly shocked that any respectable Baptist would be teaching such a doctrine. However, as he read White's views in order to refute the calumny, he was disappointed to find that White did indeed hold unorthodox opinions of the atonement. This unorthodox opinion was that Christ's death was a general atonement for the sins of the world, thereby merely making possible (not securing) the salvation of whoever might believe. For this Mercer castigated him as having "departed from the acknowledged Faith of the denomination." Mercer wrote to White "Surely, if you have not departed from the characteristic doctrine of the denomination, and gone to general provision, and free-will ability, your book most miserably belies you!"¹⁶

Patrick Hues Mell (1814–1888), professor at Mercer and later Chancellor of the University of Georgia, and an author of one of the works herein reprinted, is another commanding figure in nineteenth century Southern Baptist life. Mell served as Clerk of the Georgia Association (1845–1851), Moderator of the Georgia Association (1855–1870, 1874–1886), Clerk of the Georgia Baptist Convention (1845–1855), President of the Georgia Baptist Convention (1857–1871, 1877–1886), and President of the Southern Baptist Convention (1863–1871, 1880–1886). Throughout his life as a celebrated parliamentarian and professor, he also sustained a vital interest in what Baptist preachers preached. In 1850, out of his concerns for "the doctrines of Grace," he issued *Predestination and the Saints' Perseverance Stated and Defended*. In 1868 he again went to the press with a polemical speech given at the Georgia Baptist Ministers' Institute—"Calvinism." In both of these Mell vigorously defends these doctrines out of a concern that they were not being preached enough by the younger ministers of the day.

Controversies, too, reveal the times. Controversy erupted around Pro-

¹³ "That Baptists are Calvinists is readily admitted," Editors in "Orthodoxy, Again," *The Southern Baptist* 3 (May 24, 1848), 426.

¹⁴ Robert Gardner mistakenly proves Furman's Calvinism by citing an article by his son, Richard B. Furman, written in 1849 for *The Southern Baptist Review* (Robert G. Gardner, "John Leadley Dagg: Pioneer American Baptist Theologian" [Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1957], 190). See instead Richard Furman, *Conversion Essential to Salvation* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1816).

¹⁵ Jesse Mercer, *Ten Letters, Addressed to the Rev. Cyrus White, in Reference to his Scriptural View of the Atonement* (Washington, Ga.: Printed at the News Office, 1830), i.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

fessor James S. Mims (1817–1855). Though there is more on this controversy in Greg Wills’ article in this same volume, it is instructive simply to note the presumption of theological agreement that was the context of the controversy. Mims was Professor of Theology at Furman University from 1843 until his death in 1855. From editorials in *The Southern Baptist* (of Charleston, South Carolina) and the *The Guardian* (of Richmond, Virginia) throughout 1848, one gathers that the editor of *The Guardian* thought that a speech (or speeches) made by Mims showed him to be unorthodox in his view of imputation (apparently he held Andrew Fuller’s theology).¹⁷ The editorial committee of *The Southern Baptist* successfully defended Mims. They wrote:

If the Philadelphia Confession of Faith may be regarded as setting forth the views of the Baptist denomination (and perhaps it does so as faithfully as any Confession) still, we hesitate not to say, that very few of our ministers adopt it in full. We are altogether free to confess that it contains statements which do not meet our approbation.¹⁸

They went on to state that Fuller’s views are a more “adequate expression” of the views of most Southern Baptist ministers. While these disputes between “Gillites” (as the editor of *The Guardian* seemed to be) and “Fullerites” were common, they evidence perhaps more theological unity than diversity. Both sides agreed that humans were totally depraved and would only be saved by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the elect—the only question was how that imputation was to have occurred.

Another too often neglected source of information about church life in earlier centuries among Baptists are the autobiographies of the period. Two of the most theologically detailed reminiscences are those by David Benedict (1879–1874) and J. B. Jeter (1802–1880).¹⁹ Recalling the Virginia of his youth in the 1820’s, Jeter wrote that “Presbyterians and Baptists were quite ready to assert and defend the doctrines of election, and the certain salvation of all believers; nor were they slow to attack what they considered Arminian errors.”²⁰ While they did not give “undue prominence to

¹⁷John A. Broadus mentions this controversy in his *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce* and represents Mims as being opposed to Calvinistic views of imputation. Cf. John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 101.

¹⁸“Orthodoxy, Again,” 426.

¹⁹Benedict, *Fifty Years*; and Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *The Recollections of a Long Life* (Richmond: The Religious Herald, 1891). Such literary reflections were commonly written by well-known elderly ministers. Dagg composed one at the request of his family in 1878, his *Autobiography of Rev. John L. Dagg*, D. D. (Rome, Ga.: J. F. Shanklin, Printer, 1886). S. G. Hillyer (1809–1900), Dagg’s son-in-law and a prominent Georgia Baptist minister, wrote his *Reminiscences of Georgia Baptists* (Atlanta: Foote & Davies Company, 1902). Hillyer recalls that “our fathers” believed in total depravity and election. In fact, “. . . our early Baptists believed, with great harmony, in all the ‘doctrines of grace’ . . .,” *Reminiscences*, 231.

²⁰Jeter, *Recollections*, 21.

their distinctive views,” the Baptists of fifty or sixty years ago “believed, and were ready to fight for, ‘the five points.’ . . . Baptists of the present day . . . are less carefully indoctrinated than were the fathers.”²¹

In 1857 John L. Dagg wrote that “The general agreement of Baptist churches, in doctrine as well as church order, is a fact which gives occasion for devout gratitude to God.”²² Benedict, three years later, recorded the situation differently. The extreme orthodoxy of the early 19th century Baptists, by mid-century had given way to doctrinal “laxity and indifference,” he writes. By mid-century, increasing theological diversity was accepted among Baptist ministers in New England; on a lesser scale, that was also increasingly the case in the deep South.²³

Even in the more theologically conservative South, James P. Boyce had sounded an alarm in his speech “Three Changes in Theological Education,” delivered at Furman University in 1856. Boyce stated that in the past the denomination had been “fully agreed in its doctrinal sentiment,” but that such unanimity of sentiment no longer prevailed.²⁴

The distinct principles of Arminianism have . . . been engrafted upon many of our churches; and even some of our ministry have not hesitated publicly to avow them. That sentiment, the invariable precursor or accompaniment of all heresy—that the doctrines of theology are matters of mere speculation, and its distinctions only . . . technicalities, has obtained at least a limited prevalence. And the doctrinal sentiments of a large portion of the ministry and membership of the churches, are seen to be either very much unsettled or radically wrong. Sad will be the day for this University, should such sentiments ever

²¹Ibid., 313, 317.

²²John L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 301.

²³Benedict notes this. He wrote that New Englanders were Calvinists, but not “so strongly as were those in New York, Philadelphia and further South,” *Fifty Years*, 137.

²⁴W. W. Richards maintains that “Calvinism was waning among Baptists in the South by the time Boyce was born in 1827,” and that “by mid-century it was no longer a dominant force among the majority of southern Baptists,” Walter Wiley Richards, “A Study of the Influences of Princeton Theology Upon the Theology of James Petigru Boyce and His Followers with Special Reference to the Work of Charles Hodge” (Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), ix, 78. This seems somewhat exaggerated. While Richards is correct about the trend away from the Calvinism of the Philadelphia Confession, it is misleading to say that Calvinism was no longer a dominant force among the majority of Southern Baptists by mid-century. Gardner’s footnotes in his dissertation on Dagg show the great dominance of Calvinism among Southern Baptists of this period. On the other hand, R. T. Kendall has stated that “the diminishing of strong Calvinism within the Southern Baptist Convention . . . consciously began shortly after the turn of the [twentieth] century,” Kendall, “Rise and Demise,” iv. Kendall seems to look for written remnants of Calvinism in Baptist theology, which can certainly be found well into this century, rather than accurately surmising the predominant system of theology at the time. Tom Nettles maintains a similar position: “This consensus in the Doctrines of Grace was perpetuated in Southern Baptist life through the second decade of the present [twentieth] century,” *Grace*, 50. Nettles is led to this conclusion by the questionable inclusion of people such as F. H. Kerfoot and E. C. Dargan as Calvinists.

obtain prevalence in your board, or receive the sanction of any of your theological Professors. . . . A crisis in Baptist doctrine is evidently approaching, and those of us who still cling to the doctrines which formerly distinguished us, have the important duty to perform of earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. Gentlemen, God will call us to judgment if we neglect it.²⁵

In order to fight this theological slippage, Boyce propounded the idea of a seminary based on an “abstract of principles” to be subscribed to by all the professors. When this document was composed three years later, Basil Manly, Jr. drew largely from the Calvinistic First and Second London Confessions. During his years of teaching theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Boyce’s suspicions of the declining orthodoxy of the day were confirmed. E. E. Folk, a student of Boyce’s, recalled that “. . . though young men were generally rank Arminians when they came to the Seminary, few went through this course under him without being converted to his strong Calvinistic views.”²⁶

The general concern about a diminishing orthodoxy was heard from the columns of *The Guardian* to the pamphlets of Mell, from the addresses of Boyce to the history of Benedict. The popularity of Andrew Fuller’s restatement of Calvinism combined with the declining interest in theology generally in the pulpits left Baptist preaching open to be radically altered by other influences among Baptists in the South and West.

The dominant teaching and preaching of the earlier part of the century was clear and unapologetic on the points of human depravity and divine election, of irresistible grace and perseverance—doctrines which tell little of what I must do, and much of what God has done. This is what most of those earlier generations considered the right preaching of the Word. And this is where they might find many of our own sensitivities in the pulpit, sensitivities to our unregenerate hearers’ desires—unchurched Larry and Terry, if you will—so strange.

I have been in conservative Southern Baptist churches where I have heard the most dreadful wages of sin being presented as physical death, and Our Lord’s agony in Gethsemane presented merely as an example of how to deal with stress in traffic. If many of our ministers today so little understand the problem, it is no wonder that they speak so little of the cure. If the content of our singing has changed from the love of God to our love for God to our loving to love God to our loving to love “Him,” is it any wonder

²⁵James P. Boyce, “Three Changes in Theological Education,” Unpublished Manuscript, Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1856. For a contemporary assessment and application of Boyce’s concerns in this speech, see Timothy George, “Dogma Beyond Anathema: Historical Theology in the Service of the Church,” *Review and Expositor*, 1988.

²⁶Broadus, *Boyce*, 265.

that we find the sermons of the generation of Baptist pastors who first raised our denominational structures strange? In these ways—in the contents of our hymns to the contents of our sermons—we should labor to be re-introduced to these old friends. If only because they are standing in a different place than we are, they may show us parts of the Bible more clearly than we’ve seen them before.

This is the context of the content of the sermons which shaped Baptist churches in the past. It was a preaching which was vigorous, God-centered, self-denying and thoroughly and carefully expository. So much for the preaching of the minister.

THE PRACTICE OF THE MINISTER: RIGHT ADMINISTRATION OF THE ORDINANCES

If this is what Baptist ministers preached in the 19th century, what did these ministers do?

In brief, they spent time organizing for mission efforts with their brethren, and gave themselves to training the younger generation of pastors. They preached constantly, read much, studied their Bibles, remembered their church members, visited the sick, and befriended people. In short, they did much of what pastors do today.

Something, however, which they regularly did then (many of them every week), but which is rare today, is this—they practiced corrective church discipline. Among other things, that means that they excluded people from membership in their churches based upon sin in their lives or errors in their belief. And not only did they do so, but they considered such discipline essential for the church. This is what they meant by the “right” in the phrase “right administration of the ordinances.” To baptize or offer the Lord’s Supper to those without a credible profession of faith was understood to be a mis-administration of the ordinances which Christ left to mark out His church.

In his book *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785–1900*, Greg Wills has brought to light that crucial change between the generations of our great-grandparents and our grandparents—the disappearance of corrective discipline from our churches.

Populism and authority, Wills argues, co-existed commonly and perhaps even happily in churches in that earlier day. But by the end of the 19th century, their earlier practice of religion had become “transformed.” As Wills writes in his introduction:

After the Civil War, Baptist observers began to lament that church discipline was foundering, and it was. It declined partly because it became more burdensome in larger churches. Young Baptists refused in increasing numbers to submit to discipline for dancing, and the

churches shrank from excluding them. Urban churches, pressed by the need for large buildings and the desire for refined music and preaching, subordinated church discipline to the task of keeping the church solvent. Many Baptists shared a new vision of the church, replacing the pursuit of purity with the quest for efficiency. They lost the resolve to purge their churches of straying members. No one publicly advocated the demise of discipline. No Baptist leader arose to call for an end to congregational censures. No theologians argued that discipline was unsound in principle or practice. . . . It simply faded away, as if Baptists had grown weary of holding one another accountable.²⁷

And what was the result? John Dagg asserted that “When discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”²⁸

Leaving aside the seriousness of the change for the moment, how did it happen? Why the change? Certainly the work of confronting and disciplining was never easy. Basil Manly, Jr., expressed his own “profound grief” over one soon-to-be-disciplined member of the church he pastored.²⁹

Too, by the end of the nineteenth century, urbanization was altering the face of the nation. In the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, the nation’s population shifted from being about 28% urban to being just at 40% urban. These growing urban populations brought with them comparative anonymity for those who had recently moved and the consequent ability simply to change churches if they pleased. Baptist preachers might continue to denounce, but they could no longer discipline offenders.

Wills keenly observes that “Church discipline presupposed a stark dichotomy between the norms of society and the kingdom of God. The more evangelicals purified the society, the less they felt the urgency of a discipline that separated the church from the world.”³⁰ “Activism became the crowning virtue of Baptist piety in the twentieth century.”³¹

This change had more wide-ranging effects on the work of the minister than may at first appear. For example, exactly whom was the Baptist minister pastoring? Earlier in the 19th century, it seems clear that he was officially the pastor of a distinct group of people, personally known to him, regularly in attendance, and with the expectation of being held specially accountable. By early in the next century, the minister was officially the pastor of a group of people often far larger than those he would see on a Sunday morning, many of them unknown to him personally, many rarely

²⁷Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 9.

²⁸John L. Dagg, *A Treatise of Church Order* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), 274.

²⁹Basil Manly, Jr., Letter to Rev. M. B. Wharton, 1 February 1873, Manly Collection, SBTS; quoted in Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 119.

³⁰Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 10.

³¹*Ibid.*, 133.

if ever in attendance and with no expectation whatsoever of being held accountable to any set of standards other than that of the general culture. The main community of identity began to shift from being the congregation to being the wider society in which Christians lived.

E. Y. Mullins nicely defended the shift in the self-perception of the minister's appropriate sphere of activity. There are two erroneous ideas of the ministry, he wrote, "one that the minister should spend his force in trying to correct public evils; the other that the preacher of the gospel has nothing to do with public life whatever."³²

This change greatly affected the way the pastor's work of evangelism and taking people into church membership was done. Earlier in the century, it was common for a long period of time to elapse between the time someone would apply for "a church relation" and when they were admitted. This probationary period was to allow people time to give sufficient evidence of their salvation. By later in the century, the conversion itself was assumed to be witnessed rather than the confirmation of it. The work of Baptist pastors through the century had subtly though certainly become more public, as souls were mended not by repeated private conferences with families or individuals, but by protracted preaching meetings and impassioned calls to immediate conversion. And his work became more distinct from the people's, as there was no longer a community which mutually covenanted together for accountability. As the regular practice of corrective discipline fell away, the pastor was expected to deal with just a few cases which could cause the church the most public embarrassment. In this change important boundaries were blurred, and the pastor's role was confused—all to the injury of the church.

Considering today a recovery of this understanding of biblical teaching on the role of the pastor, we might be especially interested in Wills' observation that a large part of early Baptist concern with religious liberty was "the freedom to establish pure churches by means of discipline."³³ That concern certainly will not be lost on us today.

Not too long ago there was a Baptist Press article about Jeff Noblit, the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Noblit has rediscovered something of this idea which earlier pastors preached and practiced. I have no reason to think that he discovered it through reading anything from these earlier generations; rather, in the press interview, he simply said that he came to it through reading Scripture, the same way that I'm sure these earlier pastors came to it. If such a corporate witness to the Christian gospel is going to be recovered, Pastor Noblit of Muscle Shoals will have difficulty doing it alone.³⁴ It is difficult for a congregation to

³²Cited in Harvey, *Religious Cultures*, 149.

³³Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 32.

³⁴E.g., Cone and Cone, *Life of Spencer Houghton Cone*, 272.

pursue discipline alone. One would best have agreements understood between the churches. So, for example, one church in the 1830's proudly commended itself to a prospective pastor with the boast that it had never taken any members excommunicated from sister churches. Such mutual understandings would be nearly essential for any widespread recovery of church discipline as part of the corporate witness to the gospel.

A Personal Conclusion

A few years ago, I conducted a seminar at a state Baptist Convention on "Getting your church off the plateau." I picked up some typical modern literature to read. In it, the author encouraged pastors to "Open the front door of your church and close the back door." I understood what the author meant. He meant that the church should be more accessible and that we should do a better job on follow-up, assimilation and discipling—all laudable ends. And yet, as I read about opening the front door and closing the back door, I couldn't help but think that if many of the generation of Baptist pastors from a century and a half ago gathered around to read the book, they would locate our church's major problem elsewhere. They might even say that the answer to the endemic weakness in our churches is closing the front door and opening the back door! Closing the front door simply in the sense of being willing to be honest about the cost of discipleship, and being more careful about conversions claimed and members accepted; and opening the back door in the sense of being willing to correct and discipline those who join.

In too many churches today, the centrality of preaching and administering the ordinances has been replaced by an emphasis on other things. We should stop and consider what effects this change is having on our churches and on their faithful and effective witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How did the change from exhortation to efficiency happen among our churches? Ultimately, we pastors must have fallen asleep at our jobs. We must have quietly conspired in allowing our churches to value this world more than the next. We did not oppose the subtle shift away from that emphasis on the hope we have for that day "when earthly labors are complete."

Baptist churches in 1800 were far from utopias. Racism in the culture was too fully present in the church. Too many Christians opposed organized efforts for evangelism and missions. And ministerial education was often lacking. In Baptist life, conservative, nostalgic sentiment has acted in ways both good and bad. On the one hand, it has acted to preserve the gospel among us, and yet it has also acted to preserve unbiblical traditions. Sentiment for the way we have done things defines and divides us in ways it should not and need not. And such practical sentimentality is dangerous because it is so hard to detect.

Impulses are not good, simply because they are conservative. Honesty

compels us to acknowledge that our past is well-supplied with both errors and accuracies. As we look back, however, it is the errors that tend to be emphasized. We are a people who conceive of time in terms of progress and advance. “New” in our minds seems to be associated innately with “improved.” It is the premise of this book that that is not always the case. While there is much to be lamented in our past, there is also much to be recognized and recovered.

According to one 1837 meeting of ministers, beyond overseeing their own souls well, pastors could best promote the purity of the churches by preaching the Word faithfully and exciting and enforcing godly discipline.³⁵ This, in essence, shows a traditional protestant understanding of the ministry, with the cultivation of the marks of a true church being seen to be the primary work of the minister—the right preaching of the Word, and the proper administration of the ordinances (which, especially for Baptists, necessarily includes the practice of church discipline).

This was the “noble task” to which earlier generations of faithful pastors understood God to be calling them.

And what about us? From a century’s remove, can we see how the changes since the 19th century have played themselves out? Have the changes we considered above driven the pastor to be more faithful, or less so, to his calling? Are we more, or less, about that noble task?

If I may address pastors and church leaders particularly for a moment, what responsibility do you and I have for the state of the churches today? If the pastors are not willing to be the ones to stand firm and turn the tide from accomodating pragmatism to Biblically faithful practices, how do we ever expect to see our churches edified, sanctified, the world evangelized and God glorified as He so deserves to be? This is surely the noble task to which we are called. It is to this end that these essays are published and the books herein reprinted. May God use them to His glory in the churches. Amen.

³⁵Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 17.

The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

By Greg Wills

On October 16, 1814, William B. Johnson, one of the most respected antebellum Baptist leaders, separated from the First Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia. He declared himself no longer their pastor, nor even a member of the church, and marched out. The congregation expressed their respect and goodwill by inviting him to fill the pulpit temporarily, if he refrained from stirring the controversy between him and the church. Johnson agreed but could not resist the opportunity to rebuke the church the following Sunday—he declared them a “corrupt body.” For the next five years the regular Baptist churches rejected fellowship with him.

The controversy revolved around church polity. The main issue of contention was whether Christ commanded his churches to observe all their business, worship, discipline, and ordinances on Sunday, and on every Sunday. Johnson believed Christ had so commanded. Most of the congregation disagreed. In the six weeks prior to Johnson’s separation, the church had met twice per week to discuss scriptural polity.

This was not primarily a matter of personalities and power struggles. At bottom it was a question of obedience to Christ. Both Johnson and the church agreed that in all essential matters the New Testament had fixed the church’s polity. They had no liberty to arrange their polity in any manner suited to their own particular ideas of edification and good order. They believed that Christ established the laws of church government. He had legislative prerogative; they had executive and ministerial power only—they merely executed the directives of the king of the church.

Baptists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generally agreed. Church polity, they conceded, was not the most essential area of doctrine. But just because it was not central to salvation did not mean that it was not important. The doctrine of the church was as much revealed truth as the doctrines of the incarnation, the atonement, and justification. It was an element of orthodox belief. For this reason Baptists sometimes disfellowshipped one another over disagreements in polity. For this reason also they published a great deal of literature on the subject. The texts reprinted in this volume reflect these commitments.

But polity was not merely a matter of obedience—the vitality and growth of the churches depended upon it. Baptists believed that scriptural church government formed an essential foundation for the prosperity of the church, for it advanced orthodoxy, evangelism, and discipleship. Correct polity fostered true spirituality.

Baptists believed in the first place that correct polity protected orthodox belief. Each congregation had responsibility to sustain scriptural truth against error. They judged what scripture taught, summarized scripture teaching in a written creed, pledged in their church covenant to uphold this faith, and enforced that pledge through church discipline against false teachers.

They held that correct polity also promoted discipleship. The polity in many ways merely embodied the evangelical message. They required the new birth by their policies of admission. They supported righteous behavior by church discipline. Their polity separated them from the world and worldliness. Discipleship indeed required upholding correct polity. They believed that Christ commanded his children to order their churches after the apostolic pattern. To fail was disobedience to Christ.

Baptists also believed that correct polity was foundational to evangelism. They believed that God would not ordinarily bless churches that tolerated impurity or heresy. God blessed the apostolic churches because they preached the evangelical gospel of the new birth through faith in Christ and because they established correct polity—they admitted believers only, they observed the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper correctly, they sustained true doctrine, and they expelled the immoral. Pure and orthodox churches could expect God's blessing. They trusted that God would pour down revival in greatest measure on those evangelical churches that ordered themselves after the pattern of the apostolic churches.

In 1819 William B. Johnson regained fellowship with regular Baptists when he repented of his condemnation of the Savannah church and promised to refrain from attempts to impose his views. This episode illustrates well the fact that Johnson and his fellow Baptists regarded matters of church government as important truths of revelation. Modern evangelicals generally view ecclesiology with indifference—it is a matter of prudence, taste, or tradition. Baptists of Johnson's day were closer to the mark. They held that church polity was an intrinsic part of Christianity. They debated ecclesiology intensely and sometimes divided over it. But their churches better reflected the gospel of the kingdom.

CONGREGATIONAL AUTHORITY AND SPIRITUAL EQUALITY

The scriptural church government, Baptists held, was congregationalism. They were democrats in the church—all ecclesiastical authority resided in the members jointly. They held authority immediately from Christ and

administered it according to the pattern revealed in scripture. This meant that the members together were responsible for the church's doctrine, discipline, and leadership. They had responsibility to establish what the Bible taught, to define the qualifications for admission to the church, to determine what behaviors violated the law of Christ, and to determine what errors required breaking fellowship and what errors did not. They had responsibility to examine and ordain ministers, to secure the proper administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to care for the poor of the church, and to promote evangelism and missions. Thus the congregation jointly adopted the church's creed and covenant, elected its officers, admitted believers to membership, and expelled the immoral.

They found this polity in the New Testament. Like such Puritan Congregationalists as Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, and John Cotton, Baptists understood the New Testament to teach that the apostolic churches were democracies. They appealed especially to Mt. 18:15–18, where Jesus instructed the church to expel an unrepentant offender. They appealed also to the matter of discipline in the Corinthian church in which Paul both instructed the church to judge its members (I Cor. 5:9–13) and described expulsion as a punishment inflicted “by the majority” (II Cor. 2:6).

Baptists believed, with most Protestants, that the practices of the apostolic churches were normative in all things essential to their worship, government, and discipline. Christ commissioned the apostles to establish his churches according to his pattern. He ruled the churches as their head and king. Since the apostolic churches exercised authority as democracies, Baptists argued, so ought all other churches. Christ required all churches to follow the divine pattern.

Baptists complied. In some churches, only white male members voted. In most, white male and female members voted. In many southern churches, perhaps most, slave members voted. Baptist churches practiced a more thorough democracy than did the American federal and state governments.

Most antebellum Americans were committed to a more or less patriarchal democracy, in which white men ruled in the state and in the family. Some, especially the southern planter class, added an aristocratic element. The less privileged whites who qualified to vote, they thought, should elect their social betters to run the affairs of state. The radical democratic government of the Baptist churches shocked such Americans, for it seemed to level all gender, class, and social distinctions. It put everyone—rich or poor, slave or free, male or female—on the same plane. Their votes counted alike. Such leveling threatened the social hierarchy, many Americans felt.

But Baptists, too, supported the patriarchal system. They believed that the social hierarchy sustained the general welfare.¹ But what was good for

¹This is not to say that Baptists were Federalists and Whigs; most probably were not. But whether Whigs or Democrats, Baptists endorsed the “natural” hierarchical relationships in society.

society at large was not permitted for the church. By the command of Christ the churches were spiritual democracies—all were equal in the kingdom of God. All stood equally condemned by their sin and equally indebted to the free grace of God in their redemption. All underwent the same baptism and shared in the same loaf and cup in the Lord's Supper. In the churches, they established a spiritual egalitarianism.

Baptists, especially in the South, believed that church democracies were compatible with slavery. Some southerners felt that when Baptists gave slaves spiritual equality, it implied that slaves should have social equality as well. Such egalitarianism in church, they felt, endangered the entire social system of which slavery was an essential part. But Baptists disagreed. They supported the southern social hierarchy and generally defended the institution of slavery. But they accorded slaves spiritual equality.

The church equality was unmistakable. The fact that all voted in most churches was only the most visible expression. All shared the same title—plantation mistress and her slave woman were each “sister” in the church; wealthy merchant and illiterate subsistence farmer were each “brother.” Black and white received baptism from the same minister in the same pool at the same ceremony and received the welcoming “right hand of fellowship” from every member alike. All were subject to the congregation's discipline.

The churches, however, made allowances for social standing, most visibly in the South. Most Baptists segregated the membership during worship to reflect three major social divisions. The blacks sat in the least desirable seats—either in the rear or in the gallery. The men sat on one side of the floor pews; the women and children sat on the other side. But for the most part, Baptists expressed their commitment to the social hierarchy not in the principles or practices of the church, but in how they administered these. The black members, for example, often had the right to vote, but generally took their cues from prominent white members. The vast social inequality between slaves and whites made the black members vulnerable in their person and property to any white in the entire community. They used their votes timidly and cautiously to avoid giving offense. The social hierarchy affected not so much the shape of Baptist polity as its texture. In the final analysis, Baptists pursued the apostolic model and established democratic congregations with a remarkable measure of ecclesiastical equality.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Baptists believed that Christ designed his churches for the redeemed. They held that the churches should admit the regenerate only. They therefore required persons seeking admission to the church to give evidence of their conversion. Members knew they could not peer directly into another's soul—they could not know certainly whether a person was truly born again.

But they were convinced that Christ required them to judge the evidence. They admitted persons who “in the judgment of charity” gave satisfactory evidence of conversion.

Converts usually joined the church at its monthly Saturday conference meeting. When the church “opened the door to receive experiences” applicants presented themselves for membership. They narrated their experience of conversion before the congregation. They answered questions which members posed. Their testimony and answers provided the evidence upon which the church judged. They then voted whether to receive the applicant into the church.

Baptists held that satisfactory evidence of conversion consisted of conviction, faith, and repentance. They expected converts to express their grief over their sin and admit their guilt. Converts had to state that they obtained joyful relief by trusting in Christ and in him alone. And they had to give evidence that they repented, that they abandoned sin and lived uprightly. Those who gave such evidence gained admission to the church upon their baptism.

When persons joined a Baptist church, they subscribed to its covenant, which summarized Christ’s commission to the churches. In it they declared that they intended together to be a church of Christ: “We do voluntarily and jointly separate ourselves from the world, and give ourselves unto the Lord, holding ourselves henceforth his, and no longer our own. We do also voluntarily and mutually give ourselves one to another; and receive one another in the Lord, meaning hereby to become one body, jointly to exist and act by the bonds and rules of the gospel, each esteeming himself henceforth a member of a spiritual body, accountable to it, subject to its control.”² To be a church they merely had to maintain the apostolic pattern—to frame the church’s government, officers, worship, and discipline after the model in the New Testament. Church membership meant pledging to be a church of Christ according to his rules. Samuel Jones’s *Treatise of Church Discipline* includes a typical church covenant.

Christ’s commission to the churches included also the command to make disciples of all nations. Although it was only one part of Christ’s commission, it was the greatest part. Baptists did not begin to organize and regularize their missionary efforts in a systematic way until the early 1800s, but their churches ever sought to make disciples. The churches and associations sent their pastors on missionary tours and contributed to expenses. Churches received such missionary evangelists warmly and provided them with what provisions they could spare. As Baptists organized and expanded

²Bethesda Baptist Church, Greene County, Georgia, Church Book, 16 Aug. 1817; similarly, Beavertown Baptist Church, Wilkes County, Georgia, Church Book, 18 Mar. 1836 (both on microfilm, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University).

their missionary efforts, most Baptists felt it their responsibility to contribute to the support of the preachers at home and abroad who proclaimed the good news to unbelievers.

BAPTISM

Baptists baptized converts by immersing them. Most converts preferred outdoor baptisms even when the church had an indoor baptistery. Hundreds and sometimes thousands gathered to watch the ceremony. Baptism held interest because it represented so much. It signified redemption in Christ; it was the gospel in picture. The minister explained this to the gathered crowd. But it also signified the separation of the church from the world. In baptism converts abandoned the world—its values, pastimes, and sins—and entered the kingdom of God on earth. It was a pledge to live according to the kingdom's moral code under the church's oversight.

Baptists believed that immersion of professing believers was alone baptism. They denied that sprinkling or immersing infants was baptism. They held that false churches could not baptize validly. They therefore did not recognize the validity of infant "baptisms" or the immersions of false churches.

But Baptists also rejected the immersions of other evangelical churches. Most Baptists held that the Methodist and Presbyterian churches were true churches because they held to the true gospel—they preached faith in Christ and the new birth. But these churches were in disorder because they practiced infant baptism, by which they allowed unregenerate persons to join the church. When Methodist or Presbyterian ministers immersed professing believers, as they sometimes did, Baptists denied that it was valid baptism.

Baptists held that because Methodists and Presbyterians baptized infants, they perverted scriptural baptism. Christ intended baptism to represent the redemption accomplished and applied to the person immersed. But Methodists and Presbyterians did not claim that baptized infants were redeemed and hence their baptism could not represent their redemption. Baptists concluded therefore that they perverted the meaning of baptism. Since they had a different baptism than that of the New Testament, Baptists concluded, then even when they immersed professing believers they did not truly baptize.

Baptists called such baptisms "alien immersions" and did not recognize their validity. When persons applied for membership to a Baptist church and claimed that they were immersed as professing believers by a Presbyterian or Methodist minister, Baptists required them to receive baptism before admission. This practice did not endear the Baptists to their fellow evangelicals. Baptists regretted this but felt bound by scripture.

In the late nineteenth century, many urban Baptist churches began to

make exceptions to this policy. They recognized an occasional alien immersion as a true baptism and did not require another immersion. By the mid-twentieth century, most Baptists belonged to churches that generally recognized alien immersions performed in other evangelical churches. Many churches still rejected them however. Landmark Baptists, who endorsed the views of Tennessee Baptist editor James R. Graves (1820–1893), continued to reject alien immersions. They did not recognize Methodist and Presbyterian churches as churches in any meaningful sense. Because such groups had no true churches, they had no true ministers and no true baptism.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Baptists believed that baptism was prerequisite to observing the Lord's Supper. Methodists and Presbyterians agreed with this. But Baptists held that immersion of professing believers was the only true baptism. Believers who were sprinkled as infants were not baptized. Since Baptists rejected alien immersions, even believers who received immersion at the hands of a pedobaptist minister were not baptized. Baptists therefore did not invite Methodists and Presbyterians to participate in the Lord's Supper with them. They usually called this practice "close communion."

Close communion separated Baptists from other evangelicals. Non-Baptist evangelicals sometimes accused the Baptists of bigotry, a sort of spiritual elitism. Baptists felt compelled to defend their practice and did so often. They responded that the pedobaptists also held the principle that baptism was prerequisite to participating in the Lord's Supper. They differed not on their views of the Lord's Supper then, but in their views of what constituted valid baptism. They also pleaded that they were not trying to exclude or embarrass other believers, but sought only to follow the New Testament. To follow the pattern of the apostles, Baptists argued, was not bigotry.

Baptists generally observed the Lord's Supper once per quarter. Many churches required a public reading of their covenant and creed at the church conferences held before these "quarterly meetings." They felt it appropriate that the Sunday Lord's Supper observance followed the Saturday church conferences in which they upheld their common faith and practice by reading aloud their covenanted duties under Christ. They upheld their duties also by exercising church discipline. In these ways they sought to secure that purity which was prerequisite to a proper observance of the Lord's Supper. To allow wickedness among them to go unrebuked and unrestrained would pervert the design of the Lord's Supper.

They made a distinction between the church and congregation—they invited members of the church to the table and they invited the congregation to stay and observe. Baptists visiting from other churches usually participated

(they called this “transient communion”). They usually took the bread and wine in their pews. They used fermented wine until the late nineteenth century, when some Baptists began to use grape juice, or as they called it, “unfermented wine.” They used a common cup. In the early twentieth century churches switched to the use of individual cups.

Some churches did not allow Baptists who belonged to other churches to take the Lord’s Supper with them. This was characteristic especially of Landmark churches. With all Baptists they agreed that only careful exercise of church discipline could preserve the integrity of the Lord’s Supper. But since the authority to exercise church discipline extended only to the members of the local church, they concluded that the Lord’s Supper ought to extend to the local members only. Since they furthermore had no responsibility for the discipline of members of other churches and could not ensure that transient Baptists were sound in their faith and morals, they could not protect the purity of the observance if they permitted transient communion.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Baptists also pledged themselves to separate from the world and submit to each other. Members of Atlanta’s First Baptist Church typically promised “to attend to our church conferences, and endeavor to keep up a godly discipline, that we may be blameless in the sight of God and man—That we may love as brethren and submit to one another in the Lord.”³ They sought to deal with each other in humility and kind regard. In matters on which members differed, they felt it their duty to declare their views and their reasons for them. But they sought consensus. The minority typically yielded to the will of the majority, usually without complaints or bitterness. The greatest test of mutual submission however was the exercise of church discipline.

Baptists practiced church discipline on a large scale. Between 1781 and 1860 Baptists excluded more than 40,000 members in Georgia alone. Across the nation in this period they excluded between 1 and 2 percent of their membership every year.⁴ But the number of church trials was yet greater. Only about half of the offenders received excommunication. Baptists on average disciplined between 3 and 4 percent of their members annually.

Baptists exercised discipline at their monthly Saturday conference

³Atlanta First Baptist Church, Church Book, 1 Jan. 1848, Georgia Department of History and Archives, Atlanta, Georgia.

⁴Estimate is derived from the statistical returns published in 1,600 association minutes from all southern states and 1,132 association minutes from twelve northern states. Member-years in the sample totaled 5,897,853; exclusions totaled 85,607. In this sample the churches excluded an average of 1.45 percent of members annually. For a more detailed discussion of Baptist church discipline, see Gregory Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785–1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

meetings. Churches required male members to attend. Female members attended also and often outnumbered the men. Some offenders accused themselves. In most cases one church member accused another. The accused usually confessed their guilt. When the accused was absent or denied guilt, the church appointed a committee to investigate. At a subsequent meeting the committee reported its findings and recommended a verdict and sentence. The members then voted. In some cases they found the accused not guilty and acquitted. In most cases they found the accused guilty.

Churches imposed one of two penalties or censures: admonition or excommunication. Those admonished retained their membership; those excommunicated did not. Some churches also practiced suspension. Suspended members could not participate in communion but remained in membership. After a specified period they lifted the suspension and the member again enjoyed full membership privileges. By the mid-nineteenth century few churches practiced suspension.

For members guilty of offenses, the outcome depended on the nature of the offense and on their response. For such serious offenses as violence, murder, and adultery, Baptists excommunicated with few exceptions, even when the transgressor repented. For less serious offenses, Baptists retained those who repented and excluded those who did not. Those who repented kept their membership but received a formal rebuke from the pastor in which he explained from scripture God's opposition to the offense, its terrible consequences, and exhorted the offender to walk according to holiness. Baptists expected the repentant to humble themselves utterly before God and before the church and to make no attempts at self-vindication.

Many excommunicated members maintained their piety. They lived virtuously, attended church services, and supported the work of the church. Such ones generally sought readmission. At a Saturday conference they presented their petition, confessed their sin, vindicated the church's action and authority, and pledged their repentance. The churches restored them to full fellowship.

Many offences never came before the church. For many minor offenses, individual church members admonished offenders privately. According to Mt. 18:15–18, an offended member should first rebuke the offender face to face, then in the presence of two or three others, and then before the church. When the offender repented, the process halted. Baptists believed that this triple-warning process applied to less serious sins only—in matters of grave offenses the case went directly to the church. (Some pastors urged that although grave offenses could go directly to the church, it would be wiser in most cases to pursue the triple-warning process.) Many offenders repented in such private conferences and escaped a formal church trial.

Baptists sought to restore offenders to holiness. They believed that church discipline helped believers overcome sin and temptation. God gave the church prayer, scripture, preaching, and praise as means to sanctify

them. He gave church discipline for the same reason. It was a divine medicine to heal the soul. It was for the good of believers who strayed from righteousness.

But Baptists sustained church discipline for another reason. They believed that Christ commanded it. They held that Christ required them to maintain the purity of the church through the exercise of discipline. They held that every member was accountable to Christ for sustaining purity through discipline. And they participated. They voted, accused, gave evidence, asked questions, investigated, and exhorted.

In large part the discipline worked. It promoted unity and purity. Baptists had their differences in the nineteenth century. But they defined the essential areas in which unity was necessary for maintaining fellowship. They did not tolerate departures from those standards of belief and behavior which they deemed essential. In essentials they were united and discipline protected this unity. Their churches generally achieved the purity they believed that Christ required of them, for they did not retain members who strayed from it.

God apparently blessed it—the churches experienced the greatest revivals in the period in which they practiced church discipline. Between 1790 and 1860 Baptists in America kept up strict discipline and grew at twice the rate of the population.⁵ In the twentieth century, Southern Baptist membership continued to grow faster than the population (though only marginally so since 1960) even though they abandoned discipline. The rate of growth, however, is considerably lower than it appears, for in the twentieth century it was much easier to become a Baptist and almost impossible to become an ex-Baptist.

Through church discipline Baptists maintained a clear distinction between the church and the world. Unbelievers knew that joining a Baptist church meant submitting to the church's authority to judge their belief and behavior. The gospel message had little power, Baptists believed, unless the churches were distinct from the world.

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

Most Baptists employed confessions of faith and supported their use. Most churches adopted them. So did most associations. Associations usually required churches applying for membership to present their creed, because they felt that the association should comprise churches of the same faith and practice only. They judged that they had no assurance of a church's orthodoxy unless its messengers presented the association a written statement endorsed by the church.

⁵See Wills, *Democratic Religion*, 36.

Many churches and associations adopted the lengthy Second London Confession, a Baptist revision of the Westminster Confession. Most southern churches and associations adopted a brief summary of that statement. The briefest summaries were a part of the covenant and reflect the commitments of the original: “we do hereby in his name and strength covenant and promise to keep up and defend all the articles of faith according to God’s word, such as the great doctrines of election, effectual calling, particular redemption, justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone, sanctification by the spirit of God, believers baptism by immersion, the saints’ absolute final perseverance in grace, the resurrection of the dead, future rewards, punishments.”⁶ The most common southern creeds repeated and enlarged these points to about one page’s worth.

Baptist churches adopted creeds because they believed that their polity required it. Christ required them to exclude unrepentant false teachers. But to recognize false teaching they had to agree on some understanding of what scriptural truth was. If they agreed on their understanding of what scripture taught, then there was no harm in writing that agreement down. Just as oral contracts gained security and stability when written, so agreement on scriptural teaching gained security and stability when written.

Baptists defended their use of creeds when anticreedalists attacked them. Beginning around 1820 Alexander Campbell, leader of the restorationist movement which produced the Disciples of Christ, sought to reform the Baptist churches. He opposed their creeds, the Calvinism expressed in the creeds, and the clergy who sustained both. Campbell convinced many Baptists to oppose their creeds. But the large majority of Baptists pleaded that creeds were merely the written expression of their views of scripture and as such were both lawful and needful. In the 1830s the Baptists disfellowshipped those members who subscribed to Campbell’s views.

Baptist associations excluded churches that rescinded their creeds. The Flint River Baptist Association in Georgia, for example, excluded the Bethlehem Church for this in 1852. Baptists believed that without a creed a church lacked theological stability and would drift into heresy. More commonly they concluded that a church that rescinded its creed probably had embraced heresy already.

Most Baptist churches and associations in the South favored adopting creeds. John Taylor, the famous Separate Baptist preacher of Virginia and Kentucky, held that members should agree upon some summary creed “in every church in its constitution.” He estimated that nine out of ten Baptist churches in these states had “what may properly be called a creed.” Thomas Meredith, editor of North Carolina’s *Biblical Recorder*, taught that “the

⁶Kiokee Baptist Church, Church Book, at front of second extant church book, 1820–1874, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University.

articles of faith form an indispensable element of the constitution” of a church. He knew of no church or association which “did not have its summary of faith as an essential part of its constitution.” Joseph S. Baker, who preached as a missionary in Virginia and edited several Baptist newspapers, wrote that the majority of Southern Baptists rejected anticeedal arguments—“every association with which we are acquainted” had a confession of faith.⁷

But Baptists generally tolerated members who judged creeds unlawful as long as they did not agitate persistently against them. Occasionally a prominent Baptist opposed the use of creeds and raised public objections. Their arguments persuaded few.

Many of the works reprinted here do not discuss creeds. Their chief concerns were congregational government and proper administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This was natural. These were the central areas of disagreement with such evangelical churches as the Presbyterians and the Methodists. Baptists agreed with other evangelicals that creeds were proper and useful.

Other nineteenth-century Baptist books of church polity endorsed the use of creeds. James M. Pendleton, one of the leaders of the popular Landmark movement, taught in his *Church Manual* that creeds were necessary: “It is eminently proper for those who appeal to the Scriptures as the fountain of truth to declare what they believe the Scriptures to teach. To say that they believe the Scriptures is to say nothing to the purpose. All will say this, and yet all differ as to the teachings of the Bible. There must be some distinctive declaration.”⁸

William Crowell, editor of Boston’s *Watchman and Reflector* and of St. Louis’s *Western Watchman*, defended creeds in his *Church Member’s Manual*, first published in 1847. He argued that since God required the churches to maintain true doctrine, they must determine what the Bible taught and express it in writing. “It is likewise the duty of every church to decide for itself what doctrines the Scriptures reveal; and having done so, these doctrines form its creed. These the church agrees to maintain. If an individual adopts views of doctrine radically different, . . . he ought not to be admitted to the church; or if a member of the church has renounced its creed, he has deprived himself of the right to continue in its membership.”⁹

⁷John Taylor, *History of Clear Creek Church; and Campbellism Exposed* (Frankfort, Kentucky: A. G. Hodges, 1830), 27. Thomas Meredith, “Answers to Queries,” *Biblical Recorder*, 28 June 1845, 2; and “Creeds and Compilations,” *ibid.*, 6 Oct. 1849, 2. Joseph S. Baker, “Imputed Righteousness,” *Christian Index*, 2 Nov. 1848, 350.

⁸Pendleton, *Church Manual, Designed for the Use of Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, [1867]), 42. Williams Rutherford, professor at the University of Georgia, also argued for creeds in his *Church Members’ Guide for Baptist Churches* (Atlanta: James P. Harrison, 1885), 200–216. Some other polity manuals, most notably that of John L. Dagg (*Treatise on Church Order* [Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858]), omitted all discussion of creeds.

⁹William Crowell, *The Church Member’s Manual* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1852), 120.

J. Newton Brown, who influenced Baptists widely through his *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* and his *Baptist Church Manual*, helped to write and later revised the New Hampshire Confession of Faith. Southern Baptists revised and adopted this creed in 1925 and 1963. Brown printed the confession at the beginning of his church manual and in his encyclopedia. He held that the churches should require candidates for church membership to agree with the church's creed. They should receive those only who adopted "the views of faith and practice held by this church, as set forth in the foregoing Declaration" (the New Hampshire Confession).¹⁰

Edward Hiscox, in the many editions of his famous *Baptist Church Directory*, argued that churches ought to have creeds because persons who profess adherence to the Bible alone differ widely in their interpretations of scripture. He thought it desirable for every church to have a written creed, expressing "in concise and expressive language, what they understand the Scriptures to teach."¹¹ He included the text of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith.

James L. Reynolds, professor of theology at Mercer University and Furman University, argued in his polity manual reprinted below that creeds were vital to the life of the churches. Churches and associations, first, had a duty to adopt a creed at their organization, he said. Churches could not unite for efficient and harmonious activity unless they were agreed about the nature of Christianity. But such agreement must be written, otherwise the theological content on which they agreed would be uncertain and unstable. He urged, second, that if every Christian was bound to testify to the truth, the churches had the same obligation. He argued, third, that since Christ required churches to exercise church discipline over members who erred in their behavior or belief, they had to determine what scripture taught in order to know what was a departure from the truth. And if the churches had to determine the truth, there could be no objection to writing it down. Creeds were necessary, Reynolds argued, to protect churches from heresy and error, for they constituted ramparts protecting the correct interpretation of the scriptures from interlopers and traitors who handled the word deceitfully or corrupted its teaching.¹²

William B. Johnson, however, argued against the use of creeds. He agreed that in principle "there can be no objection to a church having a written declaration of the principles of the doctrine of Christ which she believes, and of the duties which she observes, that her true scriptural position may be

¹⁰J. Newton Brown, *The Baptist Church Manual: Containing the Declaration of Faith, Covenant, Rules of Order, and Brief Forms of Church Letters* (Philadelphia: B. R. Loxley, 1853), 25.

¹¹Edward Hiscox, *The Baptist Directory: A Guide to the Doctrines and Practices of Baptist Churches* (1859; reprint, New York: Sheldon and Company, 1867), 153.

¹²Reynolds, *Church Polity: Or, The Kingdom of Christ, in Its Internal and External Development* (Richmond: Harrold and Murray, 1849), 81–97, 237–240.

known.” But he thought the adoption of written creeds ill-advised for several reasons. First, there was no scriptural command or precedent. “It is deemed essential by some Divines, and churches, and associations,” Johnson observed, “that every newly formed church should have a written covenant, or abstract of principles, drawn out and subscribed by the members. I respectfully ask again—Are these things written in the Scriptures?”¹³

Second, Johnson believed that creeds tended to replace the authority of Christ with the authority of tradition. Johnson, like other evangelical Protestants, held that the scriptural form of church government is a Christocracy, by which he meant “that form of church government of which Christ is the head, and under which he requires his people to receive all their principles of actions from, and to frame all their doings according to, his laws and precepts contained in the Bible.” He held that creeds undermined Christ’s direct rule in the churches. Creeds collected independent authority. The human race has a “strong propensity,” Johnson felt, “to yield obedience to customs of merely human origin.” Even when churches and associations adopted creeds as mere declarations of their beliefs, Johnson judged, they tended to view the creed as an authority. The creed became Baptist tradition; tradition displaced scripture. But Christocracy without creeds “carries us back beyond our fathers, and places us at the feet of Christ.”¹⁴

Third, churches and associations already possessed a perfect standard. Johnson argued that it was absurd to adopt a creed since the creeds themselves admitted that the scriptures are the only standard of faith and practice. Other Baptists claimed that creeds were merely summaries of the Bible’s message. But, Johnson asked, why not adopt the Bible as your creed? “Can man present God’s system in a selection and compilation of some of its parts, better than God has himself done it, as a whole in his own book?” Since the Bible was a “perfect and full a standard,” Johnson urged, “why should an imperfect and limited one be adopted?” Since Christ had revealed “a complete and perfect code of laws and precepts,” Johnson maintained the “impropriety of having any human selection and compilation of these.”¹⁵

Johnson won some battles on this question. At the 1824 South Carolina State Convention he opposed an effort initiated by the Georgia Baptist Convention to persuade both conventions to adopt the Philadelphia Confession

¹³W. [William B. Johnson], “The Churches of Christ,” No. VII, *Southern Baptist*, 30 Jan. 1856, 2. In 1855–1856 Johnson wrote a series of articles for the *Southern Baptist* under the name “W.” James P. Boyce noted Johnson’s pseudonym: “I see Graves has been giving you a hard rub or two, on your article signed W.” (Boyce, letter to Johnson, 20 Jan. 1858, William B. Johnson Papers, Special Collections, James B. Duke Library, Furman University).

¹⁴Johnson, *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ* (Richmond, Virginia: H. K. Ellyson, 1846), 194, 201.

¹⁵Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 197. W. [William B. Johnson], “Associations-Conventions,” *Southern Baptist*, 10 June 1856, 1.

of Faith. Johnson and others convinced the delegates to adopt no creed. He drew up the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention at its formation in 1845 and undoubtedly was instrumental in assuring that the new organization adopted no creed. He argued that Furman University did not need one.¹⁶

He lost other battles. The Reedy River Baptist Association appealed to their creed in 1855 to disfellowship two member churches. Johnson and two others moved that the association repeal its creed, its “Abstract of Principles.” The association refused. At the 1849 South Carolina Baptist Convention, Johnson completed his successful defense of Furman theology professor James Mims from the charge of heresy. James L. Reynolds, Mims’s chief accuser, appealed to the Baptist creeds to substantiate the charge. Johnson argued that the accusation had no merit, since Furman University had no creed and needed none. The Convention upheld Mims but refused to reject creeds in principle. It asserted its right to adopt creeds as a basis of union and to guide its institutions. Overall Johnson converted few to his views.¹⁷

CHURCH OFFICERS—PASTORS, ELDERS, AND DEACONS

Baptists held that there were only two offices in the church, elder and deacon. This was the apostolic rule and remained in force. The New Testament had three names for the office of elder: elder, bishop, and pastor. The New Testament writers used the terms synonymously and so did the Baptists. They often called their pastors “elder” and sometimes called them “bishop.”

They were rather careful whom they appointed to this office. Samuel Jones’s *Treatise of Church Discipline* and the Charleston Association’s *Summary of Church Discipline* urged the churches to examine strictly the character and beliefs of ordination candidates. Baptist churches generally performed their duty well. They summoned area ministers who subjected the candidate to a typically rigorous examination of his conversion, call, theology, and ecclesiology.

Some churches had plural eldership. It was sometimes a formal recognition of the ordained ministers, the elders, in their membership. These

¹⁶Johnson, “No. 1: To the Baptists of South Carolina . . .,” *Southern Baptist*, 18 Oct. 1848, 510; and “No. 2: To the Baptists of South Carolina . . .,” *ibid.*, 25 Oct. 1848, 514. Johnson was chairman of the committee that drafted the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. He prepared a draft of the constitution in advance and brought it to the meeting (Robert Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People* [Nashville: Broadman, 1974], 164–172).

¹⁷James Harrison, no title, *Southern Baptist*, 10 Oct. 1855, 2–3. M., “The S.C. Baptist Convention,” *Southern Baptist*, 19 Dec. 1849, 752.

elders assisted the pastor as necessary in preaching and administering baptism and the Lord's Supper. They were leaders of the congregation by their wisdom, piety, knowledge, and experience. Such churches recognized the gifts and calling of all elders among them.

Other churches believed that Christ required them to have a plurality of elders. They held that all elders were equal in office but differed in duties; they were equal in rank but differed in service. The teaching elders had pastoral duties and alone administered baptism and the Lord's Supper. The ruling or lay elders participated primarily in governing the church. They led the congregation in its officer elections, its admission of members, and its discipline. But since all ecclesiastical authority resided in the congregation jointly, the elders had no formal authority to act on any matter as a body of elders. Their role was rather to initiate, advise, and exhort.

The churches that practiced plural eldership on this principle had difficulty sustaining it. In part the men elected ruling elders did not understand their office and duties. In Presbyterian churches the ruling elders had ecclesiastical authority—they governed equally with ministers all matters of membership and discipline. But Baptist ruling elders had no such authority. More important, they doubted the scriptural precedent for the office. Its justification rested on I Tim. 5:17: "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." This verse seemed to make a distinction between elders who rule and those who teach and preach. Most Baptists felt that this was slender support. By 1820 most churches had dropped the practice. But from time to time churches resurrected it.

Most churches agreed with Georgia's Powelton Baptist Church, whose members concluded in 1811 that lay elders were "unnecessary and not sufficiently warranted in scripture." Many of these held that the pastor and deacons jointly constituted the eldership. South Carolina's Tyger River Baptist Association, for example, judged in 1835 that "the eldership of the church" consisted of "the ministers and deacons."¹⁸

The texts reprinted here taught that the apostolic churches practiced plural eldership. Reynolds and Williams argued that a plurality was then necessary because persecution forced congregations to meet separately in small groups in houses and each meeting needed the services of an elder. But since modern congregations can meet together, they no longer needed plural elders. Jones on the other hand argued that although plural eldership was not mandatory, the practice secured important benefits and ought to be continued. Johnson taught that Christ strictly required each church to have plural eldership.

¹⁸Powelton Baptist Church, Church Book, 6 July 1811, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University. Tyger River Baptist Association, Minutes, 1835, 2. Joseph Baker taught the same (Baker, "Dr. Baker's Articles," *Christian Index*, 5 June 1861, 1.

The other scriptural office was deacon. Deacons were to oversee the temporal affairs of the congregation. They had responsibility to care for the needs of the pastor, to sustain the poor and destitute members among them, to make preparation for the observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to look after the church's meeting house. Johnson and Reynolds argued that the early churches had deaconesses. Reynolds thought that the gender-segregating social customs of the early church era required the appointment of deaconesses, but there was no longer a need for them. Johnson argued that they were still needed. In this he agreed with R. B. C. Howell, second president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and B. H. Carroll, founding president of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹⁹

The authors of the ten texts reprinted here agreed on most points of church polity. They agreed that the apostolic model was normative in all essential points of church government, worship, and discipline. They agreed that churches should admit regenerate persons only; that baptism was the immersion of professing believers; that all ecclesiastical authority resided in the congregation jointly; that there were only two church officers; that baptism was prerequisite to communion. I have noted their disagreement on some points. I mention a few additional disagreements in the following descriptions of their texts.

Benjamin Keach, The Glory of a True Church and Its Discipline Displayed, 1697

Keach (1640–1704) was one the most influential teachers in the history of English-speaking Baptists. He was pastor of the famous Horsleydown Baptist Church in Southwark, London for most of his adult life. He published fifty-four books. He suffered violence, imprisonment, the pillory, and fines for teaching the doctrine of believer's baptism.

Keach influenced Baptist practice in several ways. He led the effort to adopt congregational singing in Baptist churches. His catechism and church confession became standard works. In the text reprinted here he described the basic elements and methods of church discipline according to the scriptures. His description of discipline was clear and cogent. For nearly two hundred years afterward Baptist churches in England and America arranged their discipline generally as Keach suggested.

¹⁹Johnson oddly omitted discussion of deaconesses in the text below, even though his table of contents promised it. For his view of deaconesses, see Johnson, "Deacons of a Church," *Western Recorder*, 9 Mar. 1867, 1. R. B. C. Howell, *The Deaconship* (1851; reprint, Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1946), 115–126. On B. H. Carroll's views, see Alan Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Life and Work of Benajah Harvey Carroll* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1994), 28–29.

Benjamin Griffith, A Short Treatise of Church Discipline, 1743

Benjamin Griffith (1688–1768) wrote the *Short Treatise* at the request of the 1742 meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association. Griffith emigrated from Wales in 1710 and became a Baptist the following year. He served as pastor of the Montgomery Baptist Church in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, from 1725 until his death. In 1743 the association approved Griffith's treatise and ordered it published with the association's confession of faith, executed by Benjamin Franklin the same year. In Griffith's preface, he indicated that he had consulted works on church government by Benjamin Keach, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Abel Morgan. More than any of the other works published in this volume, the *Short Treatise* emphasized the importance of plural eldership. The Philadelphia Baptist Association adopted Samuel Jones's *Treatise of Church Discipline* in 1797 to replace Griffith's *Short Treatise*.

Charleston Baptist Association, Summary of Church Discipline, 1774

The Charleston Baptist Association, the oldest Baptist association in the South, published its *Summary of Church Discipline* in 1774. In 1767 they appointed Oliver Hart, pastor of Charleston First Baptist Church, and Francis Pelot, pastor of the Euhaw Baptist Church, to "draw up a system of Discipline agreeable to Scripture, to be used by the Churches." With the help of Morgan Edwards and David Williams they revised it. The association adopted the revised document in 1773.²⁰ Other associations and many churches adopted it.

The Charleston Summary was a directory of church government and discipline. It defined the church and gave rules for constituting one. It taught that all church authority was in the congregation, which had the "power and privilege of choosing its own officers (Acts 6:3; 13:2), exercising its own discipline (Matt. 18:17), and of administering the Word and its ordinances, for the edification and comfort of its members (Acts 2:46)." It outlined the qualifications and duties of the two apostolic offices of the church, ministers and deacons, and told how to ordain them. It told how to receive new members and enumerated the members' duties. It explained the benefits of associations and defined the nature of their powers.

The Charleston Summary explained scriptural church discipline and gave directions for administering it. On most points its views represented those

²⁰Wood Furman, *A History of the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches in the State of South Carolina* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1811), 12–13; James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Baptist Church Discipline* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), 16–17.

of Baptist churches in the South in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On three matters, however, it differed from the common practices of the churches. First, it taught that churches had three kinds of penalty or censure at their disposal: admonition, suspension, and excommunication. Most churches did not practice suspension. Second, it taught that women should not vote: "They are excluded from all share of rule or government in the church." (The Summary implied perhaps that women could vote in admitting and disciplining members, for it advises that applicants become members of the church "by its common suffrage." In some churches, in fact, the women voted in "matters of fellowship" but not in "matters of government.") In most Baptist churches the women voted. Third, it argued that churches should not exclude repentant offenders. Most churches held that certain offenses required excommunication whether offenders repented or not.

This was not the first such document adopted by Baptists. In 1743 the Philadelphia Baptist Association adopted a similar directory, Griffith's *A Short Treatise of Church Discipline*. They differed in some ways. The Charleston Summary alone explicitly prohibited women from voting in the churches. It alone explicitly called for new members to subscribe to a written covenant. The Philadelphia Treatise made no mention of women voting or of subscription to a written covenant. But the Treatise alone called for plural eldership, in the form of ruling elders. It alone called on the elders to lay their hands on converts after baptism. The Charleston Summary did not mention these matters.

Samuel Jones, *A Treatise of Church Discipline*, 1798

Samuel Jones (1735–1814) pastored the Pennepek, New Jersey, Baptist Church for fifty-one years and played a leading role in the Philadelphia Baptist Association. The association elected him moderator of its annual meeting on nine occasions and often selected him to write its annual circular letter, to compose letters of correspondence with other bodies, or to preach the meeting's annual sermon.²¹

Jones was born in Glamorganshire, Wales, and emigrated to America with his parents. He received bachelor and master degrees from the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania). He taught school for many years and gained a reputation for extensive knowledge of Latin classics, mathematics, and science. He relished reading the New Testament in Greek.²²

²¹See Francis W. Sacks, *The Philadelphia Baptist Tradition of Church and Church Authority, 1707–1814: An Ecumenical Analysis and Theological Interpretation* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 200–202.

²²See William Staughton, *The Servant of God Concluding His Labors: A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Samuel Jones, D.D.* (Philadelphia: R. P. and W. Anderson, [1814]), 26–30.

In 1795 the Philadelphia Association selected him to prepare a new manual of church polity to replace the old one. Since 1743 they had endorsed Benjamin Griffith's "Short Treatise of Church Discipline." By the 1790s however they considered it defective. They adopted Jones's manual in 1797. First published in Philadelphia in 1798, the text in this volume is from an 1805 printing in Lexington, Kentucky.

Jones's treatise had clarity and scope. It discussed most of the topics of church polity and discipline in a thorough and clear fashion. It was also representative. Perhaps more than any other polity manual of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jones's most nearly represents the common sentiments and practices of the Baptist churches in America.

William B. Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 1846

William B. Johnson (1792–1863) was the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention and effectively promoted Baptist educational and missionary efforts. He helped to form the national missionary Triennial Convention in 1814 and the South Carolina Baptist Convention in 1821 and served as president of both bodies. He established several schools of high quality and taught large numbers of students throughout his career. He founded Columbia, South Carolina, First Baptist Church and pastored other churches, but his chief labor was in education.

While he was pastor of Savannah, Georgia, First Baptist Church, Johnson began a study of New Testament church polity and became critical of some Baptist practices. He objected to the traditional Baptist practice of excluding members who joined the Methodists or Presbyterians. He urged that members should not be received by letter of dismission from another Baptist church, but should be received only upon testimony of a work of grace. He opposed the Baptist practice of adopting written creeds in the churches and associations. He taught that pastors and evangelists did not need the permission of the church to baptize converts, for baptism was an ordinance of the kingdom of God and not of the church.²³ He held that churches ought to perform church duties—worship, preaching, the Lord's Supper, admitting and dismissing members, church discipline, and offerings—on every Sunday and on Sunday only. In these areas he disagreed with most Baptists.

Although he gained few followers, he advocated these ideas throughout his career. He wrote his *Gospel Developed* to promote them. He published them also in the South Carolina Baptist paper in a long series of articles signed "W." James L. Reynolds published his Church Polity in part as a

²³On this point, see also W. [William B. Johnson], "The Validity of Baptism Administered by an Unbaptized Evangelist," *Southern Baptist*, 27 May 1856, 1; and Johnson, "Reminiscences," 67, South Carolinian Library, University of South Carolina.

response to Johnson's "novel" ideas. But on most points of polity Johnson agreed with Reynolds and the majority of Baptists. On these common points Johnson expressed the Baptist position with clarity and precision.

Joseph S. Baker, *Queries Considered*, 1847

Joseph S. Baker (1798–1877) pastored churches in Georgia and Florida and edited the *Christian Index*, Georgia's Baptist newspaper, from February 1843 to December 1848. Circulation grew by 33 percent in this time. He edited other papers for shorter periods.

He studied at Yale University and graduated from Hampden-Sydney College. He graduated from Columbian College's medical department and worked in Virginia as a physician. He began to prepare for the ministry in the Presbyterian denomination, in which his parents had raised him. The presbytery assigned him an essay on baptism that led him to reconsider his views. He joined a Baptist church in Petersburg, Virginia, and they ordained him.

Baker wrote often on the subject of church discipline and urged the Baptists to faithfulness in this area. He published his *Queries Considered* as a number of his quarterly journal, the *Periodical Library*. He had published parts of it in various Baptist papers but added new material and revised the whole to provide a more complete directory for Baptist discipline. Baker's views were clear and represented well Baptist practice. Baptists received his views favorably.

James L. Reynolds, *Church Polity*, 1849

James L. Reynolds (1812–1877) had a distinguished career as a Southern Baptist leader. He graduated first in his class at the College of Charleston and was a full graduate of the Newton Theological Seminary in Massachusetts. He taught variously in the fields of theology, moral philosophy, and Latin language and literature at Furman University in South Carolina, Mercer University in Georgia, and the University of South Carolina. He was president of Georgetown College. Nine times his fellow Baptists elected him president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.²⁴

Reynolds pastored regularly throughout his career, including Columbia, South Carolina, First Baptist Church; Georgetown, Kentucky, First Baptist

²⁴J. C. Furman, "Biographical Sketch of Rev. J. L. Reynolds, D.D.," *Baptist Courier*, 3 Jan. 1878, 2; Daniel Walker Hollis, *University of South Carolina*, Volume 1: South Carolina College (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951), 202; William J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Beginnings in Education: A History of Furman University* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1926), 138; Furman University Board of Trustees, "Board of Trustees of Furman," *Working Christian*, 11 Dec. 1873, 2; "Professor J. L. Reynolds," *South Carolinian*, 10 March 1847, 2.

Church; and Richmond, Virginia, Second Baptist Church. He refused election as president of the University of Missouri because the board did not permit the president to accept any ministerial duties.²⁵

Reynolds wrote his *Church Polity* in part as a response to William B. Johnson's *Gospel Developed*. Reynolds and Johnson agreed on most items of polity. But Johnson sought to alter "Baptist usage" in the ways noted above. Reynolds did not attack Johnson's reformist views directly, but sought to vindicate the customary practices. In contrast to Johnson, for example, Reynolds defended the adoption of creeds and the use of letters of dismission. Reynolds wrote in the academic style of the colleges at the time but presented a cogent defense and clear description of Baptist practices.

Patrick Hues Mell, *Corrective Church Discipline*, 1860

P. H. Mell (1814–1888) was one of the most respected Baptist leaders of his era. He served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1863 to 1871 and from 1880 to 1887. He served as president of the Georgia Baptist Convention from 1857 to 1871 and from 1877 to 1886. He taught theology at Mercer University from 1842 to 1855 and became professor at the University of Georgia in 1856 and chancellor in 1878. He was born in Georgia and converted in 1832. He studied two years at Amherst College in Massachusetts. For most of his career he concurrently pastored two churches.

Mell wrote *Corrective Church Discipline* in the aftermath of the most explosive case of church discipline in Southern Baptist history. In 1859 Nashville's First Baptist Church excommunicated James R. Graves for slandering their pastor, R. B. C. Howell, and for refusing to submit to the church's authority. Graves claimed that the church violated scriptural due process in the trial because church members had not followed Jesus' command in Mt. 18 to go privately to an offender before bringing it before the church. He and many sympathizers walked out of the church conference and formed a rival church.

Graves fanned the controversy. He asked the Nashville-area Concord Baptist Association to investigate the case and to render counsel in the case. They concluded that Graves acted properly and that First Baptist Church erred. The Baptist General Association of Middle Tennessee and North Alabama (now the Tennessee Baptist Convention) similarly sustained Graves against the church. First Baptist Church ignored the advice of the association and state convention. They defended their course. It was scriptural, they claimed, and it accorded with traditional Baptist practice.

²⁵"President Reynolds," *Baptist Banner*, 4 Dec. 1850, 3; J. C. Furman, "Biographical Sketch," *ibid.*, 2; J. M. C. Breaker, "The Late Dr. J. L. Reynolds," *Baptist Courier*, 18 April 1878, 1.

Mell judged that Graves, the Concord Association, and the General Association held some erroneous principles in the realm of church discipline. He wrote *Corrective Church Discipline* in order to correct such errors and to establish a more scriptural understanding of the principles of church discipline. Mell made no mention of Graves, Howell, or Nashville First Baptist Church. But since Mell's principles were an implicit vindication of First Baptist's action, Graves and his supporters accused Mell of writing the book out of partisanship. A. S. Worrell, who assisted Graves in some of his publishing efforts, published a refutation of Mell's position in 1860.

Mell acknowledged that churches sometimes excluded innocent members. But, he argued, the innocent should endure the wrong in meekness and patience, not by forming parties and factions and seeking to vindicate themselves. Graves's supporters believed that this was a direct attack on Graves's character, although other Baptist leaders earlier taught the same. Mell's work was well received among non-Landmarkers. It in fact represented the common Baptist position on these issues.

Eleazer Savage, *Corrective Church Discipline*, 1863

Savage was born in Middletown, Connecticut on July 28, 1800. He graduated from the Hamilton Literary and Theological Seminary (now Colgate) in Hamilton, New York. From 1823 to 1826 he was pastor of Rochester, New York, First Baptist Church, during which time the church's membership more than doubled. He served also as pastor of the Baptist churches at Medina, Oswego, Albion, Holley, York, and Bath. The text reprinted here was one that Savage published in 1845 as a *Manual of Church Discipline* and in 1863 as the second half of *Church Discipline in Two Parts, Formative and Corrective* (the first half instructed pastors in the method of growing believers in holiness through such agencies as preaching, prayer, and Bible study). The text here is from the 1863 publication.

His treatment of church discipline has value today in large part because he took a rather systematic approach in which he presented details that other writers found too tedious to include. Other writers took it for granted that Baptists understood the procedural details of church discipline. But Savage included them. He described carefully the process by which churches treated offenders and delineated methodically the rule by which churches should evaluate offenses. His discussion of the manner in which believers should carry out the private aspects of discipline delineated in Matt. 18: 15–17 is especially helpful.

William Williams, *Apostolical Church Polity*, 1874

Williams (1821–1877) was one of the four founding professors of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina (now

in Louisville, Kentucky). He was born in Georgia and converted in 1837. He graduated from the University of Georgia in 1840 and from Harvard Law School in 1847. He received ordination in 1851 and was a full-time pastor until he became Professor of Theology at Mercer University in 1856. He taught church history, church government, pastoral duties, and systematic theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1859 until his death in 1877.

Williams's explanation of Baptist polity was clear and persuasive. He held the unusual position, however, that there were no formally organized churches until the Gentiles converted in significant numbers. He did not address some important issues of polity—church discipline, for example. But his views accorded well with the practice of the churches.

Williams initially presented this essay as an address to the Freemason Street Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1873. The text here is the expanded version of that address which the American Baptist Publication Society printed in 1874.

The editor of the *Religious Herald* wrote that Williams's essay "deserves the widest circulation" and that "every pastor" should put it in the hand of "every one of his flock."²⁶ He was right. Indeed, the need is far greater now to circulate not only Williams's insights, but also those expressed in the other nine works republished here.

²⁶Review of five tracts, *Religious Herald*, 29 Jan. 1874, 2.

Church Discipline: The Missing Mark¹

By R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

What is pure is corrupted much more quickly than what is
corrupt is purified.

—JOHN CASSIAN (A.D. 360–435)

The decline of church discipline is perhaps the most visible failure of the contemporary church. No longer concerned with maintaining purity of confession or lifestyle, the contemporary church sees itself as a voluntary association of autonomous members, with minimal moral accountability to God, much less to each other.

The absence of church discipline is no longer remarkable—it is generally not even noticed. Regulative and restorative church discipline is, to many church members, no longer a meaningful category, or even a memory. The present generation of both ministers and church members is virtually without experience of biblical church discipline.

As a matter of fact, most Christians introduced to the biblical teaching concerning church discipline confront the issue of church discipline as an idea they have never before encountered. At first hearing, the issue seems as antiquarian and foreign as the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials. Their only acquaintance with the disciplinary ministry of the church is often a literary invention such as *The Scarlet Letter*.

And yet, without a recovery of functional church discipline—firmly established upon the principles revealed in the Bible—the church will continue its slide into moral dissolution and relativism. Evangelicals have long recognized discipline as the “third mark” of the authentic church.² Authentic

¹Thanks are due to Crossway Books for allowing the republication of this article. It was first published in *The Compromised Church*, edited by John Armstrong (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998).

²The identification of proper discipline as the third mark of the true church goes back at least to the Belgic Confession [1561]: “The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.” “The Belgic Confession,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff, Vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), pp. 419–420. Similarly, the *Abstract of Principles of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (1858) identifies the three essential marks as true order, discipline, and worship.

biblical discipline is not an elective, but a necessary and integral mark of authentic Christianity.

How did this happen? How could the church so quickly and pervasively abandon one of its most essential functions and responsibilities? The answer is found in developments both internal and external to the church.

Put simply, the abandonment of church discipline is linked to American Christianity's creeping accommodation to American culture. As the twentieth century began, this accommodation became increasingly evident as the church acquiesced to a culture of moral individualism.

Though the nineteenth century was not a golden era for American evangelicals, the century did see the consolidation of evangelical theology and church patterns. Manuals of church discipline and congregational records indicate that discipline was regularly applied. Protestant congregations exercised discipline as a necessary and natural ministry to the members of the church, and as a means of protecting the doctrinal and moral integrity of the congregation.

As ardent congregationalists, the Baptists left a particularly instructive record of nineteenth-century discipline. Historian Gregory A. Wills aptly commented, "To an antebellum Baptist, a church without discipline would hardly have counted as a church."³ Churches held regular "Days of Discipline" when the congregation would gather to heal breaches of fellowship, admonish wayward members, rebuke the obstinate, and, if necessary, excommunicate those who resisted discipline. In so doing, congregations understood themselves to be following a biblical pattern laid down by Christ and the apostles for the protection and correction of disciples.

No sphere of life was considered outside the congregation's accountability. Members were to conduct their lives and witness in harmony with the Bible and with established moral principles. Depending on the denominational polity, discipline was codified in church covenants, books of discipline, congregational manuals, and confessions of faith. Discipline covered both doctrine and conduct. Members were disciplined for behavior that violated biblical principles or congregational covenants, but also for violations of doctrine and belief. Members were considered to be under the authority of the congregation and accountable to each other.

By the turn of the century, however, church discipline was already on the decline. In the wake of the Enlightenment, criticism of the Bible and of the doctrines of evangelical orthodoxy was widespread. Even the most conservative denominations began to show evidence of decreased attention to theological orthodoxy. At the same time, the larger culture moved toward the adoption of autonomous moral individualism. The result of these inter-

³Gregory A. Wills, *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 12.

nal and external developments was the abandonment of church discipline as ever larger portions of the church member's life were considered off-limits to the congregation.

This great shift in church life followed the tremendous cultural transformations of the early twentieth century—an era of “progressive” thought and moral liberalization. By the 1960s, only a minority of churches even pretended to practice regulative church discipline. Significantly, confessional accountability and moral discipline were generally abandoned together.

The theological category of sin has been replaced, in many circles, with the psychological concept of therapy. As Philip Reiff has argued, the “Triumph of the Therapeutic” is now a fixture of modern American culture.⁴ Church members may make poor choices, fail to live up to the expectations of an oppressive culture, or be inadequately self-actualized—but they no longer sin.

Individuals now claim an enormous zone of personal privacy and moral autonomy. The congregation—redefined as a mere voluntary association—has no right to intrude into this space. Many congregations have forfeited any responsibility to confront even the most public sins of their members. Consumed with pragmatic methods of church growth and congregational engineering, most churches leave moral matters to the domain of the individual conscience.

As Thomas Oden notes, the confession of sin is now passé and hopelessly outdated to many minds.

Naturalistic reductionism has invited us to reduce alleged individual sins to social influences for which individuals are not responsible. Narcissistic hedonism has demeaned any talk of sin or confession as ungratifying and dysfunctional. Autonomous individualism has divorced sin from a caring community. Absolute relativism has regarded moral values as so ambiguous that there is no measuring rod against which to assess anything as sin. Thus modernity, which is characterized by the confluence of these four ideological streams, has presumed to do away with confession, and has in fact made confession an embarrassment to the accommodating church of modernity.⁵

The very notion of shame has been discarded by a generation for which shame is an unnecessary and repressive hindrance to personal fulfillment. Even secular observers have noted the shamelessness of modern culture. As James Twitchell comments:

We have in the last generation tried to push shame aside. The human-potential and recovered-memory movements in psychology; the moral

⁴Philip Reiff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

⁵Thomas C. Oden, *Corrective Love: The Power of Communion Discipline* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1995), p. 56.

relativism of audience-driven Christianity; the penalty-free, all-ideas-are-equally-good transformation in higher education; the rise of no-fault behavior before the law; the often outrageous distortions in the telling of history so that certain groups can feel better about themselves; and the “I’m shame-free, but you should be ashamed of yourself” tone of political discourse are just some of the instances wherein this can be seen.⁶

Twitchell sees the Christian church aiding and abetting this moral transformation and abandonment of shame—which is, after all, a natural product of sinful behavior. “Looking at the Christian Church today, you can only see a dim pentimento of what was once painted in the boldest of colors. Christianity has simply lost it. It no longer articulates the ideal. Sex is on the loose. Shame days are over. The Devil has absconded with sin.”⁷ As Twitchell laments, “Go and sin no more” has been replaced with “Judge not lest you be judged.”

Demonstration of this moral abandonment is seen in mainline Protestantism’s surrender to an ethic of sexual “liberation.” Liberal Protestantism has lost any moral credibility in the sexual sphere. Homosexuality is not condemned, even though it is clearly condemned in the Bible. To the contrary, homosexuals get a special caucus at the denominational assembly and their own publications and special rights.

Evangelicals, though still claiming adherence to biblical standards of morality, have overwhelmingly capitulated to the divorce culture. Where are the evangelical congregations that hold married couples accountable for maintaining their marriage vows? To a great extent, evangelicals are just slightly behind liberal Protestantism in accommodating to the divorce culture and accepting what amounts to “serial monogamy”—faithfulness to one marital partner at a time. This, too, has been noted by secular observers. David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values remarked that “over the past three decades, many religious leaders . . . have largely abandoned marriage as a vital area of religious attention, essentially handing the entire matter over to opinion leaders and divorce lawyers in the secular society. Some members of the clergy seem to have lost interest in defending and strengthening marriage. Others report that they worry about offending members of their congregations who are divorced or unmarried.”⁸

Tied to this worry about offending church members is the rise of the “rights culture,” which understands society only in terms of individual rights rather than moral responsibility. Mary Ann Glendon of the Harvard

⁶James B. Twitchell, *For Shame: The Loss of Common Decency in American Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), p. 35.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁸David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 231.

Law School documents the substitution of “rights talk” for moral discourse.⁹ Unable or unwilling to deal with moral categories, modern men and women resort to the only moral language they know and understand—the unembarrassed claim to “rights” that society has no authority to limit or deny. This “rights talk” is not limited to secular society, however. Church members are so committed to their own version of “rights talk” that some congregations accept almost any behavior, belief, or “lifestyle” as acceptable, or at least off-limits to congregational sanction.

The result of this is the loss of the biblical pattern for the church—and the impending collapse of authentic Christianity in this generation. As Carl Laney laments, “The church today is suffering from an infection which has been allowed to fester. . . . As an infection weakens the body by destroying its defense mechanisms, so the church has been weakened by this ugly sore. The church has lost its power and effectiveness in serving as a vehicle for social, moral, and spiritual change. This illness is due, at least in part, to a neglect of church discipline.”¹⁰

HOLINESS AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Throughout the Bible, the people of God are characterized by a distinctive purity. This moral purity is not their own achievement, but the work of God within their midst. As the Lord said to the children of Israel, “I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44a).¹¹ Given that they have been chosen by a holy God as a people carrying His own name, God’s chosen people are to reflect His holiness by their way of living, worship, and beliefs.

The holiness code is central to the understanding of the Old Testament. As God’s chosen nation, Israel must live by God’s Word and law, which will set the children of Israel visibly apart from their pagan neighbors. As the Lord said through Moses: “Be sure to keep the commands of the LORD your God and the stipulations and decrees he has given you. Do what is right and good in the LORD’s sight, so that it may go well with you and you may go in and take over the good land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers” (Deut. 6:17–18).

The nation is reminded that it is now known by God’s name and is to reflect His holiness. “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6). God promised His covenant faithfulness to His

⁹Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

¹⁰J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), p. 12.

¹¹This verse is quoted in 1 Peter 1:16 and is addressed to the church.

people but expected them to obey His Word and follow His law. Israel's judicial system was largely designed to protect the purity of the nation.

In the New Testament, the church is likewise described as the people of God who are visible to the world by their purity of life and integrity of testimony. As Peter instructed the church: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9–10).

Peter continued, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:11–12).

As the new people of God, the church is to see itself as an alien community in the midst of spiritual darkness—strangers to the world who must abstain from the lusts and enticements of the world. The church is to be conspicuous in its purity and holiness and steadfast in its confession of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Rather than capitulating to the moral (or immoral) environment, Christians are to be conspicuous by their good behavior. As Peter summarized, "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" (1 Pet. 1:15).

The apostle Paul clearly linked the holiness expected of believers to the completed work of Christ in redemption: "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Col. 1:21–22). Clearly, this holiness made complete in the believer is the work of God; holiness is the evidence of His redemptive work. To the Corinthian congregation Paul urged, "Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

The identity of the church as the people of God is to be evident in its pure confession of Christ, its bold testimony to the Gospel, and its moral holiness before the watching world. Nothing less will mark the church as the true vessel of the Gospel.

DISCIPLINE IN THE BODY

The first dimension of discipline in the church is that discipline exercised directly by God as He deals with believers. As the book of Hebrews warns, "You have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose

heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?” (Heb. 12:5–7). As the passage continues, the author warns that those who are without discipline “are illegitimate children and not true sons” (v. 8). The purpose of discipline, however, is righteousness. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (v. 11).

This discipline is often evident in suffering—both individual and congregational. Persecution by the world has a purifying effect on the church. This persecution is not to be sought, but if the church is “tested by fire,” it must prove itself pure and genuine and receive this suffering as the Lord’s discipline, even as children receive the discipline of a father. The fact that this analogy is so foreign to many modern Christians points out the fact that discipline has disappeared in many families, as well as in the church. Children are treated as moral sovereigns in many households, and the social breakdown of the family has diminished its moral credibility. The loving discipline portrayed in this passage is as foreign to many families as it is to most congregations.

God’s loving discipline of His people is His sovereign right and is completely in keeping with His moral character—His own holiness. His fatherly discipline also establishes the authority and pattern for discipline in the church. Correction is for the greater purpose of restoration and the even higher purpose of reflecting the holiness of God.

The second dimension of discipline in the church is that disciplinary responsibility addressed to the church itself. Like God’s fatherly discipline of those He loves, the church is to exercise discipline as an integral part of its moral and theological responsibility. That the church can fall into moral disrepute is evident in the New Testament itself.

The apostle Paul confronted a case of gross moral failure in the Corinthian congregation that included “immorality of . . . a kind that does not occur even among pagans” (1 Cor. 5:1). In this case, apparent incest was known to the congregation, and yet it had taken no action.

“And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?” Paul accused the Corinthian congregation (v. 2). He instructed them to act quickly and boldly to remove this stain from their fellowship. He also warned them, “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are” (vv. 6–7a).

Paul was outraged that the Corinthian Christians would tolerate this horrible sin. Incest, though not literally unknown in the pagan world, was universally condemned and not tolerated. In this respect the Corinthian

church had fallen beneath the moral standards of the pagan world to whom they were to witness. Paul was also exasperated with a congregation he had already warned. Mentioning an earlier letter unavailable to us, Paul scolds the Corinthians:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”

The moral outrage of a wounded apostle is evident in these pointed verses, which call the Corinthian church to action and the exercise of discipline. They have now fallen into corporate sin by tolerating the presence of such a bold and arrogant sinner in their midst. Their moral testimony is clouded, and their fellowship is impure. Their arrogance has blinded them to the offense they have committed before the Lord. The open sin in their midst is like a cancer that, left unchecked, will spread throughout the entire body.

In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul offers similar instruction, combining concern for moral purity and doctrinal orthodoxy: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6). Paul instructs the Thessalonians to follow his own example because “We were not idle when we were with you” (2 Thess. 3:7).

THE PATTERN OF PROPER DISCIPLINE

How should the Corinthians have responded to this public sin? Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians of delivering this sinner unto Satan and removing him from fellowship. How is this to be done? To the Galatians Paul wrote that “if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). This teaching is clear, indicating that spiritual leaders of the church are to confront a sinning member with a spirit of humility and gentleness, and with the goal of restoration. But what are the precise steps to be taken?

The Lord Himself provided these instructions as He taught His disciples: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother

over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matt. 18:15–17).

The Lord instructed His disciples that they should first confront a sinning brother in private. “Show him his fault,” instructed the Lord. If the brother acknowledges the sin and repents, the brother has been won. The fact that the first step is a private confrontation is very important. This limits the injury caused by the sin and avoids a public spectacle, which would tarnish the witness of the church to the Gospel.

In the event the private confrontation does not lead to repentance, restoration, and reconciliation, the next step is to take witnesses. Jesus cited the Deuteronomic law which required multiple witnesses of a crime for conviction. Yet His purpose here seems larger than the mere establishment of the facts of the case. Jesus seems to intend for the witnesses to be an important presence in the event of the confrontation, thus adding corroborating testimony concerning the confrontation of a sinning brother. The brother cannot claim that he was not confronted with his sin in a brotherly context.

If the brother does not listen even in the presence of one or two witnesses, this becomes a matter for the congregation. “Tell it to the church,” instructed Jesus, and the church is to judge the matter before the Lord and render a judgment that is binding upon the sinner. This step is extremely serious, and the congregation now bears a corporate responsibility. The church must render its judgment based upon the principles of God’s Word and the facts of the case. Again, the goal is the restoration of a sinning brother or sister—not a public spectacle.

Sadly, this congregational confrontation may not avail. If it does not, the only recourse is separation from the sinning brother. “Treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector,” instructed the Lord, indicating that the separation is to be real and public. The congregation is not to consider the former brother as a part of the church. This drastic and extreme act is to follow when a brother or sister will not submit to the discipline of the church. We should note that the church should still bear witness to this man, but not as brother to brother, until and unless repentance and restoration are evident.

THE POWER OF THE KEYS

What is the church’s authority in church discipline? Jesus addressed this issue directly, even as He declared the establishment of the church after Peter’s great confession: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of

heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19). This “power of the keys” is one of the critical controversies between evangelicals and the Church of Rome. Roman Catholics believe that the pope, as Peter’s successor, holds the keys, and thus the power of binding and loosing. Protestants, however, believe that the Lord granted the keys to the church. This interpretation is supported by the Lord’s repetition of the matter in Matthew 18:18, “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Here the context reveals that the power of binding and loosing is held by the church.¹²

The terms binding and loosing were familiar terms used by rabbis in the first century to refer to the power of judging matters on the basis of the Bible. The Jewish authorities would determine how (or whether) the Scriptures applied in a specific situation and would render judgment by either binding, which meant to restrict, or loosing, which meant to liberate. The church still bears this responsibility and wields this power. John Calvin, the great Genevan Reformer, believed that the power of binding should be understood as excommunication, and loosing as reception into membership: “But the church binds him whom it excommunicates—not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. It looses him when it receives him into communion, for it makes him a sharer of the unity which is in Christ Jesus.”¹³

Calvin’s interpretation is fully in agreement at this point with Martin Luther, whose essay on “The Keys” (1530) is a massive refutation of papal claims and Roman Catholic tradition. Luther saw the keys as one of Christ’s great gifts to the church. “Both of these keys are extremely necessary in Christendom, so that we can never thank God enough for them.”¹⁴ As a pastor and theologian, Luther saw the great need for the church to bear the keys, and he understood this ministry to be gracious in the recovery of sinning saints. As Luther reflected:

¹²The New American Standard Bible, revised edition, is correct in translating the Greek verb in the perfect tense. Any other translation of the verb tense confuses the meaning and can lead to a distorted understanding of Jesus’ teaching. He is not stating that the church has the power to determine what shall later be decided in heaven. The verb tense indicates that as the church functions on the authority of Scripture, what it determines shall have been already determined in heaven. For a complete consideration of this issue, see Julius Robert Mantey, “Distorted Translations in John 20:23; Matthew 16:18–19 and 18:18,” *Review and Expositor* 78 (1981), pp. 409–416.

¹³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), p. 1214.

¹⁴Martin Luther, “The Keys,” in *Luther’s Works (American Edition)*, ed. Conrad Bergendoff, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 373.

For the dear Man, the faithful Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ, is well aware that His beloved Christians are frail, that the devil, the flesh, and the world would tempt them unceasingly and in many ways, and that at times they would fall into sin. Therefore, He has given us this remedy, the key which binds, so that we might not remain too confident in our sins, arrogant, barbarous, and without God, and the key which looses, that we should not despair in our sins.¹⁵

What about a church leader who sins? Paul instructed Timothy that a church leader—an elder—is to be considered “worthy of double honor” when he rules well (1 Tim. 5:17). When an elder sins, however, that is a matter of great consequence. First, no accusation is to be received on the basis of only one uncorroborated witness. If a charge is substantiated by two or three witnesses, however, he is “to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Tim. 5:20). Clearly, leadership carries a higher burden, and the sins of an elder cause an even greater injury to the church. The public rebuke is necessary, for the elder sins against the entire congregation. As James warned, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (Jas. 3:1).

The scandals of moral failure on the part of church leaders have caused tremendous injury to the cause of Christ. The stricter judgment should be a vivid warning to those who would violate the Word of God and lead others into sin by example. The failure of the contemporary church to apply consistent biblical church discipline has left most of these scandals unresolved on biblical grounds—and thus a continuing stain on the church.

The Bible reveals three main areas of danger requiring discipline. These are fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. Each is of critical and vital importance to the health and integrity of the church.

FIDELITY OF DOCTRINE

The theological confusion and compromise that mark the modern church are directly traceable to the church’s failure to separate itself from doctrinal error and heretics who teach it. On this matter the Bible is clear: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 John 9–11). The apostle Paul instructed the Galatians that “if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other

¹⁵Ibid.

than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:8–9).

The letters of 2 Peter and Jude explicitly warn of the dangers presented to the church in the form of false prophets and heretics. Jude alerts the church that "certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord" (v. 4). Similarly, Peter warns, "There will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves" (2 Pet. 2:1).

The church must separate itself from these heresies—and from the heretics! The permissive posture of the church in this century has allowed the most heinous heresies to grow unchecked—and heretics to be celebrated. Francis Schaeffer was among the most eloquent modern prophets who decried this doctrinal cowardice. Schaeffer emphatically denied that a church could be a true Christian fellowship and allow false doctrine. As he stated, "One cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the *dunamis*, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world can see. By the grace of God, therefore, the church must be known simultaneously for its purity of doctrine and the reality of its community."¹⁶

PURITY OF LIFE

The visible community of the true church is also to be evident in its moral purity. Christians are to live in obedience to the Word of God and to be exemplary in their conduct and untarnished in their testimony. A lack of attention to moral purity is a sure sign of congregational rebellion before the Lord.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul chastised them severely: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanc-

¹⁶Francis A. Schaeffer, "The Church Before the Watching World," in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1970), p. 144.

tified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

When Christians sin, their sin is to be confronted by the church in accordance with the pattern revealed in Scripture. The goal is the restoration of a sister or a brother, not the creation of a public spectacle. The greatest moral danger to the church is the toleration of sin, public or private. Conversely, one of the greatest blessings to the church is the gift of biblical church discipline—the ministry of the keys.

UNITY OF FELLOWSHIP

The integrity of the church is also dependent upon the true unity of its fellowship. Indeed, one of the most repeated warnings found in the New Testament is the admonition against toleration of schismatics. The unity of the church is one of its most visible distinctives—and most precious gifts.

The warnings about this are severe: “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Rom. 16:17–18). Writing to Titus, Paul instructed that the church should “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (Titus 3:10–11).

A breach in the unity of the church is a scandal in the body of Christ. The church is consistently exhorted to practice and preserve a true unity in true doctrine and biblical piety. This unity is not the false unity of a lowest-common-denominator Christianity, the “Gospel Lite” preached and taught in so many modern churches, but rather is found in the healthy and growing maturity of the congregation as it increases in grace and in its knowledge of the Word of God.

The ongoing function of church discipline is to be a part of individual self-examination and congregational reflection. The importance of maintaining integrity in personal relationships was made clear by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount as He instructed the disciples that anger against a brother is a deadly sin. Reconciliation is a mandate, not a hypothetical goal. “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23–24).

Similarly, Paul warned against participating in the Lord’s Supper amidst divisions. The Supper itself is a memorial of the broken body and shed blood of the Savior and must not be desecrated by the presence of divisions

or controversies within the congregation, or by unconfessed sin on the part of individual believers. “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Cor. 11:26–29).

The “discipline of the Table” is thus one of the most important disciplinary functions of the congregation. The Lord’s Supper is not to be served indiscriminately, but only to those baptized believers who are under the discipline of the church and in good standing with their congregation.

THE RECOVERY OF THE THIRD MARK

The mandate of the church is to maintain true gospel doctrine and order. A church lacking these essential qualities is, biblically defined, not a true church. That is a hard thing to say, for it clearly indicts thousands of American congregations who long ago abandoned this essential mark and have accommodated themselves to the spirit of the age. Fearing lawsuits and lacking courage, these churches allow sin to go unconfronted, and heresy to grow unchecked. Inevitably, the false unity they seek to preserve gives way to the factions that inevitably follow the gradual abandonment of biblical Christianity. They do not taste the true unity of a church grounded on the truth and exercising the ministry of the keys.

John Leadley Dagg, the author of a well-known and influential church manual of the nineteenth century, noted: “It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it.”¹⁷ If so, and I fear it is so, Christ has abandoned many churches who are blissfully unaware of His departure.

At the end of the twentieth century, the great task of the church is to prove itself to be the genuine church revealed in the New Testament—proving its authenticity by a demonstration of pure faith and authentic community. We must regain the New Testament concern for fidelity of doctrine, purity of life, and unity of fellowship. We must recover the missing mark.

¹⁷J. L. Dagg, *A Treatise on Church Order* (Charleston, SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858), p. 274.

SECTION II

HISTORICAL REPRINTS

The Glory of a True Church, And its Discipline display'd

BENJAMIN KEACH



Keach, Rev. Benjamin, was born in Stokeham, England, Feb. 29, 1640. He found peace through Christ in his fifteenth year; and being unable to discover infant baptism or baptism by sprinkling in the Bible, and being fully satisfied that every believer should be immersed, he was baptized after the Saviour's example by John Russel, and united with a neighboring Baptist church. This community, perceiving his remarkable talents, encouraged him, when he was eighteen years old, to exercise his gifts as a minister.

At first he was an Arminian about the extent of the atonement and free-will, but the reading of the Scriptures and the conversation of those who knew the will of God more perfectly relieved him from both errors. In 1668, in the twenty-eighth year of his age, he was ordained pastor of the church of Horsleydown, Southwark, London. The congregation increased so rapidly after Mr. Keach became pastor, that they had repeatedly to enlarge their house of worship.

Mr. Keach soon became a famous disputant on the Baptist side; he had taken Richard Baxter in hand, to the serious injury of the bishop of Kidderminster, and others had felt his heavy blows.

The Rev. John Tredwell, of Lavingham, a friend of Mr. Keach, was blessed in his ministry by the conversion of several vicious persons, who united with his church; this stirred up the indignation of the Rev. Wm. Burkitt, the commentator, a neighbor of Mr. Tredwell, who cast many unjust reflections upon the Baptists and their doctrines. Mr. Tredwell wrote Mr. Burkitt giving some reasons why he should abandon the unchristian course he was pursuing. Mr. Burkitt, at a time when Mr. Tredwell and his people were gathered in the sanctuary for public worship, with a number of his parishioners, entered the meeting-house, and demanded that Mr. Tredwell and his church should hear his view of the points in dispute. Mr. Tredwell, taken aback somewhat by "such a riotous and tumultuous challenge," agreed to let him speak against Baptist beliefs and usages, provided that he should have an opportunity to reply. For nearly two hours Mr. Burkitt sustained infant baptism, and then he and his riotous company departed without giving Mr. Tredwell an opportunity of making any return, except to a few of his own persuasion that were left behind." Mr. Burkitt speedily published the substance of the address so rudely intruded upon the Baptist minister and his people. Mr. Keach, as a valiant defender of the faith, was invited to reply to Mr. Burkitt's arguments, which he did effectively in "The Rector Rectified and Corrected." Mr. Burkitt was rector of Dedham.

He was challenged by some Episcopal ministers to discuss baptism at

Gravesend, near London. As he went to that place in a boat with some friends, he incidentally alluded to the proposed meeting in a way that permitted a stranger, an Episcopal minister, to know that he was Mr. Keach. This person attacked him about infant baptism, and received such a complete drubbing that as soon as the boat touched land he started for his Episcopal brethren and informed them of the arguments which Mr. Keach would use and of his method of putting them. The result of the interview between Mr. Keach's fellow-traveler in the Gravesend boat and his brethren was that they went away as quickly as possible, leaving Mr. Keach without an antagonist.

Mr. Keach was often in prison for preaching, and his life was frequently in danger. Some cavalry sent down to Buckinghamshire to suppress the religious meetings of Dissenters found Mr. Keach preaching, and swore that they would kill him. He was seized and bound and laid on the earth and four of the troopers were ready to trample him to death with their horses; but just as they were going to put spurs to their horses an officer who perceived their object rode up and stopped them. He was taken to prison, from which he obtained a release after suffering great hardships.

In 1664 he wrote "The Child's Instructor." For the heresies against the Episcopal Church in the little work he was arrested and bound over under heavy penalties to appear at court. The assizes began at Aylesbury Oct. 8, 1664. The judge was Lord Chief Justice Hyde, afterwards Lord Clarendon, who acted like Jeffreys at the "Bloody Assizes." He abused Mr. Keach outrageously, he threatened the jury, and he evidently wanted to have Mr. Keach executed if he could terrify him into making some unwise statements. The jury brought in a verdict that Mr. Keach was guilty in part. And when asked to explain their verdict the foreman said, "In the indictment he is charged with these words, 'When the thousand years shall be expired, then shall all the rest of the devils be raised'; but in the book it is, 'Then shall the rest of the dead be raised.'" The judge informed the jury that they could bring him in guilty of all the indictments but that sentence. They brought in the prompted verdict. And immediately the judge said: "Benjamin Keach, you are here convicted for writing, printing, and publishing a seditious and schismatical book, for which the court's judgment is that you go to jail for a fortnight without bail, and the next Saturday stand upon the pillory at Aylesbury in the open market for the space of two hours, with a paper upon your head with this inscription, 'For writing, printing, and publishing a schismatical book entitled "The Child's Instructor, or a New and Easy Primer,"' and the next Thursday to stand in the same manner and for the same time in the market of Winslow; and then your book shall be openly burnt before your face by the common hangman in disgrace of you and your doctrine. And you shall forfeit to the king's majesty the sum of twenty pounds; and shall remain in jail until you find sureties for your good behavior and appearance at the next assizes, there to renounce your doctrines and make such public submission as shall be enjoined upon you." The sheriff was as rigorous in executing this infamous sentence as the judge was insolent in pronouncing it.

On the pillory at Aylesbury Mr. Keach defended himself and the truth with great boldness. The jailer frequently interrupted him, and finally, the sheriff himself threatened to have him gagged. The people, contrary to custom, had no words of mockery for the good, persecuted minister, and no offensive missile was hurled at him. An Episcopal minister who ventured to assail Mr. Keach in the pillory was immediately reproached by the people with the ungodliness of his own life, and his voice was drowned in laughter. At Winslow, where he lived, he suffered the same shameful penalty, and a copy of his little book was burned.

Mr. Keach was a zealous Baptist; he aided ministers who came to him from all parts of his country, he had many meeting-houses built, and his works in defense of Baptist principles were read all over the kingdom. Before his death men spoke of him as the “famous” Mr. Keach, and he is still described by writers as a man of great celebrity. His two most popular works are “Tropologia, or a Key to open Scripture Metaphors,” and “Gospel Mysteries Unveiled, or an Exposition of all the Parables.” The latter work is more frequently offered for sale in the catalogues of the great London second-hand bookstores than any production of Richard Baxter, John Howe, or Jeremy Taylor. Mr. Keach was the author of forty-three works. He died July 18, 1704, in his sixty-fourth year. He was a devout Christian who led a blameless life and died in the triumphs of faith.

—William Cathcart, 1881

THE
G L O R Y
O F A
T R U E C H U R C H,
And its
Discipline display'd

Wherein a true Gospel-Church
is described.

Together with the Power of the Keys,
and who are to be let in, and who to be
shut out.

BENJAMIN KEACH

MAT. 18.18. *Whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth, shall
be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose
on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.*

JOHN ROBINSON, PUBLISHER

L O N D O N

Printed in the Year 1697.

To the Baptized Churches, particularly to that under my Care.

My Brethren,

Every House or Building consisteth both of Matter and Form: And so doth the Church of Christ, or House of the Living God.

The Matter or Materials with which it is built are Lively Stones, i.e. Converted Persons: Also the Matter and Form must be according to the Rule and Pattern shewed in the Mount, I mean Christ's Institution, and the Apostolical Churches Constitution, and not after Men's Inventions.

Now some Men, because the Typical Church of the Jews was National, and took in their Carnal Seed (as such) therefore the same Matter and Form they would have under the Gospel.

But tho a Church be rightly built in both these respects, i.e. of fit Matter and right Form, yet without a regular and orderly Discipline, it will soon lose its Beauty, and be polluted.

Many Reverend Divines of the Congregational way, have written most excellently (it is true) upon this Subject, I mean on Church-Discipline; but the Books are so voluminous that the Poorer Sort can't purchase them, and many others have not Time or Learning enough to improve them to their Profit; and our Brethren the Baptists have not written (as I can gather) on this Subject by it self: Therefore I have been earnestly desired by our Members, and also by one of our Pastors, to write a small and plain Tract concerning the Rules of the Discipline of a Gospel-Church; that all Men may not only know our Faith, but see our Order in this case also. True, this (tho plain) is but short, but may be it may provoke some other Person to do it more fully. Certainly, ignorance of the rules of Discipline causes no small trouble and disorders in our Churches; and if this may be a Prevention, or prove profitable to any, let God have the Glory, and I have my End: Who am, Yours

Benj. Keach.

THE GLORY OF A GOSPEL-CHURCH, AND THE TRUE ORDERLY DISCIPLINE THEREOF EXPLAIN'D.

Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel-Church.

Before there can be any Orderly Discipline among a Christian Assembly, they must be orderly and regularly constituted into a Church-state, according to the Institution of Christ in the Gospel.

1. A Church of Christ, according to the Gospel-Institution, is a Congregation of Godly Christians, who as a Stated-Assembly (being first baptized upon the Profession of Faith) do by mutual agreement and consent give themselves up to the Lord, and one to another, according to the Will of God; and do ordinarily meet together in one Place, for the Public Service and

Worship of God; among whom the Word of God and Sacraments are duly administered, according to Christ's Institution.¹

2. The Beauty and Glory of which Congregation doth consist in their being all Converted Persons, or *Lively Stones*; being by the Holy Spirit, united to Jesus Christ the Precious Corner-Stone, and only foundation of every Christian, as well as of every particular Congregation, and of the whole *Catholic Church*.²

3. That every Person before they are admitted Members, in such a Church so constituted, must declare to the Church (or to such with the Pastor, that they shall appoint) what God hath done for their Souls, or their Experiences of a Saving work of Grace upon their Hearts; and also the Church should enquire after, and take full satisfaction concerning their Holy Lives, or Good Conversations.³

And when admitted Members, before the Church they must solemnly enter into a Covenant, to walk in the Fellowship of that particular Congregation, and submit themselves to the Care and Discipline thereof,⁴ and to walk faithfully with God in all his Holy Ordinances, and there to be fed and have Communion, and worship God there, when the Church meets (if possible) and give themselves up to the watch and charge of the Pastor and Ministry thereof:⁵ the Pastor then also signifying in the name of the Church their acceptance of each Person, and endeavor to take the care of them, and to watch over them in the Lord, (the Members being first satisfied to receive them, and to have Communion with them.) And so the Pastor to give them the right Hand of Fellowship of a Church, or *Church Organical*.

A Church thus constituted ought forthwith to choose them a Pastor, Elder or Elders, and Deacons, (we reading of no other Officers, or Offices abiding in the Church) and what kind of Men they ought to be, and how qualified, is laid down by *Paul* to *Timothy*, and to *Titus*. Moreover, they are to take special care, that both Bishops, Overseers, or Elders, as well as the Deacons, have in some competent manner all those Qualifications; and after in a Day of solemn Prayer and Fasting, that they have elected them, (whether Pastor, &c., or Deacons) and they accepting the Office, must be ordained with Prayer, and laying on of Hands of the Eldership; being first prov'd, and found meet and fit Persons for so Sacred an Office: Therefore such are very disorderly Churches who have no Pastor or Pastors ordained, they acting not according to the Rule of the Gospel, having something wanting.⁶

¹Act. 2.41, 42, 43, 44. Act. 8.14. Act. 19.4, 5, 6. Eph. 1.1, 2 and 2.12, 13, 19. Col. 1. 2, 4, 12. I Pet. 2.5. Act. 5.13, 14. Rom. 6.17. Heb. 6.1, 2.

²Rom. 6. 3, 4, 5. I Pet. 2.4, 5, 6. Eph. 2.20, 21. Col. 2.19.

³Psa. 66.16. Act. 11.4, 5, 6, &c., 23, 24. I Pet. 3.15. II Cor. 8.5. Jer. 50.5.

⁴Heb. 13.17.

⁵I Pet. 5.1, 2.

⁶I Tim. 3.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Tit. 1. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Tit. 1.7. Act. 6.6. I Tim. 5.22. I Cor. 9.16, 17.

Of the work of a Pastor, Bishop, or Overseer.

1. The work of a Pastor is to preach the Word of Christ, or to feed the Flock, and to administer all the Ordinances of the Gospel which belong to his Sacred Office,⁷ and to be faithful and laborious therein, studying to shew himself approved unto God, a *Work-man that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*⁸ *He is a Steward of the Mysteries of God,*⁹ therefore ought to be a Man of good Understanding and Experience, being sound in the Faith, and one that is acquainted with the Mysteries of the Gospel: *Because he is to feed the People with Knowledge and Understanding.*¹⁰ He must be faithful and skillful to declare the Mind of God, and diligent therein, also to *preach in season and out of season;*¹¹ God having committed unto him the Ministry of Reconciliation,¹² a most choice and sacred Trust. What Interest hath God greater in the World which he hath committed unto Men than this? Moreover, he must make known the whole Counsel of God to the People.¹³

2. A Pastor is to visit his Flock, to know *their state, and to watch over them, to support the weak, and to strengthen the feeble-minded,*¹⁴ and succour the tempted, and to reprove them that are unruly.

3. To pray for them at all times, and with them also when sent for, and desired, and as Opportunity serves; and to sympathize with them in every State and Condition, with all Love and Compassion.

4. And to shew them in all respects, as near as he can, a good Example in *Conversation, Charity, Faith and Purity;*¹⁵ that his Ministry may be the more acceptable to all, and the Name of God be glorified, and Religion delivered from Reproach.

5. He must see he carries it to all with all Impartiality, not preferring the Rich above the Poor, nor lord it over God's Heritage, nor assume any greater Power than God hath given him; but to shew a humble and meek Spirit, nay to be *clothed with Humility.*¹⁶

The Office and Work of Deacons.

The Work of Deacons is to serve Tables,¹⁷ viz. to see to provide for the Lord's Table, the Minister's Table, and the Poor's Table.¹⁸ (1.) They should

⁷Act. 20. 31, 35.

⁸II Tim. 2.15.

⁹II Cor. 4.1, 2. I Tim. 3.

¹⁰Jer. 3.15.

¹¹II Tim. 4.2.

¹²II Cor. 5.19.

¹³Act. 20.20, 27.

¹⁴Pro. 27.23. I Thes. 5.15.

¹⁵I Tim. 4.12.

¹⁶Jam. 2.4. I Tim. 5.21. I Pet. 5.3 and 5.6.

¹⁷Act. 6.1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10.

¹⁸Act. 5. 7, 8, 9, 10.

provide Bread and Wine for the Lord's Table. (2.) See that every Member contributes to the Maintenance of the Ministry, according to their Ability,¹⁹ and their own voluntary Subscription or Obligation. (3.) That each Member do give weekly to the Poor, as God has blessed him. (4.) Also visit the Poor, and know their Condition as much as in them lies, that none, especially the aged Widows, be neglected.²⁰

Of the Duty of Church-Members to their Pastor.

1st. 'Tis the Duty of every Member to pray for their Pastor and Teachers. *Brethren, pray for us,*²¹ that the Word of the Lord may run *and be glorified*. Again, saith Paul, *Praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the Mystery of Christ. Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.*²² They that neglect this Duty seem not to care either for their Minister, or their own Souls, or whether Sinners be converted, and the Church edified or not. They pray for their daily Bread, and will they not pray to have the Bread of Life plentifully broken to them?

Motives to this.

1. Ministers Work is great: *Who is sufficient for these things?*²³
2. The Opposition is not small which is made against them.²⁴
3. God's loud Call is (as well as Ministers themselves) for the Saint's continual Prayers and Supplication for them.²⁵
4. Their Weaknesses and Temptations are many.
5. The Increase and Edification of the Church depends upon the Success of their Ministry.
6. If they fall or miscarry, God is greatly dishonoured, and his Ways and People reproached.

2dly. They ought to shew a reverential Estimation of them,²⁶ being Christ's Ambassadors, also called Rulers, Angels, &c. they that honour them, and receive them, honour and receive Jesus Christ. *Esteem them very highly in Love for their Work sake.*²⁷ Again, he saith, *Let the Elders that rule well, be accounted worthy of double Honour; especially they who labour in Word and Doctrine:*²⁸ that is, as I conceive, such that are most laborious.

¹⁹I Cor. 16.2.

²⁰Act. 6.1.

²¹I Thess. 5.25.

²²Heb. 13.18.

²³II Cor. 2.16.

²⁴I Cor. 16.9.

²⁵I Tim. 4.3, 4, 5.

²⁶II Cor. 3.19, 20.

²⁷I Thes. 3.13.

²⁸I Tim. 5.17.

3dly. 'Tis their Duty to submit themselves unto them, that is, in all their Exhortations, good Counsels and Reproofs; and when they call to any extraordinary Duty, as Prayer, Fasting, or days of Thanksgiving, if they see no just cause why such days should not be kept, they ought to obey their Pastor or Elder, as in other cases also. *Obey them that have the Rule over you, and submit yourselves.*²⁹

4thly. It is their Duty to take care to vindicate them from the unjust Charges of evil Men, or Tongue of Infamy, and not to take up a Reproach against them by report, nor to grieve their Spirits, or weaken their Hands.³⁰

5thly. 'Tis the Duty of Members to go to them when under Trouble or Temptations.

6thly. It is their Duty to provide a comfortable Maintenance for them and their Families, suitable to their State and Condition. *Let him that is taught in the Word, communicate to him that teacheth, in all good things.*³¹ *Who goeth a Warfare at his own Charge? Who planteth a Vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof?*³² &c. *Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.*³³ *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?*³⁴ They should minister to them cheerfully with all readiness of Mind. Ministers are not to ask for their Bread, but to receive it honourably.³⁵ The Ministers Maintenance, tho it is not by Tythes, &c. as under the Law, yet they have now as just a right to a comfortable Maintenance as they had then, the equity of the Duty is the same: Our Saviour, saith Dr. Owen, and the Apostles plead it from grounds of Equity and Justice; and all kind of Laws and rules of Righteousness among Men of all sorts call for it.³⁶

7thly. It is their Duty to adhere to them, and abide by them in all their Trials and Persecutions for the Word. *Ye were not ashamed of me in my Bonds, &c.*³⁷

8thly. Dr. Owen adds another Duty of the Members to their Pastor,³⁸ viz. to agree to come together upon his Appointment: *When they were come, and had gathered the Church together, &c.*³⁹

Query, *Are there no ruling Elders besides the Pastor?*

Ans. There might be such in the Primitive Apostolical Church, but we

²⁹Heb. 13.5, 17.

³⁰Jer. 20.10. Zeph. 2.8. II Cor. 11.21, 23.

³¹Gal. 6.6.

³²I Cor. 9.7, 8.

³³ver. 14.

³⁴ver. 11.

³⁵Mat. 10.9, 10.

³⁶See Dr. Owen's *Ephod*, p.21, 22.

³⁷II Tim. 4.16, 17, 18.

³⁸*Ephod*, p.27.

³⁹Act. 14.27.

see no ground to believe it an abiding Office to continue in the Church, but was only temporary.

1. Because we have none of the Qualifications of such Elders mention'd, or how to be chosen.
2. Because we read not particularly what their Work and Business is, or how distinct from preaching Elders; tho we see not but the Church may (if she sees meet) choose some able and discreet Brethren to be *Helpers in Government*.⁴⁰ We have the Qualifications of Bishops and Deacons directly laid down,⁴¹ and how to be chosen, and their Work declared,⁴² but of no other Office or Officers in the Church, but these only.

Quest. May an Elder of one Church if called, warrantably administer all Ordinances to another?

Ans. No surely;⁴³ for we find no warrant for any such Practice, he being only ordained Pastor or Elder of that particular Church that chose him, &c. and hath no Right or Authority to administer as an Elder in any other where he is not so much as a Member.⁴⁴

Quest. May a Church call out a Teacher that is no ordained Elder to administer all Ordinances to them?

Ans. You may as well ask, May a Church act disorderly? Why were Ministers to be ordained, if others unordained might warrantably do all their Work? if therefore they have no Person fitly qualified for that Office, they must look out from abroad for one that is. Yet (as we say) Necessity has no Law; provided therefore they can't do either, it is better their Teacher be called to do it, than that the Church should be without their Food, and Church Ordinances neglected; yet let all Churches take care to organize themselves, and not through Covetousness, or neglect of Duty, rest impleat Churches, and so under Sin. *God is the God of Order, and not of Confusion, in all the Churches of the Saints.*⁴⁵ And how severely did God deal of old with such that meddled with the Priests Work and Office, who were not of the Priesthood, nor called by him to administer in holy things!

Of the reception of Members.

Quest. What is the Order of receiving Members into the Church, that were no Members any where before?

⁴⁰Rom. 12.8.

⁴¹I Tim. 3.

⁴²Tit. 1.5, 6, 7.

⁴³Act. 20.17, 27, 28.

⁴⁴Tit. 1.5.

⁴⁵I Cor. 14.33, 38.

Ans. 1. The Person must give an account of his Faith; and of the Work of Grace upon his Soul before the Church;⁴⁶ and also a strict Enquiry must be made about his Life and Conversation:⁴⁷ but if through Bashfulness the Party can not speak before the Congregation,⁴⁸ the Elder and two or three more Persons may receive an account of his or her Faith,⁴⁹ and report it to the Church.⁵⁰ But if full Satisfaction by the Testimony of good and credible Persons is not given of the Party's Life and Conversation, he must be put by until Satisfaction is obtained in that respect.⁵¹ Moreover, when the Majority are satisfied, and yet one or two Persons are not, the Church and Elder will do well to wait a little time, and endeavour to satisfy such Persons, especially if the Reasons of their difference seem weighty.

Quest. *What is to be done when a Person offers himself for Communion from a Church that is corrupt, or erroneous in Principles?*

Ans. 1. The Church ought to take an account of his Faith in all Fundamental Points, and of the Work of Grace upon his Heart.

2. And if satisfied, then to send also to that corrupt People, to know whether they have any thing or not against his Life and Conversation: if satisfied in both these respects, the Church may receive him.

Quest. *To whom is it Members join themselves? is it to the Elder, or to the Church?*

Ans. They are joined to the whole Community of the Church, being incorporated as Members thereof, and thereto abide, tho the Pastor be removed by Death.⁵²

The Power of the Keys, with Church-Discipline, and Members Duties one to another.

1. We judge it necessary that a Day monthly be appointed particularly for Discipline, and not to manage such affairs on the Lord's-day, which should be spent on the publick Worship of God, of a different nature: besides, such things may (on the account of Discipline) come before the Church which may not be expedient to be heard on the Lord's-day, lest it disturb the Spirits of any Members, and hinder their Meditation in the Word which they have newly heard: tho in small Congregations perhaps a day in two or three Months may be sufficient.

⁴⁶Psa. 66.16. Act. 9.26, 27.

⁴⁷III Joh. 9, 10.

⁴⁸Rom. 14. 17, 19. I Pet. 3.15.

⁴⁹I Cor. 14.40.

⁵⁰Rom. 15.1, 2.

⁵¹Act. 11.2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

⁵²Act. 2.47 and 5.11, 15.

2. The Power of the Keys, or to receive in and shut out of the Congregation, is committed unto the Church:⁵³ The Political Power of Christ, saith Dr. *Chauncy*, is in the Church, whereby it is exercised in the Name of Christ, having all lawful Rule and Government within it self, which he thus proves, viz.

1. The Church essential is the first Subject of the Keys.
2. They must of necessity to their Preservation, purge themselves from all pernicious Members.
3. They have Power to organize themselves with Officers. Yet I humbly conceive I may add, that the Concurrence of the Presbytery is needful hereunto.
4. If need be that they call an Officer from without, or one of another Church, they must first admit him a Member, that they may ordain their Officer from among themselves.
5. They have Power to reject a scandalous Pastor from Office and Membership.

This Power of Christ is exerted as committed to them by the Hands of the Elder appointed by Christ, the due management whereof is in and with the Church to be his Care and Trust, as a Steward, whereof he is accountable to Christ and the Church, not lording it over God's Heritage.

And that the Power of the Keys is in the Church, appears to me from Mat. 18. *If he will not hear the Church*; it is not said, if he will not hear the Elder, or Elders. As also that of the Apostle, in directing the Church to cast out the Incestuous Person,⁵⁴ he doth not give this Counsel to the Elder or Elders of the Church, but to the Church;⁵⁵ so he commands the Church to withdraw from every Brother that walks disorderly. *Purge out the old Leaven, that you may be a new Lump.*⁵⁶

Of Church Censures.

Now as to Church-Censures I understand but two besides Suspension, viz. (1.) Withdrawing from a Member that walks disorderly. (2.) Casting out, or Excommunicating such that are either guilty of notorious or scandalous Crimes, of Heresy, &c. or of contemning the Authority of the Church.

Briefly to each of these.

1. Suspension is to be when a Member falls under Sin, and the Church

⁵³Act. 16.5. II Thes. 1.3, 6.

⁵⁴I Cor. 5.4, 5.

⁵⁵II Thes. 3.6, 14.

⁵⁶I Cor. 5.7.

wants time fully to hear the matter, and so can't withdraw from him, or cast him out.

2. If any Member walks disorderly, tho not guilty of gross scandalous Sins, he or she, as soon as it is taken notice of, ought to be admonished, and endeavours to be used to bring him to Repentance. *For we hear that there are some which walk disorderly, not working at all, but are busy-bodies.*⁵⁷ Such as meddle with matters that concern them not, it may be (instead of following their Trade and Business) they go about from one Member's House to another, telling or carrying of Tales and Stories of this Brother, or of that Brother or Sister, which perhaps may be true, or perhaps false, and may be too to the Reproach or Scandal of some Member or Members, which, if so, it is back biting; and that is so notorious a Crime, that without Repentance they shall not ascend God's holy Hill.⁵⁸ Back-biting is a diminishing our Neighbours, or Brother's good Name, either by denying him his due Praise, or by laying anything to his Charge falsely or irregularly, or without sufficient cause or evidence, *Thus our Annotators.* But this of disorderly walking does not amount to such a Crime, but Evils not so notorious; *Now them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own Bread.*⁵⁹ They must be admonished.

1. An Admonition is a faithful Endeavour to convict a Person of a Fault, both as to Matter of Fact and Circumstance; and this admonition must be given first, if it be private, by that Brother that knows or has knowledge of the Fault or Evil of the Person offending, whether the Elder, or Member; for any private Brother ought to admonish such with all care and faithfulness before he proceeds farther. But if it be publick, the Church ought to send for the Offender, and the Pastor must admonish him before all.

2. But if after all due Endeavours used he is not reclaimed, but continues a disorderly Person, the Church must withdraw from him. *Now we command you Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every Brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the Traditions he received from us.*⁶⁰ This is not a delivering up to Satan, Excommunicating or dismembering the Person; for this sort are still to be owned as Members, tho disorderly ones: the Church must note him so as not to have Communion or Company with him in that sense, *yet count him not as an Enemy, but exhort him as a Brother: if any Man obey not our Word, note that Man.*⁶¹ It appears that such who refuse to adhere to what the Pastor commands and exhorts to,⁶² in the Name of Christ, are to be deemed dis-

⁵⁷II Thes. 3.11, 12.

⁵⁸Psa. 15. 1, 3.

⁵⁹II Thes. 3.12.

⁶⁰II Thes. 2.6.

⁶¹II Thes 2.14, 15.

⁶²Heb. 12.25.

orderly Persons, as such are who meet not with the Church when assembled together to worship God, or that neglect private or family Prayer, or neglect their attendance on the Lord's-Supper, or to contribute to the necessary Charges of the Church, or suffer any Evils unreprieved in their Children; all such may be lookt upon disorderly Walkers, and ought to be proceeded against according to this Rule, or divulge the private Resolves of the Church, as well as in many like cases.

Of private Offences of one Brother against another.

1. As touching private Offences, the Rule *Mat. 18.* is to be observed, only this by the way must be premised, *viz.* if but one Brother or two have the knowledge of some Members Crime, yet if it be publickly known to the World, and the Name of God be reproached, it being an immoral act, a private Brother is not to proceed with such an Offender, according to *Mat. 18.* but forthwith to bring it to the Church, that the publick Scandal may be taken off.

2. But if it be a private Offence or Injury done to a Brother or Sister in particular, and not being a notorious scandalous Sin, that Brother must not mention it to one Soul, either within, or without the Church, until he hath proceeded according to the Rule.

(1.) He must tell his Brother his Fault. *Moreover, if thy Brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault betwixt thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy Brother.*⁶³

Thou must labour in Love and all Affections to convince him of his Fault; but if he will not hear thee,

(2.) Thou must take one or two more, but besure see they are discreet Persons, and such that are most likely to gain upon him; and they with thee are to labour with all Wisdom to bring him to the sense of his Fault: 'tis not just to speak to him, as if that were enough; no, no, but to take all due Pains, and to strive to convince him, that so the matter may be issued, and the Church not troubled with it: *But if he will not hear thee, take one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three Witnesses every word may be established.*⁶⁴

(3.) But if he will not hear them after all due Means and Admonitions used, then it must be brought to the Church; and if he will not hear the Church, he must be cast out: The Elder is to put the Question, whether the offending Brother be in their Judgments incorrigible, and refuseth to hear the Church; which passing in the Affirmative by the Vote of the Congregation, or the Majority of the Brethren by the lifting up of their Hands, or by their Silence; the Pastor after calling upon God, and opening the nature of the Offence, and the Justness of their Proceedings, in the Name and by the

⁶³Mat. 18.15.

⁶⁴Mat. 18.16.

Authority of Christ, pronounces the Sentence of Excommunication to this effect.

*That A.B. being guilty of great Iniquity, and not manifesting unfeigned Repentance, but refusing to hear the Church, I do in the Name, and by the Authority of Christ committed unto me as Pastor of this his Church, pronounce and declare that he is to be, and is hereby excommunicated, excluded or cast out of the Congregation, and no longer to be owned a Brother, or a Member of this Church; and this for the destruction of the Flesh, that his Spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*⁶⁵

And this we believe is the substance of that which the Apostle calls a delivering up to Satan, he being cast into the World, which is called the Kingdom of Satan, where he rules and reigns.

“The delivery unto Satan (saith Dr. Chauncy) signifies only the solemn Exclusion of a Person from the Communion of the Church, the Visible Kingdom of Christ, and disfranchizing him, or divesting him of all visible Right to Church Privileges, casting him into the Kingdom of the World, where the Prince of Darkness rules in the Children of Disobedience.” And this being done, he is to be esteemed to be not better than an Heathen Man, or Publican, or as an evil Person, and not to have so much as intimate civil Communion withal.⁶⁶

Of Scandalous Persons guilty of gross Acts of Immorality.

If any Member fall into any gross Acts of Sin, as *Swearing, Lying, Drunkenness, Fornication, Covetousness, Extortion*, or the like, and it is known and publicly spread abroad to the great scandal and reproach of Religion, and of the Holy Name of God, his Church, and People; the said Offender so charged, the Church must send one or two Brethren to him to come before the Congregation: if he will not come, but doth fight and contemn the Authority of the Church, that will bring farther Guilt upon him, for which Offence he incurs the Censure before-mentioned. But if he doth appear, his Charge is to be laid before him, and the Witnesses called; and after he has made his Defence, and said all he hath to say, and the Congregation finds him Guilty, then the same Censure is to pass upon him, to the end he may be brought to unfeigned Repentance, and the Name of God cleared; and some time must be taken to make it appear that he hath true Repentance, by the Reformation of his Life and holy walking afterwards, before he be received again, and the Censure of the Church in a solemn manner be taken off.

Dr. Chauncy puts this Question,

⁶⁵I Cor. 5.

⁶⁶Mat. 18.17.

Quest. *'How is a Church to proceed in case of open and notorious Scandals?'*

The Answer is, 'the matter of Fact, as such, being beyond all question; the Church is to proceed immediately to censure, to vindicate the Honour of Christ and his Church, and to manifest to the World their just Indignation against such Notorious Offenders, and wait for a well-grounded and tryed Evidence of his true Repentance under that Ordinance of Christ which is appointed to that end.'⁶⁷

Observe, It is the opinion of the Doctor, that tho the Person be penitent, yet because his Sin is open and scandalous, he ought to be cast out to vindicate the Honour of Christ and the Church, as part of his just Punishment (that being one reason of the Ordinance of Excommunication) as well as to bring the Person to thorough Repentance; and we are of his Mind. *Paul* takes no notice in the case of the *Incestuous Person* of his immediate Repentance; or if he repent not, then, &c. But says he, *deliver such a one to Satan*, &c. Saith the Lord, *if her Father had but spit in her Face, should she not be ashamed seven Days? Let her be shut out from the Camp Seven Days*: (speaking of Miriam) *and after that let her be received in again*.⁶⁸

Of dealing with Hereticks and Blasphemers.

As touching Hereticks or Heresy, the same Censure, when they are convicted, ought to pass against them; Heresy is commonly restrained to signify any perverse Opinion or Error in a fundamental Point of Religion, as to deny the Being of God, or the Deity of Christ, or his Satisfaction, and Justification alone by his Righteousness, or to deny the Resurrection of the Body, or eternal Judgment, or the like. Yet our Annotators say, the Word signifies the same thing with Schism and Divisions; which if so, such that are guilty of Schism or Divisions in the Church, ought to be excommunicated also.⁶⁹ *Heresies* are called *Damnable* by the Apostle Peter; without Repentance such cannot be saved, *as bring in Damnable Heresies, denying the Lord that bought them*.⁷⁰

Two things render a Man an Heretick according to the common signification of the Word. 1. An Error in matters of Faith, Fundamental or Essential to Salvation. 2. Stubbornness and Contumacy in holding and maintaining it. *A Man that is an Heretick, after the first and second Admonition reject*.⁷¹ Now that this Rejection is all one with Excommunication, appears

⁶⁷I Tim. 5.24. Act. 5.11. Jud. 23. I Cor. 5. II Cor. 7.11.

⁶⁸Numb. 12.14.

⁶⁹See Pool's Annot. on I Cor. 11.19.

⁷⁰II Pet. 2.1.

⁷¹Tit. 3.10.

by what Paul speaks, I Tim. I. 20. *Of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to Blaspheme.*⁷² Their Heresy, or Blasphemy was in saying the Resurrection was past.

Some would have none be counted an Heretick but he who is convicted and condemned so to be in his own Conscience, mistaking *Paul's* Words, *Knowing that he that is such, is subverted, being condemned of himself.* He may be condemned of himself, tho not for his *Heresy*, yet for his spending his Time about Questions, and strife of Words, to the disquieting the Peace of the Church; or tho not condemned of himself directly, yet indirectly; according to the Purport of his own Notion, or what he grants about the Point in Debate, &c. Else the Apostle refers to some notable and notorious self-condemned Heretick. It is a great question, whether *Hymeneus* and *Alexander* were condemned in their own Consciences, about that Heresy charged upon them, and yet were delivered up to Satan. However the Rule is plain, respecting any that are subverted, and resolutely maintain any Heretical Notion, i.e. after he hath been twice (or oftner) admonished, that is, after all due means used, and pains taken with him, to convince him of his abominable Error; and yet if he remains obstinate, he must *be delivered up to Satan*; that is, the righteous censure of the Church must pass upon him, as in the case of other notorious Crimes. Heresy is a Work of the Flesh: and hence some conceive such ought to be punished by the Civil Magistrate.

Quest. *What is an Admonition?*

Ans. It is a faithful endeavour to convict a Person of a Fault both as to matter of Fact, and his Duty thereupon, charging it on his Conscience in the Name of the Lord Jesus with all Wisdom and Authority.

Quest. *What is a Church Admonition?*

Ans. When an offending Brother rejecting private Admonition by one, or by two or three Persons, the complaint being brought to the Church by the Elder, the offending Member is rebuked and exhorted in the Name of the Lord Jesus to due Repentance; and if convicted, and he repents, the Church forgives him, otherwise casts him out, as I before shewed.

Quest. *May a Church admit a Member of another Congregation to have Communion with them, without an orderly receiving him as a Member?*

Ans. If the Person is well known by some of the Church, and that he is an orderly Member of a Church of the same Faith, he being occasionally cast among them they may admit him to transient Communion for that time; but if he abides in that Town or City remote to the Church to whom he belongs, he ought to have his regular dismissal, and so be delivered up to the care and watch of the Church where he desires to communicate.

Quest. *If an Excommunicated Person hath obtained of God true Repentance, and desires to be restored to the Church, what is the manner of his Reception?*

⁷²I Tim. 1.19, 20.

Ans. Upon his serious, solemn and publick Acknowledgment thereof before the Church, and due Satisfaction according to the nature of his Offence being given, the Elder solemnly proceeds and declares in the Name of the Lord Jesus,⁷³ that the sentence which A.B. was laid under (upon his unfeigned Repentance) is taken off,⁷⁴ and that he is received again as a Member, &c. To the Praise and Glory of God.⁷⁵

Quest. How ought a Pastor to be dealt withal, if he to the knowledge of the Church, or any Members thereof, walketh disorderly, and unworthily of his Sacred Office, and Membership?

Take the Answer of another Author here.

Ans. 'Those Members, to whom this is manifestly known, ought to go to him privately, and unknown to any others, (and with the *Spirit of Meekness, in great Humility*) lay his Evil before him, and intreat him as a Father, and not rebuke him as their Equal, much less as their Inferiour; and if they gain upon him, then to receive him into their former Affection and Esteem, for ever hiding it from all others. But if after all tender intreaties, he prove Refractory and Obstinate, then to bring him before the Church, and there to deal with him; they having Two or Three Witnesses in the face of the Church, to testify matter of Fact against him to their personal Knowledge.

2. 'But before he be dealt with they must appoint one from among themselves, qualifyd for the work of a Pastor, to execute the Church's Censure against him, &c.

Yet no doubt, the Church may Suspend him from his Communion, & exercising of his Office presently, upon his being fully Convicted. But seeing in the multitude of Counsel there is safety, sure no Church would so proceed without the advice of the *Presbytery*, or of a *Sister-Church* at least.

Q. Suppose a Member should think himself Oppressed by the Church; or should be Unjustly dealt with; either Withdrawn from, or Excommunicated, has he no Relief left him?

Ans. We believe he hath Relief; and also, that there is no Church infallible, but may Err in some points of Faith, as well as in Discipline. And the way proposed, and agreed to, in a general Assembly, held in *London*, 1692, of the *Elders, Ministers, and Messengers* of our Churches, we approve of, which is this; viz. *The grieved or injured Person may make his Application to a Sister-Church for Communion; and that Church may send some Brethren in their names, to that Congregation that have dealt with him, and they to see if they can possible restore him to his place; but if they cannot,*

⁷³Mat. 13.18.

⁷⁴II Cor. 2.6, 7.

⁷⁵I Tim. 5.

then to report the matter charged, with the Proofs, to the Church that sent them: and if that Congregation shall, after a full Information, &c. be persuaded the Person was not orderly dealt with, they may receive him into their Communion.

Of such that cause Divisions; or Unduely separate themselves from the Church.

This I find is generally asserted by all Congregational Divines, or worthy men, *i.e.* That no person hath power to dismember himself: *i.e.* He cannot, without great Sin, translate himself from one Church to another; but ought to have a Dismission from that Church where he is a Member.⁷⁶ provided that *Church* is orderly constituted, nothing being wanting as to any Essential of Salvation; or of Church-Communion: But if not, yet he ought to endeavour to get his orderly Dismission.

Nor is every small Difference in some points of Religion, (or Notions of little moment,) any grounds for him to desire his Dismission.

That he cannot, nor ought not to Translate himself, see what Reverend Writer saith:⁷⁷

He cannot, *saith he*, for many Reasons:

1. It is not Decent, much less an Orderly going away; but very unmannerly, and a kind of running away.
2. Such a Departure is not approved of in Families, or Civil Societies.⁷⁸
3. It destroys the Relation of Pastor and People: For what may be done by one individual Person, may be done by all.
4. What Liberty in this kind belongs to the *Sheep*, belongs to the *Shepherd*; much more he may then also leave his *Flock* at his Pleasure, without giving notice or reason thereof to the Church.
5. It is breaking *Covenant* with Christ, and with the *Congregation*, and therefore a great Immorality;⁷⁹ he being under Obligation to abide stedfastly with the Church; *i.e.* till the Church judge he hath a lawful *Call* to go to another Congregation.
6. It's a *Schism*: For if there be any such thing in the World, it's of particular Societies.
7. It is a despising the Government of the *Church*.⁸⁰
8. It is a particular Member's assuming to himself thense of the Keys; or rather stealing of them.⁸¹
9. There is as much reason Persons should come into a *Church* when they please, with out asking Consent, as depart when they please.

⁷⁶Rom. 6.17.

⁷⁷Dr. Chauncy, p.339.

⁷⁸Phil. 1.27. Tit. 2.10.

⁷⁹Rom. 1.31.

⁸⁰Act. 2.42. I Cor. 12.6, 14. 7.5. 1.20, 21, 25.

⁸¹Heb. 10.25.

10. It is very evil and unkind in another *Church*, to receive such an one, as *not doing as they would, or should be dealt with*.
11. Such Practices can issue in nothing else than the *breach* and *confusion* of all particular *Churches*; and make them like *Parishes*.
12. Such Departures cannot be pleaded for in the least, but upon the notion of a *Catholick* visible Church, wherein all Members and Officers are run into one *Organized Church*, which will, and must introduce, a Co-ordinate (if not a *Subordinate*) Pastoral Government, by combination of *Elders*, over all the Churches; and therefore by *Synods* and *Classes*.
13. It is like a Leak in a Ship, which, if not speedily stopped, will Sink at last.
14. It tends to Anarchy, putting an *Arbitrary Power* in ev'ry Member.
15. It breaks all Bonds of Love, and raiseth the greatest Animositities between Brethren and Churches.
16. It is a great Argument of some Guilt lying on the Party.

Thus the Dr.

Again he saith, It is no more in the just Power of a particular Member to dissolve his Church-Relation, than in a Man to kill himself: but by his said withdrawment he doth Schismatically rend himself from his Communion, and so Separate himself Sinfully.⁸²

Quest. *What is the just Act of the Church, that cloathes this irregular Separation, with the Formality as it were of an Excommunication.*

He Answers. (Calling) this a mixt Excommunication *i.e.* Originally proceeding from, and consists in, the act of the Brother himself, and is the Formality of his Offence; upon which proceeds the just and unviolable act of the Church.

The Judgment of the Church publicly declared by the *Elder* of the Congregation; as the Dr. words it; *viz.*

*That A.B. having so and so irregularly and sinfully withdrawn himself from the Communion of the Congregation, we do now adjudge him a Non-member, and one that is not to Communicate with the Church,*⁸³ *in the Special Ordinances of Communion, till due Satisfaction is given by him.*⁸⁴

Yet we believe, as the Dr.'s Opinion is, that a Church may, (if they find the Case to be warranted by the Word of God; or as it may be circumstanced)

⁸²Jude 19. I Cor. 1.10 and 3.3 and 11.18. Heb. 10.22, 23, 25.

⁸³Rom. 9.17, 18. II Thess. 3.6, 14, 15.

⁸⁴Jude 12.

give a dismission to a Member, when insisted on, to another regular Church, tho not in every case of small Offence, or dissent in some small points of different Notions, or from Prejudice; for that may tend soon to dissolve any *Church*: For what Church is it, where every Member is of one mind in every particular case and thing about Notions of Religion?

And such that make Divisions, and cause Schisms, or Discord among Brethren, to disturb the Peace of the *Church*,⁸⁵ if they cannot be reclaimed, must be marked,⁸⁶ and dealt with as great *Offenders*:⁸⁷ It being one of those things that God hates, and is an abomination to him.

Quest. *What is a full and lawful Dismission of a Member to another Church, upon his removing his Habitation, or on other warranted Cases.*

Ans. We answer a Letter Testimonial, or Recommendation of the Person; and if he intends to abide there wholly, to give him up to that *Communion*, and *Fellowship*,⁸⁸ to be watched over in the Lord.⁸⁹

Of Disorders, or causes of Discords, and how to be prevented, corrected, and removed.

I. One cause of Discord is, through the Ignorance in some Members of the Rules of Discipline, and right Government;⁹⁰ particularly when that Rule in Matth. 18. is not followed.

But one Person takes up an Offence against another, and speaks of it to this or that Person, before he hath told the Brother offending of it; which is a palpable Sin, and a direct violation of Christ's holy Precept: and such must, as Offenders themselves, be in a Gospel-way dealt with.

To prevent this, the Discipline of the Church should be taught; and the Members informed of their Duties.

II. Another thing that causes Trouble and Disorder in a Church, is want of Love, and tender Affections to one another; as also not having a full sight and sense of the great evil of breaking the Bonds of *Peace, and Unity*:⁹¹ O that all would lay this abominable *Evil* to Heart, how base a thing it is to break the Peace of a private Family, or Neighbourhood;⁹² but much more sinful to disturb the Peace of the Church of the living God, and *break the bonds of the Unity thereof. Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is, for Brethren to dwell together in Unity!*⁹³ But, O how ugly and hateful is the contrary!

⁸⁵II Tim. 2.23.

⁸⁶II Thes. 3.14.

⁸⁷Prov. 6.16.

⁸⁸Rom. 16.1, 2.

⁸⁹Act. 18.27.

⁹⁰Mat. 18.15.

⁹¹John 13.12, 17. Eph. 4.3.

⁹²Heb. 13.1. Eph. 4.31, 32. and 5.2.

⁹³Psa. 132.1. Jam. 3.16.

III. Another disorderly Practice is this, When one Member or another knows of some sinful act, or evils done by one or more Members, and they conceal it;⁹⁴ or do not act according to the Rule; pretending they would not be lookt upon as Contentious Persons:⁹⁵ but hereby they may become guilty of other Men's Sins, and also suffer the Name of God, and the Church, to lye under Reproach, and all thro their neglect. This is a great Iniquity.

IV. When an Elder, or Church shall know that some persons are Scandalous in their Lives, or Heretical in Judgment, and yet shall bear or connive with them.

V. When Members take liberty to hear at other Places, when the Church is assembled to worship God:⁹⁶ this is nothing less than a breaking their Covenant with the Church, and may soon dissolve any Church: For by the same Rule, one may take that liberty, another; nay, every Member may. Moreover, it casts a Contempt upon the Ministry of the Church, and tends to cause such who are Hearers to draw off, and to be Disaffected with the Doctrine taught in the Church, (they knowing these Dissenters do belong unto it.) I exhort therefore, in the Name of Christ, this may be prevented: And any of you that know who they are, that take this Liberty, pray discover them to the Church. We lay no restraint upon our Members from hearing such, who are found in the Faith at other times.

VI. The Liberty that some take to hear Men that are corrupt in their Judgments; and so take in unsound Notions, and also strive to distill them into the Minds of others, as if they were of great Importance. Alas, how many are Corrupted in these days, with *Arminianism*, *Socinianism*, and what not. This causes great trouble and disorder.

VII. When one Church shall receive a Member or Members of another Congregation without their Consent or Knowledge: Nay such that are Disorderly and may be loose Livers, or cast out for Immorality; or Persons filled with Prejudice without cause. This is enough to make Men Atheists, or condemn all Church Authority, and Religion: For hath not one regular Church as great Authority from Christ as another.⁹⁷

VIII. Another disorder is, when Members are received without the general Consent of the Church;⁹⁸ or before good Satisfaction is taken of their Godly Lives, and Conversations: Or when a Church is too remiss in the reception of her Members.

IX. Another disorder is, when a Church shall receive a charge against a

⁹⁴Act. 5.3, 8.

⁹⁵Lev. 19.17.

⁹⁶Act. 4.23.

⁹⁷II Pet. 2.2.

⁹⁸Act. 9.27.

Member (it being an Offence between Brother and Brother) before an orderly proceed has been made by the offended Person.⁹⁹

X. When judgment passes with Partiality; some are connived at, out of favour or affection. *Levi* was not to know his *Father* or *Mother* in Judgment.

XI. When Members do not constantly and early attend our public Assemblies,¹⁰⁰ and the worship of God on the Lord's day especially,¹⁰¹ but are remiss in that matter: This is a great Evil.¹⁰²

XII. When part of a Church shall meet together as dissatisfied, to consult Church-matters, without the knowledge or consent of the Church, or Pastor. This is disorderly, and tends to division; and such should be marked.¹⁰³

XIII. Another thing that tends to disquiet the Peace of the Church is, when there are any undue heats of Spirit, or Passion shewed in the Pastor, or others, in managing the Discipline of the Church. Have we not found by experience the sad effect of this? Therefore things must be always managed with coolness, and sweetness of Spirit, and moderation; every Brother having liberty to speak his mind, and not to be interrupted, until he has done; nor above one speak at once.¹⁰⁴

XIV. When one Brother or more Dissents in the sentiments of their Minds from the Church, in any matters circumstantial; either in respect of Faith, Practice, or Discipline, and will not submit to the Majority, but raise Feuds;¹⁰⁵ nay, will rend themselves from the Church, rather than consent.¹⁰⁶

I Query, what reason, or ground, hath any Man to refuse Communion with a Church that Christ hath not left, but hath Communion with?

XV. When any member shall divulge, or make known to Persons, not of the Congregation, nor being concerned in those matters, what is done in Church-meetings, the Church in this respect (as well as in others) is to be as a *Garden inclosed*, a *Spring shut up*, a *Fountain sealed*.¹⁰⁷ This oft times occasions great Grief, and the disorderly Person should be detected. Is it not a shame to any of a private Family, to divulge the Secrets of the Family? But far greater shame do these expose themselves unto.

XVI. Another disorderly Practice is this; *viz.* When a Member shall suggest, and seem to insinuate into the minds of other Members some evil

⁹⁹Mat. 18.15.

¹⁰⁰Psa. 63.1.

¹⁰¹Cant. 7.12.

¹⁰²Mark 15.1.

¹⁰³I Cor. 13.25. Rom. 16.17.

¹⁰⁴II Tim. 2.25.

¹⁰⁵Jude 19.

¹⁰⁶Jam. 3.14, 16.

¹⁰⁷Cant. 4.12.

against their Pastor, yet will not declare what it is; and may only be evil Surmisings, & out of Prejudice; and yet refuses to acquaint the Pastor with what it is:¹⁰⁸ This is very abominable, and a palpable violation of the Rule of the Gospel, and Duty of Members to their Minister. Such a person ought to be severely rebuk'd; and if he confess not his Evils, and manifesteth unfeigned Repentance, to be dealt with farther. Moreover, it is a great evil in another to hear such base Insinuations, and neither rebuke the Accuser, and so discharge his Duty, nor take two or three more to bring the Person to Repentance. If he deal thus by a private Brother, it is a great Evil, but far worse to an *Elder*, whose Name and Honour, ought with all Care and Justice, to be kept up, as being more Sacred.¹⁰⁹

XVII. Another disorderly Practice is, (which causes much trouble) When the publick Charges of a Church are not equally born but some too much burdened, when others do but little or nothing.¹¹⁰

And also, when every one does not Contribute to the Poor, as God has blessed them, on every Lord's day, or first day of the Week, as he hath Commanded.¹¹¹

XVIII. Another disorder is this, When Members refuse to communicate with the Church at the Lord's table, because some person or persons, they think are guilty of Evil, and yet they have not proceeded with them according to Rule:¹¹² These either Excommunicate the Church, or themselves, or those Persons at least, they censure unwarrantably.

I beseech you for Christ's sake, that this may never be any more among you: You ought not to deal thus with them; or refuse your Communion, (tho faulty) until the Church has dismember'd or withdrawn from them; or at least Suspended them.

XIX. When one Member, shall believe, or receive a report against another, before he knows the truth of the matter.¹¹³

XX. When an Accusation is brought against an *Elder*, contrary to the Rule, which ought not be without two or three Witnesses, as to the matter of Fact.¹¹⁴

XXI. When the word of God is not carefully attended upon, on Week, or Lecture days, by the Members generally; tho the said Meeting being appointed by the whole Church.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸Rom. 1.29. I Tim. 6.4. Zech. 7.10. I Tim. 5.19.

¹⁰⁹I Tim. 5.19.

¹¹⁰I Cor. 8.14.

¹¹¹I Cor. 16.2.

¹¹²Mat. 18.

¹¹³Jer. 20.10.

¹¹⁴I Tim. 5.19.

¹¹⁵Isa. 55.3. Act. 2.1, 2. Act. 10.33.

XXII. When Days of Prayer and Fasting, and of publick Thanksgiving, or when days of Disciplining are not generally attended upon.¹¹⁶

Lastly, When Gifted Brethren are not duely encouraged: First privately to exercise their Gifts; and being in time approved, called forth to Preach or Exercise in the Church: And when encouragement is not given to bestow Learning also upon them, for their better Accomplishment. What will become of the Churches in time to come, if this be not prevented with speed?

What tends to the Glory and Beauty of a true Gospel Church.

That which Primarily tends to the Glory of a *Church* is the Foundation on which it is Built, which is Jesus Christ. Now this is a blessed and glorious Foundation.¹¹⁷

I. In respect of God the Father, who laid this Foundation in his eternal Purpose, Counsel, and Decree; *Behold I lay in Sion*:¹¹⁸ and this is as the result of his infinite Wisdom, Love and Mercy to his Elect.

II. In respect had unto Christ himself, who is this Foundation.

(1.) He is a Suitable Foundation.

1st. In respect to the Glory of God in all his Attributes.

2ly. In respect to our Good; the answering all our wants, who are united to him, or built upon him.

3ly. In respect of the preciousness of Christ, as a Foundation; a Stone; a *precious Stone*.

4ly. In respect to the Durableness of it, *i.e. a tryed Stone*; a sure Foundation.¹¹⁹

Brethren, a Foundation of a House must of necessity be laid; no House can be built without a good Foundation, that will stand firm, and unmovable; it is the strongest part of the Building, and it beareth all the weight of the whole Superstructure: So doth Jesus Christ.

III. The Beauty and Glory of a true *Church*, consists in the true and regular, or right *Constitution* of it; nothing being wanting that is Essential to it, upon this account.

IV. It consisteth in the Excellency, Glory, and Suitableness of the materials 'tis Built with, answering to the Foundation, *all precious Stones, lively Stones; all regenerated Persons*.¹²⁰

V. In that all the Stones be well Hewed and Squared; all made fit for the Building, before laid in. Were it thus, there would not be so great a Noise

¹¹⁶Joel 2.16.

¹¹⁷I Cor. 3.4.

¹¹⁸Isa. 28.16.

¹¹⁹Isa. 28.16.

¹²⁰I Pet. 2.5, 6.

of the Hammer and Ax, in Church Discipline, as indeed there is. It was not thus in the Type, I mean in *Solomon's Temple*.¹²¹

VI. It's Beauty and Glory consisteth in that all the *Stones* being not only united by the Spirit, to *Christ the Foundation*, but also to one another in sincere Love and Affection. *In whom all the Building, fitly Framed together, groweth up unto an holy Temple in the Lord.*¹²²

VII. It consisteth in the Holiness and Purity of the Lives and Conversations of all the Members: *Be ye Holy, for I am Holy.*¹²³ *Holiness becomes thy House, O God, for Ever.*¹²⁴

VIII. It consisteth in the sweet Union and Concord that ought to be in the Church; all like the *Horses in Pharoah's Chariot, drawing together.*¹²⁵ *Endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.*¹²⁶ *By this shall all Men know ye are my Disciples, if you Love one another.*

IX. In their having the divine Presence with them: Or when the Glory of God fills his Temple.¹²⁷

X. In keeping out all unsanctified, or unclean Persons, or if they get in, to purge them out by a strict and holy Discipline, or else it will soon lose its Beauty.¹²⁸

XI. In that Zeal and Equality that should be shewed in all to keep up the Honour, Peace, and Comfort of the *Church*, and the Ministry thereof.¹²⁹

XII. In the Administration of right Discipline; to see no neglect nor delaying of Justice, thro carelessness, or Partiality: (1.) No ways partaking of other Mens Sins; which may be done by Conniving at it; (2.) By Lessening or Extenuating of it (3.) By Countenancing, or any ways Encouraging any in Sin. (4.) By not Restoring a Brother, that confesses his Sin when overtaken. (5.) Not bringing in a just Charge against an Offender, nor rebuking him; and yet have Communion with him.

2/y. Not to wrest Judgment, out of it's true and right Channel: Nor to inflict a greater censure than the Law of Christ requires on any.

3/y. Timely to acquit, and discharge a penitent Person.

4/y. Not to do any thing out of Prejudice, but in Love, and Bowels, of affection; and to do all in Christ's Name, or by his authority.

XIII. To *Sympathize* with the *Afflicted*, *Succour* the *Tempted*, and *Relieving* the *Poor* and *Distressed*: *Rejoicing* with them that *Rejoice*, and *Mourning* with them that *Mourn*.

¹²¹I Kings 6.7.

¹²²Eph. 2.19, 20, 21.

¹²³I Pet. 1.16.

¹²⁴Psa. 93.5.

¹²⁵Cant. 1.9.

¹²⁶Eph. 4.3.

¹²⁷Exod. 20.24. Mat. 18.20.

¹²⁸I Cor. 5.5, 6, 7.

¹²⁹II Cor. 8.14. Tit. 3.2.

XIV. *To speak evil of no Man*; not only speaking no evil of their Brethren, but of no *Man*, to his hurt or injury, detracting from his Worth and Honour: See *Sirach*, *Whether it be to Friend or Foe, talk not of other Men's Lives; and if thou canst, without Offence, reveal them not.*¹³⁰ We must not discourse his Faults, unless in a Gospel-way; and that too, to amend the Person, and not out of Passion, or Prejudice to expose him, but out of Love to his Soul. Yet we may speak of the evils of others, (1.) When called to do it, in a Legal or Gospel way; and it is a Sin then to conceal his Crime. (2.) Or when it is to prevent another, who is in danger to be Infected by his Company, or ill Example. (3.) Or in our own just Defence and Vindication. Moreover, consider the evil of Reproaching of others.

First as to the causes why some do it.

I. One Cause is from want of Love: Nay from Malice; and Hatred.

1. From the Baseness, ill Nature, and Cruelty of the accusers *Disposition*.
2. 'Tis occasioned from that itch, of talking and meddling in the *Affairs* of other Men.
3. Or perhaps to raise their own Esteem and Honour, some *Degrade* their Brother; which is *Abominable*.

Consider it is *theft*, or *Robbery*; nay, and 'tis worse than to Rob a Man of his Goods, because thou takest away that which perhaps thou canst not restore again.

Moreover consider, That such who reproach others, lay themselves open thereby to Reproach.

4. Moreover know, he that Receives, or Harkens to the Scandal, is as Guilty as the *Accuser*; he is like a person that receives Stolen Goods, and so is as bad as the Thief.

This being one of the Grand and Notorious Evils of these *Days* I speak the more to it.

If you abominate this evil, and avoid it, you will shine in *Grace* and *Vertue* the more clearly.

Alas, in our days, some that would be thought to be great Professors stick not to vilifie Christ's Ministers, even some of the best of Men; and are so full of Malice, they care not what wrong they do to their Brethren, nor to the truth it self, or interest of God, and so expose themselves to a lasting shame, and their Spirit, and Practice, to an abhorrance;¹³¹ they are like cursed *Cham* who discovered his Fathers nakedness;¹³² these persons violate all Laws, both Humane and Divine.

¹³⁰Eccl. 19.8.

¹³¹III John 9, 10.

¹³²Gen. 9.22.

3ly. When they bear one anothers Burdens, *and so fulfill the Law of Christ*:¹³³ And that you may do this, consider where is that Church in which there are no Burdens to be Born.

[Motives thus to do.]

1. Consider what a Burden Jesus Christ hath born for thee.
2. What a Burden thou hast to bear of thine own.¹³⁴
3. Mayst not thou in some things be a Burden to thy Brethren?
4. Wouldst thou not have others bear thy Burden.
5. May not God cause thee to bear a more heavy Burden; because thou canst not bear thy Brother's?
6. 'Tis a fulfilling the Law of Love, nay the *Law* of Christ.¹³⁵

XV. The Glory and Beauty of a Congregation, is the more manifest, when the Authority of the Church, and the Dignity of the Pastoral Office is maintained. How great was the *Evil of the gain-saying of Corah*?¹³⁶ The Apostle speaks of some that are *Selfwilled Presumptuous, who are not afraid to speak evil of Dignities*.¹³⁷

God has put a Glory and high Dignity upon the Church and in it's Authority and Power; *Whom ye bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven*.

Moreover, the Pastoral Office, is an Office of Dignity; they are called *Rulers, Angels, Fathers*.¹³⁸ For any therefore to cast contempt on the Church, or Pastor, is a great evil, and a reproach to Christ, and tends to Disorder and Confusion.¹³⁹

Lastly, When Holiness, Righteousness, Charity, Humility, and all true Piety is prest upon the Consciences of every Member, and appears in the Minister: also that all strive to excell therein, with their uttermost Care and Diligences.¹⁴⁰

The Conclusion.

Know my Brethren, *That God loves the Gates of Sion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob*.¹⁴¹ Therefore the publick Worship of God ought to be preferred before private.

¹³³Gal. 6.2.

¹³⁴II Cor. 7.9.

¹³⁵Rom. 3.10.

¹³⁶Numb. 22.7, 21. Jude 11.

¹³⁷II Pet. 2.10.

¹³⁸Rev. 2.1.

¹³⁹I Tim. 3.5. Act. 23.5.

¹⁴⁰Psa. 110.3. I Pet. 1.25.

¹⁴¹Psa. 87.2.

1. This supposeth there must be a visible Church.
2. And that they frequently meet together to worship God.
3. That they have an orderly Ministry and one ordained *Elder*, at least, to administer all Publick Ordinances.
4. Moreover, that all Persons have free liberty to assemble with the Church, and to partake of all Ordinances, save those which peculiarly belong to the Church; as the Lord's Supper, holy Discipline, and days of Prayer and Fasting. Then the Church of Old separated themselves from all Strangers.¹⁴²

Yet others may attend on all other publick Ordinances with the Church; as publick Prayer, Reading, and Preaching the Word and in Singing *God's* Praises, as hath formerly been proved. May others my Brethren, join in Prayer with us, and not praise *God* with us?

But, O my Brethren! Let me beseech you to shew your high Value, and Estimation for the publick Worship of God.

[Motives hereunto.]

1. Since *God* prefers it thus: Or has so great Esteem of his publick Worship.
2. Because he is said to dwell in *Sion*; *It is his Habitation for ever*. The place, where his Honour dwells.¹⁴³
3. Here *God* is most Glorified. In his *Temple* every one speaks of his Glory; *My Praise shall be in the great Congregation*.¹⁴⁴
4. Here is most of *God's* gracious presence (as one observes it.)
 - (1.) His *effectual Presence*, in all Places; *Where I record my Name, thither will I come; and there will I bless thee*.¹⁴⁵
 - (2.) Here is More of his intimate presence: *Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them*.¹⁴⁶
 - (3.) He walks in the midst of the seven *Golden Candlesticks*.¹⁴⁷
5. Here are the clearest manifestations of *God's* Beauty, which made holy *David* desire to dwell there for ever.¹⁴⁸ See the appearance of Christ to the Churches, *Rev. 2. cap. 3.*
6. In that it is said, that those that should be Saved, in the Apostles days, *God* added unto the Church.¹⁴⁹
7. Here is most Spiritual Advantage to be got: *Here the Dews of Her-*

¹⁴²Neh. 1.2.

¹⁴³Psa. 132.13. Psa. 26.8.

¹⁴⁴Psa. 29.9.

¹⁴⁵Exod. 20.24.

¹⁴⁶Mat. 13.20.

¹⁴⁷Rev. 1.13.

¹⁴⁸Psa. 27.4.

¹⁴⁹Act. 2.47.

*mon fall, they descend upon the Mountain of Sion. Here God commands the Blessing, even Life for evermore, I will abundantly bless her Provision, and satisfie her Poor with Bread. Here David's Doubt was resolved.*¹⁵⁰

8. Here you received your first spiritual Breath, or Life, many Souls are daily Born to Christ. That good which is most Diffusive, is to be Preferred; but that good which most partake of, is most Diffusive; *O magnifie the Lord with me! Let us exalt his Name together.*¹⁵¹ Live Coals separated, soon die.
9. Brethren (as a worthy *Divine* observes) the Church in her publick Worship is the nearest Resemblance of Heaven, especially in Singing God's Praises. What Esteem also had God's Worthies of old, for God's publick Worship? *My Soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the Courts of the Lord. How amiable are thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!*¹⁵²
10. See how the Promises of *God* run to *Sion*, or to his *Church*.¹⁵³ *He will bless thee out of Sion.* O let nothing discourage you in your waiting at the Posts of Christ's Door.¹⁵⁴ *David desired Rather to be a Door-Keeper in the House of God, than to Dwell in the Tents of Wickedness.*¹⁵⁵ Yet nevertheless do not neglect, for the Lord's sake, private Devotion; viz. Secret, and Family Prayer: O pray to be fitted for publick Worship! Come out of your Closets to the Church.¹⁵⁶ What signifies all you do in Publick, if you are not such that keep up the Worship of God in your own Families?

O neglect not Prayer, Reading, and Meditation! And take care also to Educate and Catechise your *Children*; and live as Men and Women *that are dead to this World*; and walk for the Lord's Sake as becomes the *Gospel*.¹⁵⁷

See that *Zeal* and *Knowledge* go together; a good *Conversation* and a good *Doctrine* go together. These *Two* together, are better than *One*.

Brethren, he that makes the Word of God his Rule, in whatsoever he doth, and the Glory of God his end in what he doth shall have the Spirit of God to be his strength. This is like *Solomon's* Three-fold Cord, that will be One, or it will be Three; it can't be Two; nor can it be broken.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁰Psa. 132.13 and 130.15 and 73.1 and 87.5.

¹⁵¹Psa. 34.3.

¹⁵²Psa. 84.1, 2.

¹⁵³Isa. 35.

¹⁵⁴Psa. 128.3.

¹⁵⁵Psa. 51.3. Prov. 8.34. Psa. 26.14. Psa. 87.4.

¹⁵⁶Mat. 6.6. Jer. 10.25.

¹⁵⁷Eph. 6.4. Phil. 1.27.

¹⁵⁸Eccl. 4.9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

The Solemn Covenant of the Church of Christ, meeting in *White-street*, at it's Constitution; June, 5, 1696.

*We who desire to walk together in the Fear of the Lord, do, through the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, profess our deep and serious Humiliation for all our Transgressions. And we do also solemnly, in the Presence of God, of each other, in the Sense of our own Unworthiness, give up our selves to the Lord, in a Church state according to the Apostolical Constitution that he may be our God, and we may be his People, through the Everlasting Covenant of his Free grace, in which alone we hope to be accepted by him, through his blessed Son Jesus Christ, whom we take to be our High Priest, to justify and sanctify us, and our Prophet to teach us; and to subject to him as our Law-giver, and the King of Saints; and to conform to all his Holy Laws and Ordinances, for our growth, Establishment, and Consolation; that we may be as a Holy Spouse unto him, and serve him in our Generation, and wait for his second Appearance, as our glorious Bridegroom.*¹⁵⁹

*Being fully satisfied in the way of Church-Communion, and the Truth of Grace in some good measure upon one anothers Spirits, we do solemnly join our selves together in a Holy Union and Fellowship, humbly submitting to the Discipline of the Gospel, and all Holy Duties required of a People in such a Spiritual Relation.*¹⁶⁰

*1. We do promise and ingage to walk in all Holiness, Godliness, Humility, and Brotherly Love, as much as in us lieth to render our Communion delightful to God, comfortable to our selves, and lovely to the rest of the Lord's People.*¹⁶¹

*2. We do promise to watch over each other's Conversations, and not to suffer Sin upon one another, so far as God shall discover it to us, or any of us; and to stir up one another to Love and good Works; to warn, rebuke, and admonish one another with Meekness according to the Rules left to us of Christ in that Behalf.*¹⁶²

*3. We do promise in an especial manner to pray for one another, and for the Glory and Increase of the Church, and for the Presence of God in it, and the pouring forth of his Spirit on it, and his Protection over it to his Glory.*¹⁶³

*4. We do promise to bear one another's Burdens, to cleave to one another, and to have a Fellow-feeling with one another, in all Conditions both outward and inward, as God in his Providence shall cast any of us into.*¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹Ezek. 16.6, 8. II Cor. 8.5. Hos. 2.23. II Cor. 6.16.

¹⁶⁰Exod. 26.3, 4, 6. Isa. 62.5. Psal. 122.3. Eph. 2.23. Eph. 4.16. I Pet. 2.5. Psal. 93.5. Isa. 55.8. Luke 1.74, 75.

¹⁶¹II Cor. 7.1. I Tim. 6.10. II Pet. 1.6,7. Act. 20.19. Phil. 2.3. John 13.34 and 15.12.

¹⁶²I Pet. 1.22. Lev. 19.17. Heb. 10.24, 25. I Thes. 5.14, 15. Rom. 1.15.

¹⁶³Eph. 6.18. Lam. 5.16. Col. 4.12.

¹⁶⁴Gal. 6.2. Heb. 12.12. Heb. 13.3. Rom. 12.15. II Cor. 11.29.

5. *We do promise to bear with one another's Weakness, Failings, and Infirmities, with much Tenderness, not discovering to any without the Church, nor any within, unless according to Christ's Rule, and the Order of the Gospel provided in that case.*¹⁶⁵

6. *We do promise to strive together for the Truths of the Gospel, and Purity of God's Ways and Ordinances, to avoid Causes, and Causers of Division, endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace; Ephes. 4.3.*¹⁶⁶

7. *We do promise to meet together on Lord's Days, and at other times, as the Lord shall give us Opportunities, to serve and glorify God in the way of his Worship, to edify one another and to contrive the good of the Church.*¹⁶⁷

8. *We do promise according to our Ability (or as God shall bless us with the good things of this World) to Communicate to our Pastor or Minister, God having ordained that they that Preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. (And now can any thing lay a greater obligation upon the Conscience, than this Covenant, what then is the Sin of such who violate it?)*¹⁶⁸

These and all other Gospel Duties we humbly submit unto, promising and purposing to perform, not in our own Strength, being conscious of our own Weakness, but in the Power, and Strength of the Blessed God, whose we are, and whom we desire to serve: To whom be Glory now and for evermore. Amen.

FINIS

¹⁶⁵I John 3.17, 18. Gal. 6.1. I Thes. 5.14. Rom. 15.12. Eph. 4.31, 32.

¹⁶⁶Jude 3. Gal 5.1. Tit. 3.9, 10. III John 5, 10.

¹⁶⁷Heb 3.10 and 10.25. Mal. 3.16. Rom 14.18 and 15.16.

¹⁶⁸II Cor 9.7, 8, 9, 12, 13. Gal. 6.6.

A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church

BENJAMIN GRIFFITH

Griffith, Rev. Benjamin, was born in Wales, Oct. 16, 1688, and emigrated to America in 1710. He was baptized May 12, 1711. He was ordained pastor of the Montgomery church, Bucks Co., Pa., Oct. 23, 1725, and remained with this community till his death, which took place Oct. 5, 1768.

Mr. Griffith was an able minister, with a respectable education. He read extensively the works of the great Puritan divines, and he made considerable use of his own pen. He wrote a work on "Vindication of the Resurrection of the Same Body," an answer to "Simon Butler's Creed," and a refutation of a pamphlet called "The Divine Right of Infant Baptism." He also wrote "A Treatise of Church Discipline," which was published with the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, and which has been regarded as a work of very great merit. Mr. Griffith was among the foremost Baptist ministers in his day.

—William Cathcart, 1881

A
SHORT TREATISE
Concerning
a True and Orderly
GOSPEL CHURCH

BENJAMIN GRIFFITH

PHILADELPHIA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION
PHILADELPHIA

1743

Before there can be any orderly discipline among a Christian assembly, they must be orderly constituted into a church state, according to the institution of Christ in the Gospel.

1. A visible Gospel church is made by gathering divers select persons into Jesus Christ, in a spiritual body, and relation to him as their political head, Ezekiel 34:11. 2 Thess. 2:1. himself being the great Shepherd that first seeks them, and prepares them by the work of renewing grace, for such spiritual building.

2. Christ as the Mediator of the new covenant, ordereth the everlasting Gospel to be preached, and accompanying it with his holy Spirit, blesseth it to the turning of men from darkness to light, working faith and love in them, Ephesians 2:17. Acts 26:18.

3. When sinners are thus wrought upon effectually, to such a suitable number, as may be an essential Church, i.e. so many as may act properly and orderly as a church, Matt. 17:15–17. that then it will be proper for them by their mutual consent, to propose to be constituted a Church or that others seeing the expediency thereof may encourage the same, Acts 11.

4. For the accomplishment of so glorious a work, it is necessary that a day of fasting and prayer be appointed by and among such believers, and that such procure such neighboring helps as they can, especially of the ministry, Act 8:14. 1 Thess. 3:2.

5. The persons being first orderly baptized, according to the command of Christ in Matt. 28:19. and being all satisfied of the graces and qualifications of each other, and being willing in the fear of God to take the laws of Christ upon them, and do by one mutual consent give up themselves to the Lord, and to one another in the Lord, 2 Cor. 8:5. solemnly submitting to the government of Christ in his Church, and being united, they are to be declared a Gospel Church of Jesus Christ, Phil. 2:2,3,4. Rom 15:7. and 12:1. Acts 2:41,42.

6. A number of believers thus united under Christ their mystical head, are become a church essential; and as such is the first and proper subject of the keys, and have power and privilege to govern themselves, and to choose out their own ministerial officers, Acts 14:23. and 6:3.

CONCERNING MINISTERS, &C.

1. A church thus constituted, is not yet completed, while wanting such ministerial helps, as Christ hath appointed for its growth and well-being; and wanting elders and deacons to officiate among them. Men, they must be, that are qualified for the work; their qualifications are plainly and fully set down in holy Scripture, I Tim. 3:2–7. Titus 4:5–10. all which must be found in them, in some good degree, and it is the duty of the church to try the persons, by the rule of the word.

Objection. But what shall a church do, in case they can have none among them fit to bear office according to the rule of the word?

Answer. (1.) That to expect to have officers perfect in the highest degrees of those qualifications, were to expect apostolical and extraordinary ceased gifts in ordinary time. (2.) If none among the members of a church be found fit in some measure for the ministry, a neighboring church may and ought, if possible, to supply them, Canticles 8:8. (3.) Let such as they have, if they have any that seem hopeful, to be awhile upon trial; and the person that the Lord shall choose, will flourish in some good measure with Aaron's rod among the rods of the tribes.

2. A church being destitute of ministerial helps may, after mature and often deliberate consultation, and serious prayers to God, pitch upon some person or persons in particular, giving him or them a solemn invitation to the work of the ministry upon trial; and if such accept of the church's call, let such be upon trial, to see if such fear God, make godliness their business, and be addicted to the work of the ministry, seeking to further the interest of Christ and the edification of his people in sound and wholesome doctrine; and to see if any vices or immorality appear in their advances, I Cor. 16. Phil. 2:20, 21. Read the qualifications in I Tim. 3. And in case a church should call a person to be their minister who is a member of some sister church, and he accept their call to be their minister, he must in the first place give himself a member with the church so calling him, that so they may choose him among themselves, as Acts 6:3.

3. After having taken all due care to choose one for the work of the ministry, they are, by and with the unanimous consent or suffrage of the church, to proceed to his ordination; which is a solemn setting apart of such a person for the sacred function, in this wise, by setting apart a day of fasting and prayer, Acts 13:2,3. the whole church being present, he is to have the hands of the presbytery of that church, or of neighboring elders called and authorized by that church, whereof such a person is a member, solemnly laid upon him, I Tim. 5:22. Titus 1:5. Acts 14:23. 1 Tim. 4:14. and thus such a person is to be recommended into the work of the Lord, and to take particular care of the flock of whom he is thus chosen, Acts 20:28.

4. The minister being thus put upon his work, proceeds (1.) to preach the word of God unto them, thereby to feed the flock, and therein ought to be faithful and laborious, studying to show himself a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth, 2 Tim. 2:15. as he is a steward of God in the mysteries of the Gospel, I Cor. 4:1,2. and therefore ought to be a man of good understanding and experience, being sound in the faith, not a novice, or a double-minded, unstable man, nor such as is light spirited or of a shallow understanding, but one that is learned in the mysteries of the kingdom, because he is to feed the people with knowledge and understanding, Jer. 3:15. He must be faithful in declaring the whole counsel of God, Acts 20:20. He is to instruct them in all practical godliness,

laying before them their manifold duties, and to urge them upon their consciences, Titus 2:1–15 . I Tim. 4:6. (2.) He must watch over them, as one that must give an account to God, Heb. 13:17. Such must have an eye upon every member to see how they behave in the house of God, where the presence of the Lord is more eminently, and where also the angels do always attend; and also their behavior in the families they belong to, and their conversation abroad; according to their capacities, they are not to sleep under their charge. (3.) He is to visit his flock to know their state, in order to minister suitable doctrinal relief unto them, and that he may know what disorders there may be among them, that the unruly may be reprov'd, Prov. 27:23, 1 Thess. 5:14, 15. (4.) He is to administer all the ordinances of Christ, amongst them: as Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and herein he must be careful to follow the primitive pattern, thereby to hold forth the great end, wherefore they were ordained. (5.) He must be instant with God, in his prayers for and with them, as opportunity may serve. (6.) He must show them a good example in all respects, in conversation, sobriety, charity, faith and purity, I Tim. 4:12. behaving himself impartial unto all, not preferring the rich before the poor, nor lording it over God's heritage, nor assume greater power than God hath given him, James 2:4. 1 Timothy 5:21. 1 Peter 5:3–5.

OF RULING ELDERS

Ruling Elders are such persons as are endued with gifts to assist the pastor or teacher in the government of the church; it was as a statute in Israel, Exo. 18. Deut. 1:9–13. The works of teaching and ruling belong both to the pastor; but in case he be unable; or the work of ruling too great for him, God hath provided such for his assistance, and they are called ruling elders, I Tim. 5:17. helps, I Cor. 12:28. governments, or he that ruleth, Rom. 12:8. They are qualified for, and called unto, one part of the work: and experience teacheth us the use and benefit of such rulers in the church, in easing the pastor or teacher, and keeping up the honor of the ministry. Their qualifications are such as are requisite to rule, as knowledge, judgment, prudence, &c.; and as to the manner of their ordination, it is like ordination unto other offices in the church, with fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands. Their office only relateth to rule and order, in the church of God, and doth not include teaching; yet if the church findeth they have gifts and abilities to be useful in teaching, they may be put upon trial, and if approved, they may be called and solemnly set apart by ordination, it being wholly a distinct office from the former, which was only to rule well, and not to labor in word and doctrine.

OF DEACONS

Deacons are men called forth by the church, to serve in the outward concerns thereof whose office is to serve tables, Acts 6:2–7. They are to be

intrusted with the stock of the church, out of which stock they are to assist the poor members of the church, and to provide bread and wine for the Lord's table, and also to have regard to the minister's table; and moreover they should see that all the members of the church do contribute towards the proper uses of the church, that therefrom all necessary occasions may be supplied, as God hath given them, they to the poor, so that none be neglected, I Cor. 16:2.; by the faithful discharge of which office they shall purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith, I Tim. 3:13. The qualifications of these officers are laid down, I Timothy 3:8–13. Acts 6:2–8.

OF THE ADMISSION OF CHURCH MEMBERS

The Lord Jesus Christ hath committed the use and power of the keys, in matters of government, to every visible congregational church, to be used, according to the rules and directions that he hath given in his word, in his name, and to his glory. The keys are the power of Christ, which he hath given to every particular congregation, to open and shut itself by; and to do all things in order to the great things proposed, *viz.* his glory and his people's spiritual benefit, in peace and purity, Isa. 9:7. and 22:22. Rev. 3:7. Heb. 3:6. Ephe. 2:19–22. Matt. 16:19. John 20:23.

By virtue of the charter and the power aforesaid, which Christ hath given to his church, his spiritual corporation, they are enabled to receive members in, and to exclude unworthy members as occasion may require, as may appear by divers examples, Rom. 14:1. Acts 2:41. 1 Cor. 5:4,5. Matt. 18:18. 2 Thess. 2:6,14.

In this case, a church hath to do, either with non-members, or those that are members of other churches; as to non-members proposing for admission into the church, the pastor, teacher, and elders of the church are to be acquainted therewith, and the body of the church also, in order that they may know the intent of such person or persons. A convenient meeting is necessary. When the church is come together, and the person proposing being present, after prayer to God for direction, the minister or pastor of the church is to put several questions to the person proposing, (1.) Concerning the ground and reason of his hope. 1 Pet. 3:15. wherein is to be inquired, what experience he hath of the manifold graces of the holy Spirit, working in him repentance from dead works, as Acts 2:38. Heb. 6:2. and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone is salvation hoped for, Acts 20:21. Philemon 5.; for without there be some good grounds, in the judgment of charity, that such a one is a new creature, the door of admission is not to be opened, for that would be abusing the privileges of the house of God. Therefore all due and regular care is to be taken, Psalm 65:16. Acts 9:27.

Secondly. What competency of knowledge, in the principal doctrines of faith and order, such hath acquired, 1 Tim. 2:4–6. or whether such person

be well instructed in the knowledge of God, in his glorious attributes, in the doctrine of the Trinity, or one God in three persons: the person, natures and offices of Christ; the nature of the law; of original sin; of the pollution of man, by reason of sin, and lost and undone estate thereby, and of his being a child of wrath by nature; of the nature of the redemption wrought by Christ, his sufficiency to satisfy divine justice; of the reconciliation of sinners to God, by the death of his Son; of our sins being imputed to Christ, and his righteousness imputed to us for justification, being received by faith alone; of the resurrection of Christ's body, and his ascension into heaven, and of his coming thence the second time, to judge the quick and the dead; and of the resurrection of the dead bodies of men; and of the eternal judgment; and of such proposing person's resolution to persevere in the profession of these truths unto the end. Such things are needful to be inquired into, by reason that too many in our day do build their conversion upon their convictions, and some general notions of the Christian religion, when indeed they are utter strangers unto, and very ignorant of the great mysteries of the Gospel. Yet great care is to be taken that the weak be not discouraged, for the smoking flax is not to be quenched, nor the bruised reed to be broken, but such ignorant persons are to be taught by gentle instructions, and means ought to be used for their furtherance in the knowledge of divine truths, Matt. 28:19. and where there are the beginnings of true and saving grace in the heart, such will, with a spiritual appetite, receive the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby, 1 Peter 2:2. and a church ought to be careful not to reject those, whom they judge to have the least degree of the work of saving grace wrought in them, Romans 14:1.

Thirdly. Inquiry must be made whether such a person's life and conversation is answerable to such a profession, that he be likely to adorn the Gospel with a holy conversation, Titus 2:11–15. 3:8. This regular carefulness is an indispensable duty of all regular churches, to use in the admission of members; and though all due care be used, yet some unsound and rotten professors will creep in unawares, and have crept into the purest churches, Jude 4. 1 John 2:19. Acts 5. Acts 20:29,30. Gal. 2:4. and the fallibility of churches in this matter, is not to be urged, as an argument or ground to neglect the duty incumbent on the churches, according to the rule of the word.

And after such examination, the question is to be put to the church, whether they are all satisfied with the party's confession and conversation; and if the answer be in the affirmative, then the pastor or minister is to proceed, to ask the party proposing, if he be willingly resolved, as God shall give ability, to walk in a professed subjection to the commands and institutions of Christ revealed in the Gospel, and to give himself a member of that church in particular, Rom. 12:1. 15:7,8,9. 2 Cor. 8:5. and to continue in the communion, faith, and order thereof, according to the gospel rules and directions; and after the person is baptized according to the institution

and command of Christ, and come under the imposition of the hands of the elders of the church, according to the practice of the apostles, Acts 8:14–17. Heb. 6:2. the pastor, minister, or elders, as presiding in the acts of the church's power, do receive such a one into the communion and fellowship of that church in particular. But if the church is not satisfied with the person's confession or conversation, it is proper, if the objections be of any weight, to defer the party's admission until a more ample satisfaction can be given, that all, if possible, may receive such with freedom in love, and so to discharge all gospel duties towards him, as may promote his edification in the faith, and his increase in grace, 2 Cor. 1:24. 10:8.

And concerning those that are members of sister churches, their admission is either transient or occasional admission; when any person is dismissed wholly from one church, and transmitted or recommended to another church of the same faith, order and practice. (1.) Such as are and continue members of other regular churches, may, where they are well known, be admitted into transient communion, without a letter of recommendation from the church they belong unto: but from those a church hath no knowledge of, a testimonial letter is necessary, that a church may not be imposed on by any loose or disorderly persons. (2.) Those whose residence is removed, or place of abode is more convenient to be with another congregation than that of which they are members, are, upon their request made to the church whereof such are members, to be dismissed, and to have a letter from that church they are members of, subscribed by the officers and members, and directed to the church that the person is dismissed unto; whereby the party is discharged from his or her original relation of particular membership to that church, and is transferred to the constant communion, watch and care of the other church: such persons are to be received upon their proposal, according to the credentials they bring; except the church they apply unto have a special reason to defer or refuse.

As it appears to have been the practice of believers, in the primitive times, to give themselves members of particular churches, Acts 2:41. 5:13,14. it appears also that, in the apostles' days, there were many distinct and distant particular churches, as 1 Cor. 1:2. Gal. 1:2. 1 Cor. 16:1. Philip. 1:1. which churches are several corporations of men professing repentance from dead works, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and incorporated by mutual consent, as before mentioned, whose end is to glorify God by obedience to his revealed will, and to their own edification in the faith, and the good of others; so it is the duty of believers to give themselves in particular membership, in such a particular church as shall appear by the word of God to be orthodox in the fundamental articles of the Christian religion, and to practice according to the mind of Christ declared in the New Testament, in all Gospel institutions and worship.

From which considerations, it appears the reasonable duty of every believer to give himself a member to such an orderly church as is most

conveniently situated, that is, meeting nighest the place of his or her residence, for which there are these apparent reasons. (1.) For men to give themselves members of a distant church, when another of the same faith and gospel order is nigher, is for such a person to put himself under a necessity of neglecting the ordinary appointed meetings of that church, whereof he is a member, and whereof the particular charge is given, Heb. 10:25. that he might attend and wait in the use of God's appointed means, for his edification by the ministry of that church. (2.) Such puts himself under a wilful necessity to neglect his duty of care over, and constant communion with his fellow members, and wilfully deprives himself of their care over him, advice, christian conversing, and brotherly loving instructions and counsels, that by the blessing of God might increase his knowledge, grace and comfort. (3.) Such cannot be assistant to the church in discipline, contribution, and the like duties, nor cannot be taken care of, and be assisted, without much unnecessary trouble, by the church, in case of need. (4.) Such a practice tends directly to the confusion of churches, and all church order, and suits well with the humor of noisy, lifeless, loose, or covetous niggardly persons. (5.) It is a way that the church cannot find what useful talents such persons have, to the benefit of the body of the church. (6.) It is casting great contempt upon the nearer church, in her ministry and order, and the like.

And here it is further to be considered, that as it is expedient for persons to give themselves members of such regular churches, with which they may keep the most intimate fellowship and communion in all the parts of religious worship; so it is highly reasonable that they, that are members of such regular churches, where the word is purely preached, the ordinances of the Gospel duly administered, and gospel discipline is impartially practiced, should continue their membership with such church; although there be weakness, imperfection and frailty, in the particular practical acts thereof; which, while the affairs of the church are managed by men, even their holy things will have iniquity as of old, Exodus 28:38. It is therefore unreasonable to dismiss any member, from a church that is near to any one's residence, to a church more remote, upon disgust taken at the management of some particular case, wherewith such is not well pleased, and for such cause, demands dismissal; and it is unreasonable also to grant a dismissal to such a member, who should demand a dismissal in a peremptory manner, without giving a reason for such a demand; in either of which cases, such a dismissal is not to be granted. (1.) Because by so doing the greatest confusion would be introduced; for one member would thus be dismissed to one distant church, and another distant church, and the other churches doing the like, it can end in nothing less than the confusion of every church. (2.) The same liberty that members have, pastors, ministers, ruling elders, and deacons have also, whereby any church may dismiss her members until she is unable to maintain worship and communion; for those that reside near, are become members of a remote body, and so uncon-

cerned; and those that are members live remote and so under an impossibility to occupy their place. (3.) This, in the tendency of it, is to remove the balance of churches, which is to consist of such members as can, with the utmost conveniency, meet together in one place, for both worship and government, 1 Cor. 11:20. 14:33. (4.) This hath a tendency to alter the constitution of particular churches, from being congregational corporations, into the national or universal notion of the church; which universal church we believe to be the mystical body of Jesus Christ, which as such is not the seat of instituted worship and ordinances. Also, it is not reasonable to dismiss to the world at large, nor to dismiss a member to a church, with which the church dismissing cannot hold communion.

OF THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS

The members of churches owe all their duties in a way of obedience to the will of God revealed in his word; and their duties are to be performed in love to our Lord Jesus Christ, John 14:15. who is the great Prophet, Priest and King of his Church, which he hath purchased with his own blood, Acts 20:28. Rev. 1: 5. 2 Cor. 5:15. unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given, Matt. 28:18 and is therefore our Lord and Lawgiver, Isaiah 33:22. who alone is head of his church, Ephe. 1:22. his person is to be honored and all his commands are to be observed Heb. 1:2. John 5:23. all worship is to be ascribed unto him, as God blessed forever, Romans 9:5. all church members, therefore, are under the strictest obligations to do and observe whatsoever Christ enjoineeth on them, as mutual duties towards one another.

The officers of the church, whom Christ hath appointed, are to be respected. (1.) the deacons of the church, though they officiate but in the outward concerns of the church, as in the section about deacons is noted, if they are faithful, do purchase unto themselves a good degree, 1 Tim. 3:13. are therefore to be respected. (2.) Ruling elders also are to be respected, seeing they are fitted of God, and called by the church to go before the church, or to preside in acts of government and rule, 1 Tim. 5:17. (3.) Ministers, who are the stewards of the mysteries of the Gospel, are in an eminent manner to be regarded, as being the ambassadors of peace, 2 Cor. 5:20. though they are not to hunt for it, as the pharisees of old, Matt. 23:5,6,7. The duties of church members towards their elders, teachers, ministers and pastors, may be included in their (1.) praying for them, that God would open a door of utterance unto them, to unfold the mysteries, Ephe. 6:18,19,20. (2.) To obey them in the Lord, in whatsoever they admonish them, according to the word of God, Heb. 13:17,22. (3.) In following their example and footsteps, as far as warranted by the word, 1 Cor. 4:16. 11: 1. Phil. 3:17. Heb. 13:7. (4.) In standing by them, in all their trials and afflictions, and in defending them in all good causes, as far as in them lies; in 2 Tim. 1: 15. those of Asia are

blamed, for turning away, or not standing by the apostle. (5.) In not exposing their persons for their infirmities, as far as may be considering the prosperity of the Gospel much depends on their good report, Acts 23:5. (6.) In contributing towards their maintenance, that they may attend wholly on teaching and give themselves to the ministry of the word, and to prayer, Acts 6:4. the reason thereof is evident by a threefold law. (1.) The law of nature, from whence the apostle argues, 1. Cor. 9:7–11. (2.) The Levitical law, 1 Cor. 9:13. (3.) The Gospel enjoineth and requireth the same, Gal. 6:6 1 Cor. 9:14. Let these above cited places of Scripture be considered with many others of like importance, and the nature and tendency of the work of the ministry be well weighed, and it will be clear that it is a duty required of God himself; and that not in a way of alms, as to the poor, which is another standing ordinance of Christ, but it is to be performed in love to Christ, and obedience to his laws, in order to support and carry the interest of the Gospel. Yet this is not to be given to any one that may pretend to be a minister, or thrust himself upon a church, or to such as run without a mission for filthy lucre's sake; but churches ought to take a special care who to call forth to the work of the ministry, according to the rule of instruction given by inspiration of God, be they learned or unlearned as to human learning, be they rich or poor as to worldly wealth.

The liberality of the people, if they be able, should surmount the necessity of the minister, so as that he may exercise those acts of love and hospitality, as is required of such, that therein he may be exemplary in good works, &c. Moreover, it is a duty on all those that attend on their ministry, to assist herein, Gal. 6:6. and as people do sow, so shall they reap, Gal. 6:7. and 8. vide *Confession of Faith*, 27,§. When people neglect their duty towards their ministers, such ministers must of necessity neglect their studies, and betake to other secular employments to support themselves and families, or be worse than infidels; then such people must be great spiritual losers in their edification. Yet when and where a church is not able to raise a comfortable maintenance for to support their minister, there it is not only lawful, but the duty of such ministers to labor with their hands; for to leave such a congregation destitute, to languish without the ministry, would be very uncharitable, and smell very much of filthy lucre; and to expect from a people, more than they are able, would be oppression or extortion.

OF THE MANIFOLD DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS, ESPECIALLY TO THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH

Some of them are these. (1.) Love unfeigned and without dissimulation, for all their things ought to be done in love, John 13:34,35. Rom. 12:9,10. 13:8,9,10. (2.) To labor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, Ephe. 4:3. (3.) Endeavor for the edification and spiritual benefit of the

whole body, that they all may grow up to be a holy temple in and for the Lord, 1 Cor. 14: 12,26. Ephe. 4:12,29. 2:21,22. (4.) That they all watch over one another for good, Philip. 2:3,4. (5.) That they do pray with and for one another, James 5:16. (6.) That they neglect not the assembling of themselves together, for the celebrating of divine worship, and so promote one another's spiritual benefit, Heb. 10:25. Acts 2:42. (7.) That they use all means to keep the house of God in due order and cleanness, walking inoffensive towards one another, and all others, with conscientious diligence, and so unanimously to contend for the faith and truth once delivered to the saints, in the purity thereof, according to the holy scripture, Psalm 93:5. Zech. 14:21. 1 Cor. 14:33,40. 11:2.

OF CHURCH CENSURES

Having spoken of the gathering together of a particular gospel church, and its officers, and the rules whereby we are able to be guided in choosing and ordaining of them, and of the admission of members, &c. it is meet to give a short view of a church's duties and authority, in respect of censures upon offenders.

First, of *Admonition*

(1.) Admonition is a holy, tender, and wise endeavor, to convince a brother, that hath offended in matter of fact, or else is fallen into a way, wherein to continue is like to be prejudicial to the party himself, or some others; where the matter, whatever it be, and the sinfulness thereof, with the aggravating circumstances attending it, is to be charged on his conscience, in the sight of God, with due application of the word of God, which concerns his condition: thereby leading him to his duty and true reformation. (2.) Admonition is private by one or more of the brethren, or more public by the whole church. (1.) When one brother trespasses against another, the offended brother is not to divulge the offence, but to go in a gospel way to the offender, and to use his endeavor to reclaim his brother; and if he repents, the offended brother ought to forgive him, Matt. 18:15. Luke 17:3. But if the offending brother will not hear, then the offended brother ought to take two or three other brethren, and they such as may be the most likely to gain upon the offender; but if this admonition also takes no effect, it is to be brought before the church Matt. 18:16,17. (2.) The church, when matters come thus before them, shall admonish and endeavor to reclaim the offender, in the spirit of meekness; and if the brother that offended continues obstinate and impenitent, the church is directed to exclude him, Matthew 18:17.

(1.) From whence it follows every church member has somewhat to do in his place, Heb. 12:15. (2.) In case of private offences it is preposterous

to publish them, or acquaint the church or the elders thereof therewith, before the two lower degrees of admonition are duly accomplished, and the offender has neglected to hear. (3.) That when matters are thus regularly brought to the church, then private proceedings may cease. (4.) That when private offences are brought to the church without such proper private procedure, that the church may and ought to refuse it, as not coming according to gospel rule aforesaid, in Matt. 18. (5.) But when those things that begin in private are thus regularly brought into the church, they must be received and adjudged according to the said rule, Matt. 18. So that it may and doth oftentimes fall out, that those things that begin with private admonition, do end in public excommunication.

Secondly, of *Suspension*.

(1.) A suspension may be, when the church is informed that a member hath acted amiss, either in matters of faith or practice, and not having satisfactory proof whether the information is true or false, and the case requiring time to inquire therein, it is expedient to suspend such a person from communion at the Lord's table, until the elders of the church can make suitable inquiry; as might be signified by the law in the case of leprosy, Lev. 13th and 14th chapters.

(2.) Suspension is rather to be looked upon to be, when a church doth debar a member from communion for some irregularity that he may be guilty of, which yet doth not amount so high as to be ripe for the great sentence of excommunication; but that the person, for such irregularity, ought to be debarred of the privilege of special communion and exercise of office, in order to his humiliation, 2 Thess. 3:6,7,10,11,14,15. Such is not to be accounted as an enemy, but to be exhorted as a brother in union, though not in communion: but if such a one remain impenitent and incorrigible, the church, after due waiting for his reformation, is to proceed to excommunication, Matt. 18:17. for that would be a not hearing the church in the highest degree.

Thirdly, of *Excommunication*

Excommunication is a judicial act or censure of the church, upon an offender, by the authority of Jesus Christ, and by his direction, delivered to his church by himself or his apostles, in the New Testament, which a gospel church ought to put in practice, when matters of fact require, according to Gospel rule; as first, when a member, after all due admonition, continues obstinate, and will hear no reproof, Matt. 18:17. *Secondly*, when a member hath committed a gross sin, which is directly against the moral law, and being notorious and scandalous, and proved beyond dispute, 1 Cor. 5:4,5. 1 Tim. 5:24. 2 Cor. 10:6. then a church is immediately to proceed unto

censure, notwithstanding any present signs of conviction or remorse, for the necessary vindication of the glory of God, the vindication of the church also, and their holy profession: and to manifest their just indignation and abhorrence against such wickedness, 1 Cor. 5:1–13. *Thirdly*, when a member is found to be erroneous, defective, or heretical in some fundamental point, or to swerve from the right faith, in the principles of the Christian religion, 1 Timothy 1: 19, 20.

The manner of proceeding unto this great and awful instituted ordinance, is: the church being gathered together, the offender also having notice to come to make his answer and defence (if he comes not, he aggravates his offence by despising the authority of Christ in his church) the body of the church is to have knowledge of the offender's crime fully, and the full proof thereof as of plain matter of fact; and after mature deliberate consideration, and consulting the rules of direction given in the word of God, whether the offender be present or absent, the minister or elder puts the question to the whole church, whether they judge the person guilty of such crime now proved upon him is worthy of the censure of the church for the same? to which the members in general give their judgment; which, if it be in the affirmative, then the judgment of the members in general being had, or the majority of them, the pastor, minister, or elder, sums up the sentence of the church, opens the nature of the crime, with the suitableness of the censure, according to Gospel rule; and having thus proceeded, a proper time is fixed to put the sentence in execution, at which time the pastor, minister or elder of the church, as his place and duty requires, is to lay open the heinousness of such a sin, with all the aggravating circumstances thereof, and showing what an abominable scandal such an offender is become to religion, what dishonor it is to God, &c. applying the particular places of Scripture that are proper to the case, in order to charge the offence home upon the conscience of the offender if present, that others also may fear; showing also the awful nature of this great censure, and the main end thereof, for the salvation and not the destruction of the soul, and with much solemnity in the whole society, calling upon God for his gracious presence, and his blessing upon this his sacred ordinance; that the great end thereof may be obtained; still expressing the deep sense the church hath of the fall of this brother, with the great humiliation of the church, and great sorrow for, and detestation of the sin committed. The said pastor, minister, or elder, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the presence of the congregation, and by and with the consent and according to the judicial sentence of the church, cuts off, and secludes such an offender by name, from the union and communion of the church, because of his offences: so that such a person is not thenceforth to be looked on, deemed or accounted as a brother or member of such a church, until God shall restore him again by repentance.

Which exclusion carries in it the full sense of our Lord's words, Matt. 18:17. *Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*; or of the

apostle, 1 Cor. 5:5. *to deliver such a one to Satan*; which is an authoritative putting of such a person out of the communion of the church, the kingdom of heaven, into the world, the kingdom of Satan, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, in order to his being humbled and broken under a sight and sense of his sins, which is meant by the destruction of the flesh, and to the end that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Amongst the many disorders which church members may be guilty of, and for the obstinate continuance therein, a church may and ought to use the power that Christ hath given to exclude them from her communion, that is one, which is when a member doth seclude himself, and that not in any regular way, but contrary to all rule and order; for when a church member, by reason of some offence he hath taken at the church, or some of the members thereof, and hath not done his duty according to the rule of the word, or else is a dying away in religion, by one means or another, as by the love of the world, change of condition in marriage, or not having his expected preferment in the church, or the like, doth, as it were excommunicate himself, the church according to their duty, ought to use their endeavors to reclaim such; which endeavors, if they prove fruitless, and the party obstinate, the church ought not to acquiesce in his irregular departure from them, as if all their bonds of relation and duty were over, and no more was to be done, seeing the party has usurped the power of the keys to himself: the church, therefore, must maintain the power that Christ hath committed unto it, though it cannot hinder the inordinate and unruly passions of such a one, if God leaves him to it. He will run away from the church, rending himself schismatically off, breaking through all order and covenant obligations, in opposition to brotherly endeavors to hinder him, and to stay him in his place; the church is to proceed judicially to turn the key upon such a sinful, disorderly departure; and publicly declare, that as such a one by name hath been guilty of such a thing, naming his disorders, he is no longer in their communion, nor under their watch and care, &c. and that such a person is not to return to their communion until he hath given satisfaction to the church, Rom. 16:17. Such a separation or departure is very sinful, for these and the like reasons. (1.) Because the church is a corporation privileged with laws and rules for admittance and dimittance, which ought to be observed, Matt. 18. Rom. 12:4,5. (2.) Such a departure is rude and indecent, therefore dishonorable, 1 Cor. 14:40. (3.) Because, if members may take this liberty, all the officers of the church, ministers, ruling elders and deacons may take the same liberty, which would soon unchurch any church, or at least be destructive to its beauty, comfort and edification, John 6:67. (4.) All members do covenant the contrary, Isa. 44:5. and therefore it is a breach of covenant, which is a black character, 2 Tim. 3:3. (5.) It destroys totally the relation between elders and people, which God hath ordained,

Matt. 9:36. (6.) It is a usurping of the keys, or rather stealing of them, Amos 6:13. (7.) It is schism: if there is such a thing in the world, it is of particular churches, 1 Cor. 11:18. 12:25. (8.) It is high contempt of Christ in the government of his church, Jude 18,19. 2 Peter 2:10,11. (9.) It is to break the staff of beauty [*covenant*] and of bands and brotherhood too, Zechariah 11: 10. 14. (10.) It argues either some great undiscovered guilt lying on the party, or some by-ends in his first seeking admission into such a church. All which put together, it declares the great unity of a congregational gospel church, and the sinfulness of such disorderly persons in breaking off without a just cause: but if any church becomes heretical in principles, or idolatrous in worship, or immoral in life, it is lawful for persons, after they have discharged their conscience and duty in reprovng and bearing witness against such gross defections, to depart, 2 Cor. 6:17,18.

Other disorders and causes of discords in churches are these, and many of the like: (1.) When members of churches, by their ignorance of the rules of discipline and right government of the church of Christ do not act according to their duty; particularly when that rule, Matt. 18:15,16. is not observed; and that is, either (1.) When offended members instead of going to the offender to tell him his fault, will be divulging it disorderly to others, whether members or non-members. (2.) When offended members instead of acting according to the said rule, do conceal the matter from the offender and everybody else, lest they should be looked upon as contentious persons: and thereby they suffer sin upon their brother, and are become guilty of other men's sins, and thereby they suffer the name of God, their holy profession, and the church, to lie under a reproach by their neglect; either of which ways is very sinful, as being contrary to the express rule given by our Lord Jesus Christ; and such ought, as being thereby become offenders themselves, to be in a gospel way dealt with.

(2.) When an elder or a church do know that some of the members are immoral and scandalous in life, or heretical in matters of faith and judgment, and yet bear with them, or connive at them.

(3.) When members of churches take liberty to go to hear at other places, when the church is assembled to worship God, which is directly contrary to Hebrews 10:25, and is no less than breaking covenant with the church they belong unto, and may soon dissolve and unchurch any particular church; for, by the same rule that one member takes such liberty, another may, yea, all the members may, until their assembling entirely cease. And, moreover, it is casting great contempt on the ministry of such a church, and may cause others to be disaffected to the doctrine taught in such, though sound and orthodox. Yet no restraint ought to be laid on members going to hear at other places, where sound doctrine is taught, at other times.

(4.) When members take liberty to go to hear men that are corrupt in doctrine, and so suck in some unsound notions of religion, and endeavor to

corrupt others with what they have imbibed themselves. And, alas! how many in our unhappy days are corrupted with *Arminianism*, *Socinianism*, and what not? Such cause trouble and great disorders.

(5.) Another disorder that may cause discord, is, when members are received without the general and unanimous consent of the church; or when any are admitted, with whose confession, or life and conversation, the generality of the members are not satisfied: or when elders and ministers, or leaders of the church, are remiss and careless in reception of members.

(6.) When a church shall receive a charge against a member, it being an offence given by one brother to another brother, before an orderly procedure has been made by the offended brother, according to the rule, Matthew 18.

(7.) When judgment passes with partiality, or some are connived at out of favor or affection, and others censured out of envy without due conviction. Levi was not to know his father, mother or children in judgment, Deuteronomy 33:9.

(8.) When the charges of a church are not equally borne by the members according to their several abilities, but some are burthened when others do little or nothing.

(9.) When accusations are received against an elder contrary to the rule, 1 Timothy 5:16, which requires two or three witnesses as to matter of fact.

(10.) When any member shall divulge to persons not of the congregation, nor concerned in those matters, what is done in the church meetings: the church in this respect, as well as in others, is to be a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed, Canticles 4:12. This often occasions great grief and trouble, and therefore such disorderly persons should be detected. Is it not a shame to any to divulge the secrets of a family? But far greater shame do such persons expose themselves unto.

(11.) When days of prayer, fasting or thanksgiving, or days of discipline appointed by the church, are not carefully observed and kept.

In all these, and many other things of like nature, the members of particular churches ought to give all diligence to walk worthy of their vocation, and according to the rule and direction of the word of God, that disorders may be prevented, and that church communion may be maintained in peace and purity, to the edifying of the body of the church of Christ in love.

OF THE COMMUNION OF CHURCHES

Every particular congregational church incorporated by and according to the institution of Christ in the Gospel, and duly organized according to the pattern of the primitive churches, hath sufficient power from Christ to call and ordain its own officers; so that no man, or set of men, have authority to choose officers for them, or impose any officers on them, without their

previous knowledge and voluntary consent, Acts 6:3. Deacons are to be chosen by the multitude, Acts 14:23. Elders were ordained in every church by election or suffrage of the church; and every particular church, as such, assembled with her proper elders, hath sufficient power to receive members, Acts 2:41. Romans 14:7. And in the exercise of any acts of discipline, such a church being convened with her own officers or elders in the name of Christ, may act according to gospel rule in any case, even to excommunicate such members as are found to be obstinate in disorders, or heretical in principles, after due admonition, or such as are guilty of gross and scandalous immoralities in conversation, &c. independent on any other church power superior to itself, or higher judicatory lodged in any man or any set of men, by any institution of Christ: and therefore, the elders of a church, meeting in the absence of the members, or convened with the elders of other churches, are not intrusted with a power to act for a church in admission of members, ordination, or censures, &c. and it is the duty of such a church to admonish any of her members or officers, their teacher or pastor, Colossians 4:17. and exclude any too, when their crimes require, according to the rule of the Gospel.

And such particular congregational churches, constituted and organized according to the mind of Christ revealed in the New Testament, are all equal in power and dignity, and we read of no disparity between them, or subordination among them, that should make a difference between the acts of their mutual communion, so as the acts of one church should be acts of authority, and the acts of others should be acts of obedience or subjection, although they may vastly differ in gifts, abilities and usefulness.

Such particular distinct churches, agreeing in gospel doctrine and practice, may and ought to maintain communion together in many duties, which may tend to the mutual benefit and edification of the whole: and thereby one church that hath plenty of gifts, may and ought, if possible, to supply another that lacketh, Canticles 8:8. They may have mutual giving and receiving, Philippians 4:15. and mutual translation, recommendation or dismissal of members from one church to another, as occasion may require. It is to be noted that persons called to office are not to be dismissed as officers, but as members; though another church may call such to the same office again.

By virtue also of such communion, the members of one such church may, where they are known, occasionally partake at the Lord's table with a sister church. Yet notwithstanding such communion of churches, by voluntary consent and confederation, the officers of one particular church, may not act as officers in another church, in any act of government, without a particular call thereunto from the other church where they occasionally come.

It is expedient that particular churches constituted in the way and manner, and for the ends declared in the former part of this narrative, when they

are planted by the providence of God, so as they may have opportunity and advantage so to do, should, by their mutual agreement, appoint proper times and places, to meet by their respective messengers or delegates, to consider of such things as may be for the common benefit of all such churches, for their peace, prosperity, and mutual edification, and what may be for the furtherance of the Gospel, and the interest of Christ in the world.

And forasmuch as it falls out many times that particular churches have to do with doubtful and difficult matters, or differences in point of doctrine or administration, like the church of Antioch of old, wherein either of the churches in general are concerned, or any one church in their peace, union or edification; or any member or members of a church are injured, in or by any proceeding in censures not agreeable to gospel rule and order; it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion together, should meet by their messengers and delegates to consider of and to give advice in or about such matters in difference; and their sentiments to be reported to all the churches concerned; and such messengers and delegates convened in the name of Christ, by the voluntary consent of the several churches in such mutual communion, may declare and determine of the mind of the Holy Ghost revealed in Scripture, concerning things in difference; and may decree the observation of things that are true and necessary, because revealed and appointed in the Scripture. And the churches will do well to receive, own and observe such determinations, on the evidence and authority of the mind of the Holy Ghost in them, as in Acts 15:29. Yet such delegates thus assembled, are not intrusted or armed with any coercive power, or any superior jurisdiction over the churches concerned, so as to impose their determinations on them or their officers, under the penalty of excommunication, or the like.—See the *Confession*, Chap. 26. §14,15. See also Dr. Owen *On the Nature of the Gospel Church*, Chap. 11, and Dr. Goodwin, Vol. IV. Chap. 8,9,10. &c. *Of the Government of the Churches of Christ*.

THE END.

A Summary of Church Discipline

CHARLESTON ASSOCIATION

A
S U M M A R Y
OF
Church Discipline
SHEWING THE
QUALIFICATIONS AND DUTIES
OF THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS
OF A
GOSPEL CHURCH
*BY THE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION IN
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA*

*For this Cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in Order the Things
that are wanting. Titus 1:5*

*See that thou makest all things according to the Pattern shewed to thee
in the Mount. Hebrews 8:5*

C H A R L E S T O N
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PREFACE

THE following *Summary of Church Discipline*, being designed chiefly for the benefit of the poor and unlearned, is contracted into a very narrow compass, and exhibited in the plainest language. This, with whatever defects it has, will require the candor of the more learned and intelligent.

To remove, in some measure, the ignorance of but too many church members, about discipline, was the principal motive for engaging in this work.

We mean not to impose our sentiments on any person whatever, or to anathematize those who differ from us in opinion. The Word of God and no human composition, is the standard, by which our principles and conduct must be tried.

Nevertheless, we hope this small piece may be of some use, for the right understanding of God's Word, with regard to the points treated on; and we desire that the Scriptures referred to may be carefully consulted, to see whether these things be true.

Some may say, "There is no call for this publication, seeing there is such a valuable treatise on church-discipline, published some years ago by the Philadelphia Association."

We mean not to depreciate the value of that piece; it has merited much from the Baptist Churches; but it is out of print, and we apprehend not so explicit as this; besides some things therein appear to us exceptionable. However, we have borrowed many hints from it; and are greatly indebted to the late learned, pious and judicious Dr. Gill, for what is taken from his *Exposition and Body of Divinity*.

May the Great Head of the Church bless this feeble attempt to promote his honor, and the welfare of his churches.

CHAPTER I OF A TRUE AND ORDERLY GOSPEL CHURCH

1. GOD in every age has had, has, and will have a church or people in the world, consisting of a greater or less number, and subsisting under various forms and in diverse circumstances, *Acts 7:38, Eph. 3:21*.

The catholic or universal church, considered collectively forms one complete and glorious body, *Song of Sol. 6:9*, called Christ's mystical body, of which he is the head, *Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22*. This is the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, *Heb. 12:23*.

Under the Old Testament dispensation, the church was pretty much confined to family or nation; but under the present administration Christ gathers to himself a people from among all nations, *Matt. 28:19, 20*. And being thus gathered, by the power of Christ in the gospel, it becomes their duty

to unite in distinct churches, *Acts 2:41, 47*, that they may walk together, *in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*. Hence we find that under the gospel, churches were settled wherever there was a sufficient number of converts for that purpose, *Rev. 2 and 3*.

A particular gospel church consists of a company of saints incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body, and meeting together in one place, for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their head, in all his institutions, to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit, *2 Cor. 8:5, Acts 2:1*.

2. The temple of the Lord is not to be built with dead but living materials, *1 Pet. 2:5*. None have a right to church membership but such as Christ will own as his sincere followers at the last decisive day, whatever pretensions they may make to an interest in his favor, *Matt. 7:22, 23*. Except a man be born again, he has no right to enter into the kingdom of God, or into a gospel church, *John 3:3*. Christ is a living Head and will have none but living members in his mystical body, *John 15:6*.

3. The constitution of churches is plainly supposed, *Acts 2:47, Matt. 18:17, etc.*, and it is necessary, in order that the disciples of Christ may enjoy the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which is a church ordinance, that they watch over one another, warn the unruly, and lay censures on disorderly and impenitent persons.

The Scriptures do not absolutely determine the number of persons necessary to constitute a church; but as our Lord has said, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them, Matt. 18:20*, it should seem as if that number of godly persons might, at least in some urgent cases, form a church essential, though not a church complete, or duly organized, for lack of officers. Experience has sometimes proved that such small beginnings have been succeeded with a large increase, consistent with that encouraging promise, *Isa. 60:22, a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation*.

A gospel church is not national, but congregational. This was evidently the case in the apostolic age; hence Paul sent a general epistle to the several churches in Galatia, *Gal. 1:1, 2*, and our Lord himself ordered epistles to be written to the seven distinct churches in Asia, *Rev. 2 and 3*.

With regard to the manner of constituting a church, it must be by the consent and desire of the parties concerned; and it will be expedient to call in a minister or ministers, if to be had, to assist on that important occasion. The parties being met fasting, the solemnity ought to be opened by fervent prayer to God, *Phil. 4:6*; next a sermon suitable to the occasion should be preached; and then, for the mutual satisfaction of every individual, a strict inquiry should be made into their experience of a work of grace on their hearts, their soundness in the doctrines of faith and the goodness of their lives and conversation; unless, as members of churches, they come honorably recommended for that purpose. Being thus satisfied with each other's

graces and qualifications, and united in the bond of love they should give up themselves to the Lord and to one another by the will of God, *2 Cor. 8:5*, by subscribing a written covenant consistent with the Word of God, *Isa. 44:5*, thereby binding and obliging themselves to be the Lord's, to walk in all his commands and ordinances, and in all respects to behave towards each other as brethren, agreeable to the spiritual relation they now enter into.

Being thus united in one body, under Christ their head, they become and are to be deemed a church essential, founded on the gospel plan. Let them then ratify their engagements by a participation of the Lord's supper, and so conclude the solemnity.

4. A church thus constituted has the keys, or power of government, within itself, having Christ for its head, and his law for its rule. It has the power and privilege of choosing its own officers, *Acts 6:3, 13:2*, exercising its own discipline, *Matt. 18:17*, and of administering the Word and ordinances, for the edification and comfort of its members, *Acts 2:46*. All which, with every other act of discipline, each distinct church may exercise, without being subject to the cognizance of any other church, presbytery, synod, or council whatever, *1 Cor. 5:12, Matt. 18:17*.

Churches being vested with such power ought to use it with prudence lest they dishonor Christ and his cause or wound their fellow members, *1 Cor. 10:31, Rom. 15:2*. To guard against which, church business should be debated deliberately with humility and moderation; that, if possible, the members may be unanimous in all their determinations. Nevertheless, when this unanimity cannot be attained, a majority of the male members may determine, and the minority ought peaceably to submit. This appears not only from that general rule, *Eph. 5:21, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God*; but more clearly from *2 Cor. 2:6, sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many*: Which many supposes a majority; in the original it is *hupo ton pleionon*, by the more, the greater or major part. Which plainly points out a decision by a majority.

Female members may, when called upon, act as witnesses in a church; and when aggrieved, are to make known their case, either in person or by a brother; and must have a proper regard paid them. But they are excluded from all share of rule or government in the church, *1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12*.

CHAPTER II OF CHURCH OFFICERS

THE ordinary officers of the church, and the only ones now existing, are ministers and deacons, *Phil. 1:1*. In the first gospel churches there were other officers such as apostles, prophets, and evangelists, *1 Cor. 12:28, Eph.*

4:11, who were endowed with extraordinary gifts, which were then necessary for the confirmation of the gospel, but have since become extinct.

1. Ministers of the gospel, who are frequently called elders, bishops, pastors and teachers, are appointed by Christ to the highest office in the church, and therefore need peculiar qualifications such as are pointed out, *1 Tim. 3:2-7 and Titus 1:5-10*.

As they have the charge of souls, and are leaders in the house of God, churches cannot be too careful in choosing men to the ministerial function. They ought to be men fearing God, being born again of the Spirit, sound in the faith, and of blameless lives and conversations, as becomes the gospel of Christ, having fervent desires to glorify God and save souls, *John 3:10, 2 Tim. 1:13, 1 Tim. 3:2, Rom. 9:3, 10:1*.

A church having no minister should look among its own members and see if there be any who seem to have promising gifts and graces for that great work. If such a one is found, he is to be put on private trial for a season; when on finding him promising, and that they are edified by his preaching, they may call him to preach in public. After which, if it should appear that his rod, like *Aaron's*, buds, blossoms, and bears fruit, he is to be set apart by ordination, that he may perform every part of the sacred function, *Acts 13:2, 3*. But should no such person be found in the church, it is the duty of a sister church, if possible, to supply them. And if a person, who is a member of another church be approved, and be inclined to accept a call from them, he must first become a member with them, so that they may choose him from among themselves, see *Acts 1:21*. Thus were deacons chosen, *Acts 6:3*.

The candidate having accepted the call of the church, they proceed to his ordination, which is to be done in the following manner, viz. If there is not a sufficient presbytery in the church, neighboring elders are to be called and authorized to perform that service. The day is set apart by fasting and prayer, *Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23*. The elders [ministers] being satisfied with regard to the gifts, graces, soundness of principles, and becoming life and conversation of the candidate; the church being met, and giving their suffrage for his ordination, a sermon is to be preached on the occasion, and he declaring his willingness and inward call to take upon him the sacred office, *1 Cor. 9:16*. A public confession of his faith will be required, then the ministers lay their hands on his head and by prayer set him apart to the great work of the ministry. This done, they give him the right hand of fellowship, *Gal. 2:9*, and then one of the ministers publicly gives him a charge or directory how to behave himself in the house of God, *2 Tim. 4:5*. The solemnity is concluded by prayer, singing, and a blessing on the whole congregation.

A minister, being ordained, has authority from Christ to preach the gospel and baptize believers in any part of the world where God, in his providence, may call him. But if he should be called unto and accept the

pastoral charge of any particular church, he will be more immediately confined to them and they to him, *1 Pet. 5:1–3*.

Persons thus commissioned are to attend to their work with all possible engagedness, as it becomes those who have the charge of souls. They must give themselves up to study, prayer, and meditation, *1 Tim. 4:14–16*, that they may be workmen who need not be ashamed, *2 Tim. 2:15*. They must be instant in season and out of season, preaching the pure doctrines of the gospel, *2 Tim. 1:13; 4:2*. They are to feed the Lord's flock with spiritual bread, *Acts 20:28*, to preach with the view of bringing souls to Christ, and not for the sake of honor or *filthy lucre*. They are not to lord it over God's heritage, but to be patient and tenderhearted, *1 Peter 5:3; 2 Tim. 2:24, 25*. They are to watch over the flock, *to comfort the feebleminded*, *1 Thess. 5:14*; to sound the alarm to the wicked and obstinate, *Ezek. 3:17, 18*; and to set their faces like flints against profaneness and every vice.

They should often visit the flock committed to their charge, to know the state of their souls, that they may speak a word in season to them, catechize the youth, instruct the ignorant, and pray with and for them. They are especially to visit the sick and those who are otherwise afflicted, *Ezek. 34:4*.

They are to administer the ordinances of the gospel in a strict conformity to the Word of God, *Heb. 8:5*, to preside in the affairs of the church, and see that strict discipline is duly executed therein, *Heb. 13:7, 17*. In a word, they are to be examples to the flock, *in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity*, *1 Tim. 4:12*.

2. As it is the duty of ministers more particularly to give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, God has appointed officers to be employed in the inferior services of the church, namely deacons, whose qualifications are pointed out, *Acts 6:3, 1 Tim. 3:8–13*.

Deacons are likewise to be chosen by the suffrage of the church from among its own members, and, being first proved, are to be set apart to that office by prayer and laying on of hands, *Acts 6:2–6*.

The office of a deacon is to relieve the minister from the secular concerns of the church; hence they are called Helps, *1 Cor. 12:28*. Their business is to serve tables; "The table of the Lord, by providing the bread and wine for it; receiving both from the minister, when blessed, and distributing them to the members; and collecting from them for the poor, and the defraying the charge; and observing what members are missing at the ordinance, whom they are to admonish; and if their admonitions are not regarded, to report it to the church: and they are likewise to serve the minister's table, by taking care that he has a sufficient competency for his support; and it belongs to them to stir up the members of the church to their duty in communicating to him; and what they receive of them, they are to apply to his use: and also, they are to serve the poor's table; to whom they are to distribute of the church's stock, with all impartiality, simplicity,

cheerfulness and sympathy,” Dr. Gill on *Acts 6:2*. By the faithful discharge of their office, they shall *purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith, 1 Tim. 3:13.*

CHAPTER III OF RECEIVING PERSONS TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A CHURCH thus founded on the Scripture plan ought to observe good order, as in all other cases, so also in the admission of members into their community.

1. Every well regulated society requires qualifications in its members; much more should a church of Jesus Christ be careful that none be admitted into its communion, but such as are possessed of those prerequisites pointed out in Scripture.

They must be truly gracious persons. None are fit materials of a gospel church, without having first experienced an entire change of nature, *Matt. 18:3, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* By which is intended a *gospel church state*, as the context clearly shews. To the same purpose is *John 3:5*. Christ’s church is a spiritual house, built up of *lively stones, i.e. of living souls, 1 Pet. 2:5*. By nature we are *dead in trespasses and sins*, and Christ does not place such dead materials in his spiritual building. It is certain the Ephesian church was not composed of such materials, *Eph. 2:1*. The members of the church at Rome were the *called of Jesus Christ, Rom. 1:6, called out of darkness into the Lord’s marvelous light, 1 Pet. 2:9, called to be saints, Rom. 1:7*, as were the members of the church at Corinth, *1 Cor. 1:2*, and the churches in general are called *churches of the saints, 1 Cor. 14:33*. The members of the church at Colosse are denominated not only *saints*, but *faithful brethren in Christ, Col. 1:2*, or true believers in him. None but such have a right to ordinances, *Acts 8:37*. Without faith none discern the Lord’s body in the Supper, and consequently must eat and drink unworthily, *1 Cor. 11:29*. Indeed *without faith it is impossible to please God, Heb. 11:6.*

The Church of England, in her Articles, defines a gospel church as “a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered.” Of such “faithful men” or believers in Christ was the first church at Jerusalem composed, *Acts 2:41; 5:14*. Those whom *the Lord add to the church were such as should be saved, Acts 2:47*. Let those look to it who make the church of Christ a harlot by opening the door of admission so wide as to suffer unbelievers, unconverted, and graceless persons to crowd into it without control.

They should be persons of some competent knowledge of divine and spiritual things; who have not only knowledge of themselves, and of their

lost state by nature, and of the way of salvation by Christ; but have some degree of knowledge of God in his nature, perfections, and works; and of Christ in his person as the Son of God, of his proper deity, of his incarnation, of his offices as prophet, priest, and king; of justification by his righteousness, pardon by his blood, satisfaction by his sacrifice, and of his prevalent intercession. And also of the Spirit of God: his person, offices and operations; and of the important truths of the gospel, and doctrines of grace; or how otherwise should the church be *the pillar and ground of truth*?

Their lives and conversations ought to be such as *becometh the gospel of Christ*, *Phil. 1:27*; that is holy, just, and upright, *Psalms 15:1, 2*; if their practice contradicts their profession they are not to be admitted to church membership. Holiness becomes the Lord's house forever, *Psalms 93:5*.

They ought to be truly baptized in water, *i.e.*, by immersion, upon a profession of their faith, agreeable to the ancient practice of John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, *Matt. 3:6, John 3:23, Rom. 6:4, Acts 8:36-38*. It is allowed by all that baptism is essential to church communion and ought to precede it; there is not one instance in the Word of God of any being admitted without it; the three thousand penitents, after they had *gladly received* the Word, *were baptized*; and then, and not before, were added to the church; so the first church at Samaria consisted of men and women baptized by Philip, they believing what he said concerning the kingdom of God. And Lydia and her household, and the jailor and his, being baptized upon their faith, laid the foundation of the church at Philippi. And the church at Corinth was begun with persons who hearing the Word, believed and were baptized; and the church at Ephesus was first formed by some disciples baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, *Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:15, 31-33; 18:8; 19:5*. So the members of the churches at Rome, Galatia, and Colosse were baptized persons, *Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12*.

2. Persons making application are to be admitted into the communion of a church by the common suffrage of its members; being first satisfied that they have the qualifications laid down in the preceding section; for which purpose candidates must come under examination before the church; and if it should happen that they do not give satisfaction, they should be set aside until a more satisfactory profession is made, *1 Tim. 6:12*.

It may be that one or two of the members of the church have conceived a prejudice against a person applying for fellowship; in this case they are to be duly heard and if their objections are of sufficient weight the candidate must be set aside; if not, the majority of voices ought, in all reason, to decide it. When the church concludes that the person applying for membership may be admitted the minister is to acquaint him with the rules and orders of God's house; and upon his promising, covenanting, and agreeing strictly to observe them, as assisted by the Spirit of God, the minister, in behalf of the church, is to give him the right hand of fellowship, and to receive him as a member into union and full communion with that particular church;

whereby he becomes entitled to all the rights and privileges thereof, *Col. 2:19, Rom. 15:7, 2 Cor. 8:5*.

If a member should desire a transient or occasional communion in any church to which he does not belong, if it be well known that he is an orderly person, he may be admitted to the Lord's table; but he should have nothing to do with the government of the church, unless his advice and assistance be asked. But a person unknown should by no means be admitted without a satisfactory letter of recommendation from the church to which he belongs.

When a member removes his residence nearer to another church of the same faith and order, he is bound in duty to procure a letter of dismission from the church to which he belongs, *Acts 18:27*. And the church to which he is removed is bound in duty to receive him into union and full communion, unless it should appear that he is either immoral in his life or unsound in his principles. But let it be remembered that he continues a member of his own church from whence he came until he is received into the church to which he is removing, *Acts 9:26–28*. That it is the duty of a believer to give himself as a member of an orderly church nearest to his place of residence, or which he can most conveniently attend, appears plain from the following considerations: (1) by the neglect of this duty he will deprive himself of the edification, comfort, loving instruction, watchful care, and faithful admonitions of his fellow members; (2) it would give room to suspect he was impatient of that restraint which every humble member deems his mercy; (3) it would seem as if he aimed at screening himself from necessary contributions, or church discipline; (4) such a neglect casts a manifest contempt on the church and ministry near which he resides; (5) were this conduct to be allowed and become general, it would cause great confusion among the churches; and as such a practice can suit none but careless and disorderly persons, the church they belong to ought to admonish them and if they still persist, to censure them.

The same reasons hold good against those who require a dismission from the church they belong to unto one more remote. If one member may be so dismissed, another may, even officers of the church as well as others. To dismiss a member to the world at large, would be yet more preposterous, and ought never to be done in any other way than by excommunication. The usual plea for such an unreasonable request is either that they cannot profit under such a ministry or that the concerns of the church are not properly managed; but the truth is pride is generally at the bottom of such desires, for an humble Christian will esteem others better than himself, bear with the infirmities of the weak, and pray and hope to find a blessing where Providence casts his lot.

It sometimes happens that an orderly member is called by Providence to remove, but (like Abraham, *Heb. 11:8*) he knows not whither; in such case the church to which he belongs ought to furnish him with a letter of com-

mendation, permitting him to join any church of the same faith and order, where Providence may cast his lot, *Col. 4:10*. On his being admitted into any such church, he is dismissed from the church of which he was a member, and notice thereof should be given them as soon as possible.

Members who have been suspended or excommunicated by the church and giving satisfactory evidence of their repentance are to be cautioned against the evils of which they were guilty; and on their promising, with the Lord's assistance, to lead orderly lives for the future, they are to be again received into full communion with the church and have the right hand of fellowship given them, *Gal. 6:1, 2, 2 Cor. 2:7, 8*, but they are not on any account to be rebaptized, *Eph. 4:5*.

CHAPTER IV OF THE DUTIES INCUMBENT ON CHURCH MEMBERS

A CHURCH constituted after the heavenly pattern is as a city set on a hill, from which the glories of rich and free grace abundantly shine, *Psalms 50:2*. The true members of it have the light of the gospel shining in their hearts, by the Holy Spirit, and are entitled to all the blessings of the new covenant, *Eph. 1:3*. And being thus blessed, their faith is a lively, active faith, not only purifying their hearts, but working by love, *Gal. 5:6*, whereby they become the light of the world, *Matt. 5:14–16*, which they make apparent by a faithful discharge of the duties enjoined them by the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Head of the church, *James 2:18*.

1. As ministers are the representatives of Christ, and employed by him in a work that is both useful and honorable, there are certain duties incumbent on all members of churches toward them. As (1) they owe them distinguishing honor and reverence, and are to hold them in reputation as the ambassadors of Christ, *Phil. 2:29; 2 Cor. 5:20*, and to esteem them highly for their work's sake, *1 Thess. 5:13*. (2) They are to contribute, according to their respective abilities, towards their ministers support, *Gal. 6:6*, that, being freed as much as possible from the cares of life, they may wholly devote themselves to the duties of their holy function, and have it in their power to use hospitality, *1 Tim. 3:2*, and stretch out the benevolent hand of charity to the poor in distress, *Gal. 2:10*, which maintenance ought not to be considered as a gratuity, but as a debt due to their minister. The law of nature requires it, *1 Tim. 5:18*. In the Lord's grants to Israel there was always a reserve made for the priests; under the gospel, provision is made for the support of its ministers, *1 Cor. 9:7–14*. (3) They are to obey and submit themselves to their ministers, *Eph. 6:18–20*. (4) They ought to stand by and assist them in all their troubles and afflictions, *2 Tim. 4:16, Job 6:14*. (5) They should receive no accusation against them without full proof, *1 Tim. 5:19*. (6) Nor should they expose their infirmities, *Acts 23:5, 3 John 10*.

(7) They should follow their example, as far as they follow Christ, *2 Thess. 3: 7, 1 Cor. 11:1*.

2. Deacons being in an honorable office in the church, the members are: (1) to respect and esteem them as being employed by the Lord to serve in the household of faith, and as men whom (if faithful) God will greatly honor and bless, *1 Tim. 3:13, Matt. 25:21*; (2) to submit to their godly and friendly admonitions, *1 Cor. 16:16*; (3) to encourage them in their office by cheerful and liberal contributions for the service of God's house, his ministers, and his poor, *2 Cor. 9:6, 7*.

3. The members of a church are bound in duty (1) to love all men, but especially to love and do good *to them who are of the household of faith, Gal. 6:10*, all must be done from a principle of love, *1 John 4: 7–11, John 13:34, 35*; (2) to *follow after the things which make for peace, Rom. 14:19*, in order to which they are to put the most favorable construction on words and actions that are doubtful, *1 Cor. 13:7*, and to speak no evil one of another, *James 4:11*, and to endeavor, by a disinterested and godly behavior, to sow the fruit of righteousness in peace, *James 3:18*, carefully avoiding whisperings and backbitings, *2 Cor. 12:20*, not to be busy meddlers with the concerns of others, *2 Thess. 3:11*, not to take up an evil report against another, *Acts 25:16*, nor do any thing through strife and vain glory, *Phil. 2:3*; (3) to endeavor after each other's edification and growth in grace, *1 Thess. 5:11, 2 Pet. 3:18*; (4) to pray for each other, *James 5:16*; (5) to visit each other, especially when sick or otherwise afflicted, *Acts 15:36, James 1:27*, and those visits ought to be improved for edification, therefore they should spend the time in praying together, *Psalms 34:3*, in godly conversation, *Mal. 3:16*, in exhorting and encouraging each other, *Heb. 3:13, Psalm 55:14*, warning and admonishing one another, *1 Thess. 5:14, Rom. 15:14*, ingenuously confessing their faults to one another, so far as Christian prudence will permit, *James 5:16*, and administering all possible relief to the needy and distressed, *James 2:15, 16*; (6) to avoid, as much as possible, going to law with each other, *1 Cor. 6:1–7*; (7) to prefer marrying among themselves as far as it may be done with prudence, *Amos 3:3, 2 Cor. 6:14*; (8) and to labor to find out the cause of shyness in a brother, as soon as it is discovered, *Matt. 5:23, 24*.

4. The duties of members to the church are: (1) to pray for its peace and prosperity, and use their utmost endeavors to promote its welfare, *Psalms 122:6–9*, (2) they ought carefully to attend all church meetings, whether for public worship or business, *Heb. 10:25, Psalm 84:4, 10*; (3) it is their duty to submit to the order and discipline of the church, so far as it is consistent with the Word of God, *Deut. 5:1, Heb. 13:17*; (4) they are to employ their talents and freely bestow of their substance for the service of the church, *Rom. 12:6–8, Prov. 3:9, 10*; (5) they must carefully avoid jarings, contentions and quarrels in the church, *1 Cor. 10:32, Rom. 2:8*; (6) and they must not divulge any of the church's secrets, *Song of Sol. 4:12*.

CHAPTER V OF CHURCH CENSURES

REWARDS and penalties give sanction to law; therefore our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only supreme Head of the church, in giving laws and institutions for the government thereof, has annexed rewards of grace to the faithful and obedient observers of them and punishments to be inflicted on the rebellious, *Heb. 11:6, Rom. 2:6–9, Rev. 22:12*.

There are some punishments which our righteous Lawgiver inflicts more immediately with his own hand, either by his providence in this world or by the execution of divine wrath in the world to come. There are other punishments which Christ, by his Word, authorizes his church to inflict on its rebellious and unworthy members. These are commonly called church censures which differ in their nature according to the nature and degree of the offense, and may be denominated rebuke, suspension, and excommunication.

1. Rebuke or admonition (the lowest degree of church censure) is a reproving of an offender, pointing out the offense, charging it upon the conscience, advising and exhorting him to repentance, watchfulness, and new obedience, and praying for him that he may be reclaimed, *Titus 1:13*. This, and all other church censures, must be administered in love and tenderness, *Rev. 3:19*, with Christian prudence, *1 Tim. 1:3*, a sincere aim to save the soul from death, *James 5:19, 20; 2 Cor. 13:10; Gal. 6:1*, without partiality, *1 Tim. 5:21*, and for a caution to others, *1 Tim. 5:20*.

A member becomes worthy of rebuke, (1) when he wounds the conscience of a weak brother, by the use of things in themselves indifferent, *1 Cor. 8:11, 12*; (2) when he exposes the infirmities of a brother to others, *1 Pet. 4:8*; (3) when he disquiets the peace of the brethren about matters of indifference, *Rom. 14:19–22*; (4) when he indulges anger against a brother, without a just cause, *Matt. 5:22*; (5) when he is contentious about unscriptural forms and fashions, as if they were necessary to be used in the church or among the members, *1 Cor. 11:16*; (6) when he neglects privately to admonish or reprove a brother whom he knows to be guilty of sin, *Lev. 19:17*; (7) when he neglects to attend church meetings for business, *Acts 6:2*; (8) and when he attends other places of worship to the neglect of his own, *Heb. 10:25*.

2. Suspension, considered as a church censure, is that act of a church whereby an offending member, being found guilty, is set aside from office, from the Lord's table, and from the liberty of judging or voting in any case. By this act the staff beauty is broken, but not the staff bands, *Zech. 11:10, 14*. Therefore as this censure does not cut off from union, but only from communion with the church, the suspended member is not to be accounted as enemy, but admonished as a brother, *2 Thess. 3:15*, and upon a credible profession of repentance the censure is to be taken off and the delinquent restored to all the privileges of the church.

This censure is to be administered in case of crimes which do not amount so high as to deserve excommunication, as (1) when a member breaks the peace of the church by janglings and disputings, *1 Tim. 1:6; 6:5*; (2) when he withdraws from the church on account of its wholesome discipline, notwithstanding loving admonitions have been given him, *John 6:66, Jude 19*; (3) when he leaves his place at the Lord's table for the sake of another member with whom he is offended, and neglects to do his duty by him as directed, *Matt. 18:15*; (4) when he broaches unsound, heretical principles, *Titus 3:10*; (5) when he is a busy tattler and backbiter, *Psalms 50:19–21*; (6) when he through sloth neglects the necessary duties of life, *1 Tim. 5:8*; (7) when he has committed a gross crime but gives some tokens of repentance, he is to be suspended that the church may have time to judge of his sincerity, *1 John 4:1*; (8) and when a party of members, like Korah and his company, break through their covenant obligations and attempt to set up for themselves, in an irregular manner and in opposition to all the loving persuasions of the majority, such are *trucebreakers* and *despisers of those that are good*, *2 Tim. 3:3*. In a word, all practices that in their own nature and tendency are destructive of the reputation, peace, and prosperity of the church and yet appear not to be past remedy, merit this censure.

3. As excommunication is on all hands acknowledged to be an ordinance of Christ, the great Head of the church, and a censure in its own nature, very important, awful, and tremendous, it is highly needful that churches should well understand the nature of it.

Excommunication is a censure of the highest degree; it is a judicial act of the church in which, by the authority of Christ, she cuts off and entirely excludes an unworthy member from union and communion with the church, and from all the rights and privileges thereof. "It is a disfranchising from all the immunities of a fellow-citizen with the saints, and taking from him a place and a name in the house of God" (Gill).

This censure, awful as it is, respects only the spiritual concerns of a man, as related to the church, and does by no means affect his temporal estate, or civil affairs; it does not subject him to fines, imprisonment, or death; it does not interfere with the business of the civil magistrate; nor does it break in upon the natural and civil relations between man and wife, parents and children, masters and servants; nor forbid attendance on the external ministry of the Word.

To deliver an offender unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, *1 Cor. 5:5*, was an act purely Apostolical, for it was not the act of the church; "nor is this a form of excommunication; nor was this phrase ever used in excommunicating persons by the primitive churches; nor ought it ever to be used; it is what no man, or set of men, have power to do now, since the ceasing of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which the apostles were endowed with; who, as they had a power over Satan to dispossess him from the bodies of men, so to deliver up the bodies of men into his hands" (Dr. Gill on

the text). Hence the apostle writing to Timothy on a similar case, expresses it as done by himself, and not by the church, *1 Tim. 1:20*.

The act of excommunication is expressed by various phrases; as by avoiding familiar conversation with such, *Rom. 16:17*, by not keeping company with them, *1 Cor. 5:9*, *Eph. 5:11*, by not eating with them at the Lord's table, *1 Cor. 5:11* by purging out from the church the old leaven, *1 Cor. 5:7*, by putting away the wicked from among them, *1 Cor. 5:13*, by withdrawing from disorderly persons, and by cutting them off from fellowship with the saints, *2 Thess. 3:6*, *Gal. 5:12*.

The subjects of this ordinance are members who are guilty of notorious and atrocious crimes, which are so, either in their own nature or by means of sundry aggravations. There are some crimes so high and pernicious in their own nature as to call for a speedy excommunication, unless the most evident marks of repentance appear in the offender, as (1) all sins that are against the letter of the ten commandments, *Rom. 7:12*, *Matt. 5:17*; (2) all that call for severe corporal punishments from human laws, provided those laws are not contrary to the laws of God, *Prov. 8:15*, *Rom. 13:1-4*, *1 Peter 2:13, 14*; (3) and all such sins as are highly scandalous in their nature and expose the church to contempt, *1 Tim. 5:24*, *1 Cor. 5:2*. We find black catalogs of sins which call for this censure, in *1 Cor. 5:11* and *6:9-10*. And indeed for crimes of an inferior nature, when aggravated by a contumacious [stubbornly rebellious] despising of the authority of the church (after the more gentle censures have been used) excommunication ought to take place.

But an offender, even of the highest rank, who gives clear, evident, and satisfactory proofs of a true, sincere, evangelical repentance is by no means to be excommunicated. Does not reason itself suggest that we ought to forgive those who repent, and those whom God has forgiven? Christ our great pattern did so, as appears in the case of the woman taken in adultery, *John 8:11*. Peter also is an instance of Christ's readiness to forgive penitents. Peter was a member of that congregation in the midst of which Christ sung praises to his Father, *Psalms 22:22*. Peter fell foully, he denied his Master with oaths and curses, a horrid crime! Did Christ immediately cut him off? No, but admonished him by a look; the offender repented; the penitent was forgiven. Let churches follow the example which Christ has set them.

The act of excommunication may not be performed by a member on himself; such a one, said Dr. Gill, is a *felo de se*, he is, in effect, a self-murderer. As consent is necessary to a person's coming into the church, so none can go out of it without its consent. To attempt it is to break covenant with the church, and, as much as in a man lies, to break up the church. By the same rule that one member may thus leave the church, another may, the pastor may, all may; the tendency of which conduct, all may see is confusion and destruction. Those, therefore, who are guilty of it, ought to be looked upon as trucebreakers, proud, arrogant, dangerous persons, and to be dealt with as such. And they should be avoided by all other churches.

No man has a right of himself to perform this censure; it is a punishment inflicted by many, *2 Cor 2:6*. But this great censure is to be executed “by the elders [ministers] of churches, with the consent of the members of them; for they have a right to do this, previous to their having elders, and when they have none, as to receive members, so to expel them. The power of it originally lies in the church; the authority of executing it lies in the elders, with the consent and by the order of the church; as the directions to the churches concerning this matter, testify.” (Gill)

To proceed regularly in this solemn business the church must cite an accused member to appear, either at a stated church meeting of business, or at an occasional meeting for that purpose; in order that he may have a fair trial and an opportunity of making his *defense* if he has any to make. The meeting is opened by prayer for direction; then the case is impartially examined and tried by the Word of God; if the accused member is found guilty of a crime deserving excommunication, he is not to be immediately cut off (unless it be some extraordinary case) but admonished, and some time given him for repentance and for the church to mourn over him and pray for him. If the offender continues obstinate and appears to be incorrigible, the church is under a necessity of proceeding to the execution of the great censure against him.

If the offense be private the censure may, and in some cases ought to be laid on before the church only; but if the crime is public, and very notorious, the honor of Christ calls for the censure to be public, *1 Tim. 5:20, Jude 15*. In this case the church appoints the day and summons the guilty member to attend; the minister suits his sermon to the occasion, after which he prays to God for a blessing on the ordinance to be administered; and then proceeds to sum up the sentence of the church; lays open the odious nature of the crime and the dreadful load of guilt which the sin, with its aggravations, has brought on the offender; he takes notice of the scandal it has brought on religion, how dishonorable to God, and grievous to the church; he observes that the excommunicating act is not intended for the destruction of the soul, but is used as a last remedy for the recovery of the offender, and as a caution to others. Then, by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the name and behalf of that church, he cuts off and secludes the offender by name from union and communion with the church; he having broke his covenant with them, they also excluded him from the privileges of a member, as unworthy; yet praying the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, to restore him by giving him unfeigned repentance that he may again be received into the sheepfold.

If the accused member should obstinately refuse to appear before the church, when cited as above, it is to be deemed a sign of guilt, a contempt of the authority of the church, and an aggravation of his crime; and the process of the church against him, should not be obstructed on account of his absence.

If it should happen, that the minister of the church is the offender or that the church is without a minister, in either of these cases, they ought to call one from a sister church to assist them on such an occasion; for, as has been before observed, the authority of execution this censure (as well as all other ordinances in general) lies in the elders.

The ends to be answered by this solemn ordinance, and which should always be aimed at in the administration of it, are (1) the glory of God, which is the ultimate end of it, for as his name is dishonored by the evil practices or principles of church members, so this is the most open and most effectual way of removing the dishonor that is brought upon it; (2) another end is to purge the church and preserve it from infection, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump*, and therefore *the old leaven* must be purged out, that the church may become *a new lump*; *evil communications corrupt good manners*, and therefore evil men must be put away from among the saints, *1 Cor. 5:6, 7, 13*. Lepers were to be put out of the camp that they might not infect others, and erroneous persons, whose words do eat as a canker, must be removed from the communion of churches; (3) a church of Christ is like a garden or vineyard, which, if not taken care of, as it is not, when this ordinance of excommunication is neglected, will be like the vineyard of the slothful, overrun with thorns, nettles, and other weeds; but by means of this it is cleared of the weeds of immorality, the bitter roots of false doctrines eradicated, and withered branches gathered and cast out; (4) and the good of persons excommunicated is another end which is sometimes effected by it, God blessing his own institution when rightly performed, which is for edification and not destruction; and for the saving of the souls of men who are hereby brought to shame and repentance for their sins, in which case they are to be received again with all love and tenderness and to be comforted that they may not be *swallowed up with overmuch sorrow*, *Jude 23; 2 Thess. 3:14, 15; 2 Cor. 2:7*.

CHAPTER VI OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES

AS the communion of saints, so the communion of churches is a desirable blessing. To obtain and promote which ought to be the study and endeavor of all the people of God.

Although churches formed on the gospel plan are independent of each other with regard to power, yet not so, strictly speaking, with regard to communion. For as saints in general have an indisputable right to share in each other's gifts and graces, so have churches in this joint capacity. It is a general rule, *to do good, and to communicate forget not*, *Heb. 13:16*, which is applicable in a particular manner to churches as such.

In order the more amply to obtain this blessing of communion, there

ought to be a coalescing or uniting of several churches into one body, so far as their local situation and other circumstances will admit. But as it is impracticable for all the individual members thus to associate and coalesce together, the churches should each respectively choose and delegate some of the most able, pious, and judicious from among themselves, and particularly their ministers, to convene at such times and places as may be thought most conducive to the great end proposed, and to act as their representatives in the general assembly. Their expenses ought to be defrayed by the churches who send them.

It appears advisable that these delegates, at their first meeting, should in a formal manner enter into covenant with each other, as the representatives of the churches, for the promoting of Christ's cause in general and for the interest of the churches they represent in particular. They should then form their plan of operation and fix on the most proper time and place for meeting in the future. Once a year at least they ought to meet at the place the most central and convenient for all the churches in confederation to attend.

Although such a conjunction of churches is not expressly commanded in Scripture, yet it receives sufficient countenance and authority from the light of nature and the general laws of society, but more especially from a precedent established by Apostolical authority, *Acts 15*.

The association thus formed is a respectable body as it represents not a city, country, or nation, but the churches of Jesus Christ. Yet it is by no means to be deemed a superior judicature vested with coercive power or authority over the churches; it presumes not to impose its sentiments on its constituents, under pain of excommunication; nor does it anathematize those who do not implicitly submit to its determinations, which would be nothing less than spiritual tyranny and better comport with the arbitrary spirit of popish councils than with that meekness which distinguishes the true disciples and humble followers of the lowly yet adorable Jesus. The apostles, elders, and brethren who composed the first Christian council presumed not to impose their conclusions on the churches in such a lordly manner, but prefaced their determinations with this modest prologue, *It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things, Acts 15:28*. The Baptist Association therefore arrogates no higher title than that of an Advisory Council, consistent with which epithet, it ought ever to act, when it acts at all, without intruding on the rights of independent congregational churches or usurping authority over them, *Matt. 23:10–12*.

Nevertheless, the association has a natural and unalienable right to judge for itself what churches shall be admitted into confederacy with it, and to withdraw from all acts of communion and fellowship with any church, so admitted, provided such church should obstinately persist in holding corrupt principles, or indulging vicious practices, notwithstanding all proper endeavors have been used to reclaim it, *Eph. 5:7, Rev. 18:4*.

It is generally agreed that an association when transacting business, should proceed in the following manner: (1) always begin and end each session by prayer; (2) admit none as messengers but such as come recommended by letters, well authenticated, from the churches to which they belong or from whence they come; (3) when a church petitions by letter for admission, if approved of, the moderator is to inform the messengers that their request is granted and desire them to take their seats; (4) all who have anything to offer are to rise and address the moderator; (5) while one is speaking, the rest are to be silent, yet all have an equal right to speak in turn; (6) no partiality or respect of persons is to be shown; (7) every matter should be canvassed with gravity, modesty, and a sincere aim to truth; (8) when all are not agreed, the matter may be put to the vote, and a majority determines; (9) all queries regularly sent by the churches should be answered, if possible; (10) any matter proposed, relative to the general good of the churches, should be seriously attended to; (11) every transaction should be conformable to the revealed will of God; (12) and a circular letter should be written and sent to all the churches in confederation containing such instruction, information, and advice as may be thought most suitable; and with which should be sent the transactions of the association.

The benefits arising from an association and communion of churches are many; in general, it will tend to maintain the truth, order, and discipline of the gospel. By it (1) the churches may have such doubts as arise among them cleared, which will prevent disputes, *Acts 15:28, 29*; (2) they will be furnished with salutary counsel, *Prov. 11:14*; (3) those churches which have no ministers may obtain occasional supplies, *Song of Sol. 8:8*; (4) the churches will be more closely united in promoting the cause and interest of Christ; (5) a member who is aggrieved through partiality or any other wrongs received from the church may have an opportunity of applying for direction; (6) a godly and sound ministry will be encouraged, while a ministry that is unsound and ungodly will be discountenanced; (7) there will be a reciprocal communication of their gifts, *Phil. 4:15*; (8) ministers may alternately be sent out to preach the gospel to those who are destitute, *Gal. 2:9*; (9) a large party may draw off from the church by means of an intruding minister, or other ways, and the aggrieved may have no way of obtaining redress but from the association; (11) contentions may arise between sister churches, which the association is most likely to remove; (12) and the churches may have candidates for the ministry properly tried by the association.

These and other advantages arising from an association must induce every godly church to desire a union with such a body. But should any stand off, it would argue much self-sufficiency, *Rev. 3:17*, and little or no desire after the unity of the Spirit, *Eph. 4:3*, or mutual edification, *1 Cor. 12:11-14*.

THE END.

Treatise of Church Discipline

SAMUEL JONES



Jones, Samuel, D.D., was born Jan. 14, 1735, in Glamorganshire, Wales, and was brought to this country two years afterwards by his parents. He received his education at the College of Philadelphia, and graduated in 1762; and in the beginning of the next year he was ordained to the ministry of the gospel. In 1763 he became pastor of the Lower Dublin Baptist church, and he held that office until his death, which occurred Feb. 7, 1814.

Dr. Jones, if not superior in scholarly attainments to every other American Baptist of his day, was equaled by few, and surpassed by none. His wisdom in

managing difficult matters was as striking as his learning was remarkable. At an early period of his life he became the most influential Baptist minister in the middle colonies, and probably in the whole country. Dr. Jones, when a young man, was sent by the Philadelphia Association to Rhode Island, to assist in founding Rhode Island College. At Newport he remodeled the rough draft of the college charter, which soon after obtained the sanction of the Legislature of Rhode Island. He prepared a new treatise of discipline for the Philadelphia Confession of Faith by request of the Association in 1798. Dr. Jones, Rev. David Jones, and Dr. Burgiss Allison compiled a selection of hymns for the use of the churches. In 1807 he preached the centenary Sermon of the Philadelphia Association, which was published with the volume of "Minutes for One Hundred Years," by the Baptist Publication Society. His name occurs continually in the minutes of the Association for half a century, as moderator, preacher, committeeman, or writer of the circular letter. "Dr. Jones was a ready writer and a fluent speaker; he was a large and firmly-built man, six feet or more in height, and in every way well-proportioned. His face was the very image of intelligence and of good nature, which, with the air of dignity that pervaded his movements, rendered his appearance uncommonly attractive."

He educated many young men for the Christian ministry, some of whom attained distinction for their talents, learning, and usefulness.

On the death of Dr. Manning, Dr. Jones received a letter from Judge David Howell informally offering him the presidency of Rhode Island College. Secretary Howell informed him that "the eyes of the corporation (of the college) seemed to be fixed on him for a successor to Dr. Manning."

This great and good man was largely blessed in his ministry; and he exerted a vast and useful influence over the rising Baptist churches of our country.

—William Cathcart, 1881

A
TREATISE
OF
CHURCH DISCIPLINE,
AND A
DIRECTORY.

*Done by Appointment of the Philadelphia Baptist
Association.*

SAMUEL JONES, D. D.

Son of Man, shew the house to the house of Israel.
EZEKIEL.

*These things have I written, that thou mayest know,
how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house
of God.*

PAUL.

LEXINGTON:

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1805

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Philadelphia Baptist Association, met at Philadelphia October 5th, 1795, judging our former Treatise of Church Discipline to be materially defective, appointed the writer to revise the same, or write a new one against the next association.

At their next meeting, in 1796, he had before them the reasons why it was not done, which were approved of, and he was requested to prepare it against their next session.

Being met at Lower Dublin, October 3rd, 1797, it was read to them, and they appointed a committee of one person from each church to revise it.

The said committee met at Philadelphia, on Wednesday the 13th of December following, and after making some alterations, chiefly verbal, it was agreed it should be printed for the use of the churches.

It will be understood, the writer availed himself of all the help he could derive from such writers on the subject as he had by him, or could find; and he hopes it will appear, he has bestowed some pains to render the work serviceable, both as to comprehensiveness of matter and plainness of manner, so far as the requisite brevity would admit.

He thinks it unnecessary to add any thing farther, save that he would beg leave to impress on the minds of the brethren the following particulars.

First; That they should be careful in the admission of members. Let there be pretty clear evidence of a work of grace. Slackness, or inattention here, has been the bane of the church, in all ages.

Secondly; Let there be most unremitting attention to maintain strict discipline. The glory of the church, the credit of religion, and the prosperity of Zion, depend, in a high degree, on the circumspect walk of its professors, and the vigilant zeal of all, especially of the officers, for support of order and gospel discipline.

Thirdly; That the professors of religion should walk together in love and Christian union is of material consideration. Behold how good, says the psalmist, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity. "See how these Christians love one another," was the observation of the Heathens, respecting the Christians of the first age. What a pity, that the members of the same family, and even children of the same heavenly Father, and who is also the God of peace, should disagree and wrangle like the sons of darkness.

Fourthly; Be very diligent and circumspect in the discharge of the various duties you owe to God, to yourselves, to one another, and to those of the world. Let all have occasion to observe, that you have been with Jesus, and learned of him. Walk worthy, says the apostle, of the vocation wherewith you are called.

I will only add; That you be particularly careful, to maintain and preserve temper, coolness, and impartiality, in your meetings of business. To be rigid, obstinate, partial, passionate, and overbearing, in administering

the concerns of the house of God: how unlike the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus! how unworthy of office under their divine Master.

Now, that the knowledge of God may cover the earth, and his saving power prevail among all nations; and that the churches of Christ may shine in purity of doctrine, strictness of discipline, and in the beauty of holiness, is the unfeigned and fervent prayer of, your's in all gospel service.

SAMUEL JONES.

Lower Dublin,
Dec. 26, 1797

CHAPTER I OF A GOSPEL CHURCH.

1. *Ekklesia*, the word in the original for Church,¹ signifies, *to be called out of*; that is, a gospel church consists of such persons, as have been *called out* of a state of nature into a state of grace, *called* with an effectual calling, *called out* of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son, or are judged in charity to be so called. Rom. i. 6, 7. viii. 30. 1 Cor. i. 2. Eph. iv. 1. Heb. iii. 1. 2 Tim. i. 9. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

2. The word church sometimes means the whole body of the elect, and is commonly called the catholic, or universal church. Eph. i. 22, 23. v. 23. Col. i. 18, 24. This comprehends those in Heaven, called the church triumphant. Heb. xii. 23. Those on earth, called the church militant. 1 Cor. xii. 28. and those yet to be born.

3. But the church, of which we now treat, means a number of disciples, saints, or believers, that have been baptised, and united together in gospel fellowship, and is called a particular church. "Were baptised," Acts ii, 41. "Tell it unto the church," Matt. xviii. 17. "The church that is in their house," Rom. xvi. 5. "That the church may receive edifying," 1 Cor. xiv 5. "Churches of the saints," 1 Cor. xiv. 33. "The churches of Asia," 1 Cor. xvi. 19. "The church that is at Babylon," 1 Pet. v. 13.

4. A particular church is not parochial, as comprehending all of the same parish; nor diocesan, as if one pastor might have several flocks;² nor yet provincial, for there were many churches in Judea, Gal. i. 22. Galatia, 1 Cor. xvi. Macedonia, 2 Cor. viii. 1. much less national.

5. A number of believers are united together into a particular church, by

¹In 1805 this treatise was reprinted in Lexington, KY by T. Anderson. The only change was in the first line. The 1805 edition removed the beginning Greek word 'Ekklesia' and simply read 'The Greek word, in the original, for Church and then it goes on as the 1798 edition read.

²We learn from history, that a church never thrives unless the minister lives among them. The practice of pluralities may suit the minister's pride, and save the pockets of the churches, but starves their souls.

an act of mutual confederation. “Gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God,” 2 Cor. viii. 5.

6. Whether the requisite number should be twelve or thirteen, because our blessed Lord and his disciples, at the first celebration of the Lord’s supper, made that number, or whether three will be sufficient, because of the promise in Matt. xviii. 20. may be doubtful: but there ought to be so many, as to answer the end of that holy institution.

7. When such a number is found in any place, they ought to propose among themselves, or others may propose it to them, to be constituted a church.

8. For this purpose it will be necessary to appoint a time and place, when they are to meet fasting. One minister or more should be present to assist, and to preach on the occasion. Acts viii. 14. xi. 22.

9. After a suitable sermon has been preached, the acting minister, being furnished with a list of the names of the candidates, and they standing before him, is to interrogate them: respecting their desire to be constituted a Gospel church, their knowledge of, and satisfaction with each other’s qualifications, and their purpose and resolution to walk together in church relation, in love to one another, and in obedience to the requirements of Christ in the Gospel, together with such other questions as will involve the leading particulars of a church covenant; and after they have given their assent to the whole, the church covenant³ is to be read to them, which they are then, or afterwards, to sign, and the minister pronounces them, in the name of the Lord Jesus, a regular gospel church, giving them, or their representative, the right hand of fellowship, and wishing them prosperity in the Lord. Is. xlv. 5. Amos iii. Acts xi. 23. 2 Cor. vi. 14. ix. 13.

10. It will be understood, that prayers and singing ought to be introduced

³ THE CHURCH COVENANT.

We, whose names are under written, being desirous to be constituted a church of Jesus Christ, in this place, and having all due knowledge of one another in point of a work of grace on our hearts, religious principles, and moral characters, and being desirous of enjoying the privileges that appertain to the people of God in a church relation, do, in the name of the Lord Jesus, voluntarily and freely give ourselves up to the Lord, and to one another, according to his word, to be one body under one head, jointly to exist and act by the bands and rules of the gospel, and do promise and engage to do all things, by divine assistance, in our different capacities and relations that the Lord has commanded us, and requires of us: particularly to deny ourselves, take up our cross, follow Christ, keep the faith, assemble ourselves together, love the brethren, submit one to another in the Lord, care one for another, bear one another’s burdens, endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and, finally, to honour, obey and maintain them that may have the rule over us in the Lord. This is the Covenant we solemnly enter into, in the fear of God, humbly imploring the Divine assistance and blessing that we may be built up and established to the glory of God, the advancement of the Redeemer’s interest, and the comfort and edification of our own souls, through the infinite riches of free grace, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord: and now, to the only wise God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be worship, honour, power, glory, dominion, and obedience rendered, now and ever more, Amen.

Done at _____ in the county of _____
and the state of _____ on the _____ day of _____
_____ in the year of our blessed Lord and saviour,

in their proper places through the whole, and then a suitable address to the constituted church, with a benediction, will close the solemnity.

11. It is this mutual consent, confederation, and union of persons into one body, as a particular church, that makes that church distinct from any other church, and that makes the members of it, members of that church more than of any other. "Onesimus, who is one of you; Epaphras, who is one of you." Col. iv. 9, 12. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." Rom. xii. 5.

12. Such particular churches have full power and authority to transact all their own affairs, independent of any other church or churches: such as, to choose their own officers, receive members, exercise discipline among themselves, exclude members, if need be, and, in general, do every thing that concerns them as a distinct religious corporation. Matt. xviii. 17. I Cor. v. 2 Thes. iii. 6, 14. Acts i. 5, 23. vi. 3. xv. 4. xxi. 22.

13. No church, however, can be independent of Christ, who is the head of the body, and who, while he has committed the executive power to his church, has retained the legislative in his own hands, or rather, has enacted, by himself or his apostles, all the laws that are necessary, and the church must take heed how they execute the same, as they will answer it to their Lord and Master. "One is your Master, even Christ. Hear ye him." Matt. xviii. 5. xxiii. 8. "There is one law giver." James iv. 12.

14. Under the law, every member of the congregation was a member of the church. The church and congregation were then commensurate, but under the Gospel they are distinct from one another. For though the church be in some sense congregational, yet the church and congregation are two distinct things, so that the one word should not be used for the other, as if they were synonymous.

15. A particular church, constituted as above, is said to be a church essential, but not complete, while destitute of officers. These were either extraordinary or ordinary; the first comprehending apostles, prophets, and evangelists; and the other, bishops, or ministers or elders, and deacons; to which some add, ruling elders.

CHAPTER II OF MINISTERS.

I. The names or titles appropriated to those officers in the New Testament, are either such as seem to belong to them, in virtue of their office, as common names, while they have not taken the charge of any particular church, and then they are called teachers or preachers. Acts xiii. 1. I Cor. xii. 28. Rom. x. 14.; or they are such as arise from their taking the charge of some church, and then they obtain relative titles, and are called pastors. Eph. iv. 11. Overseers or bishops, Acts xx. 17, 28. Elders, I Tim. v. 17. Stewards, I Cor. iv. 1. Ministers, Col. iv. 7. I Tim. iv. 6.

2. The qualifications for this office are pretty clearly pointed out, both in a positive and negative way, natural, moral, and evangelical. Luke xxi. 15. I Tim. iii. 2–6. Tit. i. 5–9. 2 Tim. ii. 24. iii. 15, 17. Acts xviii. 24. Rom. ix. 3. xi. 14.

3. To this office persons must be called: First, of God, styled the inward call, which is a zeal for the glory of God in the salvation of the souls of men, and a strong desire to be made useful in that way, with a persuasion of God's designation of the person for the office. This is the voice of God in his conscience. Is xlix. 5. Jer. i. 5. xxiii. 21. Heb. v. 4. I Cor. ix. 16, 17. Rom. x. 15. Secondly, They must be called of the church, whose duty it is to look out for useful gifts; and when they have reason to hope that they discover some appearance thereof in any, they should move such to the trial of their gifts; or the person, whose mind is impressed, may offer himself, I Tim. iii. 1.

4. If, after any one has been on trial some time, the appearances are promising, the church ought to give him a letter of licence,⁴ for the exercise of his gifts abroad, his encouragement and further improvement, and to obtain the opinion of others concerning his gifts. "Lay hands suddenly on no man," I Tim. v. 22.

5. After he has been on trial a longer or shorter time, according to circumstances, the church should proceed to invest him more fully with, and confirm him in, the ministerial office, by ordination.

6. The essence of ordination consists in the call of the church, in their voting in his favour, and designating him by said vote to the ministerial work, which power it was necessary should be lodged somewhere, with a view to maintain order; that no person who deems himself called and qualified for the office, might enter upon it without the approbation of others, and this power was lodged in the church. But nevertheless, it is expedient and necessary, in order to give the designation weight and solemnity, that there should be a public and formal procedure, when we instate a person in the ministerial office, Luke x. 1. Acts xiv. 23. Mark iii. 14.

7. For this purpose, having called one or more ministers to their assistance and all met fasting, a sermon should be preached suited to the occasion. Then, after seeing the person's licence, and the vote for his ordination, one of the ministers should interrogate him respecting his call of God, his motives, his doctrinal knowledge, his soundness in the faith, and his resolution to persevere with diligence. Having given satisfaction, he is desired to kneel,

⁴To all people, to whom these presents shall come; The Baptist church at _____, sendeth greeting. The bearer hereof, our beloved brother _____, being a man of good moral character, real piety, and sound knowledge of divine things; and having been called to the exercise of his ministerial gifts, whereof we have now had considerable trial, both in private and public; we have judged him worthy; and do therefore hereby licence and authorise him to preach the Gospel wherever he may have a call; not doubting, but that in due time circumstances will lead on to a more full investiture of him in the ministerial office, by ordination. In the mean time, we recommend him to favour and respect, praying the Lord may be with, and abundantly bless him.
Done at our meeting at _____.

and the ministers present lay their hands on his head, accompanied with suitable words, and one prays. Then he rises up, and they address him in terms of congratulation, bid him a welcome to take part with them of the holy ministry, and give him the right hand of fellowship. After this a charge is delivered, and prayer, with singing, having been introduced in their proper places through the whole, a benediction closes the solemnity. "With the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, or eldership," I Tim. iv. 14. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting," Acts xiv. 23. "Lay hands suddenly on no man," I Tim. v. 22.

8. The ministers ought to give him, a certificate of his ordination.⁵

9. We should now proceed to treat of the duties of the ministerial office. But although a person, in virtue of his ordination, is fully instated in the office, and has a right to discharge every part of it, when called thereto, yet while he remains only a teacher or preacher, and is not connected with any church as their pastor or minister, he can have but little to do besides preaching. It will therefore be proper to defer the confederation of the duties of the pastoral office, until we have treated of his acquiring that title, by means of taking the oversight of some church, which will much enlarge his sphere of action.

CHAPTER III OF DEACONS.

1. The business of deacons originally, in the church of Jerusalem, was very extensive, for the church consisted of thousands, and had all things common, Acts ii. 41–44. iv. 32. v. 14. But, through a change of circumstances in the church, their work is now brought to a less compass.

2. They are to take charge of the outward concerns of the church, particularly to serve tables, Acts vi. 2, 3. The Lord's Table, I Cor. x. 21. that of the poor, and the minister's table. They are therefore to see, that the members of the church contribute to all necessary uses, according to their abilities, I Cor. xvi. 2. 2 Cor. ix. 7.

3. Their qualifications are set down in Acts vi. 3. I Tim. iii. 8–13.

⁵To all people, to whom these presents shall come the subscribers send Greeting.—Being convened at _____ on the _____ of _____ 1789, at the influence of the Baptist church of _____ aforesaid, for the purpose of setting apart, by solemn ordination, the bearer hereof to the sacred office of the ministry; and being, by sufficient testimonials, fully certified of his moral character, real piety, and found knowledge in divine things, as well as ministerial gifts and abilities, whereof we had otherwise due knowledge: WE DID THEREFORE, on the said _____ day of _____ in the presence of said church, and a full assembly met, solemnly ordain and set apart, to the said sacred office of the ministry, by imposition of hands, prayer, and other rituals among us in that case in use, the said bearer, our worthy and reverend brother _____ whom we therefore recommend, as such, to favour and respect.

4. The manner of executing their office is with impartiality or simplicity, cheerfulness, compassion, tenderness, and faithfulness, Rom. xii. 8.

5. They are to be set in the office by ordination, much after the same manner as ministers, Acts vi. 3–6.

6. By the faithful discharge of their office, they purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith, I Tim. ii. 13.

CHAPTER IV OF RULING ELDERS.

1. Concerning the divine right of the office of ruling elders, there has been considerable doubt and much disputation. We, therefore, had a thought of passing it over in silence; but, on farther consideration, concluded to state briefly the arguments on both sides, then subjoin a few general observations, and so let the churches judge for themselves, and practice as they shall see fit.

2. The scriptures usually adduced to prove the right are the following:

- (1.) He that ruleth, let him do it with diligence, Rom. 12. 8.
- (2.) God has set in the church governments, I Cor. xii. 28.
- (3.) Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine, I Tim. v. 17.
- (4.) Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, Heb. xiii. 7, 17.

From the two first scriptures it is argued, that the ruler mentioned must be an officer, because he is mentioned with the other officers, and in contradistinction from them.

And from the last two it is observed, that there must be two kinds of elders, one that rules only, and another who, besides ruling, does also labour in word and doctrine.

3. But it is objected,

- (1.) That there is nothing in the two first scriptures but may be accommodated to ministers.
- (2.) That the two last may mean the same officer, i. e. a minister, who is said to be worthy of double honour, especially if he *labours* in his work.
- (3.) There is no description given of the qualifications of persons for the office of ruling elders, as there is of bishops and deacons.
- (4.) There are no directions how they are to be put in the office.
- (5.) It would seem there were no such officers in the church of Ephesus, Acts xx. 19, 28. and of Philippi. Phil. i. 1. nor in those of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. I Pet. i. compared with Chap. v. i. ii.

The observations we meant to make are these:

1. It must be confessed there are some appearances in scripture favourable to the office.
2. If there were none it would stand on a footing with some other things left to human prudence.
3. There is the same necessity for the office, as for that of a deacon, namely, to ease the minister of part of his burden.
4. By means of the office, the minister may avoid some hard thoughts and ill-will, which is very desirable.
5. It is of material advantage to a church, to have at least one among them, capable of bringing matters forward, stating them clearly for consideration, summing up the arguments on both sides in order for a vote, and presiding and maintaining order through the whole.
6. All ministers have not a turn or talents for it, in the degree that might be wished.
7. Some that are not ministers have, in a good degree.
8. Appointing such to this service, will not only invite them to come forward by making it their business, but will also give them a more particular right, and enable them to do more good, by cloathing them with a measure of authority.

CHAPTER V OF SETTLING A MINISTER.

1. A person having been regularly ordained a minister of the gospel, as we have seen in Chap. II, he is qualified to become a pastor or minister of any destitute church.

2. This is done in consequence of a call and invitation of some church, and his accepting of the call on the terms proposed, or such as they may agree upon. Calling of him to preach, ordaining of him, and his being even a member of said church, is not sufficient, there ought to be a mutual agreement between him and the church, whereby he becomes theirs, and they his. Col. i. 7.

3. How unanimous the church ought to be in the choice and settlement of a minister, it may be hard to say. On the one hand, a bare, or even a large majority, will not be sufficient, while, on the other hand, an unanimous vote may not always be obtained, and, perhaps, in some cases, may not be absolutely necessary. The more unanimous, however, the better.

4. The congregation also is not to be neglected in this business. For, as their good is to be kept in view, and as part of the support is expected to come

from them, it ought to be known, that the person proposed to be settled gives pretty general satisfaction. I Tim. iii. 7. 3 John 12.

5. In settling a minister, having appointed a time and place, and invited a council from one or two of the neighbouring churches to assist, and to witness the transaction, one of the ministers, after praying and singing should preach a suitable sermon. Then he, or another of the council, is to put such questions to the minister to be settled, and to the representative of the church appointed for that purpose, as will draw from each of them promises to fulfil their respective parts of the covenant and agreement between them, upon which he pronounces him, in the presence of God and of the whole assembly, to be the pastor and overseer of that church, and said church to be his flock and charge. Then the settled minister and representative of the church give each other the right hand of fellowship, with expressions of mutual joy and congratulation.

6. After this a charge should be delivered to the settled minister, Col. iv. 19. [sic.] and his church; and then, prayer, singing, and a benediction, will close the service.

7. The transactions of the day, and particularly the terms of agreement between the settled minister and the church, should be entered at large on the records of the church.

8. Some may say, that so much formality in the business, with witnesses, is unnecessary, and that a private agreement between the parties is sufficient. But as a public form of marriage is indispensable; so the above is expedient and useful, as might be shewn were it necessary.

9. The duties incumbent on the pastor of a church, are many and great, and blessed is he who is found faithful therein.

10. He is to exercise love, care, tenderness, watchfulness, and diligence, in all the duties of going before, feeding and defending the flock, the sheep and the lambs, the strong, the weak and diseased, John xxi. 15, 17. Acts xx. 29. I Pet. v. 2. Jer. iii. 15. He is to preach in season and out of season—attend funerals—administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper⁶—take the lead in church government—visit the flock—particularly the sick—pray for and with them—catechise the young, and defend the faith: besides the duties of the closet, of the study, and his frequent calls abroad, to visit and supply the destitute, settle differences, attend at ordinations, associations, &c.

“And who is sufficient for these things,” 2 Cor. ii. 16.

⁶It has been thought by some, that a minister cannot warrantably administer the ordinance of the Lord's supper in or to a church, where he is not a member and settled. But why he may not do it occasionally, as persons are admitted to occasional communion, where they are not members, it is hard to say, when he has the call of the church to do it. It should seem that the call of the church to an occasional act, must be equivalent to its call to stated acts.

CHAPTER VI OF DISSOLVING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN A PASTOR AND HIS CHURCH.

1. The connection between a pastor and his church is very binding, not unlike that between man and wife, and, like that, it should not be dissolved for every cause.

2. A manifest and material breach, however, of the contract between them, will justify a separation.

3. To which we may add one cause more; i.e. when variance, disagreement, animosity, and ill-will, take place between them, or between him and many of them, to such a degree as to preclude a rational prospect of his future usefulness among them.⁷

4. In this case it will not be very material, as to the separation, who may be to blame. Nor will a majority, even a pretty large one, in the minister's favour, make it prudent for him to continue, any more than it would justify his first settlement, among them, Acts 22, 18.

5. As a pastor in such circumstances ought not to stay among them in support of a party, so neither ought he to run away from them, nor yet should they use harsh measures with him: but matters of difference ought to be first accommodated in the best manner they can, that they may part in love so far as may be.

6. For this purpose, it will be necessary to call a council from a neighbouring church or churches, the very same, if they can be had, as were witnesses of the settlement.

7. At this meeting, peace and an accommodation of all matters of variance should be laboured after, that the pastor may be dismissed and recommended in as respectful a manner as circumstances will admit, in order that his character may not suffer abroad more than need be, nor his usefulness elsewhere be prevented.

8. Should the church prove refractory, and in their ill-humour, refuse to give the pastor such a character and dismissal as he deserves, the council may and ought to give him, from under their hands, a brief statement of matters in variance, together with their opinion, and such a recommendation as they can answer for to God and their own consciences.

9. If convenient, public worship may close the meeting.

CHAPTER VII OF THE DUTIES OF MEMBERS TO THEIR PASTORS.

1. The members of churches owe all their duties in a way of obedience to the will of God revealed in his word.

⁷See Joshua Thomas's *History of the Baptists in Wales*, p. 169.

2. These are to be performed in love to our Lord Jesus Christ, John xiv. 15. who is the great prophet, priest, and king of his church, unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given, Matt. xxviii. 18. our law-giver, Is. xxxiii. 22. the head of his church, Eph. i. 22. and who is to be honoured, John v. 23. and obeyed in all things as God, over all, blessed for ever, Rom. ix. 5.

3. All church members, therefore, are under the strictest obligations to do and observe whatsoever Christ has enjoined on them, in particular the duties they owe to their ministers.

4. They ought to pray for them, that God would assist them in and bless their labours, Eph. vi. 19. Col. iv. 3. I Thes. v. 25. 2 Thes. iii. 1. Heb. xiii. 18. and that he would support them under all their trials and afflictions, 2 Thes. iii. 2.

5. They ought to obey them in the exercise of every part of their official authority, according to the word, Heb. xiii. 17.

6. They ought to treat them with respect and esteem, I Tim. v. 17. I Thes. v. 12, 13. Phil. ii. 29. Gal. iv. 15. 3 John 9, 10.

7. They ought to stand by them in their trials, afflictions, and sufferings, 2 Tim. i. 15. iv. 16. I Cor. xvi. 10. I Tim. v. 19.

8. They ought to contribute towards their maintenance, that they may apply themselves to the extensive duties of their office, Acts vi. 2, 4. See *Confession of Faith*, chap. xvii. §10.

9. Pastors of churches have a divine right to their support, if the church is able to give it without being oppressed, or so far as they are able, than which nothing is more manifest in the New Testament. "For the workman is worthy of his meat," Matt. x. 10. Luke x. 7. "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" I Cor. ix. 11. "Do ye not know, that they who minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? and they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so has the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel," I Cor. ix. 13, 14. "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things," Gal. vi. 6. See I Tim. v. 17, 18.

10. These passages of holy writ are so unequivocal and express, that no one can evade their force.

11. Mr. Hooker well observes, that "they, who will not pay their ministers, would not pay any one his due, could they refuse with the same temporal impunity." Every one knows, that those, who will not do justice, farther than the law compels them, are destitute of an honest principle.

12. Nothing but ignorance of his duty, or covetousness and want of principle, or both, can induce to neglect or refuse paying; and a covetous brother should be expelled from the church, and kept no company with, I Cor. v. 11.

13. When a people neglect their duty in regard to the support of their minister, they are not only wilful neglecters of the divine law, but must otherwise be great losers, both as they forfeit a right to the divine blessing,

as also because their minister will be less capable of, and prevented from, serving them to the same advantage, Gal. vi. 6, 7. 2 Cor. ix. 6-8.

14. This support of the minister should not be done in the way of charity, or alms, but as a matter of right; and, if the people are able, it ought to exceed his bare necessity, that he may be able to be exemplary in acts of hospitality, I Tim. iii. 2.

15. If any church and congregation are not able to give their minister a comfortable support, but are willing to do what they can towards it, it will perhaps be duty, at least very commendable, in the minister, to forego a part of his right, rather than leave them, and apply himself to some business to make up their deficiency, I Cor. ix. 12.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DUTIES OF MEMBERS TOWARDS EACH OTHER.

The principal of these are the following:

1. Love one another, John xiii. 34, 35. xv. 12, 17. Rom. xii. 9, 10. xiii. 8-10. Gal. v. 15. I Pet. i. 22.

2. Avoid every thing that tends to cool love, and make disagreeable impressions, Gal. v. 26. In order to this, they should avoid whispering and backbiting, 2 Cor. xii. 20. Evil speaking and surmising, James iv. 11. I Tim. vi. 4. tattling and being busybodies, I Tim. v. 13.

3. No one should indulge shyness in himself towards another, but immediately make known to the other his grievance and suspicion: and when he discovers shyness in another, he should inquire after the reason of it, Matt. v. 23, 24. Eph. iv. 26.

4. Bear with one another, Matt. xviii. 21, 22. Rom. xv. 1. Gal. vi. 2.

5. Promote peace and harmony, Eph. iv. 3. Rom. xiv. 19. I Thes. v. 13.

6. Advance one another's spiritual benefit and edification, I Cor. xiv. 26.

7. Watch over one another for good, and admonish one another, when occasion requires, but in much love and tenderness, Rom. xv. 14. 2 Thes. iii. 15.

8. Exhort and stir up one another to a diligent attendance on the means of grace, Heb. x. 25. Acts ii. 42.

9. Stir up one another to zeal in holy living, and in supporting the gospel.

10. Should not divulge what is done in church meetings, Cant. iv. 12. It is a shame to divulge the secrets of a family, much more those of a church.

11. Relieve the necessities of the poor, Matt. xxv. 40. John xii. 8. Rom. xii. 13. xv. 26. Gal. ii. 10. Deut. xv. 7, 11. I Cor. xvi. 1, 2. I John iii. 17. There is no good reason, however, can be given, why a church should refuse the assistance, which the good and wholesome laws of the land offer: But the deacons ought to agree with the overseer of the poor at so much a year, and

then find a place near the meeting house, where they will be taken good care of and live comfortably, and if the deacon must give more than he receives from the overseer, let the church make up the difference.

12. The church should also assist such as are not so helpless or needy as to be put on the town, yet may stand in need of assistance at times, especially when some accidents have befallen them.

13. In the last place they should not go to law with one another, if matters can be accommodated in the church, or by reference, I Cor. vi. 1-7. It is true, the circumstances of the church being so materially altered now, from what they were in the apostolic day, may be thought to render the reason of the injunction in the above text less forcible; yet the mode of reference is at any time more eligible, not only from prudential considerations but as being more friendly and kind, and, in some instances, more just. For, although the law always has justice in view, yet justice is not always within its reach, of which a christian should never take advantage against any one, not to say a brother. But by leave of the church, recourse may be had to the civil law.

CHAPTER IX OF ADMISSION OF MEMBERS.

1. We have already observed, p. 142. that every particular church has full power and authority, to transact all its own affairs, for its well being, independent of any other church, or combination of churches.

2. The chief part of church power, exercised under Christ, and according to the rules of the gospel, is versant about four things; the choice of their own officers, the admission of members, governing of them, and finally their exclusion, when they prove unworthy of a place in the house of God. Rom. xiv. 1. Acts ii. 41. I Cor. v. 13.

3. Admission is either out of the world, or from other churches.

4. When persons are wrought upon and turned to the Lord, under a real work of conviction and conversion, it will be their duty to offer themselves for baptism, and give themselves members of some gospel church, that may be near them, with whom they may walk in fellowship, and enjoy the privileges of the house of God, appointed for their nourishment and growth in grace. Acts ii. 38. Isaiah xlv. 5. lvi. 6. 2 Cor. viii. 5.

5. To this end, it will be proper for the candidate to acquaint the minister or pastor beforehand of his design, which is commonly done, that the minister, after conversing freely with him, may either encourage or discourage.

6. There is no doubt, but that every gospel minister has a right, in virtue of the commission, to baptize all such meet subjects, as apply to him for baptism, and afterward the church may receive them on the testimony of said minister, or on their giving in their religious experience.

7. But, since the church has a right to obtain full knowledge of the experience, religious principles, and moral conduct of those, that offer themselves for membership; and forasmuch as it is edifying, and tends to excite and increase christian fellowship, to hear persons declare what the Lord has done for them, Psalm lxvi. 16. and also, as it may be of use to administer the holy ordinance of baptism in a more open and public way; it will be better for persons to be examined in the first instance before the church, either on the day of preparation before communion, or at any other time, and then baptised.

8. The prerequisites for baptism and admission into the church are, godly experience, soundness in the faith, and a regular life.

9. Knowledge of the first will be best obtained, by letting persons declare, in their own way, the gracious dealings of the Lord with them, such questions being put occasionally as will assist and lead them on. I Peter iii. 15. The second should be confined to the essentials of religion. Rom. xiv. 1. xv. 7. And we attend to the last, as the necessary fruit, without which, their pretension to religion must be vain. Titus ii. 12, 14. iii. 8.

10. In admitting persons to baptism and then into the church, all precaution should be attended to, and carefulness used, that we open not the doors too wide on the one hand, nor on the other keep them too close. Zech. iv. 10. Matt. xii. 20. Isaiah xxvi. 1-6. Particularly, when they give in their religious experience, seek to discover, whether they have been convinced of righteousness, as well as of sin; whether they have only felt the power of the law, or have also discovered the glory of the gospel. John xvi. 8.

11. When the church is pretty generally satisfied with the parties' confession and conversation, they are, after being baptized, to be received into the church as members.

12. In doing this, the Minister, after a brief introduction, enquires whether they will watch and be watched over, give and receive admonition and reproof as occasion may require, keep their places in the church, contribute according to their abilities towards all necessary uses, and in all things walk in a professed and willing subjection to the commands and institutions of Christ in the gospel: which having promised he gives them the right hand of fellowship, bids them a welcome among the disciples, prays, and gives out a suitable Hymn. 2 Cor. viii. 5. Acts. ii. 41. 2 Cor. vi. 14. Those who practice laying on of hands will know when to introduce it.

13. If the case of the applicant be pretty doubtful, his baptism, and consequently admission, had better be deferred: but this should be done with much tenderness and suitable encouragement, when there are some hopeful appearances.

14. Persons are sometimes admitted from other churches to transient and occasional communion, without transferring their membership, and this may be done without letters of recommendation, when they are known, but not otherwise. Acts. xviii. 27. Rom. xvi. 1, 2. Col. iv. 10.

15. When any member's residence is in providence removed to a distance from the church whereof he is a member, and more convenient to attend with another church of the same faith, he ought to apply to the church of which he is a member, for a letter recommendatory and dismissive to the church more contiguous to him, and the church whereof he is a member ought to give him such a letter, if he is in good standing among them, directed to the church to which he is dismissed, and said church ought to receive him, unless they should have good reason to refuse. Rom. xvi. 1. Acts ix. 26, 27. xviii. 27.

16. It is a good general rule, that persons ought to be members of such churches as are nearest to them; for they cannot otherwise so well enjoy the benefit of membership, nor perform the duties, that arise out of church relation.

17. There may be however cases, that will make against this rule, particularly when persons plead greater benefit to themselves, in a church more remote; and they ought to be attended to, provided the other church be not too remote; for edification is the first object of church relation, and their entering into the relation at first was a voluntary act; nor should a church be made a prison of, wherein to confine people against their will.

18. It is certain there can be no dismissal to the world; and it is doubted, whether it would be regular for a church to dismiss to another church, with which it can hold no communion: but in this case, it may give a few lines signifying the person's character and standing with them.

19. When a person offers, who is a member of a church differing in faith and order, then, satisfaction is to be required touching the points in difference.

CHAPTER X OF CHURCH CENSURES.

1. Church censures are properly but two; admonition or rebuke, and excommunication: for suspension in most cases, is rather a delay or postponement of censure.

2. Admonition and rebuke are nearly synonymous. The first is of the nature of advice, entreaty, warning, I Cor. x. 11. Acts. xxvii. 9. 2 Thes. iii. 15. 1 Tim. v. 1. Tit. iii. 10. The other carries in it more of reprehension, severity, and authority, Levit. xix. 17. Luke xix. 39. 2 Tim. iv. 2. Tit. ii. 15.

3. Admonition or rebuke is either private or public.

4. Private admonition is when the offence, whether against God, or more especially against a particular person, is private and not much known, Rom. xv. 14. Luke xvii. 3.

5. In this case, the offended brother is not to divulge the matter, but to go to the offender, and endeavour in a tender, friendly manner, to convince and reclaim his brother. If he succeeds, and the offending brother shews signs

of repentance, and promises amendment, the matter is to end there. But if not, the offended brother is to take one or two of the brethren with him, such as he shall judge most likely to gain on his brother. If this admonition also should take no effect, the matter is to be brought before the church, Matt. xviii. 15–17.

6. This rule holds good, let the offence be of ever so heinous a nature, provided it be private.

7. When it is brought before the church, after the charge is proved, should he deny it, the minister is to admonish, and endeavour in the spirit of meekness to reclaim the offender, I Tim. v. 20. Tit i. 13. Should this prove ineffectual, and the offender continue obstinate and impenitent, the church is to proceed to higher acts of censure, and, in some cases, if he is penitent, as we shall see in the 16th verse, Matt, xviii. 17.

8. Should any private matter be brought into the church, before the previous steps have been taken, the person that brings it in ought to be severely reproved and admonished, and that publicly before the church, for his irregular and injurious conduct therein: yet nevertheless, the church must now take it in hand, forasmuch as it will then be no longer private, but will require public satisfaction.

9. Public admonition or rebuke also takes place in regard to public offences, of a less heinous nature, but unseemly in christians, and unworthy of their vocation, Rom. xiv. 22. Matt. v. 22. I Cor. viii. 12.

10. Suspension is to be used, when a person, under the first admonition or rebuke in the church, proves incorrigible. For, since there is to be a second admonition, Titus iii. 10. he ought, while we are waiting to see the effect of the first, to be put under suspension, and debarred the privileges of the church, Rev. ii. 21.

11. When a charge is brought into the church against a person, if he denies it, and witnesses are not at hand, or some other circumstances make it inconvenient for the present to discuss the matter, it will be necessary to lay him, in the mean time, under suspension from the Lord's table, until the matter can come to an hearing, Lev. Chapters XIII, XIV.

12. Suspension is also used, when the offence is not sufficiently great, or is not yet ripe for the great sentence of excommunication. Such is not to be accounted as an enemy, but to be exhorted as a brother; in union, though not in communion. 2 Thes. iii. 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15.

13. To the above three cases, wherein suspension is to take place, we may add a fourth, and that is, when a person is called in question for some high misdemeanor, for which he ought to be excommunicated, it is thought, that if there are strong signs of genuine repentance, the infliction of the sentence ought to be dispensed with, yet nevertheless, the guilty person ought to be suspended from communion for a time, as a testimony of the church's indignation against every species of wickedness, and in vindication of the honour and glory of God. Thus the Lord appointed concerning Miriam, that

she should be shut out of the camp seven days, and then received in again, Numb. xii. 14. 15.

14. The last and highest act of church censure is excommunication, to which recourse must be had, when previous censures have not their due effect, in bringing persons dealt with to repentance, provided the matters for which they are under dealing, with the circumstances of aggravation during the course of said dealing, manifestly involve immorality or heresy.⁸

15. Acts of immorality include not only the particulars of the decalogue, but also the commands, appointments, institutions, and ordinances contained in the New Testament: for a breach of any positive injunction, or requirement of divine authority, must involve in it a breach of morality.

16. There should be care taken, however, not to make forced constructions of implicit immorality, as for instance, to charge a person with transgressing the rule in Heb. x. 25. and breach of covenant, because he neglects his place, attends worship elsewhere, and perhaps with those of a different persuasion, but pleads greater edification, and perhaps, conscience,⁹ lest we should act the part of Diotrephes. 3 John 10.

17. When a member is found guilty of some gross act of immorality, and which is notorious and scandalous, the church should proceed to this censure in the first place, without the previous steps of admonition and reproof, in order to vindicate the credit of their holy profession, and to manifest their abhorrence of such abomination, I Cor. v. 1, 2, 7, 13. I Tim. v. 24.

18. Such as are heretical in their principles, denying some essential doctrine, or holding and teaching such as may be unsound and scandalous, come under the notice of this ordinance, Gal. i. 6, 7. compared with Chap. v. 12. I Tim. i. 19, 20. vi. 3-5. 2 Tim. ii. 16-18. Rev. ii. 14, 15, 20. 2 Cor. ii. 6.

19. The charge being sufficiently proved in the opinion of the church, and they having determined on the person's exclusion, and set the time for that purpose, the minister is to lay open the heinousness of the crime, with the aggravating circumstances thereof, and the scandal such an one is become to religion; he is to apply the particular places of scripture, that may be pertinent to the case, in order to charge the offence home on the conscience of the offender, if present, and that others also may fear; he is to open the nature and end of the censure, expressing the solemn sense of himself and church on this awful occasion; and then he is, in the presence of the church, to cut off and seclude such an offender by name from the union and communion of the church, so that he is not, henceforth to be

⁸It is thought that Matt. xviii. 17. I Cor. v. 3, 5. refer not to excommunication.

⁹See Dr. Owen on the nature of a Gospel Church, p. 109, 225.

looked upon, deemed or accounted a brother, or a member of such a church, until God shall restore him again by repentance, for which they pray.

20. This exclusion is an authoritative putting of such a person out of the church, to keep it pure, and in order to his being humbled and broken under a sight and sense of his sins, and where there are signs of this he ought to be restored, 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 8.

21. When a person about to be excommunicated judges himself aggrieved by party influence or otherwise, he has a right to insist on a council being called from a neighbouring church or churches, and the church ought to agree to it, and allow him the choice of one half of the council.

22. If the church should refuse to call in a council, and cut the person off, or should they do it contrary to the advice of the council, the person aggrieved may lay a statement of his case before the Association, who may appoint a council, and if the church should refuse to admit of a rehearing before said council, or should refuse to abide by the decision of the council, the Association may bring said church under dealing, and, if the church continues obstinate, a neighbouring church may receive the aggrieved person into their communion.¹⁰

23. In transacting church business, it is not to be expected that unanimity will always prevail: Some will, at times, be in the minority. These have sometimes taken offence, and declined keeping their places in the church for a while. This is very wrong and irregular. For suppose a church does ever so wrong, yet any individual, after bearing his testimony against it, has done his duty, and cleared his conscience, and ought therefore to keep his place, except in case of material defection from the faith. It has been thought by good men, that our Lord communed with Judas, though he knew at the time what he was.

24. Although a church may refuse a person when he offers for membership, if they have good cause to suspect, that he is not truly religious, yet they have no right to exclude him afterward, upon the like suspicion. They may at first judge in his favour, but cannot afterwards, reverse the sentence. Excommunication is only for immorality or heresy. As for their dying away, or seeming to die away in religion, the rule is, "Let them grow together until the harvest," Matt. xiii. 30.

25. There ought to be meetings of business every month, two months, or quarterly, and not do all their business on days of preparation, lest something should happen, that might discompose the minds of some, and so unfit them for the holy communion next day.

26. Every church should keep a book of records, and enter therein all their transactions, that it may at any time afterwards be known, what was done and how it was done.

¹⁰See the *Confession of Faith*, Chap. XXVII. 15. Also Keach's *Glory of a True Church*, p. 18.

CHAPTER XI OF THE FELLOWSHIP AND COMMUNION OF CHURCHES.

1. Churches of the same faith and gospel order, so far as is necessary to communion; as they have all drank into and of one and the same spirit; as they are branches of one and the same body, and hold to one and the same head; and as they have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism: they therefore may, and ought to have and enjoy fellowship and a friendly intercourse together, as occasion may require and opportunity serve, in the discharge of those relative duties, which may tend to the mutual benefit and edification of the whole. I Cor. xii. 13. Eph. iv. 5. John xvii. 20–26. To mention a few.

2. They should be ready to assist one another, when required, in difficult cases.

3. Such as have ministerial gifts to spare, should be ready and willing to supply such as may be destitute. Cant. viii. 8.

4. Admit one another's Members of regular standing, to transient communion, when opportunity may serve.

5. Dismiss and receive members to and from one another.

6. They should assist one another with money as well as advice, if need be, and in general perform all acts of kindness towards each other, as neighbouring, though distinct families or branches of the one great family and household of faith.

7. And lastly, they have fellowship and communion together, for their mutual benefit, in the social duties of an association.

CHAPTER XII OF AN ASSOCIATION.

1. An Association consists of delegates, or Messengers from different particular churches, who have agreed to associate together, at stated times, to promote their own interest, and the good of the common cause.

2. This practice is recommended by the reason of things, the spirit of religion, and apostolic practice, Acts xv.

3. The meeting thus of churches by their delegates is of special use; to gain acquaintance with, and knowledge of one another—to preserve uniformity in faith and practice, Phil. iii. 16.—to detect and discountenance heresies—to curb licentiousness in the wanton abuse of church power—to afford assistance and advice in all difficult cases—to contribute pecuniary aid when necessary—to make appointments of supplies for destitute churches—And every way advance and secure the interest of religion, and strengthen and draw closer the bonds of union and fellowship.

4. Other churches, besides those that enter at the original constitution,

may be admitted, on making application, and giving satisfactory evidence in regard to their faith and practice, regular order and good standing.

5. The delegates thus assembled are, properly speaking, only an advisory council. They are not armed with coercive power, to compel the churches to submit to their decisions, nor have they any controul over the acts or doings of the churches. Every church still remains independent.

6. Nevertheless, the associated body may exclude from their connection any church that may act an unworthy part. This our association did some years ago as also, virtually, last association. Indeed it would be absurd to examine churches at their admission, if afterward they are to be continued in the connection, let their principles and practice be what they may, see Chap. X. ver. 22. vide also *Confession of Faith*, Chap. XXVII. 15. Our late discipline, p. 61. Dr. Owen on the nature of a gospel church, p. 254.

7. Let it not be thought, that this power of the association over the churches in connection with it disannuls or destroys the independence of those churches: for if any church of the associated body should become unsound in their principles, or act irregularly and disorderly, and will not do, what may be just and right; such a church will still remain an independent church, though an heterodox and irregular one; but it would be inconsistent and wrong in the association, to suffer such a church to continue among them, since, besides other confederations, they would hereby become partakers of their evil deeds. The association can take nothing from them, but what it gave them. This, in such circumstances, it certainly may and ought to do.

8. From what we have said, as well as from considering, that the union of churches in an association, is a voluntary act, a voluntary union or confederation, like the voluntary confederation of members into a church, it follows that every church stands in the same relation to its association, as a member does to his church, and therefore is examined in the same manner on admission. Hence

9. Complaints may be received by the association, against any church belonging to it, especially when the complaint is brought in by another church. Hence also,

10. The association has a right to call any delinquent church to account, whether for a wanton abuse of its power towards or over any of its members, neglect of attendance at the association, disregard of those things recommended to them, or any material defect in principle or practice; and if satisfactory reasons are not given therefore, nor reformation, then to exclude them.

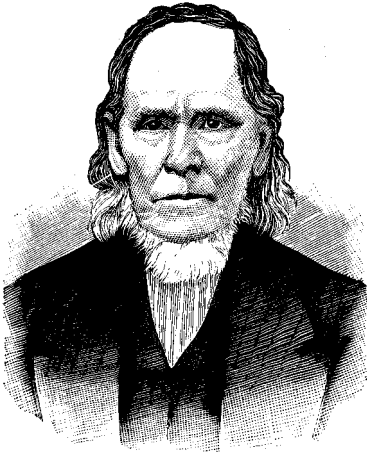
11. At the first formation of an association, or afterwards, there should be a set of rules, conditions and regulations drawn up, as the ground on which the churches agree to associate together.

12. For the maintenance of good order, the associated body when met, should choose a Moderator, to regulate, and bring forward what is to come before them, and to preside in their deliberations: as also, a Clerk, to take minutes of their proceedings.

THE END.

The Gospel Developed

WILLIAM BULLEIN JOHNSON



Johnson, W. B., D.D., was one of the most active and useful ministers that ever labored in South Carolina. "Soon after 1820" he was a member of the Saluda Association, and presided over its deliberations for a number of years. Subsequently he was the acting pastor at Edgefield Court-House, and a member of the Association bearing the name of his church, and of this Association he was chosen moderator.

The State Convention founded in 1821 had a very warm friend in Dr. Johnson. He was one of a committee of three who drafted its constitution. In 1822 he preached the introductory

sermon, and prepared the address of the Convention to the churches, which was printed in the minutes of that year, a document of great ability, and penetrated by a thoroughly missionary and evangelical spirit. In 1823 he was elected vice-president of the Convention. In 1824 he preached the annual charity sermon, and in 1825 he was chosen president on the death of the honored Dr. Richard Furman, whose name is justly venerated in South Carolina, and by hosts of Baptists all over our country. Dr. Johnson held this position for a great many years, an office the duties of which were discharged not only by Dr. Richard Furman, but by Dr. Basil Manly, Chief-Justice O'Neill, and other distinguished men. The reputation of Dr. Johnson spread over our whole country, and for three years he was president of our great national missionary society, "The Triennial Convention of the United States," and after the division in that body he was chosen the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention. In no section of our country was any Baptist minister more highly honored by his brethren.

He was a solid and impressive preacher, deeply versed in the sacred writings, and full of his Master's spirit. He was very hospitable, and his life was blameless. To the Saviour he rendered noble service, which was fruitful in an unusual measure.

Under Dr. Wayland's presidency Brown University gave him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. He died at Greenville, S.C., in 1862, when he was about eighty years of age.

The State Convention, in 1863, appointed its president, Dr. J. C. Furman, to preach a sermon "in honor of the memory of their venerable brother, the late Rev. W. B. Johnson, D.D.," and after the delivery of the discourse the Convention requested a copy for publication, and a committee was also appointed "to raise funds to erect a monument over his remains."

—William Cathcart, 1881

THE
GOSPEL DEVELOPED
THROUGH THE
GOVERNMENT AND ORDER
OF THE
CHURCHES OF JESUS CHRIST

BY W. B. JOHNSON

RICHMOND:
H. K. ELLYSON, 176 MAIN ST.
1846

DEDICATION.

I DO MOST SOLEMNLY DEDICATE THIS ESSAY TO GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT, BY WHOSE INFLUENCE IN THE PRAYERFUL STUDY OF THE WORD OF INSPIRATION, I BELIEVE I HAVE BEEN TAUGHT WHATEVER TRUTH IS HEREIN SET FORTH. AND MY EARNEST PRAYER IS, THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT AND BLESS THIS EFFORT TO PROMOTE THE CAUSE OF TRUTH IN THE EARTH.

THE AUTHOR.

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CHAPTER I THE INTRODUCTION.

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent, that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the *church*, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—EPHESIANS III: 8—11.

It is evident from the above passage, that the *church of the Lord Jesus is the chosen agent for the exhibition of the manifold wisdom of God*. The unfolding, the clear and full display of this wisdom, will necessarily present all the attributes of the divine Being in their harmonious, their sublimest operations. These operations will develop the scheme of that “salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” It is not surprising then, that *the church* in her progress to full maturity, presents to the view of *angels those things into which they desire to look*. If the church in the changes through which she passes to the completion of her honored destiny, attracts the gaze of “the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,” she should be no less an object of intense regard to “all men” on this earth. But to those who are found in her membership and her ministry, her interests, her success, her honor, should be most dear. With those, her spiritual nature and constitution, her high obligations, and exalted destiny, should be subjects of profound study and growing importance. For on whom else than on her sons and daughters, has the Lord imposed the delightful duty of rendering *her* agency effective? By what other instrumentality has Jehovah decreed that *his* eternal purposes of mercy shall be accomplished?

The church will never be presented to her admiring beholders as an entire whole, before the resurrection morn. It is only successively and in parts that she will be seen, until her congregated myriads shall appear in the last day in one body, as a bride splendidly adorned for her nuptials. During her progress to full maturity, she will be exhibited in the churches of the saints. Each church, from the relation she sustains to the whole church, which Christ loved, and for which he gave himself, may be called “the body of Christ;” and on this obvious principle, that a part may be taken for the whole. As it is impracticable for the entire body of Christ to be present in one place before the resurrection, the different parts, as they rise into existence, act, each in its place, till the whole number of the parts shall have completed their work, and the entire body be prepared for the final con-

summation. How vast then are the responsibilities of the churches of Christ on this earth! How solemn, how imposing their duties! These responsibilities must be met by the membership and the ministry. The slumbers of the saints must be broken. Their dreams of worldly aggrandizement, honor and pleasure, must not be indulged. Isaiah's voice must be heard. The command of Isaiah's Lord must be obeyed: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

As it is in the revelation of the gospel of the grace of God, that these things are brought to light, and as their fuller manifestation is committed, under the administration of the Holy Spirit, to the churches, as parts of the great whole, my purpose in this Essay is to delineate the government and order of these parts, by means of which "all men" may see the mystery of redeeming grace, and "the principalities and powers in heavenly places" become acquainted with the manifold wisdom of God.

It was my privilege to be born of parents, who were immersed upon a profession of their faith in Christ. My sainted mother took great care to give me instruction in the principles of the Bible, by interesting me in the reading of its holy pages. I was of course trained up in the principles of the Baptist denomination, for which I trust I am devoutly thankful. Before I submitted to the baptismal rite, however, I was led, by the state of things in the community of which I was a member at the time, to examine the subject of baptism. The result was a thorough conviction of the duty of believers to be immersed in water upon a profession of their faith in Christ; and I, therefore, so put on Christ. Being satisfied that the Baptists were right in the ordinance of baptism, I became a member of a Baptist church, without a scriptural examination of its government and order. For several years I carefully observed the system of church order adopted by my brethren. But some years afterwards, and about thirty-three years since, an incident of no great moment, drew my attention to the scriptural examination of the whole subject of church order. I engaged immediately in the study of the New Testament with prayerful attention, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." The result was a thorough conviction on my mind of the truth of the order of things treated of in this Essay, as taught by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Being at Greenville, in this State, during the last summer, I was requested to deliver a course of lectures on the government and order of the churches of Christ. I did so, and was requested to publish them in the Carolina Baptist. I complied with this request also. And now, I publish my views with corrections and additions in the present form. I am led to this measure by the requests that have been, at various times and by various persons, made to me for their publication. The present state of the religious world has also no small influence on my determination to present my views in a more permanent form than the columns of a newspaper afford. The religious world seems to be anxiously enquiring for the union of the friends and followers of Christ, and plans are being laid for securing it. Union, spiritual

union in the truth, is demanded in the Saviour's prayer. It is demanded in the exhortations of the apostle of the gentiles. It is demanded in the fundamental principles of the gospel of the grace of God. In the full and affecting view of his awful sufferings, the Lord Jesus said to his father, "neither pray I for these alone, but for them also, which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they all may be one in us; *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*" Paul, in the spirit of his divine Master, exhorted his brethren at Ephesus to "endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." For "there is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

The union for which the Saviour prayed, and which the apostle exhorted his brethren to endeavour to keep, is union in the truth. To secure this union should be the great object of every Christian's prayer and effort. For upon its success depends the conversion of the world to God. But this union can only be secured by obedience to the law and will of God. These are taught in the scriptures. To these then all must come. To the law and the testimony all must conform. The standard scriptures must be the sole standard of faith and practice. It was on this great, this only safe principle that Chillingworth nobly exclaimed, "*the Bible*, THE BIBLE, is the religion of protestants." To the sentiment thus expressed, I give a hearty response, and repeat it most emphatically with the change of one word only: *the Bible*, THE BIBLE, is the religion of Christians. And, now, that I may contribute my feeble effort to promote this union, I send forth this little volume with all readiness of mind, to draw the attention of my readers to the Bible, that in the study of this book, we may learn the government and order of the churches, in the observance of which, the principles of union are to be so developed, that it may rest on its true basis, and become universal.

I dare not affirm, that I have unerringly reached the entire system, but if I have been permitted to see and to set forth some of its parts, an abler hand may take up the subject and carry it out to completion.

The denomination to which I have the honor to belong, holds the true fundamental principles of the gospel of Christ. These are, the sovereignty of God in the provision and application of the plan of salvation, the supreme authority of the scriptures, the right of each individual to judge for himself in his views of truth as taught in the scriptures, the independent, democratical, Christocratic form of church government, the profession of religion by conscious subjects only, and the other principles of scripture truth growing out of these or intimately connected with them. My purpose in this Essay, is simply to carry out these principles in the light of the truth to their legitimate results; and to ask the serious attention of my brethren to these results. In the prosecution of my design, the Bible shall be my text-book and my commentary. Of "the fathers" I shall make no use, nor shall I quote from ecclesiastical historians. Not because, if asked, they would refuse to come

to my help; but because in this discussion their help is not needed. Nothing that they can say on the subject of which I treat, can be authority, and that alone which is authority, is what I want. This authority is furnished by the word of God, which we have in its completeness and fulness in the Bible.

The ecclesiastical polity, of force under the Old Testament dispensation, being abolished, I shall draw my views of church government and order from the New Testament. The Jewish ritual of carnal ordinances being superseded by the Christian order of spiritual observances, I shall not go to Moses to ask what Christ has said, or to finish what he left incomplete; but drawing from him and his inspired apostles the order which they have established, I shall present that order on *their* authority.

In this exhibition of my views, I intend no censure upon my brethren, or others who entertain different views. The right which I exercise in holding *my* views of divine truth, I cheerfully accord to all others to hold *theirs*. My sole design is to state what I believe to be the truth on an important subject, and not to assume the office of reformer, censor, or dictator. I most sincerely deprecate disruption in churches, and disturbance of harmony among members. For love's sake, therefore, I rather beseech my brethren, being such an *one* as William the aged, that they would consider these things prayerfully, and may the Lord give us all an understanding in them.

CHAPTER II THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

—EPHESIANS V:25.

I propose in this chapter, to ascertain the scriptural import of the term *church*; and to state definitely, the sense in which I shall use it in this Essay.

This term is, in the original language, *ecclesia*, which signifies assembly or congregation. It is used in the following passage to denote an assembly, both lawfully and unlawfully convened: "If ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly, *ecclesia*. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly, *ecclesia*." Acts xix: 39–41. The case was this: Demetrius had called the craftsmen and the men of like occupation, of Ephesus, together in a tumultuous assembly, *ecclesia*. Acts xix: 24, 25. The town-clerk dismissed that assembly, by telling them of its dangerous character, and directed them to an assembly, *ecclesia*, that would be lawful, in which their difficulties would be adjusted. From the use of this term in this passage, it is evident that it means a congregation or assembly of people.

This term is used by the Saviour, and the writers of the New Testament, to designate an assembly, congregation, or body of the Lord's people, as

appears from the following scriptures: "On this rock I will build my church, *ecclesia*, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matt. xvi: 16–18. "Christ also loved the church, *ecclesia*, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it by the washing of water, by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, *ecclesia*." "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" Eph. v. 25, 26, 27, 30. "Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church, *ecclesia*, of the first born, which are written in heaven." Heb. xii: 22, 23. "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, *ecclesia*, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Eph. i: 22, 23.

This term, then, as designating the people of God, has, as its first leading sense in the New Testament, the whole body of the redeemed, from Adam to the last believer. This body consists of all that the Father hath given to Christ, and this is his church, *ecclesia*, and by way of distinction, I shall call it the *universal church*; not the invisible church, as I know not of any scriptural view of this church, that renders such a term applicable to it, but the contrary. Paul says, "Unto me is this grace given, that I should preach among the gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ—to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be made known by the church, *ecclesia*, the manifold wisdom of God." Eph. iii: 8–10. And again, "Unto him be glory in the church, *ecclesia*, by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." Eph. iii: 21. A church, which is to accomplish these great ends, must be visible. The members of this church, that have passed into the number "of the spirits of just men made perfect," were visible on this earth, both to men and angels, and are still visible to the latter. Those now on earth, in a course of preparation for joining that august assembly, are visible to the same beholders, as those, who through all future time, will become subjects of the like preparation, will likewise be visible to them. And the whole body, when complete, will continue in the full view of the moral universe. Invisibility, then, is not predicable of the church of Christ. I therefore style the whole body of Christ's people, the *universal church*, in contradistinction to parts of this body, formed into distinct bodies on earth, which I would call *particular churches*, and to the consideration of which I now proceed.

The second leading sense in which the term church, *ecclesia*, is used to designate the people of God, will appear from the following scriptures: "And the Lord added to the church, *ecclesia*, daily the saved." "And great fear came upon all the church, *ecclesia*." "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church, *ecclesia*, which was at Jerusalem." "As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, *ecclesian*." "Then had the churches, *ecclesiai*, rest." "Then tidings of these things came to the ears of the church, *ecclesia*, at Jerusalem." "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, *ecclesian*." "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were

received of the church, *ecclesias*.” “Then pleased it the apostles and elders and the whole church, *ecclesia*.” “As I have given order to the churches, *ecclesi-ais*, of Galatia.” “John to the seven churches, *ecclesi-ais*, of Asia.” Acts ii: 47; v: 11, viii: 1, 3; ix: 31; xi: 22; xiv: 23; xv: 4, 22; 1 Cor. xvi: 1; Rev. i: 4.

From these scriptures we learn, that the terms church and churches, *ecclesia* and *ecclesi-ais*, are used to designate given portions of the universal church, formed into distinct bodies, and located in different places. The first nine quotations relate to the church in Jerusalem, and very satisfactorily shew, that the term church indicates one church, one body of the Lord’s people, meeting together in one place, and not several congregations, forming one church. For all the members in Jerusalem were together in their public meeting, and met in one place for their exercises. In further support of these positions, the following scriptures will be found conclusive. “All that believed were *together*, and had all things common.” “And they continued daily, with *one accord*, in the temple.” “And being let go, they,” Peter and John, “went to their own company,”—the multitude just spoken of, which were together. “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled *together*, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the *multitude* of them that believed were of *one heart and one soul*.” “Then the twelve called the *multitude* of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. And the saying pleased the *whole multitude*.” “And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the *church* and of the apostles and elders.” “Then pleased it the apostles and elders and the *whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch.” Now, it is worthy of particular attention at this point, that the church at Jerusalem was the first church, and that it was formed under the immediate guidance and supervision of the apostles, who were acting under the commission of their divine Lord, by which they were required to teach the baptized disciples to observe *all things whatsoever* Christ had commanded them.

It may be supposed, that the number of disciples in Jerusalem was too large to admit of their assembling in one place, and that, therefore, there were several congregations in the city, which yet formed only one church. But the terms church and congregation, as translations of *ecclesia*, are of precisely the same import, as has been shewn. Such supposition, then, is in contradiction of the record, and consequently inadmissible. It may also be supposed, that there was no place sufficiently large in Jerusalem to contain the multitude of believers in one place. But this again is in direct opposition to the record, for it is positively said that the twelve called the multitude *together*, and that according to their direction, seven men were chosen, to whom the daily ministration of the poor saints was committed. Let it be remembered, that for sometime, the disciples had the unrestricted use of

the temple, for they were daily in it, “praising God, and having favor with all the people.” And when they were forbidden its use, some house in the city, or the open fields, could have afforded the opportunity of assembling together until the dispersion occasioned by the great persecution, when they were all scattered abroad except the apostles.

Besides, it is not to be supposed that all the converts made at Jerusalem remained there permanently. There were, on the day of Pentecost, members of fifteen different nations present, and most probably some of all these different nations were baptized, who would soon return to their homes, to carry the glad tidings to their own country. Others, too, would be drawn to Jerusalem by the report of the great things in progress there, who, becoming disciples also, would return home with the good news of salvation. The largest number that we read of at any time, is five thousand, and we know that assemblies as large have been convened in one place, for civil, political and religious exercises, and the transaction of business.

It is, then, evident from the record of truth, that the term church, *ecclesia*, in a secondary or restricted sense, imports a distinct portion of the universal church located in one place on this earth. Such a body I shall call a church of Christ, and as contradistinguished from the universal church, I shall style it a *particular church*. These are the leading senses in which I shall use the term *ecclesia* in these lectures, as employed in the scriptures as descriptive of a congregation of the Lord’s people. And that I may not be misunderstood, I here explicitly state, that in treating of the government and order of a church of Christ, I mean a particular church, a distinct body of the Lord’s people associated together in one place, on the principles of the gospel: and not the universal church, nor a given number of distinct individual churches associated together under a confederated system of government, nor the officers of any one or more churches, or their representatives united in a council.

CHAPTER III FORM OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTED FOR THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST.

Tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church,
let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

—MATTHEW XVIII: 17.

Sufficient to such a man, is the punishment which was
inflicted of many.

—2 CORINTHIANS II:6.

The government of a church is sometimes called democratical, that is, a government by the members of the body. And so far as the mode of admin-

istering the laws of Christ is regarded, this is a proper term. For, in the account given of the first churches, each one managed its own affairs within itself, by the voice of its own members, not amenable to any other church or body of churches. This appears in the Acts of the Apostles, and their epistles to the churches. Take for example, the command of Paul to the Corinthian church, to put away the incestuous man. This act was done, as we learn from the following passage, by a majority: "sufficient to such a man is the punishment which was inflicted of many"—*ton pleionon*, the greater part. This is in accordance with the direction of the Saviour, in the case of trespass by one brother against another. In both cases, the church whose member commits the offence or the trespass, is made the last resort in the final adjustment of the matter, without the right of appeal on the part of the offender or trespasser, to any other tribunal on the earth. Again, the apostle forbids the Corinthians to go to law, brother with brother, and directs them to settle disputes in the church, without any intimation of reference to any other human tribunal. To the church of the Thessalonians, he says: "from every brother that walketh disorderly, withdraw thyself." And when the Corinthian church and the seven churches of Asia, that were in disorder, were addressed, they were addressed as distinct bodies, and directed to put away their own errors, without any intimation that if they did not, a council formed of delegates from any given number of churches, should interpose for the purpose. The government, then, of the first churches was democratical, purely so, as far as the application of the laws of Christ is considered, in the exercise of a popular vote by the members.

The government of a church is sometimes called independent. And this must necessarily be so, if the democratical form be its mode of government. But this is true only as the relation of one church to all the others is regarded. The power of a church is *derived, not original, delegated, not transferable*. Its power is then necessarily dependent upon him from whom it is derived, and therefore, restricted to those objects which he commands them to accomplish, and within those bounds which he prescribes. Unless, then, there is, in the character of the church, authority to transfer its power to some other body, it may not so transfer it. Now, so far as I understand the New Testament, I see no authority given to a church of Christ to transfer its power or authority to any other church or body of men on earth. The New Testament knows nothing of a confederation of churches by delegates, with authority to enact any rule for the churches represented. It is a stranger to associations, synods, conventions, or general councils having authority over churches. The primitive churches sent out evangelists to preach the gospel, and employed agents to carry their contributions to their suffering brethren, and to the apostle for his support. But they never appointed delegates to form ecclesiastical councils, such bodies being unknown to the gospel dispensation.

I am aware that some suppose the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, contains a model and authority for such councils. I propose now,

to examine this chapter, for the purpose of ascertaining the ground of such supposition. And I request the reader at this point to stop and read the chapter through, that he may the better understand the examination which I shall now institute. The chapter begins thus: "And certain men which came down from Judea, (to Antioch) taught the brethren and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When, therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissention and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about the question."

"And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and of the apostles and elders. "Then," after a full discussion of the subject, "pleased it the apostles and elders, and the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas, and wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia: forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying ye must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, to whom we gave no such commandment, it seemed good unto the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that ye abstain from meats offered unto idols, and from blood and from things strangled, and from fornication, from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well."

From the above, it satisfactorily appears that the brethren at Antioch, being gentiles, were unwilling to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, as those men, under pretended authority, had taught them to do. Messengers were therefore sent up to the apostles and elders, to inquire if they had given authority for such teaching. The answer is to the inquiry, and it is in the negative: We gave no such command to these men. If it be asked, why did they send to Jerusalem? The answer is, there abode the apostles, the ambassadors of Christ, who gave the law to the churches. There dwelt the first church with her elders all appointed and acting under the immediate instruction of the apostles. Here then, was the place at which the enquiry should be made. When the question was to be agitated, "the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter." In the discussion, none but the members of the church and the apostles took part. They alone formed the council, if council it were, but the proper term for the body is the church, as the spirit of inspiration calls it. Having thus answered the enquiry, important construction is added—instruction that is authoritative, for it had the seal of the Holy Ghost, and was delivered to the brethren in the cities, for to keep as "decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem." Acts xvi: 4. These decrees were sent "unto the brethren which are of the gentiles in Antioch, in Syria, and Cilicia," from the last two of which there was not even a messenger. Here, then, there is no model or authority for councils to advise or do anything

for the regulation of churches. Each church as an independent body, so far as the control of any other body on earth is regarded, acts freely. To Christ, her only Head, Lawgiver and Ruler, is she accountable; no other authority may exercise any control over her. For her government, Christ has enacted a perfect code of laws for every possible case. With this complete standard then, what need have the churches of councils formed of uninspired men? With what authority can such bodies assemble, and act in regulating the affairs of the churches? These churches have only delegated power for specific purposes, with no liberty to transfer that power. The delegates cannot give themselves the power. Whence, then, can they derive it? The truth is, that the very genius and letter of the gospel stand opposed to such councils. They are intruders into the perfect scheme of the King of Zion.

The form of the government then, appointed for the churches, is the democratical, independent form, on the principle stated above. But these terms do not convey the whole truth on the subject; for Christ is the King in Zion, the Head of the whole body of his people. As the only Lawgiver, he has given, by his apostles, a code of laws which is absolute and binding upon his people. "Go," said he to his apostles, "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The imperative duty of each church, is to ascertain her Lord's will, and implicitly to obey it. "If ye love me keep my commandments." Now where the word of the king is, there is power. The element of monarchy, then, enters into the government of the church of Christ; and I know no single term that will better express the true character of this government, than *Christocracy*—a government of which Christ is the Head, and in which his power is manifested in perfect accordance of the freedom of his people. Under this government, all things must be done, not according to our own preconceived notions of what is fit, but in obedience to the will of Christ. The members must come "to the law and the testimony;" "to the whole scripture, which is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." To this scripture nothing can be added, and from it nothing taken away. If a sinner is to come under the government of a church of Christ, he must first believe in him who is the Head, and be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Thus giving himself to the Lord, he then gives himself to his brethren in the church relation by the will of God. The church receives such an one in accordance with the word of God. The bishops of the church are the gifts of Christ, and placed in their offices by the Holy Ghost. The stated day for their assembling, and the duties to be performed when assembled, are all appointed by Christ. The administration of discipline is to be by "the power of the Lord Jesus." Every thing in the church character, is done with solemn reference to Christ's authority. "How readest thou?" is the great question by

which the church should be exercised in all that she does. It is for these reasons that I use the term *Christocracy*, as descriptive of the government of the church of Christ.

As the churches stand related to each other, they are parts of a great whole, and the more they are conformable to the will of Christ the nearer in affection and harmony will they be to one another. But in point of government they are wholly independent of each other. In the exercise of their freedom as the servants of Christ, they will find ample scope for all their powers in the study and application of the laws of their King. In the church, the members, as brethren in Christ, are all on a footing. In this sense, the church is a democratical assembly, in which the rights of each member are respected, and by a popular vote, all business is regulated.

CHAPTER IV THE MATERIALS OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, which are at Colosse. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

—COLOSSIANS I: 2; II: 12.

The Lord Jesus having finished the work which his Father had given him to do, cried, "It is finished." He then bowed his head in death and was buried. On the third day, he arose from the dead, made himself known to his disciples by many infallible proofs, and gave to his eleven apostles, as he was about to leave them for his Father's courts, the following commission: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." These apostles were thus constituted the ambassadors, the plenipotentiaries of our Lord. And to enable them to execute the commission, which they had so solemnly received, he endued them with power from on high; he gave them the Holy Spirit, "to lead them into all truth," and "to bring all things to their remembrance, whatever he had said unto them." There could, then, be no mistake committed by them, in fulfilling this commission. To the manner, therefore, in which they executed it, we are to look for the character of the *materials* of which the churches of Christ are to be composed. And not only for the character of *such materials*, but for the character of their officers, and for the whole course of duty enjoined upon the churches, and upon individual christians. An attentive consideration of the order of instruction given to

the apostles in the terms and members of the commission, will the better prepare us to understand their acts and teachings in carrying out its design.

The commission required the apostles, 1st, to teach all nations; 2nd, to baptize them; 3rd, to teach them all other things commanded. It is important here, to state the difference of meaning between the words in the original, rendered in the translation by the terms *teach* and *teaching*. The first is, *matheteusate*; the signification of which is, *disciple* or *make disciples*. The second is, *didascontes*; the signification which is, *the imparting of instruction*. According to the first, the disciple is to be made. By the second, the disciple is to be instructed in all his duty. The proper rendering of the commission in our language, then, would be "Go ye, therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." And this rendering will be more clearly understood from the following fact: In the commission the term *ethne*, translated *nations*, is in the neuter gender, and the pronoun *autous*, translated *them*, which seems to refer to nations, is in the masculine gender. When, then, the Saviour said, "Go make disciples in all nations, baptizing them," he could not mean that the nations, as nations, were to be baptized, but those individuals of the nations who received the teaching given, and became disciples; because, the pronoun *them* being in the original of the masculine gender, could not relate to the nations, which is neuter, but to those of the nations that should be made disciples. The above rendering of the commission seems now to be perfectly clear, and makes it entirely accordant with the version of it given by Mark, "Go ye into all the world, and teach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved. He that believeth not, shall be damned." It is, also, accordant with the example of our Lord, as recorded by John iv: 1, 2: "When the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard, that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples.)" These being made disciples before baptism.

According to this rendering, you will see that those who became disciples under the labors of these men, were to be baptized, and then brought to observe whatsoever things Christ had commanded. And that this was the order which they, and those who acted under their instruction, did observe, I think will satisfactorily appear in the progress of the investigation that I am now about to institute, through the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles to the churches.

On the day of Pentecost, they were all with one accord in one place. The Holy Ghost descended upon them in a miraculous manner. This being noised abroad, the multitude came together, and Peter, standing up with the eleven, preached Christ unto them, closing his discourse with these solemn and impressive words: "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified,

both Lord and Christ. And when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day, there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And the Lord added to the church daily, the saved."

We have, in this narrative, a full and explicit account of the manner in which the apostles, under the immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, understood and obeyed the commission. They taught the multitude, and having made disciples, not a few, they baptized them. After their baptism, they were added to the church and taught other duties. They, therefore, continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers. What a clear exemplification is thus given of the character of the *materials* of which a church of Christ should be formed.

On the morning of the Pentecostal day, the number of the names of the disciples was small. In the evening, this number was increased to more than three thousand. In a short time, it reached five thousand, of which number only two or three proved false. But the awful punishment which overtook them, deterred not others from the exercise or the profession of faith in Christ, for "believers were the more added to the Lord, both men and women." Not long after, the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient unto the faith. Now, it deserves especial consideration, that the church at Jerusalem was wholly under the forming hands of the apostles, and was, therefore, regulated according to the pattern shown them by their Lord. What then are the *scriptural materials* of a church of Christ? Evidently penitent, believing sinners, baptized upon a profession of faith in Christ, conscious subjects, capable of being taught all things which Christ commands.

In consequence of the persecutions against the church which was at Jerusalem, "they were all scattered abroad, except the apostles." "Then Philip went down to Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." "And when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Philip, taught by the apostles, acted as they had done. He made disciples of the Samaritans, and baptized them. These were afterwards formed into a church, and taught to observe the things commanded by Christ, as we learn in the following scripture: "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and *Samaria*, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." The members of this church were like those of Jerusalem, baptized believers. Philip, also, baptized the eunuch. Saul, receiving the Holy Ghost, was baptized,

after which he was with the disciples in Damascus, and became the apostle upon whom rested the care of all the churches.

Cornelius, the centurion, was instructed in a vision to send for Peter, who should tell him what he should do. Peter was instructed, in like manner, to go to Cornelius. He obeyed, and found on his arrival at the centurion's, that he "had called together his kinsmen and near friends," and that they were all present before God, to hear all things that were commanded of God to his apostle. Then Peter opened his mouth and preached Christ, and the remission of sins through faith in Christ. And whilst he was uttering the very doctrine, "the Holy Ghost fell upon all that heard the word." "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, seeing that they have received the Holy Ghost as well as we. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." Peter, in rehearsing the matter before his brethren of the circumcision, said, "that they believed on the Lord Jesus Christ." The centurion and his company were then baptized as believers, and as we read of a church in Cesarea, which Paul went up and saluted, it is evident that the members of the church in that city were baptized believers. At Jerusalem, "the pattern" was given to the Jewish disciples. In this centurion's company, the same "pattern" is given to the gentiles.

During Paul's abode in Philippi, he baptized Lydia and her household, and tarried with them certain days. This household is called "brethren," another name for disciples. He was afterwards imprisoned, but being released, he returned to Lydia's house, and when he had seen "the brethren" and comforted them he departed. He also baptized the jailer and his household, all believing and rejoicing in God. These were among the number of the members of the church at Philippi. Many of the Corinthians, also hearing, believed and were baptized, who became members of the church at Corinth.

In the above instances we have seen, that, without a single exception, when disciples were made by teaching, they were baptized, and we have seen also, in the Jerusalem church, that the disciples were there taught to observe the other things which Christ commands.

I proceed, now, to the epistles, for the purpose of ascertaining the character of the materials of which the churches were formed.

I begin with the epistle to the Romans, in which the apostle writes "to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be *saints*." He addresses them also as *baptized*, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death?" The *materials* of this church, then, were saints. They exercised faith, and were baptized. The members of the Corinthian, Galatian, Ephesians, Philippian, Colossian, and Thessalonian churches, are all recognized by the apostle as sanctified, justified, believing, baptized persons, as appears from the reading of the epistles themselves. Indeed, the principle upon which any of the apostles addressed

letters to churches or to individuals, was the principle of their having put on Christ in baptism. Thus, then, it is evident, that the materials of which the primitive churches were composed, were conscious subjects, who, upon profession of faith in Christ, were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And as patterns for all succeeding churches, they should be imitated, since every church of Christ, throughout all time, should be composed of such materials as the primitive churches were composed of.

I have now this further use to make of the epistles in this connection. It is to show that the third particular embraced in the commission was strictly observed by the apostles, viz: the instruction of disciples in all the commands of Christ, obedience to which, required the materials for the membership of the churches, that we have just seen were uniformly required. In these epistles, general and minute instructions are given touching the whole duty of the believer in all the relations of life. These instructions are addressed to conscious subjects, who have professed their willingness to conform to the requirements of their Lord. So far, then, all seems plain and clear as to the materials of the church of Christ. But what are we to understand by baptism? Some difficulty seems to have attended the import of this word, and, therefore, it is necessary that we bestow some attention upon it, for which the reader is referred to the next chapter.

CHAPTER V BAPTISM.

We are buried with him by baptism into death.

—ROMANS VI: 4.

The terms *baptize* and *baptism*, are brought into our language from the Greek. In the original language, their uniform meaning is immerse, dip, immersion, dipping. Hence, the baptism of a believer is the immersion of a believer, and to baptize a believer, is to immerse or dip a believer in water. We read in the New Testament of believers being buried with Christ in baptism, that is, in immersion. Now this figure illustrates the true import of baptism. The believer professes to be dead unto sin, but to be risen with Christ to a newness of life. The immersion of his body in water, and his coming out of the water, represent this death and this resurrection. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized, *immersed*, into Jesus Christ, were baptized, *immersed*,—into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism, *immersion*, into death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his

death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, if henceforth we should not serve sin.” Rom. vi: 3–6. This passage most clearly sets forth the true import of baptism, the character of its subjects and their immersion.

Difficulties may occur in the minds of some, as to the practicability of immersion in the cases we have been considering, which it may be well to remove. John baptized in Jordan, at Bethabara, and Enon. Jordan was a river, having fords, and at certain seasons overflowed its banks. It, therefore, afforded water above and below its fords of sufficient depth for immersion. Bethabara was situated on the east side of the Jordan, at which was a ferry or crossing place; of course there was a sufficiency of water to be found there for the administration of the ordinance. Enon was selected as a place of baptizing, because there was *much* water there; in the original, *udata polla*, many waters, a large collection of water; and as a space, measuring less than seven feet in length, four feet in width, and the same in depth, is sufficient for the administrator to immerse a subject in, there can be no reasonable doubt that these afforded a sufficient quantity of water for the ordinance.

At Jerusalem, the disciples had on the day of Pentecost, and for some time after, the free use of the temple for their meetings and services, as will appear from the following scriptures: “and they continuing daily with one accord in the temple.” Acts ii: 46. “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer.” Acts iii: 1–3. “And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch.” Act v: 12. “They entered into the temple early in morning and taught.” v: 21. “And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”—42. This use of the temple would secure to them the use of its appliances, which were ample for administering the baptismal rite.

There was in the temple the brazen sea, containing two thousand baths. 1 Kings vii: 23–26. A bath contains seven and a half gallons. The quantity of water in the sea, then, was fifteen thousand gallons. This quantity of water would surely suffice for the immersion of three thousand persons in a very short period of time, if there were a sufficient number of administrators present. The difficulty of procuring a sufficient number of administrators, now remains to be removed.

In the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we learn that there were about an hundred and twenty disciples who united in the appointment of Matthias to the vacant apostleship. Now these were all with one accord in one place, on the day of Pentecost. The spirit descended and sat upon them like cloven tongues as of fire, and they spake with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. How many of these were men, I have no means of knowing. But as Matthias was chosen from the number of those who had companied with the apostles all the time that the Lord Jesus had gone in

and out among them, we may rationally conclude, that the seventy disciples were present whom the Lord had sent out to preach. These, supposing Matthias to have been taken from the seventy, and added to "the eleven," would make eighty-one preachers and baptizers. Now if we divide three thousand by eighty-one, the result will be a fraction over thirty-seven. We will however say, that thirty-eight were assigned to each of these administrators. These eighty-one administrators could baptize eighty-one persons at one time, in the space of one minute, as forty persons have been baptized in thirty minutes by one administrator. The eighty-one administrators could then have baptized the three thousand in half an hour. And here let me state, that as the mode of dressing at that time was not so complex as at the present time, there was no hindrance on that account, to an immediate compliance with the duty of immersion, on the part of administrator or subject. An inner and an outer garment constituted the chief articles of dress. By throwing off the outer garment and the sandals from the feet, both were ready; and when the service was performed, the outer garment and the sandals being replaced, the parties could repair to their respective places of abode for the necessary change of habiliments. Thus all things were done decently and in order.

But, admitting for a moment that the disciples had not the free use of the temple appliances for the ordinance, yet there were pools which afforded sufficient water for its observance. There was "the King's pool," "the pool of Siloah," and another "pool." Neh. ii: 14, and iii: 15, 16. There was also "the sheep pool, called Bethesda." John v: 2. Concerning some of these pools, we have from the pen of Dr. Durbin, a recent traveler in the East, some important information. In his "Observations on the East," the Doctor says "passing out at the Jaffa gate," in Jerusalem "I found the head of the valley, or as we would call it, ravine of Gihon, about five minutes walk from the wall on the north-east. It is a broad, shallow bowl, inclining on all sides towards a large tank in the centre, constructed for the purpose of collecting all the waters of the adjacent ground. This tank is generally called the upper pool of Gihon. I did not measure its dimensions, but they are given by Dr. Robinson at 316 feet, by about 200. All the surplus water passed down the valley by a subterranean conduit, to the lower pool of Gihon, which is a vast reservoir, some 600 feet by 300, formed by extending strong walls, like dams, across the ravine, the natural rock itself probably forming the pavement." Vol. 1, p. 360. "Ascending but a few steps higher, we came to

‘Siloa’s brook, that flowed
Fast by the Oracles of God.’

"How little like the fountains of Siloam that I had pictured in my imagination. Before, it was a deep, artificial pool; now, dry and dirty. In front on the left, is a flight of steps descending to the pool, and on the right is a path

leading to an arched opening, by which you enter and descend to the basin, some six feet wide, which is called the fountain of Siloam. It is well ascertained, however, that there is no spring here, but that the water which supplies the basin flows through a long subterranean passage, from the fountain of the Virgin, situated 1100 feet to the north, in the western edge of the valley of Kedron." pp. 263, 264.

Of the sheep pool, called Bethesda, Mr. Maundrell, who visited it in 1697, thus writes, "On the 9th April, we went to take a view of what is now called the pool of Bethesda, which is 120 paces long, 40 broad, and 8 deep." A pace is a measure of five geometrical feet. The extent of this pool will then be 600 feet in length, 200 in width, and 40 in depth. "From the account of Sandys, it appears, that the basin being hewn deep in the rock, and upon, 'above,' that rock the northern wall standing, and the spring issuing from between the stones of the wall of this well, the place from whence the spring issues must be several feet above the level of the water in the basin, which basin being deeper in some places than at others, uneven at the bottom, might be deep enough to swim in, in some parts, while in others it might serve to wash the sheep without their swimming at all."—Calmet.

The very extensive use of water among the Jews in their religious rites, required the abundant supply in these pools. And thus the facilities for immersing the thousands of disciples that were made at Jerusalem, were at hand for immediate use. How ample the means, then, of shewing the practicability of immersing the three thousand on the day of Pentecost.

Of the appliances in the city of Samaria for immersion, we have no specific information. But with so fine a well in its neighborhood, as we know the people had, I suppose there can be no reasonable doubt of their possessing sufficient accommodations for the immersion of the body in water, particularly as in eastern regions, public and private baths were in common use.

The water used for the baptism of the eunuch is described as "a certain water," by which we are to understand that it had some peculiarity attending it. And it is natural to suppose, that this peculiarity fitted it for the purpose of immersion, as both Philip and the eunuch went down into it, and came up out of it. For any purpose short of this, the conveniences which such a distinguished man, an ambassador, traveling in his chariot, would take with him, would be amply sufficient.

Damascus was situated on the river Pharpar, and therefore had an abundant supply of water for immersing the body. Cesarea and Corinth were seaports, supplied with abundant water. Philippi was, like Damascus, situated on a river, in whose waters the households of Lydia and the jailer could have been immersed without difficulty, though at midnight. But in the latter case, the tank or bathing font, which all the jails in eastern cities were furnished with, for the bathing of the prisoners, presented the opportunity of immersing the household within the precincts of the yard.

Thus I think it satisfactorily appears, that all the difficulties supposed to

attend the immersion of the first converts are removed, and that, as the term baptism imports immersion, *dipping*, so it is evident that the primitive disciples were all immersed in water upon a profession of faith in Christ. We are then, I think, fully warranted in saying, *that the materials of which a church of Christ should be formed, are penitent, believing sinners, immersed in water upon a profession of faith in Christ; conscious subjects, willing to observe his commands.*

CHAPTER VI THE OFFICE AND WORK OF THE EVANGELIST.

Do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy
ministry.

— 2 TIMOTHY IV: 5.

In the preparation of the materials for the churches of Christ, evangelists or preachers of the gospel are, under the Holy Spirit, the chief agents, and their work the chief instrumentality. "For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

The office of evangelists is general, not particular, not limited to any given church or region of country. Their commission directs them to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." The *world*, then, is their field, and in whatsoever part of it their lot is cast, there does their official character go with them. When the great persecution against the church at Jerusalem scattered all its members abroad, except the apostles, "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." Of Philip, one of their number, who is called *the evangelist*, we have a particular account. He "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." And "when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women." He also preached Jesus to the eunuch, and baptized him.

To Timothy, "an evangelist," Paul gives the following charge: "Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering." To Titus, his own son after the common faith, he addresses a similar charge: "Speak thou the things that become sound doctrine. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."

The work of an evangelist, then, is to preach the gospel of Christ, and to baptize believers in him; such being the materials, as has been shewn in a

former chapter, of which the churches of Christ should be formed. The evangelists then, are, if I may so speak, general officers of the Redeemer's kingdom on earth, and the most useful body of men in our world. Qualifications of a high order are necessarily required in officers of such dignity and importance. The first and chief of these is, the possession of the saving grace of God in the soul, and manifested in the life by exercises of deep and ardent piety. Such qualifications had Timothy, in the unfeigned faith, which dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, which Paul was persuaded dwelt in him, their honored descendant, also. On this foundation, Paul required him to "be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Not to strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."

A second qualification consists in ability to teach, as we learn in the following passage: "The things that thou hast heard of me among" or by "many witnesses, the same commit thou to *faithful* men, who shall be *able* to teach others also." For surely, he who is to teach others, must possess the capacity for imparting knowledge to them.

To the capacity for teaching, must be added its diligent exercise in seeking an acquaintance with the subjects to be taught. Hence, the necessity of a third qualification, STUDY. Timothy had, by the laying on of the apostle's hands, received a gift, a special gift of the Holy Ghost, in accordance with "the prophecies that went before concerning him." The apostle, nevertheless, wrote to him thus solemnly and impressively: "*Study* to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." "Neglect not the gift that is in thee. Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear unto all."

The duty of improving the talents for the ministry, by diligent cultivation, is illustrated with great clearness and force by our Saviour, in the care which he bestowed upon the apostles. For, notwithstanding the miraculous powers which he conferred on these men, he kept them with him for more than three years, instructing them by day and by night, and then required them to remain at Jerusalem until they should be imbued with power from on high, before they should go forth fully to preach the gospel; so that when they did engage in the work, they were well instructed, well educated men. This example of the Saviour, should lead all those who intend to be preachers of the gospel, to see that they have the qualifications for the ministry that are required, and those who have entered upon its duties, to improve their powers to the best advantage. A neglect of these obvious requirements in the ministerial character, in his day, by the denomination to which he belonged, extorted from the poet of the fast-anchored isle, the following severe reproof:—

"From such apostles, oh! ye mitred heads,

Preserve the church; and lay not careless hands
On skulls that cannot teach, and will not learn."

It is the duty of the churches of Christ, to see that the evangelists whom they receive possess these qualifications; and in cases where they have not the means of improvement, the churches should afford them the necessary supply. Hence the importance of establishing and sustaining institutions of learning, at which our young men, who have the ministry in view, may acquire the necessary improvement for the great work.

It is a part of the duty of evangelists to baptize believers. The proof of this is so clear, from the commission already quoted, and the practice under it, as recorded in the Acts of the apostles, that nothing is required on the subject in this place. In the performance of this duty, the whole responsibility rests upon the evangelist. No church or individual is to share it with him. The commission is, "go," "teach," "baptize." Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, and when the awakened hearers asked what they should do, he answered, "Repent and be baptized," &c. "And they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Philip preached to the Samaritans, and baptized those that believed. He baptized the eunuch also. Ananias baptized Saul. Peter baptized the centurion and his friends. Paul baptized Lydia's and the jailer's household, together with the believing Corinthians. With these baptizers no churches or others shared the responsibility.

It is also a part of the duty of the evangelist, to teach the baptized believers all other things that Christ has commanded.

It will now be seen, that evangelists are no inconsiderable officers of Christ's kingdom, and that they hold no inferior rank in the line of instrumentality for the building up of *that* kingdom. It should be the concern, then, of every church to have an evangelist in her bishopric, laboring in her midst, and in the regions around her. Indeed, I cannot see how any church can prosper *long, if at all*, without such a servant of the most high God, seeing that his services are indispensable under the order of things established by her Head, who "gave some *evangelists*, some pastors and preachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." As soon, then, may it be expected that the natural body will be vigorous without its proper food, as that the body of Christ will be edified without the instituted ministry of the word.

But it is required that these men be supported to their work. "For the Lord has ordained that they that preach the gospel, shall live of the gospel." And what can be more reasonable? These evangelists are, as the term *euan-gelistes* in the original imports, bearers of good news, of glad tidings of great joy. They are the heralds of the Saviour of men, preaching peace through him. A work of such magnitude requires all the time and labor which can be bestowed upon it. And, therefore, those who are called to it

should not be hindered by attention to the things of this world, but set at liberty, that they may give themselves “continually to prayer,” and to the faithful discharge of its duties. And that they should be thus unfettered from the distracting cares of life, will appear the more necessary from the fact, that they are the appointed agents for preparing the materials, under the guidance of the divine Spirit, of which the churches of the Redeemer, those important bodies in our world, are to be composed.

CHAPTER VII THE FORMATION OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved.

— ACTS II: 47.

Immediately after the ascension of the Redeemer, the apostles “returned to Jerusalem, and continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” “And in those days the number of the names” of the disciples “was about an hundred and twenty.” “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” “And the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” “And the Lord added unto the *church* daily, such as should be saved.”

In these scriptures, we have a satisfactory account of the formation of the mother church at Jerusalem. *One accord, mutual consent* in the truth as it is in Jesus, constituted the principle on which the church was formed. The apostles taught the disciples the duty, and the principle, of the church relation, and they complied with it. But no official act of the *apostles* beyond teaching, do we learn, gave validity to its existence. With the pattern thus clearly given, and the scripture record of numerous churches in different places, we are taught, that wherever a sufficient number of believers in Christ, baptized upon a profession of faith in him, live sufficiently contiguous to each other for the purposes of the church relation, they should unite together in such relation on the principle of ONE ACCORD, *mutual consent in the truth*. The Bible is their only standard of doctrine and duty.

In the changes of membership from one church to another, which are necessarily effected in the providence of God, the same principle of *one accord, of mutual consent*, should be observed. When a member removes from one church into the neighborhood of another, his membership is necessarily dissolved with the first church, and should be taken in the second. The very design of a church, and the objects that its formation is to accom-

plish, make this plain and obvious. A church is a congregation, a company of disciples, redeemed from sin and condemnation, associated together to perform certain duties, and to effect certain ends. They are to meet every Lord's day, to engage in the duties of social worship, to combine their energies, and to act in concert as a band of soldiers under the Captain of their salvation. Hence the exhortation of the apostle, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." For these purposes the members must live near enough to each other to meet every Lord's day, and to see each other often. Now, when a member goes from the vicinity of one church to the vicinity of another to take up his abode, he only changes the company with which he will associate for carrying on the purposes of God. Hence, on such removal, he will state the fact, and ask a letter of commendation, as to character and standing, from the church he leaves. This he will take to the church near which he goes to reside, and presenting it, ask admission into its membership, which, where all is fair, will doubtless be granted with all readiness.

Letters of dismission, as now used in such cases as the above, assume a principle, and state a fact, neither of which is recognized in the New Testament. The principle is, that a Church has authority to dismiss a member, and that by such letter he is dismissed. The proper meaning of dismiss is, to send away, or discard. A church may dismiss an officer with whom she is dissatisfied, but it is difficult to see how she can dismiss a member without excluding him. The membership of the individual is dissolved by his removal, and the church, as suggested above, in her letter of commendation only states that fact, with his character. And he becomes a member of another church, as soon as opportunity offers. By this arrangement, the church is relieved of all responsibility in the case of the member removing. She enters the fact upon her church book, and there the matter ends. In the present order of things in the case, a member obtains a letter, in somewhat the following form: "We do hereby testify, that our brother____, who is a member in full fellowship with us, is dismissed from us at his request, and when joined to another church of the same faith and order, will be considered as dismissed from us;" or, "We do hereby certify, that our brother _____ is dismissed to join another church of the same faith and order." With this letter the brother dismissed may remove to a distance beyond the control of the church, or her means of knowing any thing about him. He retains the letter and behaves disorderly. Now, by the terms of either of the above forms, he is yet a member of the church that dismissed him. Yet he is recorded as a member dismissed, and so reported to the association. The church is thus placed in a serious dilemma. But from this she is delivered, upon the plan suggested above. A recurrence to first principles will very much assist us in this case.

When a believer is baptized upon a profession of faith in Christ, he is baptized, not into the membership of any particular church, but into subjection to the authority of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. He is then to be known and recognized as a subject of the King in Zion. Wherever his lot is cast in this world, and a church of Christ exists there, it is his privilege to be a member of it, and it is his duty to present himself for membership without delay. During his abode within her precincts, he is bound to perform his duties to the church and her members, and they to him. On his removal beyond her precincts, his membership in the church ceases, but not his subjection to the King of Zion. Taking with him a letter of commendation, he presents it as a letter of introduction to the church, in whose neighborhood he fixes his abode, and there takes his membership on the principle of mutual consent. If he shall withhold his application for membership, the church should withhold from him her privileges; for where privilege is enjoyed, the obligation to duty is binding. The following illustration may throw some light upon the subject. A foreigner, who desires to become a citizen of this Union, is required to live within its boundaries a given term of time, maintain a fair moral character, and then take the oath of allegiance to the government, in open court. Upon complying with these requirements, he becomes a citizen, not of any one individual State, but of the United States, and thus acquires a right to become a citizen of either of the States; but his actual citizenship is determined by the place of his residence. No announcement to the authorities of a State is required from a citizen on his removal, nor certificate to be presented for admission into another State. Neither is any thing of the kind required in the case of the member of a church who removes, but as the King of Zion requires his subjects to be courteous, it is becoming in them to give notice of removals, and receive letters of commendation, to be used as circumstances require.

In some churches, it is the custom to require of the applicant for membership, a relation of his experience, notwithstanding the most favorable letter of dismissal which he presents. And there is sound philosophy in the custom. It commends itself to general imitation.

CHAPTER VIII THE RULERS OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls.

— HEBREWS XIII: 17.

In every well regulated society, rulers are necessary for the management of its affairs. The King in Zion has, therefore, provided such for his churches,

whom he clothes with authority, and to whom he requires that obedience and respect be rendered. On all these points we have full instruction in his holy word, and to those portions of it which contain this instruction, I now invite your attention: "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which *labor among you*, and are *over you* in the Lord, and *admonish you*; and to *esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake*." 1 Thes. v:12, 13. "Remember them that have the *rule* over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and forever. *Obey them* that have the *rule* over you and *submit yourselves*; for they *watch for your souls*, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you. Salute all them that have the *rule* over you." Heb. xiii: 7, 17, 24.

These rulers are designated by various titles, in connection with the duties which they are to perform, as will be seen in the scriptures that follow: Paul and Barnabas "ordained them *elders* in every church." The messengers from Antioch were received of the church, and of the apostles and *elders*, at Jerusalem. "From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus, and called the *elders* of the church. And when they were come to him, he said to them, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*, to *feed* the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Acts xiv: 23, and xv: 4, and xx: 17, 18, 28. "Let the *elders that rule well* be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." 1 Tim. v: 17. "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst ordain *elders* in every city, as I had appointed thee; if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly. For a *bishop* must be blameless as the steward of God." Titus i: 5, 6, 7. "The *elders* which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder. *Feed* the flock of God, which is among you, taking the *oversight* thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being *lords* over God's heritage, but being *ensamples* to the flock" 1 Pet.v: 1, 2, 3. Christ "gave some pastors." Eph. iv: 11. "Is any sick among you, let him call for the *elders* of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil, in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick." James v: 14, 15.

In a review of these scriptures, we have these points clearly made out:—

1. That over each church of Christ in the apostolic age, a plurality of rulers was ordained, who were designated by the terms *elder*, *bishop*, *overseer*, *pastor*, with authority in the government of the flock.
2. That this authority involved no *legislative* power or right, but that it was *ministerial and executive* only, and that, in its exercise, the rulers were not to lord it over God's heritage, but as ensamples to lead the flock to the performance of duty.

3. That the duties of these rulers consisted in taking heed generally to themselves and to the flock over the which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers; to feed the members with spiritual food; to watch for their souls, and to supervise the whole body.
4. That for the right discharge of these duties, there was a division of labor among them. Whilst all were *rulers*, some, in addition to the authority of office, *labored in the word and doctrine*, that is, *preached the gospel of Christ*.
5. That great responsibility rested on these rulers, for they watched for the souls of their flock, as they that must give account; and that in order to their successful discharge of so important a trust, the members of the flock were required to respect and obey them, and to afford them a liberal support.
6. That these rulers were all equal in rank and authority, no one having a preeminence over the rest. This satisfactorily appears from the fact, that the same qualifications were required in all, so that though some labored in word and doctrine, and others did not, the distinction between them was not in rank, but in the character of their service.
7. That these *elders, pastors, bishops, overseers*, were made so by the Holy Ghost; that is, he gave them, in accordance with the will of Christ, their qualifications, by which they were recognized and appointed to the solemn charge by their brethren.
8. That the members of the flock were required to follow, *imitate*, the faith of their rulers, in due consideration of the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

For the better understanding of the terms *elder, pastor, bishop, overseer*, as having the same import in the above scriptures, I observe, that the terms *bishop* and *overseer*, are translations of the term *episkopos* in Greek. And as this term is rendered in the passages from Timothy and Titus by the word *bishop*, it would have been more proper to have rendered it by the same word in Acts xx: 28, thus, “over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you *bishops*.” Now all these terms are applied interchangeably to the office of ruler, as the same qualifications are required in all. The appropriateness of these terms in designating the office of the rulers, appears from their distinctive meaning. The Greek term for *elder* is *presbuteros*, which signifies one advanced in years, who is supposed to have *dignity* and *experience*. *Episkopos* is softened from the Saxon *bichop*, by dropping the *c*, and reads *bishop* in our language, which imports *overseer*. *Pastor* is the Latin for shepherd, a term that denotes one who has *charge of a flock*, to the feeding and management of which he is specially devoted. Of all these terms I should prefer *overseer*, if it were not that it has been applied to worldly avocations in such manner, as to lessen its dignity in its application to a spiritual ruler. *Bishop*, perhaps, is on the whole to be preferred, as it is rather

more a term of office than the term *elder*, and includes what is meant by the term *overseer*.

It is worthy of particular attention, that each church had a plurality of elders, and that although there was a difference in their respective department of service, there was a perfect equality of rank among them. Let us now endeavor to ascertain the respective departments of service assigned to the members of the bishopric.

In the solemn address which the apostle made to the Ephesians elders, *bishops*, he says, "take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, *bishops*, to *feed the church of God*, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Therefore watch and remember, that by the space of three years, I ceased not to *warn* every one of you night and day with tears." To the Hebrews, he thus writes, "remember them which have the *rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God*." "*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they WATCH FOR YOUR SOULS*, as they that must give account." And the address to the same elders by Peter, is in perfect accordance with that of his "beloved brother Paul," "*Feed the flock of God*, which is among you, taking the *oversight thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but as being ensamples to the flock." "Let the *elders that rule well*, be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who *labor in the word and doctrine*." The duties of these rulers are evidently various. Governing, not as lords, but as ensamples; *feeding*, which implies speaking the word of the Lord, from the experience of its power; *watching for souls*, warning and admonishing them; *laboring in word and doctrine*, by preaching the word, being instant in season, out of season; *taking heed unto themselves and to all the flock*. These seem to be the prominent duties of the bishopric—duties which render necessary the qualifications that are required in the epistles to Timothy and Titus; all which are fully detailed in the following scriptures: "A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient; not a brawler; not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil." 1 Tim. iii: 2–7. These qualifications most obviously fit their possessors for the various and important duties of the bishopric. The particular department of service which each shall occupy, will be determined by the talent which he has for one or the other line of duty. For example, one of the bishops may have a particular talent for *presiding* over the

body, for regulating its affairs by advice, admonition, rebuke. Let such an one be the presiding bishop. Another may have a particular capacity for teaching the flock by exposition of scripture and exhortation, and in visits to the members. Let this be *his* department. A third may be endowed with the talent for superintending a Sabbath school, directing the course of studies, gathering up children for the school, and alluring them to the reading of the scriptures and religious works. To this service, then, let *him* be devoted. And a fourth may be endowed with the gift of laboring in the word and doctrine, that is, of preaching the gospel of Christ. This one should give *himself* wholly to the ministry of the word. I mean not by the above view, to determine the number of bishop for each church at four, but simply to exhibit what services the bishops might respectively render to a church.

The importance and necessity of a bishopric for each church, embodying gifts for various services, is thus most obvious for the accomplishment of one of the great ends for which Christ came into the world, and for which, when he ascended up on high, he received gifts for men. This end is stated at large in the following passage from the epistle to the Ephesian church: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Eph. iv: 12–16. This is the noble end for which "*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers* were given."

A plurality in the bishopric is of great importance for mutual counsel and aid, that the government and edification of the flock may be promoted in the best manner. At stated meetings of the bishopric, the members would report their separate doings, and confer together upon the teachings of scripture, which they would bring forth to the church for its consideration and adoption. Such a body would constitute the proper council of advisers to the church collectively, and to the members individually. Interchangeably each would aid the other in his department, and when necessary, would unite in any one department. Oh, what a blessing would such a bishopric be to a church! But ah! where are we to find men, whose gifts fit them for composing such a bishopric? The answer is given in the passage above referred to. "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men,—some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers." To the ascended Redeemer and Head of the

churches, must we go for these gifts. For he *will be enquired of for them*. The churches must desire them. They must understand this part of their divinely instituted order, and must earnestly wrestle with their Lord for the gifts that are necessary to carry it out.

They must be willing to do another thing. This is to afford these gifts a liberal support. The divine command is, "let the *elders that rule well*, be counted worthy of *double honor*, especially they that *labor in the word and doctrine*. For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And the laborer is worthy of his hire." I Timothy v: 17, 18. The principle on which compensation is here required to the elders, is obviously correct. It is payment for work done, for service rendered. For "who goeth a warfare at his own charges? Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof? Or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk thereof?" The principle of compensation for service rendered, admits of graduation in the amount, according to the extent and quality of the labor performed. The duties of those elders who do not "labor in the word and doctrine," might be attended to by some, without interfering with their avocations in life, or by others in so small a degree, that a moderate compensation would be sufficient for the service done, whilst a larger remuneration would be necessary for those, who do "labor in the word and doctrine," since such should give themselves *wholly to the work*, in a profound study of the Bible, and in actual preaching "the truth as it is in Jesus."

Whilst a plurality of bishops is required for each church, the number is not fixed, for the obvious reason, that circumstances must necessarily determine what that number shall be. In a church where more than one cannot be obtained, that one may be appointed upon the principle, that as soon as another can be procured there shall be a plurality. And when, from the poverty and fewness of the members, it may be impracticable for them to afford a support to the ruler or rulers they may have, let the members faithfully do what they can, and let the rulers imitate the example of Paul, who "ministered with his hands to his necessities, and to them that were with him."

I have said above, that of all the terms by which the *rulers* of a church are designated, I would prefer "*overseer*," if it were not that it has been applied to worldly avocations in such a manner, as to lessen its dignity in its application to a spiritual ruler. *Bishop*, perhaps, is on the whole to be preferred, as it is rather more a term of office than the term *elder*, and includes what is meant by the term *overseer*. As we are familiar with the term *overseer*, in this country, and its import is embodied substantially in the word *bishop*, I shall now point out, in some particulars, the analogy between the offices of the spiritual, and the temporal overseer. The temporal overseer has the charge of a body of laborers. The spiritual overseer has the oversight of a church of spiritual laborers in the cause of God. The temporal overseer governs the laborers, not by the laws which he or they enact,

but by those which the employer lays down. The spiritual overseer governs the church, not by the laws which *he* or the *members pass*, but by those, which the *chief Shepherd and Bishop* establishes. The temporal overseer receives the compensation for his services out of the produce of the laborers' work. The spiritual overseer receives his from the same source. The office of the temporal overseer is *executive* only, not legislative. Such is also the authority of office which the spiritual overseer holds. The complete code of laws for the church is contained in the *Bible*, and neither the church nor the overseer has any authority to abrogate, alter, or add to any part of this code. Should the church and her overseers so disagree in their understanding of this code, that they cannot continue together profitably, let them separate in love.

For the spiritual as for the temporal overseer, a support is required; and upon the obvious principle of *mutual obligation*. "Do ye not know," says Paul, "that they which minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple and they which wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the *Lord ordained*, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" I Cor. ix: 13, 14. "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things." Gal. vi: 6. And what can be more reasonable? As citizens we cheerfully pay our taxes for the support of government, that its officers may give themselves to the making and the maintenance of the laws; and thus, under God, secure the prosperity of the land. And why not give our money to support the rulers of the churches, which their great Head has appointed, not for the making, but the maintenance of the laws of his kingdom, and the advancement of the prosperity of his people? We will give to overseers of our temporal property, full compensation for managing our temporal business; and why should not the churches exercise equal justice in compensating their spiritual overseers, to whose management the Holy Ghost has committed *them* and *their affairs*? We will spend large sums in splendid habitations, furniture, equipage, costly entertainments for carnal pleasure, all in conformity to this world; why not spend equal sums in conformity to the will of God, by sustaining the ministry of the word, the full bishopric of the churches, and thus lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal.

That we should not think, in thus complying with our duty, we have done a meritorious deed, the apostle asks, "if we have sown unto you *spiritual* things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your *carnal* things?" Does a man deserve any credit, who pays another a just price for the labor which that other has done for him? Christians are taught to say, when they have done all these things which are commanded them, "we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do." Oh! may the churches wake up to the importance of the bishopric, and the duty of its support.

CHAPTER IX THE DEACONS OR SERVANTS OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

They that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

— I TIMOTHY III: 13.

The welfare of every society requires servants, as well as rulers. And hence the provision of servants for the churches by their Head, whose qualifications will be found in the following scriptures: "Likewise must the deacons, *diaconous*, be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, *diakonitasan*, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons, *diakonoï*, be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well, *diakonesantes*, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus." 1 Tim. iii: 8–13. "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons, *diakonois*." Phil. i: 1. "I commend unto you, Phebe, our sister, which is a servant, *diakonon*, of the church which is at Cenchrea, for she hath been a succorer of many and of myself also." Rom. xvi: 1, 2. The term *diaconos*, rendered *deacon* in all the above passages, except the last, in which it is rendered *servant*, occurs in the New Testament twenty-eight times, if I am not mistaken in numbering them. In five places as above, it is rendered *deacon*. In the rest it is translated *servant* or *minister*, which terms are synonymous. Deacon, *diakonos*, is in the original of common gender, as you see from Paul's calling Phebe a *diakonon*, *female servant* or *deaconess*.

In the above qualifications, an aptitude to teach is not one. It is no part of the official duty of the deacons, then, to engage in teaching the church. Neither are they called rulers. Nor are the terms *bishop*, *overseer*, *pastor*, *elder*, *shepherd*, applied to them. We have no intimation in the scripture, that any of the spiritual concerns of the church are committed to their charge, as these are all assigned to the bishops.

It may be asked, what then *is* their line of service to the church? What affairs are committed to their hands? These questions I shall now attempt to answer.

There are two kinds of service which are essential to the prosperity of

every church. These are spiritual and temporal. The spiritual service has respect to the moral condition of the church, the walk of the members, and the general state of all the spiritual interests of the flock. These, we have very clearly seen, are assigned to the bishopric. The qualifications of deacons look not so much to the intellectual capacity of *rulers, spiritual guides, feeders of the flock, teachers*, as to trustworthiness, capacity for business, excellence and stability of moral character. As the term *deacon* means *servant*, as contradistinguished from *ruler* or *teacher*, whatever temporal service the interests of a church may require, should be committed to the hands of the *deacons*. For this reason their *particular duties* are not pointed out, while the duties of the *bishops* are defined, and the limits of their authority prescribed. These are *rulers*, and *their* duty, and the extent of *their* power, must be known. To restrict the *deacons* to the *service of tables only*, is to confine their useful labors to bounds which are too narrow. Whatever of temporal care the interests of the church require, *that* care falls upon the *deacons*, as the *servants* of the church. And that these temporal interests require much care, and that the spiritual prosperity of the church is intimately connected with these temporal interests, will satisfactorily appear from the following facts:

1. Each church must have a "local habitation," which will require money for its procurement, fitting up, and comfortable appliances for preaching and the duties of the flock.
2. Each church should have *bishops*, to whose support she is required to contribute according to her ability.
3. In a church of any size it is natural to suppose, that there will be some poor, who will stand in need of assistance for their support.
4. It is the duty of each church to contribute to the spread of the gospel, at home and abroad.

Now, for all these objects, money will be needed, and should be contributed by each member according to his ability, as "God loves a cheerful giver," and accepteth "a man according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not." The care of the meeting house and the poor, together with the payment of the "hire of the bishopric," and the transmission of money for the various benevolent objects adopted by the church, all fall under the supervision of the deacons. And as there is work enough for the bishopric in the care of the spiritual concerns of the church, so there is work enough for the deaconship in the care of the temporal concerns of the church, and hence the plurality in the deaconship, as in the bishopric, is required, and for the same reason. There are different departments of service in the *deaconship*, as in the *bishopric*, and the members of the *deaconship* need mutual counsel, as do the members of the *bishopric*. The particular department of service,

which each member in the *deacons*hip would occupy, would be determined by the talents possessed. To one, the keeping of the money, and the specialties of the church, might be committed. A second might keep the records of the church. A third might exercise a supervision over the meeting house and its arrangements, that all things may be kept in a decent and orderly manner, attracting hearers to the sanctuary of God. A fourth might be employed in attending to the poor, seeking them out, relieving their wants, and giving them good counsel. In these two last departments, *deacons*esses would be particularly useful. In visiting the *female* poor, and in attending to the *interior* of the meeting house, their services would be exceedingly valuable. And, therefore it is, that the *deacons*hip admits of females into its number. Phebe was a *diaconos*, *deacons*ess, or female servant of the church at Cenchrea, a succorer of many, even of the apostle himself. These brethren would have stated meetings, confer upon the temporal matters of the church, and make report of their doings to the flock. What a blessing would such a *deacons*hip be to a church? He who instituted the office has gifts to fill it. Let the church earnestly beseech Him to give them such, if they have them not, and He will be heard of them. I mean not, by what I have said above, to fix the number or specific employment of the *deacons*. Each church must use her own discretion in relation to both.

In the sixth chapter of Acts, we have these two lines of service, the *bishopric* and the *deacons*hip, adumbrated or intimated. The apostles undertook at first, to supervise both the *spiritual* and *temporal* interests of the church at Jerusalem, but they found it impracticable. They then desired the brethren to select seven men, whom they would set over the daily ministration of the alms to the necessitous, whilst *they* would give themselves to *prayer* and to *the ministry of the word*. Both the apostles and the seven men were extraordinary officers, if I may so speak, attending to the interests of the church at Jerusalem, until the ordinary state of things should take place in a regular organization of the churches. In the missionary tour of Paul and Barnabas, this organization was effected. And Paul has given us, in his epistle to Timothy, the settled order of officers, bishops and *deacons*. The one to be the *rulers* over the churches, having charge of their spiritual concerns; the other to be the *servants* of the churches, having charge of their temporal affairs. Ample provision is thus made for the right management of the churches, and if the members will sustain these officers, and these officers will do their duty, the Great Head of the Church will send down his blessings upon them without reserve.

It is too obvious to need remark, that, from the nature of the government of the churches, as stated in chapter III, each one is invested with full authority to appoint its own officers, independent of any dictation or control from any man or body of men on earth.

CHAPTER X

THE STATED TIME AND PLACE FOR THE MEETING OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples
came together to break bread.

— ACTS XX:7.

It is indispensable to the good ordering and prosperity of communities of rational beings, that they have a stated time and place of meeting, and stated services, in which they should engage, when met. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose, that the Head of the churches would give instruction to his ambassadors on these points. And happily for us, they have caused such instructions to be recorded in the scriptures of truth, as the following passages will clearly, shew: “Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into *remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*” “And so ordained I, in all churches.” “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and *keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you.*” “If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” 1 Cor. iv: 17, and vii: 17, and xi: 1, 2, and xiv: 37.

Under the authority of these scriptures, I shall, in the first place, endeavor to ascertain the time for the stated meetings of the churches of Christ, in which effort I shall begin with the institution of the seventh day, and its sanctification by Jehovah. “And on the seventh day God ended his work, which he had made, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work, which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it; because, that in it he had rested from all his work, which God created and made.” Gen. ii: 2, 3. That this day was statedly observed by the Israelites, previous to the delivery of the ten commandments on mount Sinai, and previous also to the enactment of the Levitical law, is apparent from Exodus xvi: 22-30. “And it came to pass that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man; and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, this is that which the Lord hath said, to-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, how long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? So the people rested on the seventh day.”

The term “Sabbath,” is of Hebrew origin, and signifies rest. It points out the *intention* of the seventh day, which God has sanctified, but does not prescribe its *employments*. In the law of the ten commandments, commonly called the *moral law*, the fourth precept requires that we “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore, the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.” Ex. xx: 8-11. In this precept, a distinction between the day and its design is evidently made, by calling the seventh day the Sabbath. The term “*Sabbath*” denotes rest from earthly labor, the term “*seventh*” denotes the *portion of time* for that rest.

It is worthy of notice, that this precept forms a part of that law which the Saviour came to “fulfil, and not to destroy,”—Matt. v: 11, 12,—of that law whose penalty is thus written, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Gen. iii: 10. It is further worthy of notice, that of all the laws which God has given to man, none were given under such tremendous sanctions, as those which accompanied this law,—none were written by the finger of Jehovah upon tables of stone, but this law. Why all the startling circumstances of its delivery? Why the curse? Evidently to indicate its unbending authority, its perpetuity, and the awful doom of its transgressor. All the precepts of this holy law stand upon the same footing, and are, therefore, enforced by the same sanctions. They are, by consequence, all equally obligatory. Of course, a violation of any one of these precepts, exposes the transgressor to the curse, as a violation of the whole does. For, “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” James ii: 10, 11.

But it may be said, however correct this reasoning is in relation to the Sabbath under the former dispensation, yet it is not so under the present; for the strict observance of the Sabbath was enjoined under the Levitical law; but, as that is now abrogated, so also is the strict observance of the Sabbath. To point out this sophism, this misapprehension of the subject, (for it is nothing else,) it will be proper to revert to the distinction, which we have already made, between the *seventh day* and the *Sabbath*. The term *seventh* relates to a *given portion* of time, the term *Sabbath* to the *design* of that portion. As the seventh portion of time was originally set apart for rest, it is evident that there was a moral reason, that is, a reason originating in the constitution of things, for such a portion to be so set apart. But whether that portion should be in the beginning, the middle, or the end of the week, depended upon the pleasure of the Creator, and therefore might

be altered at his pleasure, without abolishing its use, changing its design, or weakening its authority. Saturday, the last day of the week, was the day under the Jewish economy. Under the Christian dispensation, as we shall presently show, Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day set apart, as the day of rest and holy use.

You will observe, that the institution of the Sabbath did not originate with the Jewish or Levitical law,—it originated before Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, was born. It was instituted in the garden of Eden, and was designed not for *one people only*, but for *all mankind*. The division of time by weeks was known to the heathen, and observed by them. Laban said to Jacob, “Fulfil her week.” Gen. xxix: 27. The Philistines had seven days festival at a wedding. Judges xiv: 12, 15, 17. And heathen writers speak of the division of days by sevens, and of the sacredness of the seventh day. Noah, in sending out his winged messengers to ascertain the state of the waters, observed the period of seven days. Gen. viii.10–12. Now, all these facts serve to show, that the institution of the Sabbath of this seventh day was of universal obligation, and handed down by tradition to the nations of the earth, though often abused, and in process of time, perhaps forgotten. The Sabbath of the seventh day formed, then, no part of that covenant, (the Levitical or Jewish law,) which in the apostles’ time, waxed old and was ready to vanish away. For it depended upon the appointment of Jehovah, in the garden of Eden, and therefore is obligatory upon all men.

Now, that only which is essential to the appointment of the Sabbath, is, that a given portion of time be set apart by divine authority for sacred rest and holy duties. And the obligations upon all men to observe this portion of time, when it is made known to them, is as binding as the obligation to have no gods before Jehovah, to abstain from murder, theft and adultery. From what has been said, then, you will readily perceive, that the Lord God, who set apart the *seventh portion of time*, in the garden of Eden, as the *Sabbath*, and fixed that portion for the Jews on *Saturday, the last day of the week*, may, if he please, change that portion of time, by fixing it on *Sunday, the first day of the week*, as the *Sabbath* for another people, or for all men, without abrogating the holy day of rest, or weakening its moral obligation.

Having thus, as we trust, clearly shewn the design of the Sabbath, and the principle on which its institution rests, we shall now proceed to show, that *Sunday, the first day of the week*, is the *Christian Sabbath, the stated time for the meeting of the churches of Christ*.

Our Lord arose from the dead on the first day of the week, Matt. xxviii; and the same day at even, stood in the midst of his disciples, who, for fear of the Jews, were assembled with closed doors. On that day of the week, Jesus again stood in the midst of his disciples, who were assembled as before. John xx:19–26. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they (the disciples,) were all with one accord in one place.” Acts ii:1. The term “Pentecost” is of Greek origin, and signifies *fiftieth*. An account of the

institution of this day is given in Leviticus. "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete, even unto the morrow of the seventh Sabbath, shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord." This fiftieth day is the "Pentecost," the morrow after the seventh Sabbath, and therefore the first day of the week, the Jewish Sabbath being Saturday, the last day of the week. In the 20th of Acts, it is said, that "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples were come together," at Troas, "to break bread, Paul preached to them." Acts xx: 7. It would therefore appear, that the first day of the week was the stated time for the meeting of the disciples at Troas.

In the epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle directs that "Upon the first day of the week, every one should lay by him in store, as God had prospered him, that there be no gatherings when he came." 2) I Cor. xvi: 2. These contributions were evidently not to be laid up by each at home, but in store, in the treasury of the church; since if they were not thus laid up in one place, under the care of the church, gatherings would have been necessary on the apostle's arrival; but being there laid up, they would be at once committed to the hands of those who should, on his coming, be approved by the church, and sent by him to bring their liberality to Jerusalem. If, then, these contributions were thus to be laid up by the members of the church, on the first day of the week, the church must have met on that day. It is true, that the apostle does not, *in this passage*, direct the church to meet on the first day of the week. But the order to make the collection for the poor saints on that day, clearly shows, that it was the *stated day of their meeting*. And if the first day of the week was the stated day of the meeting of the Corinthian church, it was also the stated day of the meeting of the churches in Galatia; for the apostle had given to those churches the same order that he had given to the church at Corinth. And as he taught the *same things everywhere in every church*, it follows that the first day of the week was the stated day of meeting in all the churches of Christ in the apostolic age. But how did the churches know that the first, instead of the last day of the week was the Sabbath, the day of rest, and the day for their holy assembling for social worship? They knew that they were allowed *six* days for work, and that the *seventh* was a day of rest, to be kept holy. But whether that day should, under the new dispensation, be the last day of the week, as had been the usage of the Jews, or some other day, they could not know, except by divine revelation. Indeed, if left to their own judgment, they would more naturally have observed the *seventh* day of the week than any other, because it has been set apart by God himself for his people. The only means, then, of knowing which day should be the Sabbath of the new dispensation, was by revelation from its Author. And the manner by which he made it known was most satisfactory. He arose from the dead on the first day of the week, and appeared on the same day to "the eleven and them that

were with them," who were assembled together, and said unto them, "Peace be unto you." On the next first day, Jesus "stood in the midst" of them again. On the day of Pentecost, the first day of the week, as we have seen, the disciples "were all with one accord in one place," when the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Saviour, descended upon them in a miraculous manner, and wrought the wonders which Luke records. Thus has the Lord honored *this* day above *all other days*. It is the *resurrection day*, emphatically called *the Lord's day*. The Jewish economy is ended. Its Sabbaths are gone. A new covenant unfolds its privileges, and the *first* day of the week is its *Sabbath*. This is the day the Lord has made. In honor and in commemoration of *His* resurrection, *this* day, on which this glorious even took place, becomes *the* day of rest from earthly toil, and *the* day of holy activity in spiritual labors. Thenceforward the churches of Christ assembled on the first day of the week, to commemorate the resurrection of their ascended Lord. And hence the disciples at Troas came together on this day, to break bread in the Lord's supper, and Paul preached to them. Hence, too, the Corinthian and the Galatian churches collected for the poor saints on the same day. It was, then, by the authority of the Lord Jesus, that the apostles taught the churches the observance of the *first day* of the week, as the *christian Sabbath*. This day, then, dropping what was peculiar to the Jews in its observance, stands upon its original footing, as the seventh portion of time for rest and use, and to be employed by the church, in such duties as their Lord shall direct.

Having thus shewn the authority for the keeping of the first day of the week, as the christian Sabbath, and also as the stated day for the meeting of the churches of Christ, I shall now proceed, in the second place, to speak of the place of meeting for these churches. We read of churches in different cities, and some of them meeting in private houses. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, likewise the church that is in their house." Rom. xvi: 3, 5. "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." Coloss. iv: 15. The place of meeting is necessarily a matter of convenience, and should be made to suit the locality and circumstances of the members and the community. Contiguity of residence should, to a certain extent, determine the local position of the meeting houses. But they should not be too near to each other, lest the churches meeting in them should be frittered down to small inoperative bodies. Sacrifices ought, therefore, to be generously made by the members, so that although they may have to travel a few miles to meet their brethren, in the church relation, they may be compensated by the advantages of a larger number, greater zeal, and more effectiveness in the cause of their divine Master. Especially should the meeting houses be neat, comfortable and attractive to hearers. The following rule for the members in their proceedings, ought not to be overlooked in the arrangements of the place of meeting: "Let all things be done decently and in order."

CHAPTER XI

THE ORDINANCES OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HER STATED MEETINGS.

Now I praise you, brethren, that you keep the ordinances
as I delivered them to you.

— I CORINTHIANS XI:2.

I use the term *ordinances*, *paradoseis*, in the sense that I understand the apostle to use it in 1 Cor. xi: 2, as meaning exercises of divine worship, enjoined upon the disciples in their stated meetings. And in treating of these, I shall use more particularly the epistles to the church at Corinth, as they contain a more complete “pattern” of the ordinances of a church of Christ, than any other part of the New Testament.

The first ordinance mentioned in the fourth epistle, is the putting away of the incestuous man, concerning whose separation from the church, the apostle gives this direction, “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *when ye are gathered together*, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one to satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus; therefore, put away from yourselves that wicked person.” 1 Cor. v: 4, 5, 13. What the delivery of any one to satan for the destruction of the flesh was, I do not know. The last verse, however, plainly directs that the offender be put away from the fellowship of the church with strong disapprobation. By this case, we are taught that the church should proceed without delay or admonition, to put away from her membership, a notorious offender. The exclusion of this man was to take place when the church was gathered together, and as the time for such meeting was the *first* day of the week, it was on *this* day the act was to be done. In the second epistle, we learn that the excluded member was restored to the fellowship of the church. Restoration, as well as exclusion, then, are religious services, or ordinances of a church of Christ, forming a part of the duties of the first day, when there are cases to require them.

The apostle, in the same epistle, censures the church for the abuse of the Lord’s supper. “When ye come together, therefore, into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper. For, in eating, every one taketh before the other his own supper; and one is hungry, and another is drunken.” 1 Cor. xi: 20, 21. He then recites the manner in which the supper should be received, and corrects its abuse. It is evident that the church came together *professedly* to receive the supper of the Lord, but instead of doing so *aright*, indulged in a carnal feast. But when did they come together? Evidently on the first day of the week, as we have already seen. Therefore, the ordinance of the Lord’s supper was to be observed on the first day of the week by the church at Corinth.

In connection with the time for the observance of this supper, I invite your particular attention, in this place, to the participation of this ordinance by the disciples at Troas. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, (ready to depart on the morrow.)" Paul had been with these disciples at Troas "seven days," and yet we read not of their assembling together until the last day of his abode with them. On that day, the first day of the week, being the stated day of convening, they came together, broke bread, and heard Paul preach. Acts xx: 6, 7. Thus we see that the disciples, both at Corinth and Troas, met together on the first day of the week, and also for the purpose of breaking bread in the supper.

Again in the same epistle, the apostle treats at large of the various gifts which the Spirit imparts to the members for the edification of the church, and the conversion of the unlearned or unbelievers. In the list of these he enumerates singing, prayer, prophesying, exhorting, teaching, as will be seen in the following scriptures; "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily *prophets*, thirdly *teachers*." "He that prophesieth, speaketh unto men, to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." "Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Wherefore, let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue, pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." "If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace," that is, wait till he has done; "for ye may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." 1 Cor. xii: 28, and xiv: 3, 12-15, 23-25, 29-31.

A prophet not only predicts events, but also teaches and exhorts, as it is said above, "he that prophesieth speaketh unto men, to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." In the former part of the office of a prophet, we have none now; but in the latter part of the office, God continues such teachers to his churches for their "edification, and exhortation, and comfort." "Having then, gifts, differing according to the grace that is given unto us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."

Rom. xii: 6, 7, 8. Those, then, who possess gifts for singing, prayer, prophesying, teaching, exhortation, should feel at liberty and under obligation, to employ such as they have for the up building of the church, and the conversion of unbelievers, and they should be encouraged by the church to exercise them; that strengthened by such exercise in the presence of their brethren, they may improve, and be better fitted to use them elsewhere, as in the providence of God a door may be opened for employing them to his honor and the good of man. It is when the whole church is come together into one place that these gifts are to be exercised for the benefit of the whole. And as the church at Corinth came together on the first day of the week, it was on that day of the week that these gifts were exercised in that church.

We have now seen that the apostle taught the Corinthian church, as ordinances or injunctions from the Lord, the duty of excluding offenders from their membership, and of restoring such as might become penitent, of breaking bread in the supper of the Lord, of exercising the various spiritual gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit, and of contributing of their substance for the support of the poor saints, and that all these were to be observed on the first day of the week. Now as the apostle taught the same things *everywhere in every church*, it follows that he taught in every church, those ordinances and the time of observing them in all the churches, that we have just seen he taught in the church at Corinth. We have then in this church, the “pattern shewn” us by which all the churches of Christ should be regulated. In a former part of this work, I shewed, from the authority of the New Testament, that the materials of a church of Christ are penitent, believing sinners, immersed in water, in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, who first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to one another, by the will of God, in the church relation. I have also pointed out, from the same authority, the officers of the church, viz: bishop and deacons. We thus have the complete “pattern” shown us for the formation and organization of a church of Christ, to which all his churches should be conformed. The only exception to this law, which I conceive to be laid down in the case, is the impossibility of compliance, arising from circumstances beyond the control of the members. But where they possess their physical liberty, and the control of their affairs, I see no difficulty in the way of conforming to the “pattern” thus shewn. For example: a church is formed, her constitution is the Bible, and by its directions she proceeds to the choice of her officers, or if she postpones the choice, she appoints some persons for the time being, till the choice is made. At the hour appointed, the church assembles on the first day of the week. The presiding officer takes the chair, opens the statute book, the charter of privileges and duties, and reads a portion for the edification of himself and the brethren. He then announces a hymn, which is sung. He offers, or asks a brother to offer a prayer. The door is opened for the admission or dismissal of members; then for dealing with delinquents or restoring penitents. The opportunity is, after these ser-

vices, successfully given for the exercise of gifts, the contribution for the poor saints, and for any other business to which the attention of the church should be called. The reception of the Lord's supper terminates the services with a hymn, and the members go out. The meeting is adjourned. Let the preacher, if the church is provided with one, then preach to the congregation. I see no difficulty in doing this every Lord's day, for if a church can meet on *one* Lord's day, she can meet on *every* Lord's day, and the days are of sufficient length for all these services.

The practicability of thus conducting these services, has been tested with us. We meet every Lord's day at 9 o'clock, A.M., and attend to the services mentioned above, with the exception of the supper and the contribution. To these we attend only on *one* Lord's day in the month, in connection with the others. But we could as well attend to them all on every Lord's day, as we do on one. By thus stately meeting on every Lord's day, we are always up with our business, and have much time for exposition of scripture to the church. Preaching to the congregation suffers no interruption with us. In the afternoon, the negroes are taught and the Sunday school is attended to. The advantages attending this order of things are of great importance, for we obtain a larger number of the members of the church in her meetings, and have the colored members in attendance. And our minds are more free from the influence of secular concerns, and are in a more spiritual frame for the duties of the Lord's house.

I have said above, that where the members of a church enjoy their liberty and have the control of their affairs, I see no difficulty in their attending, on every Lord's day, to the services stated above. There may be *occasional* circumstances, however, that will render it impracticable for a church to observe the above services on *every* Lord's day. Sickness, removals, deaths, the unavoidable absence of such as have gifts for the various services, may prevent the observance of the whole order of duties. In such a case, let the members present do what they can. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," saith the Saviour.

CHAPTER XII ORDINATION TO THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

And when they had ordained them elders in every church,
and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the
Lord, on whom they believed.

— ACTS XIV:23.

When Christ ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and received gifts for men. "And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some

evangelists; and some pastors and teachers.” Eph iv: 8, 11. Apostles have ceased from the earth, and prophets, as foretellers of events, have finished their course. But evangelists, who are preachers of the gospel; pastors, who are the rulers of the churches; and teachers occupying subordinate places in the ministry, are mercifully continued to the churches. The necessity of some mode, by which these important gifts are to be recognized, and those who receive them, known, is obvious; and I shall therefore now endeavor to point out from the scriptures, that mode which I understand them to teach.

It is evident from the word of God, that Christ ordained his apostles, and that the apostles ordained elders in every church. I propose in this chapter to ascertain, and fix definitely, what I understand by the term *ordination to ministerial office* in the churches of Christ, and for this purpose invite the attention of the reader to the following scriptures: “And he, (Christ,) ordained, *epoiese*, twelve, that they should be with him; and that he might send them forth to preach.” “Wherefore of these men that have companied with us, must one be ordained, *genesthai*, to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” “It is he, (Christ,) which was ordained, *orismenos*, of God, to be the judge of quick and dead.” “When they, (Paul and Barnabas,) had ordained, *kirotonisantes*, them elders in every church.” “They delivered them the decrees for to keep, which were ordained, *kekrimena*, of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.” “The powers that be, are ordained, *tetagmenai*, of God.” “And so ordain I, *diatassomai*, in all churches.” “The Lord hath ordained, *dietaxe*, that they who preach the gospel, shall live of the gospel.” “Where unto I am ordained, *ethene*, a preacher and an apostle.” “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest ordain, *katasteses*, elders in every city.” Mark iii: 14; Acts i: 21, 22, and x:42, and xiv: 23, and xvi: 4; Rom. xiii:l; 1 Cor. vii: 17; and ix: 14; 1 Tim. ii: 7; Titus I:5.

The distinctive and appropriate meaning in the original, of the terms which in the above passages are rendered *ordain*, *ordained*, are as follows: *constituted*, *become*, *appointed*, *chosen by vote*, *judged proper*, *ordered*, *enact*, *enacted*, *appointed*, *constituted*; and with these words in place of *ordain* and *ordained*, the passages would be thus rendered: “Christ *constituted* twelve;” “must one *become* a witness;” “which was *appointed of God*;” “when they *had by votes chosen* them elders;” “the decrees that were *judged proper* of the apostles and elders;” “the powers that be, are *ordered of God*;” “and so *enact* I in all churches;” “the Lord hath enacted, that they who preach the gospel shall live of the gospel;” “whereunto I am *appointed* a teacher and an apostle;” “for this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest *constitute* elders in every city.”

The simple import of these words is *appoint*, *enact*, and of course the true import of ordination is appointment, enactment. In the ordination of Matthias to the vacant apostleship, and of the elders by Paul and Barnabas, both of which were appointments to office, we perceive that more than one person acted. In the former case, the whole number of the disciples consti-

tuting the first christian church on earth, took part, and the ordination was by casting lots, which is the same with the giving of votes. In the ordination of elders by Paul and Barnabas, the act is expressed by a term which imports, as stated above, the casting of votes in an appointment to office. In the following passage, we have the same verb used in its primary, unequivocal meaning: "And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel, throughout all the churches. And not that only, but *who was also chosen of the churches, alla kai kirotonetheis upo ton ecclesion*, to travel with us with this grace." 2 Cor. viii: 18, 19. The appointment of this brother to accompany Paul, was made evidently by the votes of the churches. Now the use of this same verb, in Acts xiv: 23; to express the ordination of elders in the churches indicates that it was done by the votes of the members of those churches, and this is confirmed by the evidently popular vote given at the election of Matthias to the apostleship.

I shall now examine the New Testament historically on the subject and begin with the ordination of the twelve apostles, and the seventy disciples. And when "he, (Christ,) had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave the power over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease. These twelve Jesus sent forth." Matt. x: 1, 5. "He, (Christ,) ordained, *epoiese*, twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach." Mark iii: 14. "And when it was day, he, (Christ,) called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles." Luke vi: 13. To whom he said, "I have ordained, *etheka*, you that ye should go and bring forth fruit." John xv: 16. The term *ordained*, used by Mark, is, in the original *epoiese*, as above, which signifies *constituted*. The same term used by John is, in the original, *etheka*, which signifies *appointed*. Christ, then, constituted or appointed the twelve apostles. "After these things the Lord appointed, *anedeixen*, other seventy also." Luke x: 1. This word, *anedeixen*, means, as it is rendered in the translation, simply to appoint. In these passages we evidently see, that ordination and appointment are identical terms, meaning precisely the same thing. We see also, that no imposition of hands was used by the Saviour in the ordination of his apostles, or of the seventy. No ceremony of induction into office was observed, as a separate act, giving validity to the original appointment. This case is worthy of attentive consideration, since the Saviour came to teach by *example*, as well as by *precept*. In baptism, the supper, and in every other duty, we have his *example*, as well as his precept. But in ordination we have not, in his *example*, the imposition of hands in appointments to ministerial office. Having made the appointment of his servants, he sent them forth, without other ceremony, to their work. When he was leaving the world for his Father's courts, he appointed ambassadors, and instructed them in all their duty. And that they might not mistake in its performance, he gave them his own Spirit to lead them into all truth, and bring all things to their remembrances that he had taught them. Let us then proceed in our historical enquiry, to examine the Acts of the Apostles, who were his ambassadors, on this subject.

Soon after the ascension of Christ, the disciples met together to the number of one hundred and twenty, in the midst of whom, Peter stood up and said, "Men and brethren, of these men which have companied with us, must one be ordained, *genesthai*, that is, become a witness, &c., to be a witness with us of his, (Jesus') resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, Lord, thou knowest the hearts of all men, shew whither of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell; and they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." Acts i: 15, 16, 21–26. Upon thus ascertaining whom Christ had appointed, he was received into the number of the apostles without imposition of hands, or further ceremony. This case deserves a more particular attention, as it settles some important principles.

Preparatory to its more particular consideration, I make the following statements:

On the day of the Saviour's resurrection, "being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, peace be unto you. Then said Jesus unto them again, peace be unto you; as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." John xx: 19, 21–23. He remained with them after this for "forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God;" but performed no work. Even the number of apostles was left incomplete by him. The complement was made up by his disciples after he left them. The reason of which is obvious. The resurrection of Christ was the *final* deed to be personally done by him on earth until his second coming. Thenceforth his kingdom was to be conducted on earth by the divine Spirit, and therefore, he, on the day that he arose, breathed on his apostles that heavenly agent. It is true that the miraculous descent of this agent was not witnessed by the multitude, or felt by the disciples *generally*, until the day of Pentecost. But he was given to the apostles on the very day that Christ arose, to teach and guide them in the interval between his resurrection and that ever memorable day.

After thus breathing on the apostles, and imparting to them the Spirit, he gave them particular instructions on the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and leading them out to Bethany, delivered to them their last commission, in which they were instructed to teach the baptized disciples all things whatsoever he had commanded them. Then lifting up his hands, he blessed them and departed from them. These holy, inspired apostles returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and abode there with one accord in prayer and supplication, waiting in obedience to their Lord's command, for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Fresh from the solemn scene of their Lord's

departure, under his and the Spirit's teaching, they could make no mistake. Thus prepared, they proceeded to the necessary work of filling up the original number of the twelve apostles, that the full body of these divinely commissioned men might be in readiness to receive the heavenly, the miraculous visitation.

This case develops some fundamental principles in the kingdom of Christ that are particularly worthy of notice.

1. That under the present dispensation, a church of Christ has the authority to appoint or ordain to ministerial offices.
2. That in the exercise of this authority, after seeking in prayer for special direction of the Lord, the appointment or ordination, should be by the casting of votes by the members.
3. That there is no privileged order of men, whose action is required to give validity to appointments or ordinations to ministerial offices because the churches are clothed with the appointing or ordaining power.

That these principles are developed in the above case, is, I think, evident from its facts. Peter does not address his brother apostles *only* in the proposal to ordain the twelfth apostle, but the body of the disciples, *the church*. They approve the proposal, they unite in the prayer and in the casting of the votes. The act is the act of the body. The apostles and the disciples all unite in it. This first act of the church unfolds in her incipency, the independent, democratical, Christocratic form of her government. In this act, we learn too, the obedience which was rendered to apostolic authority. Peter instructs the disciples in their duty, and they obey, promptly obey. Here, then, we have an important pattern set, to which all churches of Christ should conform.

The principle, authority, and manner of appointments to ministerial office being thus settled, I proceed in our historical enquiry to other parts of the Acts, which speak of evangelists, or preachers of the gospel, and bishops. Stephen, "full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people," which arrayed against him a host of opponents, "but they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." Called before the Jewish council, he delivered a noble discourse in its presence, for which he was stoned and then "fell asleep" in Jesus. By reason of "the great persecution of the church at Jerusalem, the disciples were scattered abroad, except the apostles. Therefore they that were scattered abroad, went everywhere preaching the word." Of these, Philip went down to Samaria, preaching the word and baptizing believers. Others traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word unto none but unto the Jews only. But some of them spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned

unto the Lord. Acts xi: 19, 21. We read also in the ninth chapter of Acts, of Saul of Tarsus receiving his sight and the Holy Ghost, by the imposition of the hands of Ananias, and that after his baptism he was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God. "Barnabas, too, a son of consolation, was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith; and much people was added unto the Lord." "Apollos was an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures, and being fervent in the Spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord." Timotheus was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him. This youth was a preacher, an evangelist. Titus, Paul's own son after the common faith, was also a preacher of that faith. Now who ordained these men, and where, and what were the accompanying circumstances of their designation to their ministerial office? No other answer can be satisfactorily given to these enquiries, I apprehend, than that, with the exception of Apollos, they were ordained by the churches with which they were associated, according to the pattern shewn in the ordination of Matthias. That is, that these churches, hearing these brethren exercise their gifts, were satisfied of their piety and qualifications for office, and seeking direction of the Lord in prayer, recognized them as his ministering servants. If in this way they were not recognized, I should be much pleased to know the manner in which it was done. Paul was after his baptism, certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus, and straightway preached Christ in the synagogues. Gladly did these disciples receive and recognize this apostle. Of Apollos we learn that he was received by Aquila and Priscilla, and Paul, and the Corinthians. But of what church he was a member, or in what manner he was inducted into the ministry, we have no knowledge. One thing is certain, that in relation to the appointment of any of these men to the ministry of the word by any human authority, we have no specific information. I take for granted, therefore, that the principle, authority, and manner, developed in the case of Matthias, obtained in the other cases mentioned above, with the exception of Apollos, concerning whose introduction into the ministry, as I have said before, we have no certain information, and concerning which, therefore, I cannot speak with any certainty.

CHAPTER XIII

ORDINATION TO MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

CONTINUED.

I shall now, more particularly, examine the ordination of elders in the churches, by Paul and Barnabas, as related in the following words: "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord." Acts xiv: 23. If we here take

the word *ordained*, in its simple meaning, it is far from conveying the fact, that hands were laid on these elders. If we understand it in the primary sense of the original, *kirotonesantes*, *chosen with lifting of hands*, then imposition of hands is positively excluded. So that, if we cannot find authority elsewhere for such an act in the ordination of these elders, it is evident that no such act was employed in their ordination. The scripture says, that Paul and Barnabas ordained these elders, and uses the word that signifies, primarily, a choice by lifting up of hands, as a manner of voting. I am aware that this word is also used to signify an appointment to office without votes, as in Josephus: Ant. lib. 6 c. 4, §2. *Basileus upo ton Theon kirotonetheis*, A king appointed by God. But there is one fundamental rule in the interpretation of words, which must be kept in mind. This is, that the primary meaning should be retained, unless the context or circumstances show, that a secondary meaning should be used. The primary meaning of the word in question, is to *elect by suffrages*, indicated by the lifting up of hands. Let us now inquire into the circumstances attending the ordination of these elders, to ascertain whether the primary or secondary meaning should be used. Paul and Barnabas, as the plenipotentiaries of Christ, made a tour through the churches by divine appointment. As the churches were without elders, one part of their duty was to appoint such officers for them. These officers were to possess certain qualifications, as follows: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, and greedy of filthy lucre, but patient; not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his child in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how, shall he take care of the church of God?) not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without, lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil." 1 Tim. iii: 2-7.

Of the men that possessed these qualifications, these apostles were ignorant, since only those, among whom they lived, could with certainty, know them. On the arrival of Paul and Barnabas at the church, they would of course, (Paul more especially, as on him came the care of all the churches,) act as moderators or presiding officers. They would, then, teach the church the duty of having elders or bishops, (as the terms are synonymous,) and pointing out the necessary qualifications, say to the brethren, "Present, from your numbers, such men as have these qualifications." This being done, they would propose their names for the approbation of the church, and ascertain it by their votes. Thus the original meaning of the term is preserved, whilst the whole transaction was conducted under the guidance and authority of Paul and Barnabas. So that it may be truly said by the historian, these men "ordained elders in every church." When, too, a derivative of this same verb, *kirotonetheis*, is used in 2 Cor. viii: 19, in precisely this

sense, I cannot see that the context or circumstances show that the secondary meaning of appointment without votes is to be received, and the primary, which requires votes, should be rejected. The derivation to which I have just referred, is found in the following verse: "Who was also chosen, *kirotonetheis*, of the churches to travel with us with this grace." This choice was assuredly a popular one, made by the votes of the churches. Thus, in using scripture to explain scripture, it seems satisfactorily clear, that the ordination of the elders was attended with the approbation of the churches. One thing is certain in the ordination of these elders, which is, that they were not first appointed or chosen, and then ordained sometime afterwards, as is the present practice. But that the whole transaction was done at one time.

I am strengthened in the view of the subject given above, by the circumstances attending the ordination of Matthias to the apostleship. In that case it is evident, that his ordination was by the votes of the church, and without any imposition of hands. Now since we have but one faith, that is, one system of principle and practice, the same revelation made to Peter was given to Paul, and therefore the historian uses the word *kirotonesantes*, to indicate the exercise of the popular voice in the ordination of the elders by Paul and Barnabas, as the same voice had been exercised in the ordination of Matthias.

But, admitting that Paul and Barnabas did appoint the elders, irrespective of the popular voice in the churches, I cannot see that any argument can be urged from the fact, in support of the usage which now obtains of having ministers of the gospel to come, at the call of a church, to appoint by the laying on of their hands, their elders for them, or to appoint evangelists to their work. The churches, through which Paul and Barnabas traveled, did not first choose their elders, and then send for these men to ordain them. But these men went through the churches without such call, and whether they ordained the elders with, or without the votes of the members, they did it *authoritatively*. How unlike their example is the present order of things with us.

A church first tries and approves a member for an office, and then chooses him. A time is appointed for his ordination, and ministers are invited to attend for the purpose, who, on their arrival, form an ecclesiastical council, and proceed to interrogate the candidate as to his conversion, faith, and call to the ministry. Satisfied of his fitness for ordination, they proceed to the act by the imposition of hands, and other services. Now surely the example for this is not found in the scripture.

That the ordination of elders in the churches by Paul and Barnabas, was *authoritatively* done, will not, I suppose, be questioned by any one. But this fact does not show that ministers of the gospel, *as such*, are now vested with the like authority; and for this obvious reason, that no ministers since the apostles days, have been clothed with the power with which *they* were

invested. They were plenipotentiaries of Christ, entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven on earth. They opened its treasures, they delivered its laws, they established its ordinances. Since their day, we have no such characters; and the action of the first church at Jerusalem clearly shows, that the divinely inspired apostles taught the churches their duty, and saw that they did it, as did Paul and Barnabas. And now the churches themselves, by their own act, are to ordain their elders and should always accompany the solemn act with fasting and prayer; as the sole power of ordaining to the pastorate, or bishopric, is lodged with the churches. There can be no objection to the presence of bishops or evangelists, when such men are ordained, or to their affording assistance to the churches in their choice, but the discrimination should be carefully made between assistance and power or authority. Let this be done, and our ecclesiastical councils, convened to ordain ministers, unknown to the scriptures, would become unknown to us.

Paul directed Titus to "ordain elders in every city." The manner in which Paul ordained the elders in the churches that he visited, was the manner in which, doubtless, Titus was to perform the same service in Crete. What, therefore, has been said concerning the ordination of elders by Paul, applies to the ordination of elders by Titus. With regard to Titus, it is to be particularly observed, that he was not sent for by the churches of Crete, but went there as Paul's agent, his accredited herald; and, therefore, what he did, was as though Paul had done it. Now, if the authority which Paul had, died with *him*, surely the authority of Titus must have ceased with *his agency*. And, if Paul, as Christ's ambassador, had no successor, surely Titus, as Paul's agent, could have none.

The churches of Crete did not first choose their elders, and then send for Titus to come and ordain them. Nor did Paul, after such choice was made, send Titus to invest them with pastoral authority. The ordination of the elders in Crete, too, was all attended to at one time, as had been the case in the churches that Paul visited. In the case of Titus, then, though an ordinary minister of the gospel, no example is furnished to ordinary ministers since that time, for the exercise of authority in the ordination of elders; because, what Titus did in the ordination of elders in Crete, was not done as an ordinary minister, but as the agent of an ambassador or plenipotentiary.

CHAPTER XIV ORDINATION TO MINISTERIAL OFFICE. CONTINUED.

I proceed, now, to the examination of the following scriptures: "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch, certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As

they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work where unto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." Acts xiii: 1-3. This transaction took place in the year 45, twelve years after Barnabas became a preacher of the gospel, and ten years after Paul became an apostle. By consulting the dates, as computed in the larger Bibles, it will be seen, that Barnabas was a member of the church at Jerusalem in the year thirty-three; that he was then called "a son of consolation;" that according to the record in the 11th chapter of Acts, he was sent in the year 41 by the church to Antioch, and that "when he came, and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and exhorted them all, that with full purpose of heart, they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and *full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith*: and much people was added unto the Lord."

It will be found, too, that in the year 35, Paul was visited by Ananias, who, "putting his hands on him, said, brother Saul, the Lord (even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest,) hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be *filled with the Holy Ghost and straight-way he preached Christ in the synagogues*, that he is the Son of God." Acts ix: 17, 20. The setting apart, then, of these men, as above, could not have been to the ministry of the word, or to the apostleship; for the one was a preacher, "full of the Holy Ghost and faith," and the other "an apostle," long before hands were laid on them at Antioch. But on the supposition that these men were licentiates merely, the one for twelve years, and the other for ten, and that their ordination took place at Antioch, how long should men of these days be licentiates before *they are ordained*? The truth is, these distinguished men were ordained to the ministry of the word, long ere this period, as before shewn. But there was an important work, to the performance of which they were set apart, under the teaching of the Spirit, by the prophets and teachers at Antioch. And this work consisted in visiting the churches for their confirmation in the faith, and for the ordination of elders, and preaching the gospel, as opportunity offered, to the gentiles. And when they had fulfilled the work for which they were thus set apart, they returned to Antioch, and "gathering the church together, rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened *the door of faith to the gentiles*." Thus it is evident, that the transaction at Antioch, in the setting apart of Paul and Barnabas, furnishes no example or authority for the ordination of men to the ministerial office by imposition of hands.

The appointment of the "seven men" by the Apostles, to superintend "the daily ministration," is worthy of particular attention, because it has been thought to furnish an unequivocal example of joint action between the ministry and the membership of a church, in the ordination of church officers. This action is thus recorded: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a nurturing of the Grecians against the

Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, *full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." Acts vi: 1-4.

The number of the disciples had increased at this time to a multitude, numbering five thousand at the least, and the liberality of the rich was so great, that "they sold their houses and possessions, and laid the money at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to every man as he had need." By this means, a considerable amount of money came into the hands of these men, the management of which required *some* skill and *much* time, as the distribution was made daily. It will now be remembered, that the church had not yet received either bishops or deacons, but that the apostles presided over all her interests, spiritual and temporal. In their attempt to distribute the alms of the faithful, they failed, and a murmuring arose on the part of the Grecians, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. In this extremity, they desired the disciples to look out "seven men of honest report, *full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*," whom they might set over that business. The disciples did so, and the character of the men selected and appointed to the service, gives proof of its difficulty and of the high capacity which was required for its faithful performance. Of two of them we have a deeply interesting account—Stephen and Philip. "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people," and after a noble discourse before the council, died a martyr to the truth. Philip, after the disciples were scattered abroad from Jerusalem, "went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them, and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. And when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

The qualifications of these men were of a very high order, and were possessed previous to their being set before the apostles, and the laying of their hands on them; for they were not only to be of honest report, but *full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*. This fact shews the very great importance of the service over which they were set. That this service was not the ordinary service of the church, is evident from the fact, that the occasion which rendered it necessary, was an extraordinary one. Such an one is not recorded as having taken place in any other church. It was confined to the church at Jerusalem, and was not even obligatory in that church. Hence it follows, that neither the occasion, nor the men appointed to meet its exigency, affords an example or pattern for the imposition of hands by ministers in the ordination of men to the ministry of the word, or to any other office in the churches.

The case of Timothy, recorded in the epistles written to him by Paul, now invites our attention. "Neglect not the gift that is in thee," saith Paul "which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the *gift of God* which is *in* thee by the putting on of my hands." 1 Tim iv: 14; 2 Tim. i: 6. It will here be remembered, that in the first of his letter, Paul says, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare." 2 Tim. i: 18. Taking these scriptures together, we learn, that predictions of a most favorable character had indicated the future usefulness and distinction of this young man, especially that he *should receive a gift of the Holy Ghost*; all which was fulfilled. That gifts were imparted by the laying on of the hands of the apostles is evident from the following scripture: "Now, when the apostles which were at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. Then laid they their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost." Acts viii: 14, 15, 17. The presbytery in this case, consisted of two apostles, but in laying their hands on the Samaritan believers to impart the Holy Ghost, we have no account that they also ordained them to any ministerial office. Who constituted the presbytery, with Paul, when by laying on of hands a gift was imparted to Timothy, we are not informed; but of this one thing we are certain, that *one* of its members was an *apostle*, and from the example in the case of the Samaritan believers, who received the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands, by *apostles only*, it is evident that those whom Paul associated with him in *his* presbytery, were *none other than apostles*. Surely then, this case affords no example in favor of ordination to ministerial office, whether of bishop, evangelist, or deacon, by the imposition of hands on the part of ministers or others, much less by the imposition of the hands of ordinary ministers. This is the more apparent from the fact that, as we have already shewn, neither in the ordination of the apostles, the seventy, Matthias, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Paul, Apollos, Timothy, Titus, or any of the rest of the disciples, who went everywhere preaching the word, or in the ordination of the elders, was imposition of hands used. Let it be further remarked, that the gift of Timothy was in him, and not *official*, which would be exterior to him.

This leads me to speak of the following direction to Timothy, "Lay hands suddenly on no man." 1 Tim. v: 22. This general direction has no *absolute* meaning. It is only, as hands may be laid on for good or evil for war or peace, carnally or spiritually, officially or otherwise. To determine its *relative* import, we must know the subject to which it refers. Let us then attend to its connection in this place: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angel, that thou observe these things, without preferring one

before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." 1 Tim. v: 19-22. Now, if the meaning of the direction, "Lay hands suddenly on no man," be determined by the connection in which it is found, is it not obvious from the connection in which we find it here, that it relates to the administration of affairs in the church at Ephesus? and, that it was intended to teach Timothy not to be precipitate in his measures in that church? Observe, that he must not entertain an accusation against an elder but upon due consideration, on the testimony of two or three witnesses. All that he did must be done, not upon hasty impressions, but deliberately, and on just grounds; that he should not be a partaker of other men's sins, but preserve himself pure, by not being misled by others, or hastily doing what was committed to his hands. Again, if imposition of hands be necessary in ordination to the ministry, it would seem that it would have been mentioned in the third chapter of the epistle, where the qualifications of church officers are laid down. But as it is not, and there is not a solitary case in the New Testament of ordination to the ministry by imposition of hands, I cannot suppose that the direction of Paul to Timothy, to "lay hands suddenly on no man," does refer to imposition of hands in ordination to the ministry of the word.

If my exposition of the above passages be correct, it will appear that they contain no example or authority for the imposition of hands in ordination to the ministry of the word or in any office in the churches. The remaining argument on the subject will be drawn from the form of government under which Christ has placed the churches, and will be found in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XV ORDINATION TO MINISTERIAL OFFICE. CONCLUDED.

The last argument that I shall use on the subject of ordination, is derived from the form of government instituted by Christ for his churches. This is the independent, democratical form, as has been already shewn, having the Lord Jesus as their only Head. Each church is, therefore, vested with entire control over all her own affairs, subject to him alone. The authority thus given, is delegated, and not transferable; consequently, no individual, or body of individuals, may exercise official authority in or over any church of Christ of which such individual or body is not a member, without special command from the Lord Jesus. And this arises from the nature of the government which he has instituted.

Now one of the inherent, inalienable rights of an independent government, is the appointment of its own officers. Each church of course, as an independent body, possesses the right, and may not surrender it, except by the command of her Lord. And I rejoice that this principle is firmly held by the denomination to which I have the honor to belong. But along with this

principle, a distinction is admitted between *appointment to office* and *ordination to office*. The first is conceded to each church, but the last is claimed for the ministers of the gospel, as *such*, the presence and imposition of whose hands are believed to be necessary to give validity to the appointment of the church. The necessary consequence of this distinction is, to make a church dependent for her officers on the ministers of the gospel, as a privileged order of men. Now I most respectfully submit whether such a principle and practice do not violate the independence of the churches. And I further submit, whether we should not have a command or an example most clear and unequivocal, for the adoption of a principle and practice, which most obviously violate the principles of a government that the Head of the church has established.

I have shewn, I think, in a former part of this work, that the distinction between *appointment to office* and *ordination to office* has no foundation in the scriptures. If I have been successful in doing so, then we must have ministers to appoint to ministerial office, or have the churches to ordain to such office. To the first, our churches will never, I trust, be brought to consent. To the practice of the last, however, I hope that they will attain by the teachings of the New Testament; so that the choice of officers, their appointment, ordination, or investiture with official authority, shall all be done by the church, without imposition of hands, but with fasting and prayer. And allow me to ask why a church of Christ may not be trusted with this whole matter? Is not a church of Christ "God's husbandry, God's building?" Is she not composed of "lively stones, built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ?" Is she not "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that she should shew forth the praises of him who hath called her out of darkness into his marvelous light?" Is it not said in the scriptures, that the "body of the believer is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that he dwells in it?" And what is a church but a company of those whose bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost? With the inspired volume then in their hands, and the Holy Ghost dwelling in their bodies, is not such a company competent to select, to ordain their own officers? What a reflection upon the great Head of the church, to suppose that such a company, a part of his own body, is not competent to ordain its own officers!

But it may still be said, that the ordination of ministers can be better done by those who have been already inducted into the sacred office. If so, surely he who is infinite in wisdom, would not have failed to perceive it, and to have given commandment accordingly. But as he has not done so, we ought to question the correctness of any opinion contrary to his order of things.

Again, it may be thought, that the part which ministers, according to the present practice, bear in ordination to the ministry, is necessary to ministerial fellowship. But really I do not see that this is taught in "the law and the testimony." Fellowship between christians is produced by the evidence which each affords to the other of his relation to Jesus Christ. Upon the

same principle is it that ministerial fellowship is produced. He who professes to be a minister of Christ Jesus, gives in the qualifications he possesses, the evidence of his call to the ministry to the church of which he is a member. The church, satisfied with the evidence, recognizes the gift which Christ has given, and receives its possessor as a minister of Jesus Christ. The certificate of this from the church, is his introduction to others, on whom then lies the same amount of obligation to receive him as a minister, as can arise from his ordination by brother ministers.

The only passage of scripture that has any bearing on this subject, is the following: "When James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." Gal. ii: 9. Surely this does not refer to their fellowship as apostles, ministers, or christians, but to the specific lines of service in which they were respectively to engage; Peter, James and John, to go to the circumcision, and Paul and Barnabas to the uncircumcision, the heathen. Much less can it relate to ministerial ordination by which ministerial fellowship was acquired. And yet we have drawn the practice of giving the right hand of fellowship not only into ordination, but into the receiving of members into church-fellowship, and messengers from sister associations, thus applying it to purposes not known to the New Testament.

CHAPTER XVI ON THE DISCIPLINE OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

— 2 TIMOTHY III:16, 17.

Discipline, in its comprehensive and proper sense, imports the whole course of instruction appointed by the master for the improvement of the disciple or scholar, and the means necessary for enforcing that instruction. The subject matter of instruction communicated by the great Master and Teacher, is contained in the scriptures of inspiration. An important department of the means of enforcing this instruction is committed to the churches, and to be employed in *their* government and order; the particulars of which may be summarily comprehended in the following statement: *The official meeting of the members of each church stately on every Lord's day; the performance of the duties enjoined upon them in their assembled character; the supervision of the bishops, and their instruction to the members individually and collectively; the faithful discharge of the duties of the*

members to each other; the like faithful discharge of the duties of the deacons or servants of the church; and the exclusion of the disorderly from membership, with the restoration of such as become penitent. All that is necessary for the faithful and profitable carrying out of this discipline, is contained in the scriptures. Seeing that it is profitable for doctrine, *dedaskalia*, as containing a complete system of principles and duties for both teachers and learners; for reproof, *elenchon*, as administering a salutary demonstration of errors opposed to the truth as it is in Jesus; for correction, *epanorthosin*, as giving a right direction to the life and conduct; for correction in righteousness, *paidesan tene en dikaiosune*, as training up the disciple in a course of righteous action; "that the man of God," whether private christian, evangelist, bishop, or deacon, "may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good words."

Of the several particulars mentioned above, I have already treated, with the exception of the exclusion of disorderly members, and the restoration of such as become penitent. The general direction on the subject of exclusion, is given in the following scripture: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." 2 Thess. iii: 6. It appears from this language, that a church of Christ is not a judicial court for the trial of offenders, with authority to inflict pains and penalties upon the guilty, but a voluntary society with instructions to keep itself pure from the pollutions of the unworthy.

There are two classes of offences which require the exclusion of the offenders. The first is noticed by the Saviour. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Matt. xviii: 15-17. The second class embraces those that are more public violations of the rule of conduct prescribed, in the scriptures, and are thus stated by Paul "Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Gal. v: 19-21. That those who will not hear the church, after the faithful but unsuccessful private efforts for reclaiming them, which the Saviour directs, should be separated from the membership of the church, is as obviously right, as it is that those who are guilty of the sins enumerated by the apostle, should be so separated. The exclusion of a delinquent by the church should be regarded by both as a solemn and awful measure, having for its object the recovery of the former from his error, and the firmer establishment of the latter in the ways of righteousness. When Paul directed the

Corinthian church to put away the incestuous man, it was that the spirit should be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. When, therefore, he heard of his penitence, forgiveness, and restoration to the church, he rejoiced at the good done both to the delinquent and to the church.

In cases of honest difference of opinion affecting membership, between a church and one or more of its members, whilst there should exist no charge of immorality against them, a dissolution of their membership may be allowed without censure; and hence, as some such cases may occur, it is desirable that we should have an additional column in our statistical tables, with the term *separated* at its head, as contradistinguished from the columns with the terms *dismissed* and *excluded* at their head, for the purpose of inserting the number of those who have been allowed to leave the church without censure, on account of honest difference of opinion, or some other reason.

In relation to this part of the discipline of a church, (the exclusion of disorderly members,) it is important to understand, that a proper attention to its exercise is indispensable to the welfare of the body. And further, that by the faithful, vigilant supervision of the rulers of the church and the duty of the members, the necessity of its exercise may be, as far as possible, prevented. Deviations from the path of duty, are, at first, slight, but their natural tendency is to increase with rapidity, and to affect others; for “evil communications corrupt good manners;” hence the duty of faithfully attending to the following commands: “Thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbor and not suffer sin upon him.” “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him.” “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.” “Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” In the exercise of such brotherly supervision, delinquencies would be prevented, spiritual strength invigorated, and brotherly love increased and continued.

CHAPTER XVII ON THE DUTY AND MODE OF SENDING THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE.

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

—MARK XVI: 15.

The commission to “the eleven” requires that the gospel shall be preached in all the world, and to every creature. But the apostles could not live always, and therefore could not personally obey the command to its

fullest extent. Evangelists were, therefore, among the gifts which the Saviour obtained from his Father, that the commission should be fulfilled to its largest extent. These were employed in preaching the gospel whilst the apostles lived, and have been since their days, zealously engaged in the same great work. Philip, Timothy, and a host of others "went everywhere preaching the word." Others were to be brought into it also; "faithful men, who should be able to teach others also." For these laborers in the vineyard of their Master, a support is required. "For the laborer is worthy of his hire." "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they that preach the gospel shall live of the gospel." For "who goeth a warfare at his own charges?" And from whom is this support to come? From the enemies of the gospel, or from its friends? From its friends truly. Whilst then it is the duty of the evangelist to preach, it is the duty of the churches to support the evangelist in the work. Paul received support from the churches, as we learn from the following scriptures: "Now ye Philippians know, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me, as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica, ye sent once and again into my necessity. Not because I desire a gift; but because I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all and abound; I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God." Phil. iv: 15–18. "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service." 2 Cor. xi: 8. From these teachings and examples, it is evident that the churches should support the preachers of the gospel, and even when they are engaged in the work in places from whence the support does not come.

The money or support which Paul received, was sent by Epaphroditus, the messenger or agent of the Philippians. The plan of an agency, thus adopted by the church at Philippi, was also adopted by other churches, when contributions for the poor saints were raised and sent to their relief. Paul says to the Corinthians, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem." Such agency was also employed by the churches of Macedonia, of whom the apostle makes this honorable mention: "That in a great trial of their affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty, that we would receive the gifts and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." 2 Cor. viii: 2–4. Titus was associated with Paul in the agency to the Corinthians, and seems, from the following scripture, to have been first engaged in it: "We desired Titus, that, as he had *begun*, so he would *finish* in you the same grace also."

The apostle further says, “we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; and not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us.” 2 Cor. viii: 18, 19. And not only were agents sent with the liberality of the churches to the destined point and the suffering disciples, but they were also sent to stir up the churches to liberal contributions, and to have them ready by the proper time. For says Paul, “I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they should go before unto you, and make up before hand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.”

We thus see very clearly and satisfactorily the example of the appointment of agents by churches, in the collection and application of money for benevolent objects, in cases where one church cannot so well attend to the matter. And hence arises, in the true spirit of the gospel, the appointment of agents by the churches of the present day, for collecting money for missionary, Bible, theological and other benevolent objects, and of taking the amounts so collected to some common organization, such as a missionary, Bible, theological convention, society, or board, for their right application.

In the effort to sustain missionaries, and to provide them with the appliances necessary for the great work of preaching the gospel to the heathen and the destitute, single churches would fail, and so would fail similar efforts to translate and print the Bible, and to sustain theological institutions. But by the combination of many churches, through their fiscal agents, such efforts would be successful. Hence, as the genuine fruits of the gospel, we have now so many well directed efforts in benevolent christian *arrangements* for sending the living teacher with the written word to evangelize the world.

CHAPTER XVIII ON THE DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

— PAUL.

I purpose now to shew, that the faithful observance of the government and order of the churches of Christ, *will* develop the gospel. But before I enter upon this part of the subject, I shall present the following statement of the condition of things in the moral government of God, which the gospel is designed to affect, and then give a general view of the gospel scheme for accomplishing the end proposed.

The Creator and moral Governor of the universe, subsists in the social state. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit constitute a society of the most pure, holy and noble character. We, the creatures of the divine power, are made for the social state also; and are, therefore, endowed with those

properties of body and of mind, which preeminently fit us for such a state of existence. For the right exercise of these powers, and for the preservation of the social intercourse between our Creator and us, he has established certain fixed relations. From these relations arise certain obligations, and these obligations imperatively require the performance of certain duties,—duties which call into requisition all our energies.

From this order of things proceed the two fundamental laws of the divine government, thus promulgated by the Lord Jesus Christ: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The obligation to obey these commandments manifestly arises from the relations stated above; and whilst these relations are sustained, these commandments will be obeyed, and happiness will be the result. But a disturbance of these relations will inevitably derange the moral system, and disobedience to these commandments will follow as a matter of course. Such disobedience is sin, for “sin is the transgression of the law.” And such transgression will necessarily produce misery. For “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,” *and naught else*.

The relation between God and us, is the relation of the creature to the creator, of the subject to the ruler; and hence comes the right of supreme control on the part of God, and the duty of implicit submission on the part of man. But we have withheld this submission. We have refused to obey the commands of God, our Maker, and thus given clear proof that we do not love him *supremely*. It is evident, then, that we have disturbed the relation between God and us.

The relation between ourselves, is the relation of creatures, the descendants of a common parent; and, therefore, we are under obligation to love one another, as we love ourselves, and as is required in the second commandment. But instead of *thus* loving *one* another, we are “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, *living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another*.” We have, then, disturbed the relations between ourselves also.

The relation existing between all holy intelligences and us, is the relation of subjects of the same Creator and moral Governor, placed under the same fundamental laws as stated above. The disobedience to these laws, which has disturbed the relations between God and us, and between ourselves, has necessarily disturbed the relation between these holy intelligences and us.

In thus disturbing these great relations, which lie at the foundation of all righteous authority, and obedience; of the social state; of order and of happiness; the awful consequences of insubordination, disorder, and wretchedness have come in upon our world, as a desolating flood. To whom shall we look for relief in this exigency? To whom but to Him who is the founder of

the relations that have been disturbed, and who only can readjust them, that in their reestablishment by His gracious interposition, we may obtain the removal of existing disorders. And blessed be His holy name, we shall not look in vain. For He has laid help upon one that is mighty; even Christ the righteous, who is God over all, blessed forever more.

It is evident from what has been said, that the disturbance of the relations between God and us has involved our whole race in infinite guilt. It is equally evident that, having violated an infinite law, the penalty of whose violation is everlasting banishment from the presence of God and the glory of his power, we cannot now remove the penalty by our imperfect obedience to the law, neither can we endure and survive the penalty. It is impossible, therefore, for us to readjust the disturbed relations. But in the gospel of our Lord Jesus, our heavenly Father has made ample provision to meet the exigency of the case. *He has so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* For he sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. For this purpose, *when the fulness of time was come, he sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* Being made under the law, he became subject to its requirements, and having rendered a perfect obedience to them all, he suffered the penalty on the cross, was buried, and rose again triumphantly from the grave. In his obedience and suffering, his death and resurrection, he magnified the law and made it honorable, and became its “end for righteousness to every one that believeth.” He who knew no sin was made a sin offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And hence, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

The Saviour has thus readjusted the relations which we had disturbed. And therefore, “when he ascended up on high he received gifts for men, yea for the most rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” “He is now at the Father’s right hand, as the advocate and intercessor of his people. He “is exalted as a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel and redemption of sins.” *It hath pleased the Father*, that in him should all fulness dwell, and that of his fulness we all should receive, and grace for grace.” The most ample provision has been made for the return of sinners to God, in the exercises of penitence and faith, of love and obedience, of self-denial and holiness. The divine Spirit has descended, as the fruit of the Saviour’s mission and the gift of God, to regenerate and sanctify by the truth of God, which is his word, the hearts of returning sinners, and to make their bodies the temples of his abode. And through this gracious provision every sinner is invited to come back to his offended God, to have the most endearing and permanent *relations* reestablished between himself and his God, and the whole moral system. And just in proportion as sinners accept this invitation, and return to their allegiance to the Creator and moral Governor of the universe, through the gospel plan, will all

the disturbed relations between our world and its Maker, between ourselves, and between all holy intelligences and us be readjusted. These are the good tidings which the gospel reveals, good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for the gospel shall be published in all lands, and “every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” And “in the dispensation of the fulness of time, he will gather together in *one* all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him.”

When the disturbed relations were readjusted by our Lord Jesus Christ, the way was open for the reconstruction of the social state, for which man was originally created. Hence, immediately after the Saviour’s ascension, a church was formed at Jerusalem, and wherever the gospel was preached and sinners were converted and baptized, they were formed in churches, embracing in their membership those who resided within convenient limits. In these holy societies, principles the most pure and elevated were inculcated, truths the most sublime taught, characters the most distinguished held up for imitation,—characters *of whom the world was not worthy*. Above all, the spotless example of the meek and lowly Jesus was presented as the *perfect pattern*, to which all were to look and all were to be conformed. In such communities, trained by the teachings and living under the influences of their Head, the most spiritual and noble society should be found. There should personal holiness thrive. There should zeal glow with unabated ardor. There should efforts worthy of the cause in which they are engaged, originate and be carried on with liberality and perseverance. It is manifest, then, that the churches of Christ are charged with an important agency in carrying on the purposes of God to final triumph; and that, in fulfilling the duties of this honored agency, they will develop the glorious gospel of the Son of God. But it is equally evident, that the right fulfillment of this agency for developing the gospel, must depend, under God, upon a faithful observance of the form of government and the order of duty which their prophet and king, the Lord Jesus, has commanded to his churches. My object will then be, in the succeeding part of this work, to shew that the gospel will be developed by the churches, in the faithful observance of that government and order which Christ has instituted for them.

CHAPTER XIX

FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND ORDER AUTHORITATIVELY TAUGHT IN THE SCRIPTURES.

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

—ISAIAH VIII:20

I am now about to point out the adaptation of the government and order instituted by Christ for his churches, in the observance of which his gospel will be developed. Preparatory to this, however, I shall assign some reasons for believing, that he has authoritatively enacted *one* form of government, and *one* order of duties for their adoption and practice.

One prominent object of the gospel revelation, is, as we have seen, to reconcile all things to God, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. Hence the exhortation: “Endeavoring to keep the *unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*; which is urged upon the ground, that “there is *one* body, and *one* Spirit, even as ye are called in *one* hope of your calling; *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” One faith, that is, *one system of faith*, as the perfect standard of doctrine and duty, of principles and practice, to which all are to be conformed. And not different systems or standards, modified to suit the various and opposite notions, views and preferences of imperfect, misjudging minds. And as we have seen that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,” we must come to this scripture as the supreme authority.

Now it is evident, that the perfection of Christian character contemplated in the social state, requires, from the constitution of our nature, the establishment and observance of an authorized form of government, and of certain modes of worship, to the conception and enactment of which no sinful, uninspired man is competent. It is the prerogative of Him only, who knows what is in man, and whose “kingdom is not of this world,” to appoint these modes, these forms, and to give them their *authority*. Under the former dispensation, all the forms of worship for the congregation of Israel, were instituted by Jehovah, and given to Moses with special order that “all things should be done according to the pattern shewn in the mount.” Under the present dispensation, all the modes and forms of worship for the churches of the saints, were ordained by our Lord Jesus and given to his apostles, with the like command, to teach them to his disciples. Of these holy, inspired men, Paul was selected to present the system of the gospel with greater clearness and to delineate the order of the churches with greater fulness than the other apostles. And for this reason, we are to consult *his* writings more particularly for a knowledge of the order of the churches.

That all these arrangements should be committed to men, to whom the spirit of inspiration was given, was indispensable to their certainty and their authority. For how could Jew or gentile, or both together, devise the order of the churches, by which the *truth* should be developed, or the *glory* of its author promoted? The Jew, attached to the rite of circumcision, the synagogue worship, the authority of the Sanhedrin, and the whole order of the

Levitical economy, would have very naturally preferred a continuance of his system of carnal ordinances, as far as would be practicable, as is evident from the acts of the apostles and their epistles. The gentile, on the contrary, devoted to the ceremonies and sacrifices of the heathen worship, would have urged a translation of these into the service of Christ. In the union of the Jewish and gentile converts in one church, then, there was no prospect in human view of an agreement upon the modes of worship in which they should engage, "with one heart and one soul." The union of all his people, for which Christ so earnestly prayed, could not, in such a state of things, be secured. And the exhortation of the apostle to be of *one* mind, to speak the *same* thing, would have been nugatory. If it be admitted that the members of the first churches could have settled down upon a given order, as the result of mutual agreement, such order would have had no authority over succeeding churches. Hence, in the progress of the churches through consecutive ages, similar difficulties would have been ever recurring. Hence, then, the absolute necessity of an authoritative order of government and service in the churches of Christ; and hence the command to the apostles, "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" Hence the language of Paul to the Corinthians, "wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved brother, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways, which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church." Paul was solicitous to have his Corinthian brethren imitators of him, as far as he followed Christ, and therefore sent Timothy to strengthen their memories, and wrote down in his epistle to them, the ways that he had taught them, that they might the better remember them, and that, as a part of the scripture, they might be handed down to all succeeding churches, for *their* observance. Under this authority, the ordinances that he taught them were delivered as they were received from Christ, and hence they were obligatory, not only upon the Corinthians, but also upon *all* churches of Christ, as a part of the law and the testimony, the standard of their faith and practice. Even with the care which the apostle has taken to make the government and order of the churches plain, and to clothe them with the authority of his Lord, what awful mistakes have been made by those who have professed allegiance to his authority, as is manifest in the various forms of church order that have been set up in the world. And if we had no first principles, firmly established in the gospel of the Redeemer, we should despair of seeing on this earth the union of his disciples, in answer to his prayer. But blessed be God, we have these, and if by his grace we will go back to them, and bring them up in their right application, we need not despair of such union. For if God is pleased to make a communication to us in human language, we will be able so to understand it as to know what is required at our hands, or the communication would be of no avail.

It may be laid down as an incontrovertible position, that an intelligent being, in determining upon the pursuit of an object, will adopt the best plan within his power, for its accomplishment. Jehovah is an intelligent being, with an understanding that is infinite. He has determined to accomplish the noblest object in the universe. *It is his own glory.* The plan for its accomplishment must necessarily be the best, for his understanding is infinite. This plan embraces a course of instrumentality reaching through all time. Since the ascent of Christ to his Father's courts, the administration of the affairs of his kingdom on earth, is committed more immediately to the Holy Spirit. This spiritual being was poured out on the day of Pentecost, on the apostles, in such effusion that they were baptized in him, immersed, overwhelmed in him. Thenceforth, he became their infallible guide in the execution of the commission received from their Lord, the Christ. This guide, says the Saviour, "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." The apostles could not fail then to remember, and teach every iota of doctrine and duty, of principle and practice which the Prophet and King of his church requires them to receive and do, to believe and perform: Hence the obligation on believers to study and know all that is taught by the apostles in the New Testament appertaining to their duty.

Every observant mind knows the indispensable necessity of a minute attention to the smaller, even the minutest parts of a scheme, to secure the accomplishment of its end. For of what is any scheme composed but of its parts? If, then, the parts fail, the scheme fails. When God gave directions to Moses for the building of the tabernacle, he said, "see that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." And when Jesus Christ commissioned his apostles to declare *his* will in the rearing up of his church, was he less particular? Did he not say, "teaching them to observe *all things whatsoever* I have commanded you?" If this command was obligatory upon the apostles, so that they *must* teach *the all things*, is not the *duty* to observe *the all things* as obligatory upon those who are thus taught? "If ye love *me*, keep my commandments," says Jesus. The obligation to obedience is then imperative upon believers. And how any who profess to be believers can relieve themselves from this obligation, is not taught in the law of God. If the duty to obey the teachings of Christ be imperative, the duty of knowing these teachings is equally so. Ignorance, then, of these teachings where the means of knowledge is in our reach, is sin, is rebellion against the King in Zion, and necessarily draws after it guilt in proportion to the opportunity of acquiring the necessary knowledge.

The New Testament is comparatively a small book, and can be deliberately *read through* in two days' continuous reading. It will be practicable, then, to read this book through once a month with care, so that a comprehensive view of the whole may be obtained in that time. And if such a reading of this book was to be observed once a month, it would be read through twelve times in a year. And what an acquaintance with the commands of

Christ would be received in this period of time. And if to this frequency of reading this book, prayer, spiritual, fervent prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, be added, and if, when believers met, they would talk about what they had read, and assist each other in understanding it, and yet again, if they would faithfully obey the teachings of that book as fast as they learn them, who could calculate the amount of knowledge which they would acquire—knowledge, not speculative, but practical, spiritual, sanctifying—in one year? O! what a different aspect would the churches then present! What a moral power would they exert upon the world, for they would then be removed from the false position in which they now too generally appear, and occupy their right position.

CHAPTER XX

FORM OF GOVERNMENT ADAPTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOSPEL.

The form of government instituted by Christ for his churches, is, as we have seen, a Christocracy. By this term I mean that form of government of which Christ is the *head*, and under which he requires his people to receive *all* their principles of actions from, and to frame *all* their doings according to, his laws and precepts contained in the Bible. He is their prophet and their king, and his dominion over them is absolute, for they are not their own, but belong unconditionally to him. They are, therefore, gathered together in the church relation by his *sole authority*. Being baptized *into* Christ, they have put *on* Christ. They have renounced their devotion to the world, and their allegiance to satan. “They have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts,” and “sin shall not have dominion over them.” They have pledged themselves to submit to Christ’s authority, to obey his laws, and to promote his cause and glory in the world.

In this form of government, the wisest plan is laid for union among the members of a church. As there is but *one* “foundation” for their hope of salvation, so there is but “*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all.” All the members of a church of Christ meet as equals, for they are “fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of faith,” “where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” Whatever distinctions may exist between these members in society, (and distinctions *there* must necessarily exist,) they are not known in the church relation, for the members of this body are all *one* in Christ Jesus,” having equal rights and equal privileges. The Jew, on entering the church, claimed no preeminence over the Greek, and the Greek, in becoming a member of the same body despised not the Jew, but both harmoniously joined in the *one* faith to serve the *one* Lord. How gracious, how just, how wise the principle on

which the members of a church of Christ are gathered together. How admirably calculated to harmonize the materials of such a body brought together from different communities, nations and empires, and educated under systems of different and opposing principles and forms.

Now, to preserve the union of these materials, this first principle must ever be kept in view. That they are the subjects of *one* Master to be governed not by *their own opinions*, or by *the opinions of others*, but by the laws of Christ. In all their enquiries, their judgments, their acts, the question must not be, how *feelest* thou? how *thinkest* thou? but, how *readest* thou? They must bring their feelings, their thoughts “to the law and the testimony;” “to the scripture which is given by inspiration of God, and which is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Hence the duty of searching the scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation; and hence the inconsistency of studying other books to learn from *them* what the *scriptures* teach. If a citizen would know what the laws of his State require at his hands, he must study her constitution and the enactments of her legislature, not the writers on these points.

Keeping this first principle in view, that Christ is the *one* Lord of his people, and has given the revelation of his will in a complete and perfect code of laws and precepts, the impropriety of having any human selection and compilation of these, as a *standard of faith and practice*, is manifestly evident. If it be said that the compilation thus prepared contains what is in the Bible, the question comes up, why then form the compilation? Why not use *the Bible* as *the standard*? Can man present God’s System in a selection and compilation of some of its parts, better than God has himself done it, as a whole in his own book? Suppose the legislature should select portions of the constitution of the State and compile them into a book, and set it forth as the standard by which its laws should be made. Would the people allow it?

The manner in which divine truth is taught in the Bible, is not that frigid, dry manner which system makers adopt; but like its divine author, grand, striking, powerful. Is it respectful to the great Teacher, who spake as never man spake, to turn away from *his* teachings to *human* compilations, to learn from *them* what their common master has required them to learn from Him, *in his incomparable book, the Holy Bible*?

If union, then, is to be secured in the church it must be in *the truth as it is in Jesus*, in drawing from the *one* fountain of knowledge, drinking into the *same* spirit of grace, in habitually referring every thing to the *one* standard, “the law and the testimony.”

And that this may be effectively done, what is learnt from this standard must be reduced to practice. “Happy are ye, if ye know these things, *if ye do them*.” “Then shall we know, if we *follow* on to know the Lord.” “Ye are my friends, if ye do *whatsoever* I command you.” “If ye love *me* keep my

commandments.” “He that keepeth my commandments, *he* it is that loveth me.” The Lord has not given us his revelation to admire and approve in words, and then to neglect and disregard and trample it under our feet. But he has given it to us as the “more sure word of prophecy, to which we do well to take heed, as to a light that shineth in a dark place;” and to which implicit obedience is to be rendered.

In the government of a church thus formed by Christ, one is not the representative or delegate of another, for the principle of proxy in the church relation is abhorrent from its genius. Great responsibility thus rests upon *each* member of a church, a responsibility which cannot be shaken off. This responsibility may not be met, the duties which it imposes may be neglected; but the responsibility remains in all its force—it cannot be thrown off. And what a responsibility is this! The apostle says, “as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.” Such have voluntarily bound themselves to “observe *all things whatsoever* Christ has commanded them.” This responsibility requires obedience,—implicit obedience. Now knowledge is necessary to obedience, and hence the necessity of studying the scriptures to know the commands of Christ, that we may obey them.

A church of Christ, then, should be an intelligent, moral, spiritual community, maintaining intercourse with its Head, doing all things in obedience to his will and for his honor. Provided with a perfect code of laws for its government, and blessed with the presence and teaching of the Holy Spirit, such a body is an independent community of the highest rank on earth. Its members are to be living epistles of the truth, known and read of all men. Such a community is the representative of Christ on earth. According to the principle on which the Christocracy is formed, one church of Christ is not to take another as her “pattern.” She is not to enquire how another acts, in order to know how she should act. Nor is she to be deterred from acting in conformity with the “pattern” shewn by the apostles, because others are not conformed to that pattern. The value of the Christocratic form of government consists in this, that each acting in reference to Christ alone, all will be conformed to Christ, and thus conformed to each other. And this is the manner by which uniformity is to be secured and preserved, and not by confederations of churches, confessions of faith, or written codes or formularies framed by man, as bonds of union for the churches of Christ.

When a church is formed, the enquiry touching the order which she is to adopt, should not be, what are the usages of other churches? but, what are the laws and ordinances which Christ has appointed for the government of *his* churches? And if, in the adoption of these, there be a departure from the usages of other churches, the enquiry should not be, what will those churches think of such measures? but, are they right? are they taught in the word of God?

Another obvious advantage attending the Christocratic form of government is, that it frees the churches from the influence of mere human customs, and the authority of men. The history of our race develops a strong propensity in man to submit to the guidance of mere names, and to yield obedience to customs of mere human origin. Hence the power of the traditions of men. The principle on which the government of the churches of Christ is founded, scatters to the wind all this extraneous influence. It carries us back beyond our fathers, and places us at the feet of Christ. It delivers us from the traditions of men, and brings us under the authority of the Lawgiver in Zion. It takes us back to the fountain, to first principles, and enables us to break from our necks the iron dominion of mere names, by teaching us to call no man master or father on earth.

The Christocratic form of government does not treat the members of the churches as mere machines, but as rational, moral beings, the free exercise of whose powers is required in ascertaining and performing their duty, upon high and noble principles of truth and righteousness. It makes provision, therefore, for the exercise of the voluntary, independent, democratical principle, as has been shewn in the second chapter of this work. The noble principle of equal rights is also wisely maintained and guarded, in perfect consistency with enlightened and entire submission to the authority of the king in Zion. This form of government is, then, adapted most fitly to the development of the gospel, as a scheme of salvation by grace, and for securing union between the dissevered parts of His kingdom, who will “gather together into one all things in Christ.”

CHAPTER XXI ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH OR BY THE ORDINANCES.

Now I praise you, brethren, that ye keep the ordinances as
I delivered them to you.

— I CORINTHIANS II:2.

One prominent design of the gospel is to readjust disturbed relations between social beings, that the social state may be reconstructed on proper principles. Hence the importance of organizing the redeemed of the Lord on this earth into churches, and of their frequent meetings for the purpose of closer union and greater improvement in these relations. For by this means, they will be the better prepared for the purer and nobler society of heaven, which will comprehend the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the whole church; and the angelic host. These churches must then have a local habitation, and stated periods of assembling. The Lord Jesus has, therefore,

instituted one day in seven for their coming together, and that day is the first day of the week. This day is emphatically called *the Lord's day*, because it is *the* day on which he arose from the dead in glorious triumph over "death and him that had the power of death, that is the devil." It is the day on which that event occurred, from which proceed justification from guilt and all our spiritual blessings here, our victory over the grave, and our admission into heaven. In devout admiration of all these unmerited blessings, the apostle of the circumcision thus pours forth his adoring gratitude and praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."

Intimately connected with the resurrection of Christ, is his death. And these events are placed in the scriptures in such close connection as to indicate that when we meet to commemorate *the one*, we should always associate with it *the other*. Hence the practice of the primitive churches in "meeting together *on the first day of the week to break bread*." By uniformly meeting together on every first day of the week to break bread, the churches not only "shew forth" or develop the *death* of the Saviour, until he come, but also his *resurrection*. And in the commemoration of these events at the same time, they develop the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins, and the justification of the forgiven sinner—two cardinal points of the gospel, viz: that *Christ "was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."*

The faithful observance of these two ordinances in the order of the churches, viz: The stated meeting on the first day of the week, and the breaking of bread in the supper, will develop much, very much of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as to the foundation of a sinner's hope for salvation.

The collection for the poor saints on the return of each Lord's day, is a beautiful and striking development of the gospel, inasmuch as it is an exhibition of that sympathizing, liberal spirit which the gospel inspires. The rule "concerning the collection for the saints," is, "upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him." Each member of the church is to do this and to do it out of the means which God has given him. All the members are thus constituted almoners of the Lord's bounty to the Lord's poor. And for this obvious reason, that they might cultivate the same sympathy, liberality, and generosity that adorned *him*, who though "he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." He whose "is the earth and its fulness, the silver, and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills," could easily supply all the wants of the poor directly from himself. But instead of this, he first gives to *one* portion of his people the means of supplying

the wants of *another* portion, that they might feel the gratitude due to the divine Giver, and then enjoy the blessedness of *giving*, which is greater than the blessedness of *receiving*.

In connection with this benefit, there will be found another of no small importance to the Christian. It is the enlightened economy that will attend his business. The conscientious weekly contributor must have a good degree of acquaintance with the state of his finances, or he cannot know how much he can give. It is true, he ought to know, in order that he should regulate his *mode of living aright*. On this point, however, too many are very careless. But in obeying this law of Christ, *the collection for the saints*, there is an additional incitement to bring Christians to this duty. And this duty performed, they will be restrained from extravagance and reliance upon anticipated resources. By their weekly contributions, they will feel their dependence on God more simply and forcibly. And feeling this dependence on God aright, they will realize that they are stewards, not absolute owners, that they are put in trust of *his* substance, not for the gratification of *their own* vain thoughts, worldly ambition, or carnal desires, but for the glory of God, and thus they will be led not "to waste their Lord's money," but to employ it profitably, "till he come."

It may be objected that though a weekly contribution may be observed by those who do a cash business, yet to those who receive their funds once a year only, it would be impracticable. The answer to this objection is found in the condition of the rule to be obeyed: *The prosperity which is given by God*. If the disciple receives his funds once a year only, then he can contribute but once a year; because until he does receive his funds, he cannot know what his prosperity is. But this same disciple must have money throughout the year for support of his family, and for many other things. He must form some judgment of his finances to enable him to provide these things. Can he not, by the same rule, form some judgment which he can contribute something at least weekly, for the present wants of the poor, reserving the full contribution for the end of year, when he will be able accurately to know what he can give? The faithful observance then, of the ordinance of the contribution of the saints, will not only develop the gospel in its liberal, generous spirit, "as to receiving and giving," but in that discretion which it teaches a good man to observe in the ordering of his affairs.

The reading of the scriptures as an ordinance of the church, is of peculiar value in the development of the gospel to all who may be present to hear, but especially to the members. 1st. It is making them intimately acquainted with its rich treasures, its animating hopes, and its powerful incitements to action. And secondly, by its preparing them to use the word of the Lord as the sword of the Spirit, for attack or defense in the Christian warfare. For these purposes, Timothy was directed to "give attendance to *reading*, exhortation and doctrine"—all of them exercises of a public character for the benefit of the church at Ephesus. And for the same purposes, doubtless, did

Paul say to the Colossians, “when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” And to the Thessalonians, “I charge you by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.”

In the reading of the holy word, as the act of the church, with the light that will be thrown on its different parts in the exercise of the gifts of the members, their minds will be led up “to the law and the testimony,” as the perfect and only standard of faith and practice. The principles of the doctrine of Christ, the privileges and the duties of his people, will all come under review in their proper connection and with their proper sanctions. Obscurity will be removed from passages that are dark, apparent inconsistencies reconciled, and the duties enjoined by the Head of the church enforced with an authority not to be resisted. “The law and the testimony” will become the standard of faith and practice, *in fact and not in name only*. We shall then no more hear from Christians, “I do not *feel* to do this or that,” although *such feeling* may be in direct opposition to the word of God. Neither shall we witness the unscriptural conduct based upon such an unscriptural sentiment. Feeling will not be the standard of duty, but the word of the Lord. The enquiry as to the duty to be performed, will not be, “*how feelest thou?*” But “*what is written in the law?*” “How readest thou?”

Now it is a well known fact, that the body of Christians, as well as of mankind in general, are in limited circumstances, so that their time is mostly occupied in making provision for the temporal support of themselves and their families. Very little of it is therefore left for reading, and that little too seldom rightly employed. Not a few also are incapable of reading especially among our domestics. Now the stated reading of the scriptures in the church every Lord’s day, will remedy this deficiency, a deficiency which the preaching of the gospel does not fully supply, as the reflecting mind will evidently perceive. How wisely then is this ordinance of the church calculated to develop the gospel, by having its grand design, with its peculiar requirements, *set forth* before the members of the church and the attending audience, in the words of the most High; that all may *hear in their own tongues the wonderful works of God*, and that the members themselves may be thoroughly taught in the *whole scripture*, which is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Thus taught, how happily and firmly prepared as the soldiers of the cross, are they to use “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, in their attacks upon the kingdom of Satan, and in their defense against his attacks upon them.” With a “thus it is written,” in imitation of the Captain of their salvation, they will successfully urge their onward course to victory and the victor’s crown.

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH OR BY THE ORDINANCES.

Now I praise you, brethren, that ye keep the ordinances as
I delivered them unto you.—

I CORINTHIANS II:2.

The gospel is a system of purity, and therefore requires its subjects to be holy and obedient to righteous authority. The churches are required, therefore, to withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions received from the apostles of the Lord. Exclusion from membership for disorderly conduct, then, is an important ordinance of the churches. It is designed for their preservation from irregularity and pollution, and the reclaiming of offenders, and thus fitly accords with the benevolence of Him who came to save sinners *from* their sins, and not *in* them. The exclusion of the incestuous man from the Corinthian church, is an exemplification of its design in keeping the church pure, and his penitence and restoration, of its sanative influence in reclaiming the delinquent. It is, therefore, a development of the gospel as a system of pure morality, worthy of Him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

The gospel comes to ignorant man, full of instruction. It reveals Christ as the light of the world, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. The word of the Lord is, therefore, a light unto our feet, a lamp unto our paths. But since it has been committed to writing, the greater part of those to whom it has been sent have not been able to read it. God has therefore in great mercy raised up and qualified holy men, apt to teach, for the purpose of calling the attention of men to this word. And as one of the fruits of the Saviour's mission, "when he ascended up on high, he received gifts for men. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, *for the edifying of the body of Christ.*" Eph. iv: 8, 11, 12. The apostles, and prophets as foretellers of events, have ceased, but the remaining gifts are still continued. Paul in his letter to the Romans says, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given unto us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." Rom. xii: 6-8. To the Corinthians he saith, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another, faith by the same Spirit; to another, the gifts

of healing by the same Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, the discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For, as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members, every one of them in the body as it has pleased him." "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." 1 Cor. xii: 7-18, 27. Again, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and *all may be comforted*." 1 Cor. xiv: 29-31.

In the delineation of the natural body, and the various uses of its members, we have a striking illustration of the church, the body of Christ, and the benefits resulting from the appropriate exercise of the gifts of her various members. For, as the members of the natural body form a complete whole, and produce their results by united and appropriate acts; so the members of the church constitute the spiritual body of Christ; and in the performance of their respective duties in their appropriate places, form one complete spiritual whole. It is true that the various gifts of the church may and should be exercised at other times than those when the members are convened, yet it is in the collective character, when assembled on the first day of the week, that they are to be developed, receive their proper direction, and gain their proper energy. Now, it is evident, that if the natural body is to maintain its dignity and usefulness, it must be by the united exercise of its members as a whole, under the guidance of the animating spirit within; so if the church of Christ is to maintain her dignity and usefulness, it must be by the union and appropriate exercise of her members, under the guidance of her great Head. One important direct design of the gospel, contemplated by the exercise of gifts, is, as we have seen, that "*all may learn, and all may be comforted*."

Another is, the increase of the worshippers of God, as thus stated by the apostle: "If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one that is

unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all, and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.”

Another design is, that those who possess gifts will fall into their proper places. There is a diversity of gifts for the accomplishment of different objects, all tending to the grand result of *edifying the body of Christ*. It is, therefore, all important that every one should know and use his proper gift of God. This is to be ascertained by their exercise before the church, who is constituted the judge. Upon the present plan of the church’s meeting on some day or evening in the week for business *only*, and not assembling on the Sabbath for the exercise of gifts, or spending the day together as a body for social duties, no opportunity is presented for the members to exhibit their different talents for usefulness. Hence many a modest spirit is repressed and kept back, till urged forward by some powerful agency, or sore affliction. Hence, too, has arisen the unscriptural order of things among us, which knows no intermediate office in the ministry between the deaconship and the preaching office. Hence it is too, that many who are sensible of *no* call to the preaching of the gospel, but who possess profitable gifts for exhortation, are hindered from *that* useful department of service to the church; whilst others, who have gifts for exhortation only, present themselves in a vain conceit of their powers as candidates for the pulpit, into which they are too easily admitted by their brethren, who exercise not the discrimination necessary for distinguishing between the different gifts and their respective destinations. Now, the assembling of the church on every first day of the week for social worship, would open the way, without embarrassment, for each member to exhibit his gift, and the judgment of the brethren would place him in his proper sphere. When should we have the exhorter, the evangelist, the pastor, the man of wisdom, the man of knowledge, come forth to his proper service, a benefit of incalculable importance to the church, and the cause of the church’s Head. Thus does it appear, that the exercise of gifts in the churches will develop the design of the gospel in diffusing light and knowledge, in increasing the worshippers of God, and in placing every possessor of a gift in his proper place.

Intimately connected with the exercise of gifts for the teaching of the truth, is the ordinance of singing, as is evident from the following scripture: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ.” In this exercise, also, we offer praise to God which glorifies his holy name, the ultimate design of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer, which moves the hand that moves the universe, is the expression of the soul to God in deep contrition, under a sense of sin and guilt, with an anxious desire for mercy, as exemplified in the petition of the publican,

“Lord be merciful to me a sinner.” This exercise admits of enlargement, nay, such enlargement is required in the prayer which our Lord taught his disciples. As an ordinance of the church, it tends to develop the gospel, inasmuch as it brings out and improves the very state of mind which the gospel inspires, humility and dependence on God. In its exercise there is an acknowledgment and adoration of God as our Father who is in heaven; the earnest desire for the coming of his kingdom, and the universal prevalence of his will in all the earth. In this exercise there is, also, the daily petition for temporal mercy and the forgiveness of sin, the humble entreaty for preserving power. Thus the soul honors God in this near approach to his throne, and intimate converse with him who sits upon it, through Jesus Christ.

In the appointment of evangelists, bishops and deacons, for the gathering of the materials for the churches, for the building up, teaching, and governing of these materials, and the management of the fiscal concerns of the churches, we clearly perceive the wise arrangement of the Head of the church for developing his gospel in its fullest extent.

CHAPTER XXIII CONCLUSION.

In the contemplation of the government and order of the churches of Christ, delineated in the preceding chapters of this work, I have been deeply impressed with the beautiful simplicity and moral power of the whole system, as wisely adapted to the development of the gospel of Christ. By this system, the churches have *one* supreme, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Head, who is infinitely wise, good and faithful, and who has redeemed them out of every nation, kindred, tongue and people, by his own blood, his word and his Spirit. These all, whether “Jew or Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free,” are all *one* in him. To him all these look by faith, and in his written word, under the influence of his Spirit, they are to learn his will. Their only rule of duty is contained in the Bible, given by inspiration of God. These churches, independent in point of government of each other, and of all other bodies of men, civil or ecclesiastical, are amenable to Christ alone. Their officers are given by him with the qualifications and authority that they have. Each church forms within herself an independent democracy, under the King in Zion, with a perfect code of laws for every case, and the divine Spirit dwelling in the body of each member, to exert a heavenly influence upon each one and upon the whole society. How ample her appliances for improvement, for action, for successful, triumphant action! What need of diligence, of study, of intelligence, of courage, of growth in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, in each member, for the fulfillment of the high destiny of all the churches. What a

pattern of purity of principle, of courtesy of manners, of disinterestedness of heart, and unity of spirit, should the churches manifest! What proof should the members give of the readjustment of the social relations, by an exhibition of supreme love to God, and a love to one another beyond the measure of self-love, even the measure of that love wherewith the Saviour has loved them, so as to be willing to lay down their lives for the brethren! In such a course, how beautifully and successfully would they develop the gospel!

It is with societies of this sort, that the Lord, in the organization of his churches, designs to dot this world, as oases in the desert to refresh the moral eye. He places them in various parts of the earth as leaven to leaven the whole lump; and as these churches multiply and extend their benign influence, the whole earth will be brought into conformity to the will and image of Christ. Such bodies, in thus developing the gospel, will give no reasonable grounds of disquietude to the governments of the earth. Spiritual, moral, obedient to the laws, peaceful, exemplary, doing good to the souls and the bodies of men, they will in no wise interfere with the affairs of these governments, civil, ecclesiastical or military; but they will purify and prepare their people, citizens or subjects for a more faithful obedience to law and order, so that the whole earth will be ultimately brought under the authority and dominion of the Lord Jesus. The kingdoms of this world will then become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ.

To attain to such a high state of excellence and usefulness, the instituted means must be used. "Paul plants, Apollos waters," and then "God gives the increase." There is an intimate connection between means and ends in the government of God; hence the imperative obligation upon his creatures to use the means of his own appointment. The gospel individualizes man. It singles out the individual from the mass, renews him by the Spirit and the truth, makes him feel his responsibility, and then brings him into the church relation with his fellows that have passed through the same process. For the society thus brought together, the whole system of faith and practice by which it is to be governed is established by divine authority. By this, all other systems for the government of the church are excluded on the sound principle of law thus expressed, *adoptio unius, exclusio alterius, the adoption of the one is the exclusion of all others*. It is then obligatory more especially upon Christians, to observe, minutely and faithfully to observe, the system of faith and practice instituted by their prophet and king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am aware that difference of opinion on what this system teaches and requires, prevails among those who love the Lord in sincerity and truth. Some think that general principles only are laid down in the New Testament, on the government and order of the churches, and that believers are at liberty to adopt the details according to their own judgment. Others believe that the Head of the church has authoritatively settled by his apostles, not only

the form of government which his churches should adopt, but also the *ordinances* which they should observe under *that* form. A distinguished writer, after describing with much accuracy from the New Testament, the order of the primitive churches, says, if I remember right, “it is not probable, nay it is not possible, that this order was intended for universal adoption and practice.” Why then, it may be asked, did Paul so *particularly* enjoin upon the Corinthians, an imitation of him, in the “ways which be in Christ, and which he taught everywhere in every church?” Why did he praise them for keeping the ordinances as he had delivered them? Why did he send Timothy to them with a long letter, in which these matters were all treated of, that he might, by means of that authoritative document, strengthen them more successfully and effectively in the observance of these ordinances? Why did he request his son Timothy to abide at Ephesus, notwithstanding the church there had her full corps of elders and write to him two letters of instruction, to teach him how he ought to behave himself in the house of God? And lastly, why did he leave Titus in Crete, that he should set in order the things that were wanting, and ordain elders in every city? Why all this solicitude about the government and order of the Corinthian, Ephesian and Cretian churches? Why the minute instruction on these points to the church at Corinth? Why all this, too, in letters to the church and to his two sons in the gospel, which letters now form a part of “the law and the testimony,”—“of the scripture which is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works?” Obviously was all this done for the instruction of all succeeding churches, that they may be conformed to a divine “pattern.”

It cannot be true, then, that general principles only are laid down in the New Testament on church government and order, with liberty to believers to frame the details according to their own judgments. It cannot be true, that there is no definite “form of sound words” on these subjects in the book of God, which we are “to hold fast.” But on the contrary, it is true that the Head of the church has legislated on these points with particular care, and that his legislation is of paramount authority. Whether I have succeeded in bringing out fully and satisfactorily in this little work, the system of government and ordinances taught in the gospel, I leave to the judgment of others, after a scriptural examination of the word of God.

Permit me then, my brethren, immersed upon a profession of your faith in Christ, to request you to enter upon this examination with prayerful hearts, in the light of the New Testament. Upon you rests great responsibilities. You are called of late, in the providence of God, more especially to take a prominent stand in the advancement of the truth. Brethren of the Southern Baptist Convention, it is evident that God has called us to effective action. The two lines of service for *successful* action, are through the churches and the ministry. Piety, ardent piety, glowing zeal, love to God and man, must be cultivated in our churches, to bring them up to their high

duty for successful effort. That religion which they are sending to others, they must *feel* and *live* themselves; then will their offerings be acceptable to God, and their labors blessed by him. Their liberality will abound, and the means will be afforded for carrying on the work of the Lord. How shall they arrive at this? Through *the truth*, the instrumentality of *the truth*, under God's grace; for the truth only can make us free from all error. Let us come to the truth, then, in doctrine and in duty, in our personal and social relations, that the gospel of our Lord Jesus may be fully developed.

Brethren in the ministry, to you is committed the high trust of teaching the truth to the people. The priests' lips should keep knowledge. Permit me, then, most affectionately to request your attention to the points treated of in this work. I most sincerely desire the good of Zion, and of those who are planted on her walls as watchmen. That they should see eye to eye, is most desirable and important; and therefore I ask your attention to these points now set before you. Reject whatever is wrong in my treatment of the subject, and receive only the truth as it is taught in the New Testament.

The subjects on which I have written, appear to me to be of peculiar interest to the churches at the present time. The claims of the "man of sin" are being reasserted in the present day with a boldness that is astonishing. Refuted as they have been from time to time, they seem to gather strength from defeat. It becomes the lovers of truth and its defenders more especially, then, to bestir themselves in its defense. (An important part of our conflict is with "FORMALISM." Whilst the *forms* of religion are intimately connected with its vitals, *formalism* tends to their destruction.) It is essential, then, to the full vigor of religious principle, that it be cherished and developed by means of the forms which its divine author has instituted. Hence the obligation which rests upon the people God to maintain the spirituality of those ordinances of the churches, which their Head has commanded.

Oh! what a time will that be, when the churches shall all come up to their high privileges—when, on each returning first day, they shall appear in the majesty of their Lord—when in the spiritual observance of all the ordinances delivered by the apostles, the whole moral force of their spiritual engines shall be brought under the command of "the Captain of their salvation," to bear upon the purposes of God! Then shall the windows of heaven be opened and a blessing be poured out most abundantly upon the saints and the whole earth! Then will energy divine fall upon the counsels, the plans, and the efforts of "the servants of the most high God!" Then will that vast moral machinery, now in operation for pulling down the strongholds of satan, and for the upbuilding of the Redeemer's kingdom, exert its mighty influence with success! Then will the conquests of Immanuel be pushed to universal empire, and the headstone of the glorious super structure be brought out with shoutings of GRACE, GRACE, UNTO IT!

THE END.

Queries Considered

JOSEPH S. BAKER



Photo courtesy of the Christian Index

Baker, Dr. Joseph S., was born in Liberty Co., Ga., in 1798, of Presbyterian parents, and died at Quitman Co., Ga., in 1877. He was educated at Yale and at Hampden Sidney College, Va., where he graduated in 1823.

On leaving college he returned to Liberty Co., Ga., and engaged in farming and merchandising, having inherited considerable property. He was then, at the age of twenty-five, a member of the Presbyterian church near Riceborough, and placed himself under the care of the Presbytery with a view to entering the ministry at a session held with the Midway church in the fall of 1823. The Presbytery assigned him, as the subject of his first thesis, "Was John's

Baptism Christian Baptism?" The investigation of the subject by him led to his adoption of Baptist views a few years later. He removed to Virginia in 1825, having sold all his property in Georgia. He graduated in the medical department of Columbian College, D.C., in 1828, and practiced medicine in Nottaway Co., Va., until 1831, when he moved to Petersburg. There he united with the Baptists, was licensed and ordained. He preached in Virginia at Petersburg, Norfolk, and other places, part of the time as a missionary, until 1839 or 1840, when he moved to Georgia and settled in Columbus. In 1843 he became editor of the *Christian Index*, and moved to Penfield, where the paper was then published. For six years he occupied the editorial chair with an ability so distinguished, and with a pen so trenchant and powerful, evidencing at the same time so much of genuine piety and such a thorough acquaintance with Baptist doctrines and practices, that he acquired a denominational influence that expired only with his life.

He resided for a while with a son who was a lawyer at Jacksonville, Fla., and mayor of the town. He then served the churches at Albany and Palmyra, Ga., and Jacksonville, Fla., until the war. During that struggle he preached to the soldiers as an evangelist. After the war he moved to Quitman, Ga., where he resided until his death, in 1877, ripening more and more to the last for the skies. Dr. Baker was a man of great natural abilities. He was a deep thinker, a perspicuous writer, and he did much to assist denominational progress in Georgia. He was a most decided Baptist. He had read much, was a fine scholar, and he was deeply versed in the polity and principles of all denominations. An excellent preacher, he was a man of strong faith in divine providence, and bore the severe sufferings of his last days with great Christian fortitude and resignation. For years he exerted a strong and healthy influence among the Georgia Baptists, and it was always employed in favor of sound doctrine and practical godliness.

—William Cathcart, 1881

QUERIES CONSIDERED

OR

AN INVESTIGATION OF VARIOUS SUBJECTS

INVOLVED IN THE EXERCISE OF

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

BY REV. JOSEPH S. BAKER

PENFIELD, GA.
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INTRODUCTION.

After a long and unexpected delay, induced by causes which the publisher could not control, the fourth and last number of the first volume of this work is laid before our readers. We had contemplated republishing in this number an interesting little work, published originally in the land of the Waldenses, but when the printer called for it, it was not to be found. In our emergency, we have concluded to lay before our readers a series of Essays, on various subjects connected with practical Church Discipline. Some of these have been in print before, and have been extensively copied into Baptist papers, and, indeed, one or two of them have also appeared in papers that do not support our denominational views. This fact, together with the frequency with which the queries discussed have been propounded to us and others, encourage the hope, that they will not only prove acceptable to our readers, but will assist them, either directly or indirectly, in forming correct views of the subjects investigated—subjects involving the best interests of individuals, and the peace and purity of our churches.

Some of the Essays in this number are prepared expressly for the occasion, others have been amplified and amended, and all have been revised with more or less care. We submit them to the public with a deep sense of our solemn responsibility to the great Head of the Church, for the views which we aid in propagating, and with an earnest desire and humble prayer, that they may be made to subserve the cause of truth and righteousness.

We tender our most grateful acknowledgments to our subscribers for their patronage, and for their kind indulgence and patient forbearance, amid the provoking delays which have occurred in the publication of our last two numbers. The work will not be continued unless we can insure *regularity* in future emissions. We have on hand a valuable article, prepared expressly for the Periodical Library; by one who wields the pen of a “ready writer.” We would have substituted it for the present number, but for its length; it would probably fill 120 pages. Negotiations now pending, will decide, in the course of a few weeks, the question, Shall the Periodical Library be continued? We feel but little *personal* interest in its decision. Its publication, so far, has subjected us to a small pecuniary loss. We leave the decision of the question, “to be, or not to be,” with Him whose it is to order all events for the advancement of his own glory.

THE PUBLISHER

QUERIES CONSIDERED; OR
AN INVESTIGATION OF VARIOUS SUBJECTS
INVOLVED IN THE EXERCISE
OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Personal Differences.

QUERY I. *What course should one member of a church pursue toward another, by whom he has been aggrieved?*

This query is very explicitly answered by the Saviour, in Matthew xviii., 15–17:

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

Were it not that our moral affections have been perverted, and our understandings beclouded by sin, a word of comment on the above passage would be wholly superfluous; but such are the imperfections of our frail natures, that we often misapprehend truth—even when it is expressed in the most lucid manner—and have need to have it exhibited in a multitude of forms, and accompanied with various elucidations, before we can fully comprehend it. Clear as are the instructions given by the Saviour, relative to the course we should pursue in a case of trespass, events are almost daily occurring, which plainly indicate that they are not properly understood, by many of those who profess to have been taught by his Spirit. This consideration seems to us to justify our commenting, somewhat in detail, on the passage which contains an answer to the query at the head of this article.

“*If thy brother shall trespass against thee.*”—The supposed case, in this instance, is one of an actual trespass, committed by one brother on the rights of another. Observe that these words limit the application of the rule given to cases of *personal* differences, between individual members of the body of Christ; but, at the same time, extend it to every *kind* of trespass, that one may commit against another. The wrong done may have been committed wilfully, or may have been committed inadvertently; it may have been of a very flagrant character, or it may have been attended with many palliating circumstances. If it be sufficient to abate the ardor of our affection for the brother, or in the slightest degree to impair our confidence in him, we ought, by observing the rule prescribed, to place it in his power to restore himself to that place in our affections and confidence, which he occupied before the commission of the offence. On the other hand, no aggravation of the offence, on the part of the offender, can exonerate us

from our obligation to obey the express instructions of our Saviour. It is frequently the case, in serious difficulties between brethren, that the aggrieved individual, when reminded of this rule, and urged to observe it; inquires, "what is the use?" or responds, "it will do no good. He knew that he was doing wrong—I know the character of the man, and know that he will refuse to make reparation." It is an old adage, that two wrongs cannot make one wrong right. His having sinned against you, is no sufficient reason why you should sin against your Saviour, by refusing obedience to his injunctions. Do *your* duty, and leave the result in the hand of God. He often corrects the most incorrigible. If the offender prove obstinate, his very obstinacy may lead him to reflect upon the impropriety of his conduct, and be the means of his conviction. If he fail to repair the injury he has done, God will not fail to make you amends. Whether he repents or not, you will be rewarded with the smiles of an approving God, and the possession of what will be worth more to you than all the world—a *quiet conscience*.

But there is another view of the subject which you should take. If the offender has offered you a wanton injury, he has, through you, inflicted a wound upon the Church: for if "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." 1 Cor. 12. 26. And if he possess the incorrigible character ascribed to him, the sooner he is out of the church the better will it be for the cause of Christ, and the cause of humanity. As long as he continues in it, he will prove but a "root of bitterness," and a cause of reproach; a hindrance, instead of a help to her advancement. You therefore owe it to your God, to the church, and the world that is yet to be evangelized, to adopt those measures, which are necessary to precede the introduction of the case, in a proper way, before the church. If you bring it into the church before you have pursued the course directed in the rule before us, you give the offender an advantage over you, of which, if he be an evil-minded man, he will not fail to avail himself; for you do, by that act, manifest a contempt of divine authority, and place yourself by his side, in the seat of the criminal. When one, in manifest violation of this law of Christ, complains to you of the injuries done him by another, beware of him, and believe but little of what he tells you of his adversary; for he who scruples not to act falsely toward his Saviour will rarely scruple falsely to accuse his brother, if he may thereby justify himself in the eyes of others, or palliate his own offences. We are always more or less suspicious of one who is disposed to vent in our ear, long and doleful accounts of the injuries, he has received from others. In a large majority of instances, those will be found to complain most frequently of trespasses who are most frequently guilty of trespassing on the rights and feelings of others. Such manifest far more reverence for the demands of self-interest, than for those of truth, justice or mercy. Self is the god whom they adore, and at whose shrine they hesitate not to sacrifice all whose will or interest succumbs not to their own. They demand of others what they are unwilling to grant, and expect to be treated as they are unwilling to treat others.

"If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."—Our attention is here directed to the *end* which we should have in view. That end is the recovery of a brother from the error of his ways, and not the gratification of a spirit of revenge, or the ministering to our pride, by triumphing over the infirmities of another. Let this end be kept in view, and the means of effecting it, will rarely be wanting. We will feel the importance of avoiding every thing that savours of a disposition to upbraid or censure. Let it be remembered, that "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man," Prov. 27. 19. Whatever, therefore, in another, would prove repulsive to us, will, in us, prove repulsive to others; and, on the contrary, whatever would be most likely to conciliate our affections, will be most likely to conciliate the affections of others. We should manifest, by our actions, words, and even by the expressions of our countenance, that we are more grieved that our brother should *do* wrong, than that we should *suffer* wrong. A look or a tear has often effected what which all the terrors of the law, backed by the elegant declamations of the orator, could not effect. It was a look that touched the heart of Peter and wrought repentance in his soul. To gain a brother, by the manifestation of a meek, gentle and condescending spirit, would be a far greater triumph than to extort from him, by the force of law, a reluctant reparation for the wrongs he has done us.

"If he will not hear thee"—What then? Abandon the case as hopeless? No. Arraign him before the church? No; but make another effort. Go to him again, and, now "take with thee one or two more." But be judicious in your selection, Select such as are discreet, pre-eminent for their piety, and least likely to be suspected as partisans in the affair.—Proceed, as before, to lay the matter before him coolly, respectfully and affectionately. Manifest every disposition to settle the difference amicably.

The object of taking "one or two more," is twofold. First, that they may exert their influence in endeavors to adjust the difficulty. That this is one of the reasons for the rule, is obvious from the next verse—"if he refuse to *hear* them, &c. They must speak before they can be heard. They are therefore, to counsel, advise and admonish. It is often the case, that an offender will listen to an admonition coming from a disinterested party, which would be rejected if offered by the individual aggrieved. But a second reason for this direction is, that if the offender continue incorrigible they may serve as witnesses in the case, when brought before the church. This leads to the considerations of the Law of Evidence.

"That in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established." Note; the Saviour here establishes, as a rule necessary for the administration of justice, under the new or christian dispensation, a rule which had been observed under the old or Jewish dispensation. By this, no individual was to be condemned upon the simple testimony of another. For the word of one man is to be considered as good as that of another, until one or the other of the parties is proved unworthy of confidence. The testimony of one man, however, added to the testimony of the accuser, is recognized as sufficient for

the conviction of the offender. This is evident, from its being left to the aggrieved to decide whether he will take with him *one* or *two* others.¹

It has been objected to this rule, that if we adhere to it rigidly, it will often be difficult to exclude delinquent members. In reply to this, we have three remarks to make; 1st. It is always safe to adhere closely to the rules which infinite wisdom has prescribed, and always dangerous, inasmuch as it is sinful, to substitute the deductions of human reason, for the teachings of the Holy Spirit. 2d. It is better that ten should escape merited punishment, than that one should suffer unjustly. This is a principle which God himself sanctioned, in the case of Lot and the idolatrous cities of the plains—(See Gen. 19.) 3d. The rule does not interdict the passing judgment against an individual, where the testimony of one man is sustained by circumstantial evidence, or the indirect testimony of others. Suppose, for instance, a member is charged, by one who sustains an irreproachable character, with the commission of a criminal act. In the investigation of the case, it is ascertained, upon the testimony of others, that his general conduct has not comported with the gospel of Christ, but has rather accorded, in character, with the act with which he stands charged, and circumstances are developed which clearly indicate, in the accused, a disposition to commit the act with which he is charged. We would not hesitate to say, that the laws of Christ's kingdom afford no protection to such. They require that he should so walk as to maintain a good report without, and that upon the testimony of two or more witnesses, every word should be established. In the supposed case, the *direct* testimony of the accuser, is sustained by the *indirect* testimony of the many. The law therefore is not violated, but fulfilled.

"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church."—This is the last scriptural resort. Do not mistake it. We are not instructed to report the case for a decision to the priest, or the deacons, or the ruling elders, or the select men, or the class, or the vestry, or to any judicial committee; but to *"to tell it unto the church."* The object should still be, not to punish, but to reclaim him. Should the church find it necessary to withdraw her fellowship from him, she should do it in such a manner as to evince, that she claimed no right to punish, but simply exercised the right vested in her of

¹A case has been reported to us, in which a brother objected to the course pursued by another, because he took with him three brethren, instead of one or two, when he went the second time to attempt the settlement of a personal difficulty; and this article, the substance of which had been but recently published, was adduced as evidence that the views of the author accorded with his own. It may not, therefore, be improper to add, that we do not suppose it was the design of the Saviour to fix definitely the number that we should take with us to aid in settling a personal difference with a brother. The phrase "one or two" is itself indefinite. It is used, not unfrequently, as equivalent to "a few;" and, in our opinion, is so used by the Saviour. The aggrieved was to take with him a few brethren—that is, a sufficient number to 'establish the word,' but not enough to embarrass the settlement of the difficulty, or to give to it undue publicity. We can very readily conceive of cases in which it may be desirable to have as many as three brethren present. If there should be only diversity of opinion between the first two, the presence of a third person might greatly aid in adjusting the affair.

protecting herself, and the cause of Christ from reproach. When therefore the painful necessity is laid upon her, of excluding a member, it is always better that the motion should be made to *withdraw fellowship* from him, than that it should be made to *expel* or *excommunicate* him. The former expression seems to intimate, that we are influenced, not by any ill feeling towards the offender, but by a view of the sinfulness of his conduct, a respect for divine authority, and a regard for the purity of the church; while the latter expression, will inevitably convey the idea of an abhorrence, not only of the person's *sins*, but of the *person* himself.

Closing Remarks. 1. The query answered involves both a case of conscience and a case of church discipline. The rule upon which we have commented is designed for the regulation of the conduct of individuals, and is a rule by which the church should require her members to walk. If any fail to observe it, their conduct should not be suffered to escape the notice of the church.

2d. It is a manifest perversion of the rule to apply it to cases of public offences; that is, to offences committed against the common cause of Christ. To extend a rule beyond the limits assigned it in the word of God, is to establish a dangerous precedent, and to recognize as correct, principles upon which Paedobaptism and Popery have reared their fabric.

3d. The rule is given for the direction of the person aggrieved or injured. The neglect of it cannot therefore be justified upon the common plea; "I have not injured him—he has injured me, and therefore it is his place to come to me." The rule for the offender is distinct from that here given for the offended. In a subsequent part of this volume, we shall notice what is taught of offenders, and the course to be pursued in cases of public offences.

4th. It will be difficult for one, whose heart has not been properly subdued by divine grace, to submit to this rule; but to one full of the Spirit of Christ submission will prove easy. Such will ever realize the truth of the Saviour's declaration: "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matt. 11. 30. Hence if we feel a disposition to refuse obedience to this, or any other rule of Christ's kingdom, we have sufficient reason to conclude that our hearts are not right before God.

INFRACTIONS OF THE RULE PRESCRIBED BY THE SAVIOUR.

Infractions of the rule, upon which we have commented, frequently occur. There is one error in reference to these, prevalent in many of our churches, which should be corrected. We allude to the opinion, that a violation of the rule by the aggrieved, in bringing an offender before the church before he has pursued the course prescribed by the Saviour, relieves the church from the obligation to deal with the individual thus arraigned before them.

Were the effects of personal difficulties confined to the parties more immediately implicated, such an opinion might be maintained with some degree of plausibility; but it should be remembered, that every offence committed by one individual against another, is an offence committed against the whole body, and against the cause, for the furtherance of which that body was incorporated. While, therefore, the irregularity in the course pursued by the person aggrieved might subject him to censure and preclude from him the right to complain of the church, should she neglect to act upon the case, it is certain, that such neglect could not fail to afford just cause of complaint to others.

On this subject we lay down two distinct propositions, and request our readers to test their correctness by the touchstone of God's word. If they be found correct, let them be carried out in the acts of their respective churches, to the honor of God, and to the good of his cause.

I. A church is bound to take cognizance of every manifest violation by its members, of any of the laws of Christ's kingdom, with which it becomes acquainted, whether the information of such violations is communicated in a regular order or not.

The reasons for this rule are obvious. The church is required to set the seal of her disapprobation on every transgression of the law of God. Her obligation to do this is not made to depend, in the slightest degree, upon the means by which she arrives at a knowledge of the transgression; for the character of an offence is not affected, in the least, by the manner in which it is made known. The magistrate is as much bound to have a band of robbers arrested, when information of their acts of robbery is communicated by one of their own number, who has turned a traitor, as when it is communicated by an honest and orderly citizen. And so is the church as much bound to notice offences committed, when she receives her intelligence through one who is himself an offender, as when she receives it through the most harmless and exemplary of her members. So long as she is ignorant of the offences committed by her members, she is not chargeable with them; but the moment she is made acquainted with them, if she fails to adopt measures for calling the offenders to account, and for preventing the recurrence of the like offences in future, she virtually sanctions those offences, bids the offenders God speed, becomes a partaker of their evil deeds, and renders herself amenable both to God and man. [See Ps. 1., 18—1 Tim. v., 22—2 John xi.]

II. While an act, which is subsequent to another, may be affected by that which is anterior to it, that which is anterior cannot be affected by that which is subsequent.

Were the plain, obvious truth contained in this proposition borne in remembrance, it might save our churches from many errors and from much merited reproach. But further to illustrate our views and point out the

course to be pursued under certain contingencies, we will suppose a case, and offer some comments upon it.

A. charges B. with trespasses committed against himself, before he pursues the course prescribed by the Saviour. B., in return, charges A. with a violation of the rule to which we have referred, and pleads, perhaps, that the church has no right to deal with him, as the case was informally brought before it. Such a plea is evidently invalid. The truth is, they are both offenders, and the church is bound to investigate and act on the cases of both. But as she cannot act on both simultaneously, the question may arise, which case should be first taken up? We answer, unhesitatingly, the case of B., and that for two reasons: 1st. Because the offence of B. was committed prior to that of A., and was first brought to the notice of the church; 2d. Because A's offence grew out of that of B. Properly, therefore, to adjudicate the case of A., we must acquaint ourselves with those circumstances in the conduct of B. which tended to aggravate or palliate the offence of the former. But to do this, it would be necessary to enter fully into the investigation of the conduct of B. The case is as clear as the sun in a cloudless sky at noonday.

We have frequently known churches to dismiss cases indefinitely, because there was some irregularity in the manner in which they were brought before them. In other instances, the cases were dismissed until the accuser brings his accusation in the prescribed form. These generally prove, too, *final* dismissions. If we are right in the views expressed in the preceding part of these courses. "He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." By a parity of reasoning, that church which knows of the existence of an evil in it and neglects to correct it promptly, must be viewed as guilty before God.

When an individual is charged with criminal conduct, if instead of replying to the charges brought against him, he endeavors to criminate others, he affords strong presumptive evidence of his own guilt. He acts upon the same principle with the thief, who, when the officer of justice and the mob are at his heels, raises the cry, and cries loudest of all, "Stop thief! stop thief!" His principle is to evade justice by diverting attention from himself to some other individual. To prevent your plucking the beam out of his own eye, he would set you to picking at the mote in his brother's eye.

PUBLIC OFFENCES.

QUERY II. *Is it invariably our duty to admonish a public offender privately, before we report his case to the church?*

We think it is not. We know that the opinion is very prevalent, in our southern Churches, that even public offenders should not be arraigned before the church, until we have labored with them in private and found all

our efforts to produce a reformation fruitless. This opinion appears to be founded, in part, upon a misunderstanding and a consequent misapplication of the rule in Matthew xviii, 15–17, upon which we made some annotations in our reply to the preceding query and, in part, upon a contracted view of the end of church discipline. We have already stated, that the rule in Matthew is limited to cases of personal difference, and cannot therefore be extended to cases of public offences, without sanctioning a principle most manifestly erroneous and highly pernicious in its tendency. The question then occurs, is there any other foundation in the word of God for the opinion to which we have alluded? We answer, No more than there is for pedobaptism and popery. There is neither precept nor example in the word of God to justify the belief, that it is our duty, ordinarily, to admonish a public offender privately, before he is called to an account publicly for his conduct.

To satisfy the reader of the correctness of this assertion, we would direct his attention to the numerous injunctions given in the sacred writings in reference to public offences. The following are some of the many to which we refer:

Romans xvi, 17.—“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have leaned; and avoid them.”

1 Cor. v., 4, 5.—“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (The Apostle, in this passage, prescribes the course to be pursued in the case of a certain fornicator who had married his father’s wife.)

Verse 11.—“But now I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no, not to eat.”

Verse 23.—“Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person”—(the fornicator, to whom he had previously referred.)

2 Thess. iii, 6.—“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

Verse 14.—“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

1 Tim. v, 20.—“Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” See also Prov. xx., 10—Gal. i., 7, 9—2 John v., 10, &c.

On these passages of Scripture we have but two remarks to offer: 1st. They are addressed, with but one exception, to the people of God, or the Church; and, in the passage excepted, the Apostle gives to the highest officer in the church a rule, which is evidently designed not so much for the regulation of his own conduct, as for the government of the church over which he presides. This is apparent from the instructions which precede it,

relative to widows, unmarried women, elders, &c. 2d. In these passages there is not the most distant allusion to any preliminary steps, required to be taken, as in the case of personal differences,—no direction to go to the offender and “tell him his fault between thee and him alone,” and “if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more,” &c.

As it respects the examples of Christ and his Apostles, they are adverse to the opinion which we are combating. Christ publicly charged the scribes and pharisees, and even his own disciples, with their derelictions of duty. But as some may question the propriety of making the acts of an Omniscient and sinless Saviour a precedent for short-sighted and erring mortals, in matters of this kind, we will refer to the acts of his disciples, after the administration of the affairs of the church was delivered up into their hands.

At an early period, while yet the disciples held their possessions in common, Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of a novel species of fraud, and of a barefaced falsehood. Peter received intelligence of the fact. It is not stated whether he received it by a direct communication from the Searcher of hearts, or through individuals who were acquainted with the circumstances of the case; for it was a matter of no consequence to us to know by what means he obtained his information. But as it was of importance that we should be acquainted with the course of conduct which, under such circumstances, Infinite Wisdom would approve, the particulars of the proceedings in the case are given in full. Ananias and Sapphira appeared successively before the Apostles and those who were assembled with them. Peter did not take them aside and expostulate with them on the evil nature of their sin, and urge them to an acknowledgement of their guilt and a profession and penitence, but interrogated them, respectively, relative to the transaction in which they had offended, and publicly charged them with the guilt of lying unto the Holy Ghost. God set the seal of his approbation upon the course pursued by Peter, by visiting them with a most awful and speedy judgment. It should be borne in remembrance, that the infliction of the punishment, in this case, was not the act of the Apostle, but the immediate act of God.—See Acts v., 1–11.

On a subsequent occasion, Peter himself, it appears, was guilty of pursuing a course which did not well comport with his Christian vocation. For this the Apostle Paul passed his censures upon him, not in a private interview, but in the presence of an assembly of the disciples,—“*before them all.*” Gal. ii., 11, 14. Moreover, the proceedings in this case were recorded, sent abroad and read to the churches. While empires have risen and fallen, that record has been preserved by the kind providence of God, and is still read to the churches for their edification. We do not learn that Peter, after the manner of modern offenders, objected to the course pursued by Paul, in order to screen himself from censure. Nor does it appear that he manifested, at the time, or subsequently, any hostile feelings towards him who had thus publicly accused him of conduct inconsistent with his Christian

character. So far from this, when he had occasion to mention Paul, in one of his epistles, he speaks of him as "*our beloved brother Paul.*"—2 Peter iii, 15.

Enough has been said, we conceive, to evince, that the precepts of the gospel and the examples of the apostles, so far from teaching that it is our duty invariably to admonish a public offender privately, before we arraign him publicly, sanction a course of conduct directly the opposite of this.

But we have heard it objected, that the apostles acted under the immediate and special influences of the Holy Spirit, and therefore their examples are not safe precedents for us. In reply to this objection we have several things to say: 1st. Satan and his subjects are ever fruitful in inventions. An offender, therefore, will seldom want for a plausible objection to every rule of discipline that is applicable to his case, even though such be expressly given in Scripture. 2d. If we admit what is objected to the examples of the Apostles, it will by no means follow, that an opposite course of conduct to theirs would be correct. 3d. If the simple fact that the apostles acted under extraordinary influences of the spirit, renders it improper to follow their examples in one instance, in which it is possible to imitate them, we see not why it should not render it equally improper to follow them in any other of their public acts. 4th. We cannot believe that the Holy Spirit would dictate a course which was repugnant to the principles of moral rectitude or natural equity. As these principles are as eternal and unchangeable in their nature as the being of God, we cannot conceive that what was morally right in the days of Peter and Paul, can be morally wrong now. 5th. The examples of the apostles and primitive disciples, we are expressly taught in Scripture to follow. (See 1 Cor. iii, 10; Phil. iii., 7—I Thess. i., 7—2 Thess. iii., 9—&c.) This of itself should be sufficient to obviate every objection.

As we have answered an objection to the views which we entertain, we will now proceed to state an objection or two to the rule of those who differ from us in opinion.

1st. Their rule must necessarily prove invalid. It can bind no one; for what is every man's duty is evidently the duty of no one in particular. When an individual is guilty of a public offence, the knowledge of his guilt becomes, as it were, public property, and every member of the church suffers equally from his defection. The duty to go to him, therefore, cannot devolve upon any one in particular. Moreover, if you require the public offender to be admonished privately, before his conduct is submitted to the church for investigation, you do virtually extend over him the aegis of your protection, and insure impunity in sin to the grossest offenders. The greater the offence, too, the greater would be the security of the offender; for who would ever report to the church the case of the confirmed drunkard, the notorious gambler, or the abandoned prostitute, if he were required first to admonish such in private?

2d. We further object to the rule in question, that if it be observed, it cannot secure the ends which we should have in view. The rule is based upon the mistaken notion, that the reformation of the individual is the principal thing that renders action necessary. But interests have been affected infinitely superior to the individual interests of the offender. His misconduct has brought reproach upon the cause of Christ, and served to fortify the ungodly in their unbelief, and confirm them in all their hard speeches and ungodly deeds. He has fixed a stain upon the Christian name, which all his tears of penitence can never wash away; and he has rolled a stone against the sinners heart, which no subsequent exertion of his power can ever remove. If there is not an action of the church on his case, her neglect will fix, indelibly, a stain on her own character. So long as she holds in fellowship the offender, she must and will be considered as holding fellowship with his deeds of darkness. The prominent objects which should be kept in view in dealing with public offenders, should be the preserving untarnished the honor of the cause of Christ and the good name of the church. But these objects could not be advanced by requiring the offender to be admonished privately, before he is brought to the bar of the church. Should he repent and make acknowledgments in private, this could not supercede the necessity of an action of the church; as nothing but an action of the church could evince to the world, that she had no fellowship for his unchristian acts. The argument *cui bono* must be allowed, therefore, to have its full force here.

We close the present article with a few general deductions drawn from the preceding remarks:

1. There is no authority in Scripture for requiring public offenders to be admonished privately before their cases are submitted to the action of the church.
2. Both Scripture and reason teach the impropriety of incorporating such a rule in the constitution of any church.
3. The individual who is guilty of committing a public offence, has no right to complain, if he receives his first admonition in the presence of the whole church.

PUBLIC OFFENDERS.

QUERY III. *Under what circumstances is it our duty to go to a public offender and admonish him in private?*

While we affirm that there is no law of Christ's kingdom which imposes upon us the obligation to admonish an offender privately, before we introduce his case to the notice of the church, we would not be understood as pronouncing it *unlawful* in any case to pursue such a course. Circumstances

may render it not only lawful, but manifestly our duty to labor with an individual in private, before we act upon his case in public.

There is a wide and material difference between a positive obligation and a moral duty. The one rests upon a positive precept or express example; the other upon general principles directly or indirectly recognized in the word of God. Thus we may speak, with propriety, of a positive obligation to perform a moral duty; for there are positive precepts to do the whole will of God, and the will of God is revealed, in part, in the general principles to which allusion has been made. It may, therefore, be our duty to do what it would be very unlawful in the church, by an express rule, to require us to do. The church has no right to pass any law for which it has no express warrant in the word of God; but we are morally bound, as individuals, to do many things for which there is no express precept. Were an express precept necessary to impose a duty, what an endless number of volumes must have been written to teach us "the whole duty of man." The long life of a Methuselah would have proved insufficient to enable one to acquaint himself with the thousandth part of those precepts, which it would have been necessary to give; and, consequently, insufficient to teach him the thousandth part of his duty!

The question at the head of this article then occurs,—Under what circumstances is it our duty to go to a public offender and admonish him in private? Before attempting to answer this query, we would premise, that the Scriptures certainly justify us in making a distinction between offenders. Jude, in his Epistle, speaking of certain false teachers, and those who were led astray through their artifices, says. "And of some have compassion, making a difference; And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh,"—v. 22, 23.

The sum and substance of the instructions on this subject appear to be this: That gross, wilful and obstinate offenders are to be promptly excluded from the church, while such as have been misled by them, and have sinned inadvertently,—not through a settled purpose to do evil, or any perverse disposition of the heart, but through the weakness of their frail natures, and the infatuation of the moment,—should be treated with greater lenity. If they are tractable, can be made sensible of their errors, are ingenuous enough to confess their faults, and honest enough, not only to reform their conduct, but to seek to make some adequate reparation for the wrongs they have done, they should be retained in communion. But even in such cases, it is necessary that the church proceed in such a manner as to evince, very clearly, that while she retained the offender in fellowship, she held his sins in utter abhorrence.

Churches, in the present day, are ready enough to make distinctions in the treatment of offenders; but the distinctions of which they make are too often founded upon the influence which individuals possess in the world,—upon an influence which is produced, not by a holy fire, but by the adventitious

circumstances of place, property or worldly reputation. If one animadverts upon that improper conduct of a member who is thus favored, the reply is, "O, he is an officer of government, he is a man of wealth, or he is a man of talents, a man of great erudition—we must bear with him." It is thus, in the church, as it is in the state: wealth, office, and worldly reputation cover more sins by far than the robe of charity. Christians, as well as men of the world, but too frequently verify the truth of Shakespeare's remark:

"Through tattered clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furred gowns, hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks:
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it."

It is scarcely necessary to add, that the only distinctions which are warranted by the word of God, are those founded on differences in moral character.

These remarks, we trust, have prepared the reader, in some degree, to give a due consideration to the views which we shall express in answer to the query we are considering. In reply to that query, we would observe in general terms, that when three things occur in the case of the offender, we may safely conclude that it is our duty to reason with him in private, before we arraign him publicly. 1st. When the offence committed is evidently ascribable more to an error of the head than of the heart, and savors more of what the world would call an impropriety, than of an immorality; 2d. When it is in the power of the individual, by his own act, effectually to secure the church from all unjust imputations on his account; and, 3d. When the general character of the individual is such as to justify the belief of his willingness, when convinced of his error, to make any reparation in his power, for the wrongs committed. If any of these things be wanting in the case of the offender, the duty to admonish him privately will be, at least, very questionable. If all are wanting, it certainly cannot be proved the duty of any one to do it.

If the offence consist in some grossly immoral act, such as the sin of drunkenness, the commission of assault and battery, fornication, &c., no acknowledgments, no professions of penitence on the part of the offender, can shield the church from reproach. It will, therefore, be absolutely necessary that the church should act upon his case. She should act promptly, act with decision, and act effectually. Our churches, almost uniformly, are guilty of two flagrant errors in reference to such cases. The first is, that of delaying action unnecessarily; and the second, that of receiving an acknowledgment, perhaps reluctantly made, as a sufficient satisfaction for the injuries done to the cause of Christ,

1. *The delay of action.*—The church of Rome, in the height of her arrogance and in the supremacy of her power, issued her decretals, that the ordi-

nance of baptism should be administered only on specified days, at Easter and Whitsuntide.² We, while loud in condemning this usurpation of power, scruple not to imitate her example, by adopting a rule which requires that offenders shall be tried only on certain appointed days; and the number of these days amount only to twelve,—on only twelve days out of the 365 is it lawful, according to the usage of very many of our churches, to investigate and act upon the moral delinquencies of our members! Where is the Scripture to justify such a restriction? The truth is, there is no more sanction given in Scripture to the restriction which we adopt, than there is to that adopted by the church of Rome. Whenever the disciples assemble in the name of the Lord, they are as fully authorized to investigate and act upon cases of church discipline, as they are to unite in the worship of God. “When ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan,” &c. (1 Cor. v. 4, 5,) was the direction given by an inspired apostle.

According to the rule which custom has established among us, if a man in our church meeting day gets drunk, murders his neighbor, or commits highway robbery, we can do nothing with him, until the next church meeting. His case is then perhaps introduced; but the offender is generally absent, consequently nothing final can be done. A committee is appointed to cite him to appear before our next church meeting. Another month rolls round—his case is taken up—some one notifies the church, that it was out of his power to attend that day—he had a friend to meet, a neighbor to visit, a debt to pay, or something of the kind to do, and requests that the case be deferred. It is deferred, accordingly, another month; and sometimes it is put off from month to month, for six months or more. We knew an instance in which a member committed murder, was tried by a civil court, condemned, and came near being hung before the church could act upon his case! And why was this? Because she had bound up her hands, not with the rules of God’s word, but with the rules of her own invention. We are sticklers for the rules which God has prescribed for the administration of gospel ordinances. It is well, but, brethren, let us be equally tenacious of the rules which he has prescribed for the regulation of our own conduct, and the government of our churches.

Perhaps some may respond, you condemn the course which custom has established amongst us; what course would you have us pursue? We answer, the first time the disciples are “gathered together” after the offence becomes known to the members of the church, let the case be taken up. If the offender be absent, let persons be appointed to apprise him of the charges alleged against him, and cite him to appear at your next meeting. Let your meeting be appointed at an early day. If you should not be able to dispose of the case at your next meeting, *adjourn from day to day*, and be

²Wheatly on Book Com. Prayer pp. 214, 311, London Edition. 1759. Histor. Sac. Biblioth. Art. Bapt. &c.

sure to make a *final* disposition of the case *as soon as practicable*. Remember, that every day the offender continues in the church, the wound he has inflicted upon her honor is kept open, and her spiritual strength is wasting. Moreover, promptitude in acting upon the case of offenders, will have a tendency greatly to restrain others from the commission of evil.

If it be deemed too much for an individual to assume the responsibility of laboring to produce a reformation in this matter, could not something be done in our ministers' meetings, or at our Associations, which would have a tendency to direct the attention of our churches to this subject and lead to the correction of the existing evil?

2. *The receiving acknowledgments as a satisfaction for public offences.* This practice, which is also very prevalent, seems to us to savor of the Romish practice of forgiving sin, granting indulgences, &c. If there be a difference, we know not but that it is in favor of the Romanist; for he receives an actual compensation, something substantial for the injuries done his church; but we receive nothing but a wordy acknowledgment—and what are words but empty air? A member gets drunk—we arraign him before the church—he makes his confession—sheds, perhaps, a few whiskey tears, and—is freely pardoned! In two or three months he is drunk again. The same scene is acted over:—he is arraigned and pardoned as freely as ever. We doubt not that there are members in some of our churches, (we trust not in many,) who have been drunk half a dozen times since they have been united with us, and have been as often pardoned! These are blemishes which are noted by our adversaries and pointed at. Exaggerated accounts of them are dealt out with an unsparing hand, both from the pulpit and the press. We have recently seen some to these accounts in a public print. While we deplore the existence of such a state of things in any church, we cannot but pity the man whose depraved taste leads him to feed on such unsavory food; to nourish his pride and arrogance with the offals of the church. But we leave such to their loathsome diet, while we proceed to recommend a remedy for the prevailing evil.

We would have it established as a general principle in our churches, *that every member guilty of a scandalous public offence should be excluded and kept out of the church, until he had sufficient time to evince the sincerity of his professions of penitence and restore himself, in some degree at least, to the confidence of the community.* Amongst the many reasons which we have for favoring the adoption of such a rule, we will specify the following:

First. The Scriptures expressly teach us to withdraw our fellowship from such, without making any exceptions in favor of those who are willing to compromise the matter with an acknowledgment.

Second. They require, that members of the church should maintain a fair character in the world. The offender, in the supposed case, has broken his fellowship with the saints by his own acts, and justly forfeited all claims upon the church. The question, therefore, virtually involved in his trial, is not, Shall we *keep* him in fellowship? but, shall we *renew* our fellowship

with him? If there exist causes which would justify us in rejecting his fellowship, when proffered for the first time, we see not why the same causes should not justify us in rejecting his fellowship, when proffered a second time. But ill report in the world, would, probably, be considered as a sufficient cause why we should not receive him into the church, were he presenting himself before us for the first time; and, if so, it should be considered an equally valid cause why we should not receive him, a second time, to our communion. Allow him time to vegetate anew and “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.”

Third. The Scriptures, moreover, require us to labor to preserve the church pure and promote its prosperity. The injunction to do this, of course, involves the duty to use the means necessary for the accomplishment of these ends. But no church can be preserved pure and prosperous that will receive an acknowledgment of error as a sufficient satisfaction for a scandalous offence; or a promise of amendment as a sufficient security for the future good conduct of a gross offender.

Fourth. Such a rule as that we propose, would exert a restraining influence on the members of our churches. It would inculcate circumspection more effectually than all the labored arguments of their ministers. An individual would be much less likely to yield to temptation when he knew that, if he yielded, the inevitable consequence would be exclusion from the church and a consequent loss of character.

Fifth. The rule would be galling only to the evil-doer. To the true Christian it could never prove oppressive. An enlightened Christian, if in an ungarded moment he were hurried into the commission of any gross sin, would be the first to insist on enforcing the rule in his own case; for however much he loved himself, he would love his Saviour more; and however reluctant he might be to sustain an injury in his own character, he would be still more reluctant to be instrumental in fixing a stain upon the character of the church. Amid his greatest aberrations from the path of moral rectitude, the cause of Christ would still be dear to his heart, and rather than subject the best of causes to unmerited reproach on his account, he would prefer to suffer anything in his own person. A temporary exclusion from the church could do such an one no injury. It might assist in humbling him before God, and in his own estimation, and thus prepare him for subsequent exaltation. It would afford him an opportunity of giving the most satisfactory evidence to the church, and to the world of the genuineness of his professions and the sincerity of his penitence.

With the view of illustrating, confirming and enforcing what we have written on this point, we will report a case with which we became acquainted in Virginia:

An aged and prominent member of a church was overcome by drink. At the first conference meeting that was convened after his misfortune, he reported himself to the church, deplored his sin, expressed his penitence

with a flood of tears, but called upon the church to do her duty, and shield herself from the reproach which his misconduct was calculated to bring upon her. The deep distress of this hoary-headed sire excited commiseration in every bosom—the whole church was in tears. As soon as their feelings would allow it, a proposition was made to pass over the offence and dismiss the case. Many were the voices immediately lifted in its favor. One tremulous voice alone was heard to oppose it—it was the voice of the offender himself. At length the pastor, who was a man of intelligence as well as of approved piety, arose. Every eye was fixed upon him with intense anxiety. He expressed his regret for the misfortunes of the brother,—the same regrets were felt by all;—his sympathy for him in his present state of mental suffering,—this was in perfect unison with the feelings evinced by the audience;—but he concluded with adding, that he concurred with the brother in thinking that the honor of the church required that she should express, in the most decided manner, her disapprobation of the act of which he had unfortunately been guilty, and that the offender should be excluded. Disappointment of a most painful character was depicted on every countenance. The church, however, yielded reluctantly, to the concurrent views of the pastor and the offender himself. The latter was excluded, but after a month or two was restored. He has never since, within our knowledge, done anything to dishonor the cause of his Saviour.

In the case above reported, the honor of the church was preserved untarnished, while no real injury was done to the individual by enforcing the rules of the gospel. The course which he wisely pursued, gave the church and the community greater confidence in him, if possible, than they had prior to his fall. While no one thought *worse of the offender*, every one thought *better* of the church, for the course which she pursued. To the offenders, and to churches, we would say, Go ye, and do likewise.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

OBJECTION I. *By your rule you would exclude many a true christian from the Church.*

Answer. The character of the *offence*, and not that of the *offender*, should influence all our decisions, in ecclesiastical as well as in civil tribunals. When a member is arraigned before a church, it is no part of our business to enter into a general investigation of his claims to be considered a christian. The question to be decided is not, Is he a christian? but, Is he guilty? It therefore devolves on us, in the first place, to endeavor to ascertain whether he is actually guilty of the charges preferred against him. If the charges be sustained by satisfactory evidence, it is our duty, in the next place, to recur to the '*law and the testimony*,' to learn what course they direct us to pursue, towards one guilty of the offences supposed to be

proved on the accused—whether they would justify us in conniving at his sin, by retaining him in fellowship. Now the word of God teaches us, expressly, to withdraw from such as depart from the faith, or walk disorderly amongst us. There are no exceptions made in favor of those who may hope to be christians. Considerations of personal character are to influence us, only in cases such as that to which we refer on a preceding page.

By complying with the Gospel rule to which we refer above, we do not declare a belief that the accused is not a christian, but merely decide that the acts charged upon him are infringements of the law of God, and such infringements as require us to set upon him the seal of our disapprobation;—that they are derogatory to the character of a christian, reproachful to the cause of Christ, and hurtful to souls. If there be a stain on the character of the church, we must seek to wipe it off, no matter by whom it has been affixed. We should give no more countenance to sin in one individual than in another;—we should be, at least as careful not to sanction it in the christian, as in the unconverted. The fact that a sin has been committed by a christian, does not lessen its evil, in any respect;—it rather increases it. A sinful act committed by one who has hitherto sustained a fair character, is calculated to exert a wider and more baneful influence than the same act committed by a loose professor or an avowed unbeliever. It is with rays of moral darkness as with rays of solar light;—the more elevated the object that reflects them, the more extensively is their influence spread abroad and felt. Shall we, then, plead in extenuation of sin, that which increases its power to harm? God forbid.

That the simple act of withdrawing fellowship from an individual does not amount to a declaration of a belief that he is no christian;—in other words, that the general character which one sustains as a christian, should not shield him from the consequences of his guilt, in any particular instance, those who raise the objection we are endeavoring to answer, not infrequently admit by their practice. They withdraw fellowship from a certain class of offenders, of whose christian character they entertain no doubt, as is evident from their uniting with them, subsequently, in acts of religious worship which clearly indicate *christian* fellowship. We allude to the course they pursue, in common with us, towards those who are guilty of overleaping the barriers, which separate us as a church from other denominations of christians. We never pretend, that we separate ourselves from those who have adopted the creed and practice of another denomination, because we believe them to be deceivers or false professors; but base our justification solely on the ground, that our views of duty will not allow us to sanction, in any one, what we believe to be violations of the word of God.

“Here is firm footing: here is solid rock;
This can support us; all is sea besides,
Sinks under us; bestorms, and then devours.”

Involves us in counter currents of inconsistency, and in a maelstrom of strife and confusion.

We trust that what we have written on this subject, will be sufficient to satisfy the reader of the correctness of the principle laid down in the first sentence of this article; and, if so, that he will ever, hereafter, in his church conferences, regulate his course in accordance with it.

OBJECTION II. *The apostle Paul teaches, in Gal. vi. 1, that if a brother be overtaken in a fault, we are to restore him, not exclude him as you direct.*

Answer. The passage referred to in the above objection, like that in Matt. xviii, 15–17, is but too frequently misunderstood and misapplied. From few things have our churches suffered more injury, than from the perversion and misapplication of the discipline rules laid down in the sacred Scriptures.

Can any one read attentively the writings of Paul, and notice the utter abhorrence which he expresses for the immoral practices which prevailed in his day, as well as in ours, the urgency with which he enjoins on the church to withdraw from those who indulge in them; the heavy censures he passes on some for retaining such in fellowship, and then suppose, for one moment, that he had reference to open immoralities in the passage to which we are referred? Who would charge the apostle with such inconsistency? Certainly no one;—but note,

1. The apostle speaks of “*faults*,” not of *vices*; of errors that originate in the head, or in the infirmities of the flesh, and not of those that originate in a corrupt heart, and are associated with a perverse will. This is evident from the reason he assigns why they should restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, “considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.” Can it be possible that the apostle, who contended so strenuously that the people of God were predestined to good works, and that they would be preserved in a state of holiness, by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, intended to intimate, that they were themselves predisposed to be guilty of drunkenness, fornication, adultery, theft, murder, &c., and therefore should deal gently with such as were guilty of these offences, that they might not be treated with severity when guilty of the same? We cannot believe it. If the apostle had designed to intimate that they were predisposed to commit such acts, we cannot believe that he would have sought to influence their present conduct, by holding out a hope of impunity in the future indulgence of their sinful propensities.

2. But, let it be observed further, that the apostle supposes the case of one who is seeking to *evade*—*who is running away from* his faults, but is unfortunately *overtaken* by them. Now, there is a wide difference between such an one, and one who seeks evil, runs into temptation, and plunges into vice. The latter overtakes his faults, the former is overtaken by them. It would be exceedingly pernicious, as well as absurd, to apply, in the one case, a rule given to direct our conflict in the other. The apostle evidently

speaks of one who errs involuntarily. We have spoken of those who voluntarily, and in a flagrant manner, transgress the laws of God. The direction of the apostle, therefore, cannot be properly applied to cases like those of which we are treating.

3. But again—"Ye that are spiritual, restore such a one"—restore such a one to what? To the fellowship of the church? No; we have no reason to believe that the apostle has any allusion to an *excluded* member. And if he does allude to such, the passage is inapplicable when we are discussing, not whether an individual shall be *restored* to the church, but whether he shall be *retained* in fellowship, after being guilty of an open immorality, provided he is willing to make an acknowledgment and profess penitence. It is in the latter case that the passage is generally objected to us. As to the propriety of restoring excluded members, first to a godly life, and then to the fellowship of the church, there exists no diversity of sentiment amongst us. But the apostle is not speaking of *retaining* a member in fellowship; he is speaking of *restoring* one to something. We have seen, that it cannot be to church fellowship, as the individual is not supposed, even by our objectors, to have been an *excluded* member. The question then again occurs, to what are such to be restored? We answer, first, to our affections, if in an unguarded moment they have done anything to alienate them; secondly, to their right reason, if through the infirmities of the flesh, they have suffered their tempestuous passions, or the cares and vexations of the world, to distract and disturb their minds; and, thirdly, to the consolations of the gospel, if through the weakness of their frames they have been drawn away from these, and are now mourning the absence of their former joys. Whatever may be the meaning of this passage, one thing is certain, it can have no possible allusion to the course to be pursued, when dealing with individuals who are charged with gross immoralities.

RUMORED OFFENCES.

QUERY IV. *How are we to proceed when a member of the church is charged, by common rumor, with criminal conduct?*

This is an important inquiry. It presents before us a subject on which it is much more common to err than to act correctly, and one which involves interests in no respect inferior to those involved in our preceding articles on private and public offences. In our answer we shall speak, first, in reference to the action of individuals, and, secondly, in reference to the action of the church.

The action of individuals.—1st. It is not our duty to notice every evil report that we hear of a brother; for evil reports, of some kind or other, will ever be circulated about those who are active in the cause of Christ. The word of God declares, that if any man will live godly, he shall suffer per-

secution; and where persecutors are prohibited the use of fire and faggot, and the sword, by the civil law, they will never fail to resort to the "scourge of the tongue." He that will busy himself with every evil report which he hears of a brother, will find but little time to attend to anything else, and will seldom hear any good of himself or of others. As a general rule, therefore, we would say, give no heed to reports of a vague, indefinite, unauthenticated and improbable character. But, on the other hand, beware of turning a deaf ear to every evil report. If we were to adopt the rule, never to give ear to an evil report, it is evident that offenders could never be arraigned or convicted of guilt. If report charges a brother with a criminal act, of a *specific* character, we are bound to notice it. Our duty to the accused, as well as to the church, requires that we should notice it, and trace it, if possible, to its source.

2d. We should carefully avoid giving currency to an evil report, however confident we may be of the truth of that report. Many violate this rule, unintentionally. They profess, perhaps, great regret that such a report should be circulated, and a strong desire that it should be suppressed. At the same time, they roll the ball as it were forward, give it a new impetus, and a new direction. It is sent into their neighbor's family circle, and thence into many others. They thus act, effectually, as agents for the transmission of the evil which they profess to deplore. Another repeats the evil rumor, and excuses himself by saying, it is no secret; he supposes there is no harm in repeating what is in every man's mouth. We would remind such, that we are cautioned in Scripture against following the multitude to do evil, and that sin is not the less sinful because it is committed by the many.

3d. It is our duty, in but very few instances, if indeed in any, to give information of the report to the individual principally affected by it; for if the report be of a comparatively trivial or of an indefinite character, it is worse than useless to apprize him of it. On the other hand, if the report contains specific charges of a criminal character, to acquaint him with it, without taking previous steps to ascertain the truth or falsity of those charges, cannot fail to be productive of evil, whether he be innocent or guilty. If innocent, it will greatly harass his mind, damp the energies of his soul, embarrass his actions, weaken his efforts, and, consequently, diminish his usefulness. If he be guilty, it will serve to place him on his guard against the consequences of his guilt, and afford him an opportunity of seeking to conceal his sin and evade justice. It would be like notifying a thief before hand, of our intention to search for the goods which we suspect him of having stolen. A man, it should be remembered, who is base enough to commit a grossly criminal act, will seldom be found honest enough to confess it. These remarks may serve to prepare the way for the rule which we would recommend to be pursued, in every instance in which a brother is charged, by common report, with some criminal act.

Our rule is simply this, *endeavor to trace the report to its origin, with as*

little delay as possible. Demand of him who repeats the report in your hearing, his author. Go to his authority and proceed, in like manner, from individual to individual, until you are well assured that the report is false, or until you have obtained evidence sufficient to prove it true. In either event, you will be rewarded with the consciousness of having discharged your duty. Yours will be the satisfaction to reflect, that you have been instrumental in vindicating the innocent, or detecting the guilty, and unmasking the hypocrite. Were this course generally pursued, it would tend, evidently, to restrain the circulation of evil reports. Individuals would be led to reflect well before they gave currency to a report.

4th. Having obtained evidence of the truth of an evil rumor, it is your duty, in the next place, to bring it, or cause it to be brought, before the church; not in the form of a *report*, but in the form of a *charge* against the member implicated. When the case is brought up for trial, it will be your duty, farther, to adduce the evidence upon which the charge was based.

The action of the church.—In reference to the question, as it affects the church, we have but two remarks to make. 1st. An evil report should never be brought before a church, unless brought in the way above directed, or by the individual chiefly implicated in the report. 2d. Should information, however, of a report affecting injuriously the character of a member, be lodged with the church, it will be her duty, whether the case was formally or informally brought before her, to adopt such measures as may be necessary to a thorough investigation of it. She should use every lawful means in her power to obtain sufficient evidence, either to exculpate or convict the reported offender. In all such cases, however, it should be remembered, that *every man is to be presumed innocent, until he is proved guilty.* By this rule we expect others to regulate their conduct towards us; by the same rule we should regulate our conduct towards others—"Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Phil. iii, 16, and Matt. vii, 12.

"Blessed Redeemer! how divine,
How righteous is this rule of thine,
Never to deal with others worse
Than we would have them deal with us!"

RIGHTS OF OFFENDERS.

QUERY V. *Is it right to exclude a public offender without giving him a hearing and affording him an opportunity to defend himself?*

We answer, certainly not in ordinary cases. The grossest offenders have rights, and it becomes the christian and the church of Christ to respect the rights of every individual. We are required, in the Scriptures, not only to love mercy and walk humbly, but to deal justly, Mic. vi, 8. To render "unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are

God's;" Matt. xxii, 21. Caesar, it is certain, was not a friend of God; for it was by Caesar's laws that the Son of God was immolated upon the cross: yet even Caesar was to receive his due.

Is our civil government the guardian of our civil rights? So should the church be of our spiritual privileges. Is it necessary, in the one, that before a person can be disfranchised, he should be fairly tried and condemned, upon the testimony of credible witnesses? So should it be in the other. But instead of this, we have known a charge brought against an offender, and, in several instances, the motion made and *carried* to exclude him, although the charge was sustained only by the testimony of the accuser—the whole process occupying, perhaps, not more than five or ten minutes; and all this occurring—where? Not in the confessional of a son of apostate Rome; not in the classroom or closet of a tyrannical itinerant; not in the sessions convened by a haughty and aristocratic presbytery; but in the conference of a church that has ever gloried in being the champion of equal rights and of apostolical practices! Brethren, we write these things not to shame you, but to profit you; not to blazon forth your failures in duty, but to point out errors for your correction, "that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." View us not as an enemy, who glories in your shame, because we speak the truth; but as one whose interests are identified with yours; who is honored when you are honored, and who bleeds when you are wounded.

A procedure, like that we have noticed, has not the least semblance of justice in it. It is in direct opposition to the teachings of God's word, tends to the establishment of a dangerous precedent, and frustrates the ends which should be had in view in the exercise of church discipline.

I. It is at variance with the rules of God's word, for,

1st. The word of God teaches, that an individual is not to be condemned except upon the testimony of "*two or three witnesses.*" See Deut. xvii. 6 and xix. 15, for the original law on this subject. In the latter passage, it is said, "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth; at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." For evidence of the incorporation of this law in the christian code, see Matt. xviii, 16; 2 Cor. xiii. 1; 1st Tim. v. 19. We would refer the reader also to our remarks on this subject in our preceding articles.

2d. From the word of God, it further appears, that witnesses were required to give in their testimony *in the presence of the accused*. This is evident from all the reports of trials recorded in Sacred Writ. In that most iniquitous trial, the most unparallel for injustice of any recorded to the annals of criminal jurisprudence—in the trial of the Prince of Peace—the right to confront his witnesses was not withheld. That the witnesses gave in their testimony in his presence, is apparent from the whole narrative as well as from the interrogatory of Pilate; Matt. xxvii. 13. "Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?"

Reason and observation concur in teaching the importance of respecting

this rule of right; for there are many persons, who are sufficiently malicious to accuse one behind his back, but are not sufficiently bold to sustain their accusation before his face. The consciousness that the accused *knows* the accusation to be false, has often confounded a false witness: and this it will generally do, where the accuser is not hardened in iniquity. Thus this rule is calculated to afford protection to the innocent, against at least a dastardly enemy. We have not infrequently been pained and disgusted at the course pursued by accusers, and truly mortified, when the accuser has happened to be a brother in the church. That which had been affirmed as a matter of fact, behind one's back, turns out to be, before his face, but a matter of opinion, or an unwarrantable inference; and the charge which was thought to be based upon personal observation is found to be based upon nothing more substantial than a very questionable 'hearsay.'

3d. The same authority teaches us, that the accused should be allowed *to answer for himself*. This privilege was conceded to the Saviour, by the high priest, when the false witnesses gave in their testimony, "and the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?" Matt. xxvi, 52. The same right was conceded to the apostle Paul, on the occasion on which he delivered his eloquent and ever memorable address before Agrippa. "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand and answered for himself," &c. Acts xxvi. 1, &c. When the Pharisees, on one occasion, manifested a disposition to condemn the Saviour, unheard, Nicodemus appealed to them, John vii. 51. "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" He evidently considered their conduct, in this instance, as of a most unjustifiable character; abhorrent alike to the principles of natural equity, and the spirit and letter of their judicial code.

Testimony may be given that appears direct, that is strong and true, as far as it goes: it may appear so conclusive as to leave no doubt on our minds relative to the guilt of the accused, and yet, when circumstances are explained, and important omissions in the testimony are supplied, the case may present a very different aspect from that which was at first presented. A case which occurred under our own observation will serve for an illustration. A very excellent brother brought a charge of intoxication against another. He stated, that he passed from one town to another with the accused; was in his company some ten or fifteen minutes—the time occupied in the passage—that the accused was very talkative, but was so much intoxicated, that he could not speak distinctly. As it was known that the accused had once been in the habit of taking an occasional glass of liquor, and as the witness was one in whose veracity all had confidence, the impression made on every mind was, that the accused was guilty. Subsequently, the case was taken up. The accused being allowed to answer for himself, stated, what was known to every one, that he labored under an

impediment of speech, and that certain variations in the atmosphere, or any mental excitement, tended greatly to increase that impediment. He added, what had not been known, that his mind had become somewhat excited, by his anxiety to reach the neighboring town in time to secure a passage to some place which he was about to visit. He ascribed his inarticulate address to the combined influence of his mental excitement and the cold and damp atmosphere to which he was exposed on his passage, and affirmed, that on the day on which he was said to have been intoxicated, he had not touched a drop of spirituous liquors, nor, indeed, had he tasted any for many months previously. The church was satisfied with the defence, and the accuser apologized with, "*I thought* he had been drinking, and *thought* that it was the influence of liquor that caused him to speak so indistinctly."

In this case, it will be observed, that the facts stated by the accuser, as proof of the charge of intoxication, were admitted to be true by the accused; but when the circumstances were explained, they were not deemed sufficient to justify the inference deduced from them.

II. To try and condemn an individual, either in the church or out of it, without giving him a hearing, and allowing him to face his accusers, is to establish a precedent that is dangerous in the extreme. If this thing may be done with impunity, the character of no one can be secure; for there is no man who has not his enemies, and no man who has not failings, which may serve as the ground work for the basest of charges. How often have those, who have been engaged in tracing reports to their origin, been astonished to find how great a fire a little matter is capable of kindling, and to how odious a tale a little imprudence may give rise. We will not hazard the assertion that it is never lawful to exclude a member from the church, without affording him an opportunity to confront the witnesses and defend himself, but we will say, that if such a course is ever lawful, it is only in extreme cases, which but rarely occur, and which should not be allowed to serve as precedents for other cases. To justify even this departure from the usual routine, three things must hold true. 1st. The offence committed must be of a highly criminal character. 2d. The proof must be such as to admit of no possibility of a refutation. 3d. The circumstances of the case must also be such, that the character of the church would suffer by the delay which would be necessary for a formal trial. It should ever be remembered, that it is much easier to inflict a wound than to heal one. The injuries committed in an hour of excitement, a whole life time may be insufficient to repair. If, therefore, we err, it is ever best to err on mercy's side.

III. To withhold from an offender any of his just rights, is to preclude the likelihood of effecting the ends for which we resort to the exercise of church discipline. To inflict a wanton injury upon an individual, is certainly not the most effectual way of bringing him to acknowledge the injuries he has done, either to the church or to the cause of Christ. The slightest deviation from the rule of right, on the part of the church, will tend rather to

confirm the offender in his offences. It will excite prejudice against us, close the doors of his head and heart against our appeals and remonstrances; and, like a coat of mail, render him invulnerable to the most pointed reproofs. Such a course of conduct, moreover, instead of shielding the church from reproach, will expose her but the more. While she is attempting to stop up the breach which the offender has made in her walls, she pulls down a whole broadside.

Learn, then, to respect the rights of offenders, if you would have them brought back to the exercise of a godly sorrow for their sins, and would shield yourselves, and the cause of Christ, from reproach. These, as we have stated in our former articles, are the great ends, for the accomplishment of which, the exercise of church discipline has been enjoined. Much wisdom and discretion is needed, to preserve us from an undue laxity on the one hand, and an unjustifiable severity on the other. In seeking to be lenient, we may be over-indulgent: and in seeking to be just, we may be tyrannical and oppressive. May He who is the light of the world and the head of the church, enable his people to steer clear of each extreme. But to do this, beloved brethren, we must cultivate a spirit of prayer, and diligently study the word of God.

OMISSIONS OF DUTY.

QUERY VI. *Is it right for a church to exclude a member, against whom there is no charge of immorality, for simply neglecting some christian duty; such, for instance, as the duty to unite in celebrating the Lord's Supper,—to contribute according to his ability to the support of the Gospel, to keep up family worship, &c.?*

We feel but little hesitation in answering the above query in the affirmative, and are very confident that we shall be able to make it apparent, that our views on this subject are sustained, both by the Sacred Scriptures and the usage of the more intelligent and efficient portion of our churches.

A proper regard for the preservation of discipline in our churches, imperiously require, that our church members be exercised in the practice of all the moral and social virtues enjoined in the word of God. The scriptures not only require of us that we “cease to do evil,” but that we “learn to do well.” The requisition to love and serve one another, to minister to the necessities of the needy, not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, to contribute for the support of the ministry, to aid in diffusing abroad the blessings of the gospel of Christ, are as express as the prohibitions of immoral acts. But, unfortunately, we seem to lose sight of this important fact, and attach more importance to negative than to positive duties;—that is, to the duty to abstain from evil, than to the duty to do good. We make that primary which should be secondary, and that secondary

which should be primary. We are more careful to punish an offending member, than we are to instruct and train the unoffending. We would not hesitate to exclude from our communion a servant who positively refused, in but one or two instances, to obey his master, while we retain in fellowship those who habitually neglect the most peremptory commands of their God! We thus declare, by our acts, that we esteem it a greater offence to neglect a duty to a fellow creature, than to neglect our duties to God. If a member will but abstain from open immoralities, and attend his church conferences once in two or three, or six months, we hold him in full fellowship, and report him to be in good standing, though he afford no fruit, either of his love to God, or his interest in the prosperity of the church!

To see that our church members are employed in doing good, is one of the most effectual means of keeping them from the commission of evil. The more they are employed in the duties of religion, the more will they delight in them, and the less will they relish those sinful indulgences which expose one, not only to the censures of the church, but to the displeasure of God. Knowing then, as we do, that the neglect of duty prepares for the commission of crime, if we connive at the one, we cannot but be held responsible for the other. With what justice, or with what propriety can we sit in judgment upon an offending brother, if we witnessed his first derelictions of duty and neglected to admonish him? If, when he first turned aside from the path of duty, we said, by our silence, if in no other way, "brother, go on; you are in the right way; God speed thee?"

There must be a reformation also in this department of discipline, before the church can appear to the beholder as a beautiful fabric, completely built of polished stones. If we would have our church members to be as a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariot, we must put them in the harness, attach them to the chariot of the gospel, and be as careful to make them pull forward, as we are to keep them from running backward. The whip and the spur must be applied when they stop and refuse to work, as well as when they make attempts to break loose and shake off their gear. Why was the barren fig tree withered by the curse of the Saviour? We read not that it bore evil fruit; but it was barren—it yielded no good fruit, (Matt. xxi, 19, 20. See also the parable xxiv, 32.) 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is to be hewn down and cast into the fire.' (Matt. iii, 10.) This is declared to be an ordinance of heaven, by him who was sent to prepare the way for the building up of the church of Christ. The Saviour confirms the decree and declares, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away" (John xv, 2.) And again, "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." (v, 6.)

This branch of church discipline merits, and should receive, more attention than we have hitherto given to it. It is with church members as with orators; the main thing to secure commendation and success in their holy

vocation, is “*action*.” Like good soldiers and good scholars, they must be regularly and systematically exercised in their several duties. We should watch over each other, therefore, not only that we may reprove each other’s offences, but that we may stir up each other’s languid affections, and excite to good works. We represent the neglect of duty as a very little sin, (and so does Satan,) but in the word of God, it is represented as a sin of so great a magnitude as to justify the excluding from heaven all such as are guilty of it: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. ii, 3.) “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these (his disciples) ye did it not to me,” is represented as the language of the Judge of all the earth, when sentencing to final banishment from his presence, those who claimed to be his peculiar people. (Matt. xxv, 45.) Observe, that they are excluded, not because they persecuted, oppressed, impoverished, or imprisoned his disciples; but because they neglected to visit and administer to their necessities. But if this afford just ground of exclusion from heaven, it must—it does afford just ground of exclusion from the privileges of the church.

The inference which we would draw, from all that has been said on this subject, is, that to be faithful to God, and just and impartial in our administration of the laws of Christ’s kingdom, we must subject to the censures of the church, not only those who do evil, but those also who neglect to do good; for the word of God admonishes, “to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” (Jas. iv, 17.) Let this be borne in remembrance, and let the actions of our churches be regulated accordingly, and our church registry will be less frequently stained with the record of the guilt of our members; its pages will be more frequently embellished with entries of acts of benevolence, and with the names of new recruits in the cause of Christ.

Baptist churches have repeatedly sanctioned the principle for which we contend—the principle which leads us to deal with members for the neglect of duty. The Kehukee Association, in 1783, considered the following query:—“What shall a church do with a member who shall absent himself from the communion of the Lord’s supper?” They returned the answer, “That it is the duty of the church to inquire into the reason of his absenting himself from the communion, and if he does not render a satisfactory reason the church shall deal with him.” Hist. Keh. As. p. 68.

In the minutes of the Georgia Association, for the year 1835, we find the following queries and answers, in reference to the same subject. 1. “Is it the duty of church members to partake of the Lord’s supper, when regularly administered in the church? *Answer, Yes!* 2. Are members excusable who take their seats in order, but refuse to partake of the elements? *Answer, No!* 3. Is it the duty of the church or not, when members take their seats and do not commune, to inquire into the reason thereof? *Answer, Yes!* 4. When members take their seats at communion, and fail to partake on account of a want of fellowship with some brother or brethren, and yet do

not lay charges against those for whose sake they refuse to commune, ought the church to deal with them who thus act? *Answer, Yes, after gospel steps have been taken!*"

In the minutes of the same Association, for 1798, is the following query. "What shall be done with those professors who do not hold worship in their families?" They answer, "It is our opinion that the churches to whom such professors belong, *first admonish, exhort, and reprove* them, but if they will not be *reclaimed*, then deal with them as neglecters of *known duty*." In the minutes for 1808, the following query and answer occur: "Should a brother be continued in fellowship who, though able, will not assist in supporting the gospel? Ans.—We are of opinion where the ability is *obvious* on the one hand, and the unwillingness positive on the other, and the brother cannot be brought to his duty by proper means, he ought to be excluded." Hist Ga. As. p. 130, 132, 138.

Our views on this subject are thus sustained by the sacred Scriptures and by the express decisions of large and respectable portions of our denomination. Our misfortune is not that we lack light on this subject, but that we lack the zeal, energy and moral courage which is requisite to the faithful discharge of our duty. Our churches are often as neglectful of their duty as the most unfaithful of their members.

OF WITNESSES.

QUERY VII. *In the trial of offenders, may we receive testimony from the world? and, if so, are we to allow it equal weight with testimony received from church members?*

In the trial of offenders, regard must ever be had, both to the character of the witnesses, and to the circumstances under which their testimony is given, and that, too, whether the testimony be for or against the offender.

1st. *The character of the witness.*—Some churches, we are fully aware, adopt the rule, that the testimony of no one, who is not a member of the church, shall be received against one who is a member. Of this rule we would say a few things.

We are at a loss to know upon what foundation it is based. We know of no passage of Scripture, which restricts us, in the receiving of testimony to the members of the church. In the absence of any specific instructions on the subject, we must recur to the general principles established in the word of God. These, in our estimation, favor the idea, that the testimony of the world is not to be disregarded. For they teach, that christians should be of good report without, and live above reproach in the world; but how is a professor's standing in the world to be known, but by the testimony of persons of the world? Should A and B, members of the church, testify that C, a fellow member, sustains a very bad character in the world; that he had been

engaged in a fraudulent transaction with some of his neighbors, or had been seen beastly drunk on some festival occasion; that these facts were of great notoriety, and attested by multitudes, it is ten to one, that the church, which professes to reject the testimony of the world, would reject C. upon such testimony, and, perhaps, never dream that it was rejecting him solely upon the testimony of the world. Yet, that under such circumstances, he would be rejected wholly upon such testimony, is very evident. A and B, it is true, are members of the church; but they have no personal knowledge of the facts in the case. They only certify what is the testimony of others, who are unconnected with the church, and upon the reported testimony of persons of the world, C is excluded.

Again suppose a member of the church is arraigned before a civil tribunal, and after a fair trial, by an impartial jury, is convicted of theft, murder, perjury, or any grossly criminal act. Is there a church in christendom that would retain such an individual in fellowship, because his guilt was not attested by members of the church? We presume not; but if he is excluded, upon whose testimony will it be? Will it not be upon the testimony of the world? Whatever may be the rule in her code of discipline, the church that excludes a member under such circumstances, would most evidently give a direct sanction to the receiving of testimony from the world.

The general principles of the gospel, moreover, teach us that we are to use all lawful means to keep the church pure. If it be necessary to this end, to admit the testimony of the world, and if the admission of such testimony be not actually prohibited in the word of God, it is not only lawful, but an imperious duty to receive credible testimony from the world, when adduced. A very little observation and reflection will be sufficient to satisfy any one, that without the admission of such testimony, it will be impossible to keep the church pure. The designing hypocrite will always be careful to avoid manifest improprieties of conduct before his fellow member. Give him to understand, that you will not receive against him the testimony of the world, and, when he is out of your sight, he will not fear to throw off the mask, act without restraint, and give a loose rein to his vicious propensities.

To adopt such a rule, would be, moreover, to hold out an inducement to those who had lost their character in the world, to unite with the church; for it would afford them a prospect of sustaining their sinking reputation. Instances have frequently occurred, in which individuals who were guilty of grossly criminal acts, and feared the consequences of dejection, have sought to unite—and, indeed, have actually united with a church, with the view of screening themselves from merited reproach. What incalculable injury is done to the cause of Christ in such instances! Alas! how often is the Saviour wounded afresh in the house of his friends! The rule in question would most evidently tend to make the church a shelter for the guilty and a refuge of lies. Can the great Head of the church approve a rule that has such a tendency? What church can do it after mature reflection?

Churches that have adopted the rule to which we have alluded, we doubt not, have acted from the purest motives. But we are all liable to err, and that, too, while influenced by the best of motives. Pastors and people are alike frail and fallible.

The rule in question has probably grown out of an apprehension of the evils which would be likely to result, were we to admit testimony from the world indiscriminately. We are no advocates for the indiscriminate admission of testimony. It is equally important that we should have respect to the character of the witnesses, whether they be out of the church or in it. But would we not have greater confidence in the testimony of some persons in the world, than in that of some who are members of a church? And why is this? Is it not because there are persons out of the church, who sustain a better character than some who are unfortunately in it? Pause for a time, and when you have settled these questions satisfactorily, ask yourselves, will either reason or revelation sustain you in rejecting the testimony of the more worthy, and receiving the testimony of those who are less entitled to confidence? Would this be complying with the rule of God's word, which prescribes "honor to whom honor is due?"

2d. *Circumstances under which testimony is given.* To deal justly, we must not only have respect to the character of witnesses, but to the circumstances under which their testimony is given. If testimony be given under the influence of prejudice or passion, or if the interests or the character of the witness be involved in the trial, we cannot be too cautious how we receive his testimony. In other words, we must have respect to the motives by which the witness may be presumed to be influenced. The native disposition of an evil heart, ever leads its possessor to seek to reduce others to a level with himself. Hence the evil-minded are ever found ready to impeach the character, torture the words, and misrepresent the conduct of those, whose uprightness conveys a silent, but severe censure upon their own loose deportment. Even a holy Saviour did not escape detraction. Many were the calumnious reports circulated, and false charges alleged against him.

We cannot do better than to close this branch of our subject with an extract from the charge given to the jury, by Judge Cushman, a few years since, in the trial of a libel suit, instituted against Edward C. Delavan, by John Taylor, one of the brewers of Albany.

After adverting to the fact, that a larger number of witnesses had been sworn on the part of the plaintiff than on the part of the defendant, the Judge proceeds: "The number of witnesses, gentlemen, is never to be the governing consideration in such a case. You are to look at the character of the witnesses for intelligence and integrity; how far they may be under the influence of bias or interest, the relation in which they stand, and their opportunities for observation. Hence the value of an open examination; that the candor of a witness may be noted, the manner in which he testifies, and

his willingness to tell the whole truth. While, therefore, you are not to leave out of view the number of witnesses, you are to look to the circumstances mentioned, rather than to the number, to decide upon the weight which is to be given to the evidence adduced." A Report, &c., p 47.

3rd. *The mode of admitting testimony from the world.* Those who admit the testimony of persons of the world, frequently err in the manner in which it is admitted. It is admitted at second hand, or by report. The witnesses are exonerated, by the church, from the duty of submitting to an examination in the presence of the accused, and the accused is deprived of the right of facing his accuser. These things certainly ought not so to be. It is paying greater deference to persons of the world than we usually pay to members of the church. It may be argued, that the witnesses are generally unwilling to come forward and give in their testimony at a church meeting, and that we have no means of compelling their attendance. This reasoning is more plausible than valid; for under no circumstances should the accused be condemned, without affording him an opportunity of confronting the witnesses. This we have shown, in our last number, is an established rule of Christ's kingdom. But it may be asked, what is to be done, if they persist in refusing to come before the church? We reply, if the accused *denies the charge*, and *wishes to face his accuser*, the church should, under such circumstances, go with him to the accuser. This she may do by the appointment of a committee as her representative, to act for and in her name. But it may be objected, this would be attended with great difficulty and trouble. We admit this fact; but is it not better to encounter any difficulty, and endure any trouble, than infringe upon the rights which are conceded to an individual in the institutions of heaven? Let us labor to keep the law of God, as well as the ordinances of the gospel, "as they were delivered to the saints." If we infringe on the *judicial* code of heaven, with what consistency can we reprove others, for infringing on those ordinances of the gospel which are ceremonial in their character? Is it less important that we should observe those institutions which are judicial, than it is that we should observe those which are ceremonial? Do they not both emanate from the same authority? And do they not both conduce to the same end—the advancement of the glory of God, in the recognition of his authority, and the acknowledgement of his wisdom and goodness? Are they not both, therefore, equally binding? Brethren, let us not make distinctions where God has made none.

We add an extract from the *Biblical Recorder*, giving the views of Mr. Meredith on this subject—than whom there is no better disciplinarian in the South.

"In all cases testimony should be sustained according to its true value, that is, according to the amount of credible evidence it contains, whether the witness be in the church or out of it. We see no good reason for rejecting a person's testimony, in such cases, merely because he is not a professor of religion.

While on this subject, we would take occasion to observe, that testimony against an accused ought always to be received with extreme caution. It would be better to let half a dozen guilty persons go unconvicted, than to have one innocent brother unjustly condemned. Besides, where there is the least exacerbation of feeling, men are generally much more liable to *overstate* their testimony than to understate it. It is surprising to see how much some professedly good men can make out of a very little thing, and sometimes indeed out of nothing at all. We recollect a case in which two members of a Baptist church, of reputed veracity, gave their testimony before a council of ministers, in which they conjunctively charged a brother with the most scandalous behavior—which testimony we *knew* to be substantially untrue from beginning to end. Indeed we knew that one of the witnesses was *himself* guilty of the very offence which he thus alleged against his brother, and thus *ostensibly proved* by the testimony of a second person. We presume, if these witnesses had been testifying before a court of justice, they would unhesitatingly have sworn to the truth of their statements. The only explanation that we can give of the affair is, that the parties were strongly exasperated against the accused, and were interested to some extent in his conviction and ruin. With their motives we have nothing to do: we speak only of the *facts*. The circumstance made an indelible impression on our mind, and taught us, most forcibly, how easily a man's reputation may be ruined when he is opposed by interested witnesses, and happens, at the same time, to have no one, by whom to confront them. From that day we have been doubly cautious how we receive testimony *against* a person, when the witness was in any way interested in the conviction of the accused, or was even under the influence of ill-will or prejudice against him."

From all that has been said, the following inferences are to be drawn:

1. Testimony from the world is not to be rejected in the trial of church members.
2. The weight given to any testimony must depend upon the character of the witness and the circumstances under which his testimony is given.

SUSPENSION FROM THE CHURCH.

QUERY VIII. *Has a church the right to suspend a member for a limited time?*

We think not. If an individual is convicted of unchristian conduct, and does not give ample satisfaction, he ought to be *excluded*, and not *suspended*. If he has not been convicted of unchristian conduct, to suspend him is to do him great injustice—it is to censure him before he is proved worthy of censure.

Many of our ablest writers on church discipline, seem to be involved in

a labyrinth of difficulties, when they engaged in the discussion of this subject. Even the astute Mr. James, seems somewhat bewildered here. He admits that there is no scriptural warrant for an act of suspension, yet argues, inconclusively, we think, in favor of such an act. He asks, "What is to be done in those cases where neither the guilt nor the innocence of an individual is at once apparent to the church; but still a strong, very strong case, so far as *prima facie* evidence goes, is made out against him; or where there is some appearance of penitence, but yet that penitence is equivocal? Are we to admit that individual to the full privileges of communion? what, while his conduct is under examination, and his character, to say the best, suspicious?" Church Memb. Guide, Note on p. 154.

We answer, there is no need of an act of the church in this case. The Great Founder of the church has met it with a rule: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Matt. v, 23, 24. This rule interdicts the presenting a public offering to God while a brother has aught against us, and requires us to use all lawful means to be reconciled to our brother; to restore ourselves to his confidence and affections, before we present our offering. Now to a case like that supposed by Mr. James, not only an individual, but the whole church are suspicious of him and disaffected towards him. "Are we to admit that individual," Mr. James asks, "to the full privileges of communion?" The scriptural rule quoted directs, that he should first be reconciled to his brethren; and to do this, he must clear himself of all just grounds of suspicion. The spirit of the rule clearly inculcates, that no individual having a difficulty with another, or, (a necessary inference,) with the church, should participate in any religious acts of a public character that is *peculiar* to church members. It cannot be intended to interdict private acts of devotion; for the same authority enjoins on us to pray for them that despitefully use us; and those that maltreat us must certainly have something against us. But what it is the duty of an individual to do, it is the duty of a church to see that he does. It is her duty, therefore, to see that no one repairs to the communion table who is lying under suspicion, or has unsettled difficulties with any portion of the church.

But is not the enforcing this rule the same, in effect, with an act of suspension? Certainly not. The rule is general. It is not made for any one individual in particular. It does not pre-suppose either the guilt or innocence of the individual upon whom it is enforced; for the innocent, as well as the guilty, are required to observe it. But an act suspending a member, is a rule made for that individual in particular. It *presupposes some degree of guilt*, and is an *act of censure*. We object to such an act, that it is unnecessary. It moreover violates the rights of the individual; and that principle, admitted in all legislation human and divine, which requires that every individual be presumed innocent until he is proved guilty. The act to which we object presumes him to be guilty, and punishes him accordingly.

The question discussed above is not a novel one. It has often been considered in our church conferences, and in our Associational and Ministerial meetings; and the general sentiment and practice of our denomination, as far as we have had an opportunity of acquainting ourselves with it, harmonize with the views expressed above. As early as 1783, the Kehukee Association, which met at Meglamare's M. H., Va., recorded it as their opinion, in answer to a special query on this subject, that "there is no degree of church censure to be inflicted on an impenitent member, after a public hearing in the church, besides excommunication." Hist. Keh. As. p. 67.

In conclusion, we would impress upon the mind of every one who desires to be instructed in things pertaining to the kingdom of Christ, the absolute necessity of seeking wisdom of Him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. The preservation of due discipline in our churches and the discriminating between different offences, and proportioning the censure to the offence, will call for the exercise of great patience and prudence, in the investigation of difficulties, unwearied assiduity in ferreting out evil, and great firmness and meekness in awarding justice to all. And the exercise of these, again, will require much of the grace of God, and much of the influence of the spirit of Christ. May the Lord, in his mercy, conform us to his will in all things, and preserve us "holy, and unblameable, and unproveable, in his sight."

ALTERATION OF CREEDS AND TRIAL OF MINISTERS.

QUERIES IX and XX. 1. *Has a church the right, without the aid of a presbytery, to alter an article of faith, upon which she was constituted?*

2. *Has she the right, without the aid of a presbytery, to excommunicate an ordained minister?*

The above queries we find in the *Biblical Recorder*, of Nov. 20th, 1847, edited by Rev. Thos. Meredith, Raleigh, N.C. They are so well answered by the editor that we copy his reply entire. The latter query is intimately connected with subjects discussed in our preceding articles. The editor says, in his reply,

"It will be seen at once that the answers to be given to the above queries must depend on the opinions entertained respecting the independence of our churches.

If our churches are absolutely independent, as is generally contended, then they are competent, of themselves, and in their individual capacity, to the execution of every duty, essential to their existence or to their prosperity. To deny this would be clearly to deny that our churches are strictly and absolutely independent of each other.

If our churches are absolutely independent it will follow that they have the right, not only to alter an article of faith in their Constitution, and to

excommunicate a minister, without the aid of a presbytery, but also to ordain their ministers, and even to effect their own constitution, without the concurrence of any foreign or adventitious aid. Being absolutely independent, there is a manifest contradiction in terms in representing them as dependent on a presbytery, or any extraneous agency whatever, for the performance of any act of government, of discipline, or of legislation. Those therefore who contend for independence in its strict and absolute sense, to be consistent, should set aside all presbyteries, councils, and all such things, and proceed to the work of ordination, excommunication of ministers, and all such acts, by virtue of the power constitutionally inherent in themselves.

But if, on the other hand, our churches are not independent, in the absolute sense of the term:—That is to say, if they are dependent on a presbytery consisting of ministers or members from other churches, for their ordinations, and even their constitution, then it is no denial of their legitimate powers, to say that *“they” have not the right*, either to alter their constitution or to exclude their ministers, without the aid of a presbytery. On the contrary, consistency would seem to require that neither the one nor the other should be done without such aid. If it be true, as is generally believed, and which we can see no cause to deny, that the same authority is required to take away an office, that is requisite to confer it—to destroy or essentially modify a contract, that is requisite to constitute it—then it will clearly follow, as a consequence resulting from established principles, that neither a minister should be deposed, nor a church constitution altered, without the concurrence of a power fully equal to that which is accounted necessary to create the one and execute the other. This seems to us to be clear and conclusive reasoning, and we can see no ground on which it can be fairly contested by those who admit the dependence of our churches on the action of presbyteries at all.

Our own opinion is this:—That, although our churches are independent, so far as independence can be of any essential advantage to them, yet, as *associated bodies*, and also as holding members recognized as parties to a common fellowship, it is not practicable in the nature of things that they can be strictly independent of each other.

For example, if a member from one church bring a letter of dismission to another, of the same faith and order, on the faith of the letter the said member is admitted to membership, without baptism and without inquiry. Now the question to be asked is, what gives the letter from one church such ready credit with another? The reply is, the latter has full confidence in the piety, the purity, and the good order of the former. Very good. Then the question arises—what is the ground of this confidence? It is the fact that the said church claims to be one of the same “faith and order”—that is, one holding the same religious belief, and conforming to the same form of government as the other. And on what is this claim rested? Is it the fact that she

is independent—that is, that she ordains and deposes, and excommunicates her ministers, and forms and modifies her constitution, at pleasure, without recourse to presbyteries or ministers from other churches? It is not. On the contrary, were such known to be the facts connected with anyone of our churches, her letters of dismission would have no more credit with us than would letters brought from churches of another denomination. On the other hand, the confidence of our churches in the orthodoxy and good order of each other, is founded mainly on the facts, that their constitutions and ordinations all take place under the cognizance of presbyteries consisting of ministers from other churches, who are generally known, and whose acts of concurrence are regarded as guarantees that said proceedings are valid and correct.

The same is true of any minister who passes among our churches. He is certified as a minister on account of the credit of the church that sends him forth. And that credit is rested mainly on the fact, that that church was herself constituted, and ordains her ministers, only with the consent and concurrence of an assisting presbytery.

Again, suppose a minister long known to the churches should be expelled by the church to which he belongs. To that act all the other churches are required to conform, by declining further to receive his ministrations. Here is an act of conformity demanded, which if yielded, implies that the said churches are governed in this respect by the act of another church—and if not yielded will afford ground for complaint that the act of one church has been set aside by that of another. In such case the latter church will be apt to inquire whether the minister concerned has been *regularly* and *justly* tried and expelled—and in order to settle this question, they will doubtless feel it important to know whether he has been tried by a presbytery or council of ministers; or whether his case has been disposed of by the church, in her exclusive and independent capacity. And it is scarcely necessary to add, that they will be much more liable to yield their concurrence in the former case than in the latter.

These, and other similar considerations, go to show, that, whatever may be said of churches in their individual and isolated capacities—as members of one great community of churches, such as they really are in a denominational point of view, they sustain to each other divers mutual relations, giving rise to corresponding mutual obligations, which are utterly incompatible with a state of strict and absolute independence. We might just as well talk of the absolute independence of the several States of the Union—or of the absolute independence of the several members of a church—or of the absolute independence of the individual citizens of any civil community. And should it be said, that in all these cases the parties are bound by the stipulations of a written compact or constitution, the reply is, that, in our community of churches, forming the great commonwealth of our denomination, though there be no *written* constitution, yet we have the articles of a compact

as clearly understood, and as rigidly observed, as though they were engraved on tablets of stone or of brass.

In view of the foregoing considerations we therefore give it as our opinion, that, whatever a church may be said, strictly speaking, to have a *right* to do, as a matter of expediency or consistency, she ought neither to modify her articles of faith, nor expel nor depose her ministers without the presence and concurrence of a presbytery or council. Should a church wish to stand aloof from all others, asking neither their confidence nor their fellowship, and asserting the claims of an absolutely independent community, then she may proceed to depose her ministers, modify her articles of faith, and even perform her own ordinations, by virtue of her own sovereign and absolute power. But if she would be considered as a party to a great religious fraternity, sharing the confidence and fellowship of the whole, and claiming to have her acts respected and legalized by all other churches, then she must recollect, that she is necessarily bound to give as much as she receives, and must therefore conform to those usages which the nature of such relations imperatively enjoins."

Mr. Wm. Sands, editor of the *Religious Herald*, Richmond, Va., has an editorial on the exclusion of Ministers, in his paper of the 25th November, from which it appears that his views accord with those of Mr. Meredith. We extract from it the following paragraph.

"Another evil which occasionally occurs amongst our churches, is the exclusion of ministers without calling a council of ministers from neighboring churches. We are aware that the churches which act thus contend that as each one is an independent body, they have full power to deal with all their members, not excepting their pastor. Granting this alledged authority, we still question very strongly the expediency of such a course, since the general practice based on experience has sanctioned the calling of council. A principal of law founded in true wisdom, is the right of an offender to be tried by a jury of his fellows. It is deemed necessary when a brother is ordained to the work of the ministry, to call in a presbytery or council of ministers; and when placed on trial for an offence which may lead to his expulsion and exclusion from the ministry, it seems but reasonable to let his case be tried by his fellow-laborers. In nearly every case in which a minister has been excluded on insufficient grounds, which has come under our knowledge, the church has acted without a council. A minister is placed in a different position from the private members. He has or ought to have constant intercourse with all his fellow-members. If popular, he may have many warm friends; if unpopular, equally warm enemies. When charges are alledged against him, too often parties are formed, heated discussions ensue, and the church is unfitted to act on his case, calmly and with due impartiality. It would therefore, in all cases, be much better to call in the aid of a Council."

We concur in the views expressed in the above extracts, and deem it wholly unnecessary to follow them with any additional remarks of our own.

EXCLUSION BY MINORITIES.

QUERY XI. *Has the minority in a church the right to demand the exclusion of an individual whom the majority believe to be innocent?*

The Sacred Scriptures give no intimation that such a right has been vested in the minority of a church; but there are *precedents* to the point, recorded with great clearness and precision.

The Scriptures teach us, that decisions of the church were ordinarily made by the lifting up of the hands of its members, as will appear from an examination of the following passages of Scripture in the original. Acts xiv, 22; 2d Cor. viii, 19. Now we cannot account for this voting, by the lifting up of the hands, if it was not to ascertain the will of the *majority*.

But we are not left to infer from *general* principles the course pursued by the primitive church in the exclusion of members. We have the *express* testimony of an inspired apostle, that, in at least one case of exclusion, the individual was excluded, not by the *few*, but by the *many*. "Sufficient to such a man (one that had been excluded) is this punishment which was inflicted of many." 2 Cor. ii, 6. The word here rendered "many" is *pleionon*, which signifies the *greater part—the majority*. On this subject, then, the Scripture is explicit and conclusive—NOTHING CAN BE MORE SO. That passage is sufficient, of itself, to show what was the practice of the church in apostolic times.

The Scriptures teach, that we are to esteem others better than ourselves, Phil. ii, 3, and to submit to one another, Eph. v, 21; 1 Cor. xvi, 16; 1 Pet. v, 5. Now when two or three set up their judgment against that of a large and respectable majority, do they comply with the precepts to which we have referred? Do they not rather say, stand off, for we are holier than you all? Is, lxv, 5. We are the people (the people of God—the church) and wisdom will die with us? Job xii, 2.

But note again, that it is as much the duty of the church to *protect* and *defend* those of her members, whom she believes to be innocent, as it is to *censure* or *withdraw* from those whom she believes to be guilty. Now if she neglect this duty, and an innocent member suffer in consequence thereof, will she not have to answer for it to the great Head of the Church? Would it be deemed satisfactory, when the blood of our brother is required at our hand, to answer, "Lord, nine-tenths of us believed him innocent—we were reluctant to give him up, but A, B and C said he was guilty and must be sacrificed?" Can we throw the responsibility upon A, B and C? We do not see how it can with justice be done, unless we assume that A, B and C constitute the *church*—for the rules of discipline are given to be enforced by the *church* and not by *individual members*.

If a member is to be excluded because two or three insist on it, then the excision of the Saviour was not so reprehensible as we had supposed. One of the twelve favored his excision, and none was found to advocate his cause. Ps. 69, 20, and 142, 4. When we eject a member, to gratify a small minority, it does appear to us that we condemn the Saviour anew; for he identifies himself with his disciples. "But when ye sin so against the brethren, ye sin against Christ." 1 Cor. viii, 12. It is a maxim universally received, that in all doubtful cases, we should adopt that interpretation of a rule which inclines to mercy.

OBJECTION I. *I have ever believed that in the reception of a member and the restoration of one, as well in as the dismissal of one by letter, unanimity was indispensable.—See Minutes of the Georgia Association for 1829, Article 14.*³

This we have always understood to accord, with a certain restriction, with the practice of Baptist churches generally. The restriction consists in this: That the one objecting to the reception, restoration, or dismissal of the applicant, *assign a satisfactory reason for his objection*, when so required by the friends of the applicant. All the decisions of the Georgia Association, to which the objection alludes, refer to the rejection, restoration, or dismissal of members by letter. Now the practice of our churches, in reference to this matter, is founded upon no *specific* scriptural rule, but upon views of *expediency* derived from the *general* principles of the gospel. It is deemed inexpedient to receive or restore one to membership in the church, while a member urges a serious objection, because this would be to *introduce* a cause of dissension in a church that is presumed to be in a state of peace and quietude. The Sacred Scriptures require that we remove every root of bitterness that is calculated to produce trouble. Heb. xii, 15, and it is argued, that if it be our duty to *remove* such a "root of bitterness," it must be equally our duty to *labor to prevent its introduction*.

But the question of *exclusion* is a very different thing. The "root" is already in the church. Who is to decide whether it is a sweet or bitter root? The church in its collective capacity, or one or two individuals? Suppose that a truly godly member is charged with high crimes and misdemeanors by his enemies. (The godly will ever have enemies, 2 Tim. iii, 12, and they are frequently of his own household, Matt. x, 36,—in his own church. The worldly minded professor is generally ready to believe any evil of the one whose zeal and self-denial reproaches him for his worldly mindedness and vanity.) Suppose the evidence adduced to sustain the charges against this godly man are deemed, by nine-tenths of the members, insufficient to establish the charge—shall he be excluded because one-tenth, upon insufficient testimony, believe him to be guilty? Sanction that principle gener-

³This objection we give as we find it in print, in one of our Baptist periodicals.

ally—adopt it in our churches—and the *character of no member can be safe in a Baptist church*; for every man—the best of men, are liable to have enemies; and it is too often the case, that the more innocent a man is, the more violent and implacable are his enemies. We would far prefer to trust our character to a jury, composed of men of the world, than to the members of a church, which adopted the principle that she was bound to exclude a member, though she believed him to be perfectly innocent, if two or three persisted in their belief of his guilt.

OBJECTION II. *I have always understood that in civil cases, the dissent of one individual was sufficient to nullify the decision of the majority.*

In the case of a jury, a man cannot be condemned by a minority. The jury must all concur in his guilt, or he is acquitted; so that reference to our civil courts makes not for, but against the objector. We certainly would never place our membership in a church in which one individual, should we be so unfortunate as to make him our enemy, would have the power to exclude us—that is, if aware of the fact at the time. This would be far worse than the arbitrary policy of Peodobaptist churches, in vesting the power of exclusion in the hands of an itinerant, a vestry, or a body of select men.

As the practice of some few of our churches is contrary to that of the church at Corinth, we will take the liberty to add a word or two in reference to “*Baptist usage.*”

We resided in Virginia eight or nine years after we became a Baptist, was extensively acquainted with some of the oldest churches in that State, and never knew one that did not coincide with the Georgia Association, in reference to the receiving and restoring of members into fellowship and dismissing by letter; but we never knew an individual excluded, during our sojourn in that State, by the vote of a minority; nor did we ever hear, but once, a question raised on the subject. We were also called, in 1842, to assist in a council convened to settle a difficulty in a large church in Western Georgia, growing out of the fact, that a small majority had retained in fellowship one that was charged with unchristian conduct. The minority being large and respectable, and much dissatisfied with the decision of the church, had taken letters. During the whole of the examination no one pleaded the *right of the minority to exclude a member*. The council was composed, we think, of six experienced ministers; and several other ministering brethren were present, when the case was examined and subsequently reported before the church. We never, until very recently, knew a case of one’s being excluded by a minority vote. This is the sum of all we know about the *usage of Modern Baptist churches*.

We would recommend to our brethren in conclusion, to investigate the subject for themselves, and not to pin their faith to the sleeves of any one. We are no pope, and therefore do not presume to claim infallibility. We know that we are liable to err, both in judgment and in our acts, and often have erred, but the *scriptures are unerring—search them*.

PUBLISHING EXCLUSIONS.

QUERY XII. *Should the exclusion of offending members be published from the pulpit?*

Some christian societies think the scriptures require it, and act accordingly. It was the practice of the Independent Church, within whose pale we were raised, to read out, before the congregation, the names of excommunicated members, and declare them to be no longer members of the church. But this practice has never, within our knowledge, prevailed among Baptist churches in our country.

The question was brought before a general conference of the Kehukee Association, in 1782, in the following form: "Has a church any authority from God's word, to lay it upon their minister to get up in a congregation and publish the excommunication of a disorderly member?" The conference answered, "We think that the offending member being dealt with in a public conference, is sufficient without any more publication." The question indicates that some church or churches thought that the exclusion should be made public. The answer, which was sanctioned by the Association at its next annual meeting, evinces that the practice was not generally approved by the churches of that day, though it evades the question relative to the "authority of God's word."

There may exist a necessity for the publication of exclusions in those societies in which a few select individuals, met in secret session, are allowed the right to excommunicate members; but as in Baptist churches, members are tried and acquitted or excluded by the *whole* church, met in public conference, as they were in the days of Christ and the apostles, such necessity does not exist.

CONCLUSION.

TO OUR READERS.—In laying before you this little volume, friends and brethren, we do not expect your concurrence in every sentiment it contains. Our hope is, that the discussion of the several subjects introduced will lead you to investigate them for yourselves, and excite an interest in our churches generally, on the subject of Gospel discipline. It is but too evident, that many of our churches have no fixed principles of discipline. They pursue one course at one church conference, and an opposite course, perhaps, at another. This is ruinous, both to the church and its individual members. A multiplication of crime and laxity in discipline are the inevitable results. To aid in correcting these evils has been our aim and desire. How far we may succeed time will shew.

Church Polity or The Kingdom of Christ

J. L. REYNOLDS

Reynolds, J. L., D. D., a native of Charleston, S.C., was born on the 17th of March, 1812. He graduated with the first honor at Charleston College, and from it went to Newton Theological Seminary, where he took the full course. His first pastorate was in Columbia, S. C. Thence he was called to the presidency of Georgetown College, Ky. After a successful service in that position, he became pastor of the Second Baptist church in Richmond, Va. He was called from Richmond to the professorship of Latin in the South Carolina College in the palmy days of that renowned institution. "For nearly twenty-five years the handsome, intellectual face and courtly manners of Dr. Reynolds were familiar in those classic halls, and hundreds of young men who read these lines will have tender memories revived of the genial and elegant Latin professor of their college days." He was at length, at his own request, transferred to the chair of Moral Philosophy. After the war political changes dismissed him and the entire faculty of the college. In 1874 he became Professor of Latin in Furman University, from which position he was called to "come up higher" on the 19th of December, 1877.

He was one of the most genial and delightful of companions. As a classical scholar, the Baptist ministry of South Carolina has not had his superior, if, indeed, his equal. As a preacher he was always instructive, and at times overwhelmingly eloquent and pathetic. The great gulf which he left has not yet been filled. His wife, a fit helpmeet in talent and accomplishments, survived him but a short time, so that it might almost be said "in death they were not divided."

—William Cathcart, 1881

CHURCH POLITY
OR
THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST,
IN ITS
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENT.

BY J. L. REYNOLDS

Pastor of the Second Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.

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PREFACE.

CHURCH POLITY has become the absorbing topic of the Christian world. In common with all thinking men, I have devoted considerable time to its examination; and have made some progress in the preparation of a volume with the design of exhibiting the polity of the New Testament, and tracing the gradual departures from it in the churches which succeeded those planted by the apostles. The completion of the work, on the plan proposed, will require several years, even under circumstances the most favorable to the prosecution of my labors. Perhaps I may not complete it at all. I have, therefore, yielded the more readily to the suggestion of my worthy friend, the editor of the Periodical Library, to prepare a smaller work, which is now submitted to the public. May the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls bless it to the instruction of the flock, for which he labored and died.

THE AUTHOR.

Mercer University, July, 1846.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE favorable reception with which this little book has met, has encouraged me to prepare a new and enlarged edition, which is now offered to the public, with the hope that it may contribute to the diffusion of correct sentiments on the subject of which it treats.

J. L. REYNOLDS.

Richmond, August, 1848.

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CHAPTER I. STATEMENT OF THE SUBJECT.

WHEN Christ uttered, in the judgment hall of Pilate, the remarkable words—"I am a king,"¹ he pronounced a sentiment fraught with unspeakable dignity and power. His enemies might deride his pretensions and express their mockery of his claim, by presenting him with a crown of thorns, a reed and a purple robe, and nailing him to the cross; but in the eyes of unfallen intelligences, he was a king. A higher power presided over that derisive ceremony, and converted it into a real coronation. That crown of thorns was indeed the diadem of empire; that purple robe was the badge of royalty; that fragile reed was the symbol of unbounded power; and that cross the throne of dominion which shall never end.

This pregnant truth contained the fulfilment of the hopes which had cheered mankind through all previous generations. When our first parents had broken the covenant, graciously made with them by their Creator, and were expelled from the garden of Paradise, they bore with them the seeds of a glorious promise, which, scattered by their posterity among the nations of the earth, sprung up in the form of a general expectation of a golden age;² and, entrusted to a particular race, inspired them with the confident hope that a deliverer would afterwards arise, who, assuming the position and responsibilities of the second Adam, would arrest the dominion of sin and death, and gather together the covenant people into a kingdom of holiness and love.

The promise which was committed to our first parents, when they traced, with lingering footsteps, the path of their departure from paradise, was entrusted, as a special mark of the divine favor, to Abraham and his seed; and, in its subsequent announcement and corroboration, still further limited to Isaac, to Jacob, and finally to David, who was chosen of God as the favored individual in whose lineage should appear the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

This conception of the Messiah's kingdom was still further developed and amplified by the prophets, a succession of inspired men, from Samuel to Malachi, who sustained a most important relation to the Jewish Theocracy. While to the priests were committed the direction and support of the ritual service, the external worship of Jehovah, it was the main design of the prophets to cherish and diffuse a theocratic spirit, by which the people might be retained in loyalty to their invisible king. In this elevated sphere were their functions discharged, and to this end were their labors directed. They may thus be considered the forerunners and prototypes of the ministers of the Christian dispensation.³

¹John 18:37.

²Hengstenberg's *Christology*, 1, p. 14-19.

³*Der Prophetismus der Hebräer* von A. Knobel. Th. I. S. II. Baumgarten-Crusius' *Biblische Theologie*, §6, 1. "The primary notion of a prophet," says Stillingfleet, "doth not lie in foretelling future events, but in declaring and interpreting to the world the mind of God, which he receives by immediate revelation from himself." *Origines Sacrae*, B. II. chap. 5th. Stuart on the O. T. p. 90, note.

In the discharge of their high functions, the prophets announced the coming of the Messiah; predicted the time of his appearance; and, grouping together the most striking and imposing characteristics of earthly sovereignties, presented a magnificent picture of his spiritual kingdom, and of the happiness which the nations would enjoy under his mild and equitable reign. This happy period would be signalized by the restoration of the long lost harmony between Judah and Israel, and the entrance of the Gentiles within the fold of the people of God. The kingdom of the Messiah was not to be limited by geographical divisions, nor restricted to a peculiar nation. The whole world was to be invited to its privileges, and all nations made to share in its blessings.⁴ The most opulent earthly kingdoms had perished, and the most powerful dynasties been destroyed; even Judah and Israel, though blessed with divine protection and guidance, had bowed their necks to the oppressor, and gone into captivity; but the kingdom of the Messiah would never perish, and of his government there would be no end. The uttermost parts of the earth were to be its boundaries, and eternity the measure of its duration.⁵

When the fulness of the time was come, Jesus of Nazareth appeared, and appropriated these predictions of the Messiah to himself. In striking harmony with the theocratic representations of the prophets, he denominated the dispensation which he introduced, "the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven;"⁶ and claimed the honor and allegiance due to a divine messenger. Attesting his mission by infallible signs, and declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead, he stood forth, in virtue of his divinity and the appointment of the Father, the head of that spiritual kingdom, of which the Jewish theocracy was but a feeble type.⁷

The predictions of the prophets and the admonitions of Jesus were

⁴Jer. 30: 4, 9; Eze. 37: 24; Hos. 1: 10; Isaiah 11: 10; and Dan. 7: 14.

⁵Twisten's Dogmatik, I. S. 323. Knapp's Theol. §91. For a full examination of the Messianic predictions of the O. T. see Hengstenberg's Christology.

⁶The word in the original, which is translated *kingdom*, is equivalent to *kingly authority*; and this expression, modified according to the context, may generally be substituted for it. Dr. Dagg's interpretation of John 3: 5, pp. 9, 23. The expression, *kingdom of heaven*, is a periphrasis for the *Christian state or dispensation*, and is evidently derived from the mode of thought and speech common to the Jews. "The God Jehovah was their proper king, supreme over their state and nation. He governed them through the instrumentality of human regents and deputed kings.

Their constitution was *theocratic*, to make use of a happy term, first applied to the subject by Josephus. Hence, the Israelitish state and nation are called the *possession*, and the *peculiar people of Jehovah*: as Ex. 19: 6; Psalms 114: 2. In the same way the later Jews applied the phrase, *kingdom of God, or of heaven*: vid. Schoettgen, de regno coelorum, (Hor. Heb. T. I. extr.); and Wetstein on Matt. 21: 25." Knapp's Theology, §99. (1.) vid. Bland on Matt. 3: 2. Campbell on the Gospels, Diss. 5, part 1.

The Lexicons have blundered sadly on this phrase. Tholuck, after an elaborate criticism on Wahl, Bretschneider, and others, gives the following as the true definition: "Christ designates, by 'the kingdom of heaven,' the community of those, who, united through his Spirit under him as the head, rejoice in the truth and enjoy a holy and blissful life; all of which is effected through communion with him." Biblical Repository, I, p. 567. Christian Review, IV., p. 380. Even this is a partial view.

⁷John 4: 25-26; 9: 35, 37; Matt. 26: 63, 64; 16: 15-17; 27: 11.

sufficiently perspicuous to have prevented the formation of erroneous opinions with respect to the nature of this kingdom. Christ declared explicitly that he claimed not to be an earthly monarch; refused to be made king;⁸ and proved, by many incidents in his life, how little he thought of interfering with the civil concerns of men.⁹ In immediate connection with the assertion of his royalty, he declares that his kingdom is not of this world.¹⁰ And as if to relieve the minds of his disciples of all doubt on the subject, he predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, and the overthrow of the Jewish political state.¹¹

The history of our race has developed nothing more clearly, than the tenacity with which the mind clings to errors which are sanctioned by universal belief, and hallowed by venerable associations. Notwithstanding our Lord's unambiguous language, with respect to the nature of his kingdom, his followers continued, up to the period of his ascension,¹² deeply tinged with the Jewish notion of the Messiah; and few of them rose to the elevated conception of a spiritual economy, which, obliterating all national distinctions, and swaying its sceptre over the souls of men, would dispense to Jew and Gentile alike, its healing and saving influence. Long after the disciples had attained and promulgated correct views on this subject, the old Judaizing leaven continued to work. A large number of the early professors of christianity, including several distinguished fathers, were persuaded into an expectation of the temporal reign of Christ;¹³ and Chilaism, although repeatedly convicted of folly and delusion, has subsequently appeared, at intervals, in the history of the Church, and numbered multitudes among the victims of its gross hallucinations. Its latest modern development, Millerism, has just spent its force in our own country.

As the reign of Christ has primary reference to the human race, the Messiah appeared in human form. By his mysterious incarnation, he formed the connecting link between the subjects of his kingdom and himself, allying his divine nature to theirs, and making them partakers of his own. Every real member of Christ's kingdom bears the likeness of its great king. As "the habitation of God through the spirit," the divine and the human are united in him. It is also a necessary inference, from the principle which was stated at the beginning of this paragraph, that the instrumentality by which the kingdom of Christ is promoted among men must be material as well as spiritual, human as well as divine. These divine and spiritual elements in its organization, are not cognizable by the senses, and must, of course, be invisible. It is only in reference to its human or material elements that it

⁸John 6: 15.

⁹Matt. 17: 24; 22: 21; Luke 12: 13.

¹⁰John 18: 36.

¹¹Luke 19: 43.

¹²Acts 1: 6.

¹³Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte von Dr. F. H. Meier, §32.

becomes visible. Its local and temporal developments are visible, but its efficient agencies and ultimate ends are spiritual. Wherever the phrases which designate the Messiah's reign, occur in the Scriptures, they refer to it under the one or the other of these aspects. The idea of a visible kingdom of Christ, as embodied in the visible church, is foreign to the letter and spirit of the New Testament.¹⁴

The late Dr. Mason, in a work¹⁵ which is distinguished for the confidence with which he asserts his sentiments, rather than the conclusiveness of his reasoning, or the correctness of his principles of interpretation, maintains that by the kingdom of heaven is designed the "external visible church." "This," he contends, "can be but one, or else it would not be *a* kingdom, and *the* kingdom, but several. And this one must be visible, because its ordinances are administered by visible agency." To prove his position, the excellent author relies upon several passages of Scripture, particularly those parables in which an analogy is suggested between the kingdom of God and the usages of common life.¹⁶ His argument is founded upon an erroneous view of the nature and design of a parable, and especially of those which he cites in support of his position. "The parables of the Saviour," as Neander has remarked, "we may define as representations, by which the truths, relating to the kingdom of God, are exhibited in a vivid manner to the eye of the mind, by means of special relations and analogies of common life, whether derived from nature or the world of mankind."¹⁷ It was no part of his design, in any of them, to present an exact representation of the kingdom of heaven, considered as a unit, but simply to illustrate some particular truth connected with the christian dispensation. To attempt to press the analogy beyond its legitimate limits, and find a specific correspondence between each point in the narrative or fact and the Messiah's kingdom, is contrary to the most approved principles of interpretation. For illustration, it is simply necessary to refer to two parables, which occur in immediate connection with those which Dr. M. has cited. The parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven are intended to represent the diffusiveness of genuine piety, under two different but related aspects. There is but one idea in both of them, though clothed in different drapery, and relating to different forms of development. The former indicates the diffusion of piety, or the extension of the reign of heaven among masses of mankind; the latter refers to the development of the same principle in an individual. There is, therefore, an analogy between the mustard seed and the leaven, on the one hand, and vital religion on the other.

¹⁴Robinson in his *Lexicon*, p. 130, has assigned this meaning to the phrase, but the texts he cites fail to establish it.—e. g. Matt. 6: 10, manifestly relates to the spiritual reign of Christ. Schleusner does the same. Pasor is more correct.

¹⁵*Essays on the Church*, New York, 1843, p. 18.

¹⁶Matt. 13: 24, 30, 47, 50; 16: 19; 25: 1; 28: 19, 20; John 20: 21, 23.

¹⁷*Christian Review*, vol. 8, p. 202.

If we proceed to examine the parable of the sower, upon which the author relies with so much confidence, we shall see that it is susceptible of a similar interpretation. It teaches the important truth, that in the progress of the Gospel its pure and legitimate effects would sometimes be mingled with foreign admixtures; that in those organizations which would be established for the propagation of the truth, spurious professors would obtrude themselves among the genuine subjects of his kingdom. Human sagacity could not prevent this conjunction, but a separation would be effected at the end of the world. The parable of the net, to which Dr. M. also refers, teaches the same truth.

Fortunately we are not left to conjecture here. Christ has given his own interpretation of the parable of the sower. He tells us “the field is the world,” not the church; and “the children of the kingdom” are distinguished from “the children of the wicked one.” If it be urged that these latter are represented in a subsequent verse, as forming a part of his kingdom, since it is said that the angels shall “gather out of his kingdom all things that offend,” it is sufficient to reply that the royal authority of Christ extends over his foes as well as his friends. The former may appear in visible connection with his genuine disciples, but have never been recognized by him. Even if this parable were ambiguous, the many passages of Scripture, in which moral and spiritual qualifications are mentioned as indispensable to admittance into the kingdom of the Redeemer, would be sufficient to determine who are his real subjects.¹⁸

Great stress is laid, by Dr. M.,¹⁹ upon the predictions in the Old Testament, in which the kingdom of the Messiah is described. In his judgment they manifestly refer to an external visible community. This view, however, betrays a very imperfect apprehension of the nature of those prophecies, and of just principles of interpretation. He sustains his position only by attaching a literal sense to figurative representations. The passages which he has quoted are taken from the second part of the book of Isaiah,²⁰ one of the most splendid portions of the prophetic writings, in which the prophet, ravished with the glorious vision of the new theocracy, which the Spirit reveals to his mental gaze, portrays it in glowing language, and in imagery derived from the earthly theocracy, or the kingdoms of the earth. A literal interpretation is, here, out of the question. The kingdom which he depicts can be realized only in the spiritual theocracy of the Redeemer. With reference to chap. 60, upon expressions in which Dr. M. relies with great confidence, it may be said, without any assumption of superior perspicacity, in the language of a distinguished critic:—“It can scarcely be necessary to remark, that the whole representation is figurative through-

¹⁸ Mark 10: 15; John 3: 3; Col. 1: 13; Eph. 5: 5; Matt. 3: 2; 5: 3, &c.

¹⁹ Pages 8–10.

²⁰ Isaiah 40–66.

out.”²¹ But Dr. M. thinks that “that light, which was to shine upon the Gentiles, and the ‘brightness’ of that ‘rising,’ which was to attract the ‘kings,’ must of necessity be external.”—p. 10. But can any one, after even a cursory glance at this chapter, 60, believe that this light is a material, visible light; that the *darkness* which covers the people is its opposite in nature; and that kings will actually behold this light? It is clear that the terms are used figuratively—darkness being the symbol of sin and misery—light, of righteousness and happiness.²² The chapter has no reference to a “visible church catholic,” but simply describes the extent of the Messiah’s reign, and the blessings by which it would be attended.

This kingdom belongs to Christ as Mediator. It differs from his natural kingdom, not in the extent of its sway, but in the authority from which it is derived, and the object for which its government is administered. As God, he possesses an indefeasible right to rule the universe; but as Mediator, he exercises his rule in accordance with the provisions of the covenant of grace, and administers the affairs of his kingdom with special reference to his chosen people.²³ This kingdom has been committed to him by the Father as the reward of his obedience unto death. As that obedience is possessed of a retrospective efficacy, and delivers from guilt and condemnation the faithful who died before the advent of the Redeemer; so his royal authority, which was first publicly committed to him at his resurrection from the dead, was exercised in the administration of his kingdom in every age. His incarnation was only the removal of his audience chamber to earth; the visible manifestation of the divine sovereign; and his ascension to heaven was his public coronation in the sight of the universe.

The benefits of Christ’s kingdom are restricted to its real, accredited subjects. But for the purpose of administering its government and promoting its interests, he has been invested with all power in heaven and in earth.²⁴ He sways his sceptre over the armies of heaven, the inhabitants of the earth, and the spirits of hell. All the agents of the universe are held in his hand, and execute his will. All will be made contributors to the promotion of his kingdom, and will grace his final triumph.

The reign of the Redeemer is to be perpetual. Such is the description given of it in ancient prophecy and confirmed by Christ and his apostles.²⁵ The only apparent exception to the general tenor of the Scriptures, is found in 1 Cor. 15: 24, 28. But even this passage, upon a more careful examination, will be found to comport with the representations which are elsewhere

²¹ Hengstenberg’s Christology, vol. I, p. 438.

²² Rosenmuller thinks the figurative use of these expressions is so evident as scarcely to need notice. Per *lucem* Hierosolymae oriturum felicem ejus statu significari, uti supra 45: 75, 8: 8, 10, vix monitu opus. Vid. Scholia in V. T. II. p. 747.

²³ Dick’s Theol. Lec. LXIV. Col. 1: 15, 19; Heb. 1: 3, 14.

²⁴ Matt. 28: 18; Eph. 1: 22; John 13: 3; Phil. 2: 9, 11. 1 Peter 3: 22; 1 Cor. 15: 24, 26.

²⁵ Psalm 45: 6; Heb. 1: 8; Psalm 72: 5.

found of the perpetual duration of the Messiah's kingdom. The import of this passage seems to be, that God has committed to Christ the government of his mediatorial kingdom and invested him with full power to carry it on to perfection, by "placing all things under his feet." His enemies oppose his progress in vain; for he must finally triumph, and put down all opposing "rule, and all authority and power." When this glorious period arrives, he will present the kingdom to his Father, in all the amplitude and splendor of a redeemed and purified possession. His mediatorial work, so far as it regards this world, will be accomplished. He will then see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. But lest it should be supposed that he will then abdicate his throne, and resign the authority delegated to him by the Father, the apostle adds—"And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." He will still act as the representative of the Father, and administer the government of his kingdom in subservience to the interests and happiness of his redeemed and glorified people.²⁶

The reign of Christ is a subject of unspeakable dignity and interest. With it are connected the noblest prospects and dearest hopes of mankind. Sages have dreamed of ideal republics; poets have painted the glories of a golden age; and the human race, groaning under the curse of sin, and burdened with the accumulated sorrows of earth, have earnestly longed for a period of respite from grief, and a state of pure and permanent felicity. Under the dominion of the Redeemer, these hopes are fulfilled, these expectations are realized. With the condescension that marks the character of the king, and the unexampled benignity which induced him, at the cost of his own sufferings and death, to rear this kingdom, as an asylum for guilt and a refuge for sorrow, he invites the nations to its rights and immunities. The right of citizenship is proffered, without distinction of clime or country, sex or station. In the distribution of its favors, no regard is had to Jew or Greek, Barbarian or Scythian, bond or free. The possessors of uncertain riches are blessed with spiritual wealth; and the poor are made rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. All its subjects are the sons of God, the redeemed of Christ. Imbued with the graces of heaven, furnished with every thing necessary to their comfort and happiness, and favored with occasional glimpses of the glory in reversion, they possess, even on earth, a joy which is unspeakable, and a peace which passeth all understanding. And when the reign of Christ is fully consummated, and all his followers have entered the

²⁶It has been supposed that the phraseology of the 25th verse implies the termination of the reign of Christ. "He must reign *till*, &c." But the word does not necessarily limit the reign of Christ to the event specified, viz: the subjection of his foes. It is said in Romans 5: 13 "*Until* the law, sin was in the world." But this does not imply that sin did not exist after the giving of the law. See also parallel expressions in Genesis 28: 15; 1 Samuel 15: 35; Isaiah 22: 14; Psalms 112: 8; 1 Timothy 4: 13. The passage is similarly interpreted. Biblical Repos. 3, p. 749-755, and Am. Biblical Repos. 2, p. 443.

heavenly world, they will accede to an inheritance which is as infinite in value, as it is interminable in duration. It is a matter of vast importance, of imperative necessity, to every man that he be a member of this kingdom of Christ. Admittance is granted and the conditions clearly defined. The king himself has inscribed over its portal the solemn words, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

CHAPTER II. SOURCES OF PROOF.

As the kingdom of Christ is a subject of pure revelation, it may justly be expected that every thing pertaining to its nature, and to the external organizations by which its principles are to be diffused among men, will be found in the inspired volume, in which that revelation is deposited. But in opposition to this obvious and rational inference, it is asserted by many that the Scriptures contain no specific directions with respect to the outward development of Christ's kingdom—no form of Church government.²⁷ If this assumption were correct, if neither Christ nor his apostles had left anything determinate, with respect to the earthly relations of his church, but committed its organization and management entirely to fallible men, we should feel bound humbly to submit to his will, and acquiescing in the wisdom of the arrangement, should do whatever human sagacity and prudence might suggest, to discharge the delicate and momentous trust committed to us. But happily for us and for the interests of his kingdom, he has not imposed upon us this fearful responsibility. The Scriptures are a sufficient rule of faith and practice. The principles of ecclesiastical polity are prescribed in them with all necessary comprehensiveness and clearness. The founder of the Church has provided better for its interests, than to commit its affairs to the control of fallible men. "Whatever ways of constituting the church may to us seem fit, proper, and reasonable, the question is, not what constitution of Christ's church seems convenient to human wisdom, but what constitution is actually established by Christ's infinite wisdom."²⁸

It would have been happy for the world if men had been satisfied with the simple form of ecclesiastical polity contained in the New Testament. Rejecting this, or proceeding upon the assumption that the New Testament contains none, they have attempted to trace analogies between Christ's

²⁷ Hooker Eccl. Pol. B. 3 §2. §11. So also Tomline, Paley and other Episcopal divines. Burton's Hist. Church, p. 60. Neander, in Coleman's Prim. Ch. Introduc. p. 18.

²⁸ Edwards's Works, 4, p. 377.

This point is very ably discussed by Dr. Smyth, in his learned work on Presbytery, ch. II., and on Prelacy, Lee, II., Note C. Lec. III., Vid. Dr. Woods' Lectures on Church Government, pp. 9–12. Hal-dane's View of Social Worship, &c. ch. 2. Milton's Reason of Church Government, ch. I., II.

church and the defunct forms of Judaism, or engrafted upon it rites and ceremonies borrowed from Heathenism. From the close of the second century down to the present time, a considerable party have derived their notions of ecclesiastical polity from the Jewish temple and priesthood.²⁹ And even a late writer has supposed that its rudiments may be discovered in the Jewish sacerdotal institute.³⁰ A more gross misconception of the genius of Christianity than is implied in this Judaizing system, can scarcely be imagined. No two persons can be more unlike than a Jewish priest and a Christian minister; and to argue from the prerogatives and duties of the one to those of the other is a gross paralogism.

To model the church of Christ after the Jewish temple is to abjure our liberty in the Gospel, and to relapse into the weak and beggarly elements of Levitical bondage. "To argue from a Levitical priesthood to a Christian ministry, and to prove the validity of the latter institution by an appeal to the former, and specially to compare the official duties of the two respective classes, with an assumption that they are parallel, is out of all question."³¹

The unscriptural notion of a human priesthood in the church of Christ, is fraught with pestilent error, and has led to the most enormous abuses. It has substituted a new class of mediators between God and man, to the exclusion and dishonor of the one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus; for, as Dr. Arnold has observed, "the essential point in the notion of a priest is this: that he is a person made necessary to our intercourse with God, without being necessary or beneficial to us morally. His interference makes the worshipper neither a wiser man, nor holier than he would have been without it; and yet it is held to be indispensable. This unreasonable, unmoral, unspiritual necessity, is the essence of the idea of priesthood." Viewed in its relations to the cardinal truths of Christianity, no error can be more utterly subversive of the Gospel. We are not, therefore, surprised at the earnestness with which he combats it, and the indignation with which he denounces it, as "the worst and earliest form of Anti-Christ."³² It was this human priesthood "bedecked in deformed and fantastic dresses, in palls and mitres, gold and gewgaws, fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe, or the flamen's vestry,"³³ that for ages presented Christianity to the world, under the motley image of resuscitated Judaism amalgamating with Paganism. Rearing

²⁹Punchard's *Hist. of Congregationalism*, p. 22. Campbell's *Lec. on Eccl. Hist.* Lec. X. part I. Gieseler's *Church Hist.* I. §65. Mosheim, I. p. 144. Neander, p. 111. *Kirchenverfassung* von K. D. Hullmann, S. 35.

³⁰*Spiritual Despotism*, by Isaac Taylor, Sec. 3.

³¹Stuart on the Old Testament, pp. 88, 388–392. Edward's *Works*, IV. pp. 390, 594. Woods' *Lectures on Church Government*, p. 13. Lord Bacon advised the removal of the offensive term priest from the English Liturgy. *Pacification of the Church*, *Works* I. p. 356. This argument is, in the hands of Prelacy, self-destructive; for the Jewish hierarchy was not prelatical. Smyth's *Presbytery*, ch. XIII. Taylor's *Spiritual Despotism*, Sec. 3.

³²Arnold on the Church. *Miscellaneous Works*, pp. 16, 18.

³³*Milton of Reformation in England. Prose Works*, p. 1.

its colossal throne upon the earth, and stretching its powerful sceptre over the flames of purgatory and the prisons of hell, it robbed life of its last joy, and death of its only hope.

The evils of attempting to graft Christianity upon Judaism, and effect an unnatural amalgamation between carnal ordinances and a spiritual religion, appear, although in a mitigated form, in some of the practices which have crept into use since the age of the apostles. Infant baptism is, in its essential idea, alien to the spirit of Christianity. Whether it be considered the condition, or the privilege of church membership (according to the discrepant views of its supporters), it involves the glaring absurdity of making carnal descent the condition of admittance to spiritual blessings. How futile the effort to effect a coalescence between a right conferred by hereditary transmission and the privileges of a kingdom, in which citizenship is determined by entirely different qualifications, the subjects of which are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "How unwary are many excellent men," says Prof. Stuart,³⁴ "in contending for infant baptism, on the ground of the Jewish analogy of circumcision? Are females not proper subjects of baptism? And again, are a man's slaves to be all baptized because he is? Are they church-members of course, when they are so baptized? Is there no difference between engrafting into a politico-ecclesiastical community, and into one of which it is said that "it is not of this world?"

Where this practice is combined with the priestly dogma of baptismal regeneration, it conduces equally to sacerdotal power and spiritual delusion. Among the great majority of Protestants, its tendency is, to a great extent, neutralized by the assertion of the necessity of the new birth. This salutary truth extracts the poison from the opposite error. Infant baptism possesses no natural affinity for the evangelical scheme. Appended to it, it is a mere heterogeneous addition, which refuses and defies vital incorporation; and its only effect is to mar the heavenly beauty of Christianity by an unnatural and earthly encumbrance. Carnal rites combined with a spiritual religion are as unseemly as would be wings of wax upon the angel Gabriel.

Another class of writers find the original pattern of the Christian church in the polity of the synagogue,³⁵ and affirm that the Apostles did not introduce new organizations, but converted these Jewish assemblies into Christian churches. A fatal objection to this theory is, that we have not the slightest intimation of it in the New Testament. If it had been the design of the Apostles to present the synagogue as the model of Christian churches, it is incredible that they would have omitted to say so. It may further be urged

³⁴Old Testament, p. 395.

³⁵Vid. Vitringa a de Synag. et Selden de Synag. Neander's Planting of the Chr. Ch. chap. 2. Gieseler. §25. Whately's Kingdom of Christ, pp. 78-80. Coleman's Prim. Ch. chap. 2. Smyth's Presb. B. 1. ch. 13.

that the synagogue was not a divine institution,³⁶ and could not therefore be adopted as the exemplar of Christian churches, without express divine authority. This authority Christ has not given; the apostles nowhere assert it. We objected to the notion which transfers the Levitical priesthood to the Christian church, that it is a virtual repeal of the Gospel; we object to this scheme, that it exalts a human institution into an institution of Christ. Neither of them derives any warrant from the word of God.

We look in vain for the model of a church among the Jews. It was foreign to their modes of conception; nor is there a word in their language by which the idea can be expressed. They had words, or phrases, designating an assembly for religious purposes, and the place or house where such an assembly was convened, but none which embodied the conception of a church as distinguished from a congregation, of an organized body composed of professedly pious persons, professing spiritual qualifications, and combined for the promotion of purely spiritual purposes.³⁷ The idea of a church is peculiar to Christianity. "This system presents the only true form of a church. The Jews had no distinct organization which could, with propriety, be denominated a church. Much less is any association under other forms of religion, entitled to this appellation."³⁸

It is well known to all who have examined the subject of ecclesiastical polity, that the testimony of the Fathers has been appealed to as competent authority. But if the Bible be our directory, in faith and practice, why need we apply to other sources for information? Should it be found, upon examination, that the testimony of the Fathers conflicts with the practice of the Apostles, it must be rejected. The form of church government, taught in the Scriptures, must be ascertained, before we can determine how far this testimony is entitled to credit. Upon Protestant and Scriptural principles, no other course is admissible.

The advocates of tradition proceed upon the assumption that the Scriptures do not contain a revelation of all that is necessary for "doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" and in support of it they refer to doctrines and practices which have been very generally received, but are not taught or enjoined in the word of God. Thus, Klee, a Roman Catholic, says "that many things in the ethical and liturgical practice of the church are retained which rest only on traditional grounds, as the

³⁶The divine institution of the synagogue is pleaded by Dr. Smyth and others, from the expression in Psalm 74: 8. "God's synagogues." But at the time this Psalm was composed, synagogues were not in existence. The Hebrew is more properly rendered, "the places of assembly," alluding to Ramah, Bethel, &c., the seats of the prophets (Gesen. Heb. Lex. p. 554); or the plural may be used, as Stuart thinks (O. T. p. 72), for the singular, and the allusion be to the temple.

³⁷Josephs, a learned Jew, in his *English and Hebrew Lexicon*, London, 1834, under the word church, gives phrases which indicate only the house used for religious purposes.

³⁸Coleman's *Christian Antiquities*, ch. 1, §3.

lawfulness and necessity of infant baptism, the validity of heretical baptism, &c.”³⁹ When we consider how far the Puseyites have advanced in their approach to Rome, we are not surprised to find one of them denouncing, as “a shallow and irreligious assumption,” the cardinal principle of Protestantism, “that whatever God designs his creatures to believe or perform, he has plainly taught and declared.”⁴⁰ A more learned and candid advocate of Episcopacy has said: “The claim of Episcopacy to be of divine institution, and therefore obligatory on the church, rests fundamentally on the one question—Has it the authority of Scripture? If it has not, it is not necessarily binding.”⁴¹

The majestic simplicity of the New Testament, its revelation of pure and lofty truths, and its entire freedom from folly and fanaticism, stamp it with the impress of divinity, and attract the admiration of minds not yet prepared to acknowledge its heavenly origin. But, in passing from its pages to those of the early Christian fathers, we are conscious of an immense descent. The transition from Paul and John to Barnabas and Hermas, is felt as a departure from the teachings of inspired Apostles to the puerile conceits of a Judaizer and the drivelling of a dotard. It would be vain, if it were necessary, to attempt to supply the deficiencies of the former by the latter. The hand of Providence has fixed a “great gulf” between the inspired and the uninspired Christian writings, and thus placed its condemnation upon those who are so “exceedingly zealous of the traditions” of the Fathers.

If the Scriptures were deficient or obscure, and the inquirer after truth were, therefore, driven to the Fathers, even that refuge would fail him. Their testimony is suspicious, partial, and contradictory; their works are corrupted and interpolated; and they themselves refer him back to the Scriptures as the only authoritative guide.⁴²

To sustain the authority of the Fathers, and give plausibility to the scheme which rests the polity of the churches upon their testimony, it is

³⁹*Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, I. S. 114. Compare Hooker's *Eccl. Pol.* B. I. ch. 14. Townsend's *N. T.* P. 10. Note 9.

⁴⁰Marshall's *Notes on the Episc. Pol.* New York, 1844, p. 16. Of the accuracy with which this writer states facts, the reader may judge by the following statements: “The latest improvement upon the Baptist heresy is Mormonism.” P. 345. “The great body of Methodists, following Dr. A. Clarke, have departed from the true doctrine of the Trinity.” p. 346. These statements are made upon the highest “American authority.” We may smile at the easy credulity of this “curate of Swallowcliffe;” but what shall we say of the Rt. Rev. Editor, Jonathan M. Wainwright, D.D., who endorses these and similar “old wives’ fables?”

⁴¹Dr. Onderdonk's *Episcopacy*, tested by Scripture, p. 1. Barnes' Reply, p. 99. See also Carson's refutation of Whately's illogical assumption with respect to the burden of proof, in his work on Baptism, ch. 1.

⁴²Goode's *Divine Rule*, chaps. 5–7. Daille on the right use of the Fathers. Smyth's *Pres. and Prel.* pp. 314–328. *Apostol. Succ.* p. 79. Knapp's *Theology*, §7. Dwight, 4, pp. 239–242. Neander's *Church History*, p. 407. Baumgarten Crusius, *Compendium der Dogmengeschichte*, Leipzig, 1840, §20. Milton's *Animadv. on Rem. Def. Sec. 4*. Jortin says of Antiquity (or the Fathers), “she is like Briarius, and has a hundred hands, and these hands often clash and beat one another.” *Eccl. Hist.* 2. p. 57.

sometimes affirmed that we are indebted to them for our knowledge and reception of the books which compose the sacred canon; and the inference thence derived, that if their testimony is valid in the one case, it is equally so in the other. But this is to confound things which are manifestly different. In settling the preliminary question, as to what books are canonical, we may refer to the testimony of the Fathers; but in order to ascertain what those books contain, we must consult the books themselves. The testimony of these early witnesses is to be calmly weighed, carefully scrutinized, and subjected to the rules which regulate our estimate of historical evidence. They are simply the media of proof, the means by which we arrive at a knowledge of the facts by which the question is to be decided. "The church of Jesus Christ, in the present day, does not believe in the divine authority of those books which it admits to be canonical, *because* the ancient church regarded them in the same light; but *because* there is satisfactory evidence that they were composed by men who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."⁴³

The advocates of prelacy have not failed to charge upon other pedobaptists the inconsistency of admitting infant baptism upon the testimony of the Fathers, and rejecting the claims of episcopacy and the apostolical succession, although sustained upon the same foundation. From this dilemma Dr. Woods would extricate himself, by denying that it presents a fair statement of the case. "The chief historical argument in favor of infant Baptism does not," in his view, "arise from the fact, that the practice did at length generally prevail in the early ages; but from *the testimony* of the Fathers, that it was received from the apostles."⁴⁴ But the historical argument here is extremely defective. Origen is the first of the Fathers who uses such language,⁴⁵ and he lived A. D. 185–254. His assertion, at so distant a remove from the time of the apostles, possesses little weight; especially as he ascribes to them, in the same connection, the doctrine that baptism cleanses from original sin.

I find no authority for this custom, either in the Scriptures, or the earliest Christian documents. If the baptism of infants be an ordinance of Christ, it must be plainly taught, by precept or example, in the New Testament. If it be not so taught, to attempt to sustain it by an appeal to historical evidence, is to abandon the fundamental principle of Protestantism.

The period seems to be rapidly approaching when the Christian world must choose between the Scriptures and the traditions of men. If ever the

⁴³Arguments of Romanists Discussed and Refuted by Rev. Dr. Thornwell, p. 213. The testimony of the Fathers is the medium per quod, not the medium propter quod. Twisten's Vorlesungen, I. S. 433, Pictet. Theol. Lib. 1. cap. IX, 4. Chillingworth, ch. 2. Answer, §25.

⁴⁴Lectures on Church Government, p. 61.

⁴⁵Ecclesia ab apostolis traditionem accepit etiam parvulis baptismum dare. Sciebant illi . . . quod essent in omnibus genuinae sordes peccati, quae per aquam et spiritum ablu deberent. Orig. In ep. ad Rom. Opp. T. IV. p. 565.

man of sin is successfully assailed in his strong hold, it must be by the sword of the Spirit. The Bible is our only reliable armory. Equipped and supplied from this source, the man of God need not fear an encounter with the hosts of darkness. But if, rejecting the panoply which divine munificence has supplied, he resorts to earthly means of defence, he will fall in the struggle, oppressed with the mortifying consciousness that his unhallowed weapons have only precipitated his defeat. Like Milton's angels, he will be bruised and crushed beneath the weight of his own armor:

"Their armor helped their harm, crushed in and bruised
 Into their substance pent, which wrought them pain
 Implacable, and many a dolorous groan."
Paradise Lost, VI., 658.

CHAPTER III. THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

THE word Church (in the original Greek of the New Testament, *ekklēsia*), means a congregation, or assembly; and the character of the assembly, to which it is applied, is to be ascertained by the use of the term in each particular instance. In its sacred use, it is confined to two meanings, referring either to a particular local society of Christians, or to the whole body of God's redeemed people.⁴⁶ Of the latter meaning of the word, the following are instances:

Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it. Eph. 5: 25. Gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body. Eph. 1: 22, 23. The general assembly and Church of the first born, which are written in Heaven. Heb. 12: 23.

It is this community of believers, the household of God, the whole family in heaven and earth, that constitutes the Holy Catholic Church, the kingdom of Christ in its internal development. It is one, and indivisible. Its members are known, certainly, only to Omniscience. Ordained unto eternal life before the foundation of the world, and in due time called, justified, sanctified, and glorified, they constitute the only real spiritual body of Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. Those who are members of this Church, and those alone, are interested in the benefits of the atonement,

⁴⁶Campbell's Lectures on Eccl. History, Lee, 6, p. 100, 105, 106. King's Prim. Church, chap. 1. [It is sometimes asserted that Lord King subsequently renounced the views maintained in this book, Vid. Rose's note to Neander's Church History, Pref. p. 4. But the evidence is not satisfactory. Vid. Punchard on Congregationalism, p. 147.] Haldane's View of Social Worship, &c., ch. 5, §1. Dagg's Essay on Communion, chap. 3, §1. Dr. Johnson's Gosp. Developed, ch. 2. Barrow, Wks. (Am. Ed.) III. 312.

share the gifts of the Spirit, and enjoy the bliss which appertains to the communion of saints. Beyond its limits there is no salvation.⁴⁷

The conception of the spiritual unity of the Church, which can be realized only by a living communion of all its members with the head, is clearly discerned in the instructions of Christ and his apostles, and is a glorious and precious truth. But it was soon misapprehended and perverted. The attempt was made to realize this unity in an outward church, possessed of an external visible organization, and embracing, among its members, all the professors of Christianity in the world. The unity of the Spirit, which consists in faith and love, was merged in a unity of outward form.⁴⁸ The radical error of this theory consists in the assumption of an external visible union of Christians as the starting point from which to arrive at a real spiritual unity; whereas the reverse is the proper order of procedure. The primary and essential union of Christians consists in their connexion with a common head, and the possession of a common spirit; and particular societies of Christians can approximate to this unity, only in proportion as they realize in themselves the harmony and sympathy which distinguish the body of Christ.⁴⁹

The minds of men had no sooner become possessed of this figment of a visible Catholic Church, than they saw the necessity of seeking for some visible head. This was indispensable to its completeness. Here we have the germ of the papal system, which has, at least, the merit of consistency; for the necessity of a visible head is a logical deduction from the doctrine of a visible Catholic Church. "Without a visible head," observes a distinguished Roman Catholic, "the whole view which the Catholic Church takes of herself, as a visible society representing the place of Christ, would have been lost, or rather would never have occurred to her. In a visible church, a visible head is necessarily included."⁵⁰

The doctrine of a visible Catholic Church, although it seems to have been rejected by Luther, has been maintained by a large number of Protes-

⁴⁷The best definition of the Church of Christ, is that given by Augustine, and incorporated by Calvin in his *Cat. Eccl. Genev. Quid est ecclesia? Corpus ac Societas fidelium quos deus ad vitam aeternam praeordinavit*. See also *Inst.* IV. I. n. 2. 7. *Pictet Theol. Art.* XXVII. 7.

⁴⁸Neander's *Church Hist.* p. 120. Munscher *Dogmensge.* [Ed. Von Coln.] §34. Meyer, §25. The name, *holy Catholic Church*, first occurs in the epistle of the Church of Smyrna, concerning the martyrdom of Polycarp, written A. D. 169. Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* IV. 15. The earliest patron of the notion was Irenaeus, († 201); it was fully developed by Cyprian, († 258,) in his book *De unitate ecclesiae*. Having referred to the history of Eusebius, I take this opportunity to caution the reader against trusting too implicitly to Cruse's translation of the work, published by Rev. R. Davis, Phila. It was made under Episcopalian influence, and is deeply tinged with it. Some of its errors have been noticed in Dr. Smyth's *Confirmation Examined*. Note A. p. 199. The expression *Catholic Church*, is also found in the larger collection of the epistles of Ignatius. *Ep. ad Smyrn.* c. 8 († 107). But the passage is not considered genuine. Munscher, §34.

⁴⁹Marheineke *Grundlehren der Christl. Dogmatik*. S. 445. Nitzsch. *System der Christl. Lehre*, §188.

⁵⁰Mohler's *Symbolism*, p. 377. Barrow, *Unit. ch.* VIII. 4.

tants,⁵¹ and even some of the advocates of Congregationalism have, with singular inconsistency, embraced the same view.⁵² The subject demands, therefore, a thorough discussion. I am happy to say that Dr. Dagg, who has devoted much reflection to this topic, has, at my solicitation, furnished me with his views; and they are here inserted as a valuable and instructive addition to this work.

The question respecting the existence of a Visible Church Catholic, may be regarded, 1, as real,—2, as verbal.

I. As *real*. The real question may be stated thus: Do all who profess the true religion constitute one organized society?

The following doctrine is maintained by Dr. Mason: There exists in the world a great society, composed of all who profess the true religion. This society is so organized that the parts are united in mutual dependence, and furnished with a principle of living efficiency in one common system, so as to bring the strength of the whole to operate on every part, or through all the parts collectively, as occasion may require. This society possesses the power of self-preservation, which includes, 1. A power of commanding the agency of any particular member; 2. A power of combining the agency of all her members; 3. A power of providing for her nourishment and health; 4. A power of expelling impurities and corruptions. This society, with a regular succession of members, has existed visibly and publicly, from the days of Abraham to the present time.⁵³

The following weighty objections lie against this doctrine:

1. It does not accord with the facts of history. All the professors of Christianity are not now so united, and it is certain that they have not been for ages past.
2. It favors the pretensions of the Roman Church. If any such society existed in the middle ages, its seat of power must have been at Rome.
3. The powers attributed to this society are inconsistent with the individual and personal responsibilities of its members. A power to command implies an obligation to obey. Now either the power must be exercised with infallible rectitude, or the members are bound to oppose it, and to obey God rather than men.
4. The Church organizations of primitive Christians did not extend beyond single congregations, which existed and acted independently of each other. Membership was voluntary, and no power was claimed

⁵¹Hill's Divinity, p. 695. Dick's Theology, 2, p. 456. Smyth's Ecclesiastical Catechism, p. 11, with a copious citation of authorities. "The Church," says Ogilby, "is Christ's mystical body. This body of Christ is a *visible* body, made of many *visible* parts," Lectures on the Church, p. 13, New York, 1844.

⁵²Walker's Church Discipline, p. 10, where he says the term Church, in Matt. 16: 18, "appears to include, generally, such professed believers as hold the Christian faith and practice uncorrupted, throughout the world."

⁵³Mason's Essays, pp. 5, 195, and elsewhere.

to interfere in any wise with the individual and personal responsibility of any member. "To his own master he standeth or falleth."

5. The combination of individuals or of churches, for the purpose of exercising any controlling power whatever over the consciences of men, is the germ and spirit of Anti-Christ.

The doctrine to which these objections are opposed, is a corruption of the Scripture doctrine, respecting what theological writers have called the Invisible Church. The saints in heaven, with all regenerate persons on earth, form a society which is called, in the language of inspiration, the Body of Christ, the Church of Christ, the People of Christ, the Flock of Christ, &c. Eph. 5: 23–27; Matt. 1: 21; 1 Peter 2: 9; Luke 12: 32; John 10: 16; Heb. 12: 23. The oneness of this body does not depend on any external organization, but arises from a spiritual union of all its members to Christ. It is compacted, not by any external force, nor by powers conferred on the members collectively, for the purpose of consolidation and control, but by that which every joint supplieth. Love is the cement of the parts, and the principle of living efficiency, growth and strength which pervades the whole. It maketh increase of itself in love. Membership in this society is, in the highest sense, voluntary, and all controlling power belongs, not to the body, but to the living head, Jesus Christ.

A few texts of Scripture, in which the term Church is used, have, by a mistaken interpretation of them, been supposed to favor the doctrine of a Visible Church Catholic. Dr. Mason refers to six as proof texts of this doctrine. It is a very remarkable circumstance that three of these six texts refer to a period in the history of Christianity, when no church of external organization existed, but that which was at Jerusalem. This was not a Catholic Church as distinguished from a particular Church; and therefore these texts fail to prove anything in the question, except the difficulty of finding support for the doctrine in the word of God. The three passages are these: "The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved" Acts 2: 47. "Saul made havoc of the church"—Acts 8: 3. "I persecuted the Church of God"—1 Cor. 15: 9.

It is due, however, to the scheme of Dr. M., to say that it finds a Visible Church Catholic in existence at the period to which these texts refer: and it is due to the cause of truth to show that, in this very particular, the scheme involves incredible absurdity. He says, (pages 7 and 8,) "The Jews were not cut off till after the commencement and establishment of the new dispensation; that is, till after the Gentiles were taken in." According to this view of the subject, the excision of the Jews did not take place until after the conversion of Cornelius. Of consequence, the Jewish nation continued to be the Visible Church Catholic during the period to which the texts above quoted refer; and if they signify what they are cited to prove, their correct interpretation is as follows: "The Lord added to the Church;" i. e. to the

Jewish nation. "Saul made havoc of the Church;" i. e. of the Jewish nation. "I persecuted the Church;" i.e. the Jewish nation. Comment is unnecessary.

Two causes have favored the misinterpretation of Scripture on this subject.

The first of these is an ambiguous use of the epithets visible and invisible. The saints in heaven are invisible to mortal eyes; but that part of the Church of the first born which still remains on earth, instead of being invisible, is a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid. The Saviour enjoined on his followers to let their light shine before men, that their good works, not their church organization, should be seen. The saints are distinguished from the ungodly world by their holiness of life; they need not a mark in their right hand or in their forehead, in order that their characters may be known and read of all men.

From the confounding of visibility with organization originated the remark of Dr. M.:⁵⁴ "Nor is it to be imagined that he (Saul) was able to pick out the elect and persecute them." The objects of persecution were not rendered visible to Saul by ecclesiastical organization. He did not pick them out by searching for their names in some church book. They are called "the disciples of the Lord"—the saints—and their relation to Christ is clearly intimated in the inquiry, "Why persecutest thou *me*?" The persecution was aimed at Jesus and his genuine disciples, and the guilt of it was estimated accordingly; nor was it necessary, in order that Saul should persecute the true disciples of Christ, that they should, on the one hand, be separated from any false professors who might chance to be among them; or, on the other band, that they should be incorporated with these false professors, under some system of ecclesiastical government. Samson could burn the corn of the Philistines, without either separating the wheat from the tares or binding the whole in one great bundle. And a man may exclude the light of day from his chamber, though he neither "pick out" the sunbeams from the motes that float in them, nor press the light and the motes together into one consolidated mass. It should be remembered, however, that our present inquiry is not, whether the term *Church* includes, in its proper signification, false professors as well as true; but whether all professors, both true and false, constitute one organized society. So far, therefore, as the illustration of our present subject is concerned, it is of no importance whether the term *wheat* may properly signify the tares as well as the wheat; or the term *light*, the motes as well as the sunbeams. The only question is, whether one organized mass must be formed by the wheat and the tares, before they can be burned; or by the sunbeams and the motes, before they can be excluded.

Saul persecuted the Church when he persecuted such of its members as were within his reach. What was done to the part was regarded as done to

⁵⁴This is the error of Bellarmine, de Ecclesia Mil. III. cap. 12. Non dici potest [ecclesia] societas hominum, nisi in externis et visibilibus signis consistat. See, also, Walter, Kirchenrecht, §11.

the whole; and what was done against the members on earth was regarded as done against the head in heaven. On the same principle of interpretation we may understand the phrases: "Gaius, the host of the whole Church,"—Rom. 16: 23. "Give none offence to the Church of God,"—1 Cor. 10: 32. They import hospitality to saints generally, and offence to saints generally. But that the saints should be entertained, offended, or persecuted, it is not necessary that they should be united in a Visible Church Catholic. These phrases are two of the remaining proof texts of Dr. M., and, like the three before quoted, prove nothing to his purpose.

A second cause which has contributed to the misinterpretation of Scripture on the subject, is a secularized view of the Christian ministry.

The Saviour, at Pilate's bar, declared, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." In this declaration it is clearly implied, that the officers in his kingdom, like the kingdom itself, belong to another world. When he gave to Peter his great pastoral commission, in the memorable words, "Feed my sheep,—Feed my lambs,"—he prescribed spiritual duties, and appointed him a pastor, not to a single congregation, nor the Visible Church Catholic, but to the spiritual flock of Christ. The food administered is spiritual, and the recipients must be spiritual; the food is the sincere milk of the word. The recipients are the new-born babes who desire, and the believers, to whom Christ is precious. To suppose infant and adult members of the Visible Church Catholic to be intended, is a gross misconception of the Saviour's design.

When Peter met with Simon the Sorcerer, who had professed faith in Christ and been baptized, he did not on that account recognize him as one of Christ's sheep, and feed him accordingly; nor did he wait for the Church Catholic to bring its power to bear on this part of the great body, and expel the impurity. Peter regarded not his profession, but his spiritual state; not his relation to any visible Church, but his relation to Christ and things spiritual.

As Peter felt and acted, so felt and acted all the Apostles; and so they taught all the primitive ministers to feel and act. So Peter taught:

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

"Feed the flock of God, which is among you, taking the oversight thereof; not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

"And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." 1 Peter 5: 1–4.

So Paul taught the elders at Ephesus:

“Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”—Acts 20: 28.

So he taught his son Timothy:

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”—1 *Tim.* 3: 15.

These men referred every thing to eternity, and the heart-searching God. They regarded themselves as members of a spiritual body; and to their view the flock of God—the heritage of God—the house of God—the Church of God, consisted of those who were bound to them by spiritual ties, and whom they expected to meet in heaven.

The spirituality of the Christian ministry is vividly represented in 1 Cor. 12 chap. The body of Christ is one with many members, who are baptized into it by one Spirit, and drink of one Spirit. The eye, the ear, the hands, the feet, have their proper offices for the benefit of the whole. God hath set them in the body: and of none of them can it be said it is not of the body. All the diversities of gifts are from the same Spirit. From that member which sustains the highest and most important office, to that which occupies the least honorable place, one spiritual sympathy extends, which pervades the whole and excludes the possibility of schism. Assuredly this is not a description of the Visible Church Catholic. No false apostles, no false prophets, no ministers of Satan, in the form of ministers of righteousness, belong to this body. God has not set such in it. The Spirit has not baptized such into it. Such have not a care for the body. Of all such it may, with truth, be said, they are not of the body. Yet such officers and members must belong to the body, if Dr. M.’s interpretation of the 28th verse of this chapter is correct. This verse is his only remaining proof-text; and, like all the rest, utterly fails, when rightly interpreted, to serve the purpose for which it was quoted.

The evils resulting from secularized views of the Christian Church and ministry, are incalculable. This cause gave birth to the Man of Sin, and all the lordship which has been exercised over God’s heritage. It has furnished, with sheep’s clothing, the grievous wolves that have devoured the flock. To it may be ascribed, in chief part, the divisions which have been the opprobrium of Christianity and the stumbling-block of infidels. Having lost the unity of the spirit, the professors of religion, lest they should, by the independence of the churches, and the uncontrolled personal responsibility of every member, “be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth,” resolved to build a tower, whose top should reach to heaven, and to inscribe on it the motto, **VISIBLE UNITY**. But, as it happened to the builders at Babel, their language became confounded, and their mad scheme ended in

discord and division. Carnal leaders draw away disciples after them; and those who follow in such divisions are carnal. "While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" Many schemes have been proposed, for the healing of these divisions, by the amalgamation of religious societies, but all will prove abortive, till men return to the unity of the Spirit.

Having examined the question concerning the Visible Church Catholic, as *real*; we proceed to consider it

II. As *verbal*. The verbal question may be thus stated: Is the term Church properly used to denote all the professors of the true religion taken collectively? This is a question of comparatively little importance; yet it deserves consideration, on account of the close connection which is often found to subsist between errors of thought and errors of language.

Men may be classified with respect to any property by which some are distinguished from others. The tall, the wise, the honest, the aged, are classes of which we may have occasion to think and speak. But these classes exist as classes in our minds only. The individuals of each class exist separately and independently, and may, in fact, have less to do with each other than with individuals of other classes. So, all the professors of the true religion may be classed together, and may be thought and spoken of as if forming a company distinct from the rest of mankind. It is therefore possible that the term Church may be used to denote this class of men, without implying that they are united in a visible organization. But can it be so used with propriety?

1. The term which is rendered Church in the New Testament, signifies an assembly. Dr. Mason says, "Whenever it occurs you are sure of an assembly, and nothing more." Now all the professors of religion, though they form a class in our mental conception, do not form an assembly. They never have assembled, and they never will assemble except on the day of judgment; and even then they will be separated from each other—some on the right hand, and some on the left.

2. In many of the examples in which the term Church is in the Scriptures used in its Catholic sense, it clearly denotes the body of real saints. Of those examples in which it has been supposed to denote all the professors of religion, not one has been found that, on a careful examination, requires this interpretation. To assign a new meaning, without necessity, is not in accordance with sound criticism.

3. It is not necessary to suppose that the inspired writers, whenever they employed the term Church in its Catholic sense, had present to their minds the distinction between true and false professors. A field of wheat may be called a field of wheat, without any regard to tares which may chance to be in it. So the several churches were addressed as believers, disciples, saints, &c., without regard to false professors who might chance to be among

them; yet the terms believers, disciples, and saints, do not acquire a new meaning from such application of them.

We may conclude, therefore, that the term Church, when used in its Catholic sense, denotes the body of real saints, as distinguished from all other persons; that it never denotes all the professors of religion, as distinguished from the body of real saints; and that it cannot include false professors of religion, unless it be in a vague and loose application of it.

It has been asked, Is not baptism the door into the Church? To this question it might be a sufficient reply, to refer to the tenth chapter of John, the only place of Scripture in which the door into the fold of Christ is mentioned. But if we must furnish an answer from the analogy of faith, rather than by direct appeal to Scripture, it will be needful to find the house, before we seek for the door. If there is no such building as the Visible Church Catholic, all inquiry about the door into it must, of course, be useless.

Baptism has been placed, by Christ, at the *beginning* of all the outward duties which he requires of his followers. It is, therefore, an *initiatory* service. But all agree that, as in the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch, baptism does not introduce to membership in a particular church; and it is clear that an individual must be a member of Christ's spiritual body, *before* baptism, or any other duty, can be acceptably performed. "Without me ye can do nothing."

For whose accommodation is this building needed, of which baptism is the door? It denies shelter, of course, to all unbaptized persons; and all regenerate persons are better provided for, having been admitted into Christ's spiritual house. The only persons, therefore, who need it, are the unregenerate baptized, the followers of Simon the Sorcerer, who, while they profess Christ, are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. Verily, for such persons, God's wise master builders are not required to provide a building; much less have they been authorized to place one of Christ's ordinances as the door into it. Pedobaptists have found difficulty in assigning a suitable apartment to their baptized infants; and have placed them, not so properly in the Church, as within its pale. Whether it would better accord with the analogy of this faith, to call baptism the gate, than the door, may be left for those to decide who are unwilling to keep the ordinances as they were delivered.

Baptism is not, like the Lord's supper, a social rite. It signifies the fellowship of the individual believer with Christ, not the fellowship of believers with one another. The obligation to be baptized is independent of the obligation to form social relations with other disciples, and is prior. Baptism, is, therefore, a qualification for admission into a Church of external organization; but it does not confer membership.

CHAPTER IV. PARTICULAR CHURCHES.

THE Gospel is admirably adapted to man. Its disclosures of grace meet his wants, as a fallen guilty creature; and its revelation of a future state satisfies the instinctive longings of his soul for immortality. The ecclesiastical polity of the New Testament is not less suited to him, as a social being. The instincts of our nature lead us to society, and many of our noblest qualities are called forth and nurtured by its influence. A particular Church is a society of believers baptized upon profession of their faith in Christ.

When the Apostles went forth, under the broad commission of their ascended Master, preaching the Gospel, they gathered together the fruits of their ministry, wherever they went, into local societies. These are the only Churches known to the New Testament. They constitute the external development of Christ's kingdom; and are employed, as nurseries, to prepare the genuine children of the kingdom for their ultimate and permanent abode.

A Church of Christ is a single congregation of professed believers, formed by the mutual agreement of its members, and designed for religious purposes. In this sense the word is used by the sacred writers more than sixty times. This is the view which has always been held by Baptists. "A particular gospel Church," says one of the earliest authorities in this country, "consists of a company of saints incorporated by a special covenant, into one distinct body, and meeting together in one place, for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other, and with Christ their head, in all his institutions, to their mutual edification, and the glory of God through the Spirit."⁵⁵ 2 Cor. 8: 5 ; Acts 2: 1.

Several important principles are involved in the Scriptural definition of a gospel Church.

1. A Church is a single local society.
2. It is composed of professed believers.
3. It possesses the power of admitting to membership, exercising discipline, choosing its officers, and, in general, managing its own affairs.
4. It is independent of all other Churches.

Each of these points demands a separate investigation.

⁵⁵ Summary of Church Discipline of the Charleston Association republished by Rev. D. Sheppard, Charleston, 1831. This Summary was prepared, probably, by Oliver Hart, Francis Pelot, and David Williams. *Rippon's Register*, for A. D. 1796, p. 511.

CHAPTER V. A CHURCH IS A SINGLE LOCAL SOCIETY.

THIS is clear:

1. From the meaning and use of the term. We read in the New Testament of “the Church” in a particular city, village, and even house, and of “the Churches” of certain regions; but never of a Church involving a plurality of congregations.⁵⁶ “A bishoprick was but a single congregation.”⁵⁷ There is no trace of any other kind of Church, presbyterian, diocesan, or national.⁵⁸

2. From the history of the Churches in the New Testament. The Church at Jerusalem, the model after which the other Churches seem to have been formed,⁵⁹ was a single congregation, which could meet together for social worship and the transaction of Church business.⁶⁰ So also the Churches at Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, &c., were all single congregations.⁶¹

It has been objected that the members of these Churches were too numerous to constitute a single congregation.⁶² But if the New Testament alludes, in these cases, to only one Church, and affirms that “the whole Church” did meet together and transact business in common, the objection is negated by the authority of Scripture. The argument which attempts to disprove the congregational polity of the Church at Jerusalem, is similar to that by which the baptism of its members has been assailed. The narrative in Acts plainly intimates that the three thousand converts were baptized, (or immersed.) But it is objected that they were too numerous to be baptized, and therefore must have been sprinkled. In either case the baptized congregationalist rejects the unwarrantable assumption.⁶³

It is not, however, material to the argument to prove that the members of a Church actually did meet together for social worship. The Scriptures inform us that this was the case at Jerusalem. In other cities, where the number of members was very large, local convenience may have been consulted;

⁵⁶Acts 2: 47; 13: 1; Rom. 16: 1, 5; Col. 4: 15; Acts 9: 31; 15: 40, 41; 1 Cor. 16: 19.

⁵⁷King's Prim. Church, cap. 2, §12.

⁵⁸R. Hall's Wks. 4, p. 394.

⁵⁹Gieseler's Church Hist. I. p. 56.

⁶⁰Acts 2: 44, 46; 4: 23-31; 5: 11-14. Comp. 3: 2, 11; 6: 1-6.

⁶¹Acts 13: 1-4; 14: 25-27; 15: 22-30; 1 Cor. 11: 20, 33; 14: 23, 26.

⁶²Dick's Theol. 2, p. 478. Hill, p. 692. Milner, Church Hist. Cent. 3, ch. 20.

⁶³The baptism of the three thousand is not so improbable a case after all. I baptized, on one occasion, seventy-six persons in seventeen minutes, and that without any special view to expedition. I did not even know that any one was noticing the time. The twelve apostles, baptizing at the same rate, would have baptized the three thousand in fifty-five minutes and fifty-five seconds!

Since writing the above, I have learned that “Elder Courtney baptized seventy-five persons in the basin on the canal, in Richmond, Va. He had assistants, who led the candidates to and from him; and he performed the whole in seventeen minutes, notwithstanding he was seventy years old.” Life of John Leland, Richmond, 1836, p. 33. For similar cases among the earlier Christians, see Christian Rev. III. p. 91.

and there may have been portions of the Church that held their religious meetings in different places, but still constituting, as in some of our large cities, branches or arms of the Church located in those cities. This is rendered probable, by the existence of a plurality of bishops. It is sufficient to show that the Churches of the New Testament were single societies, that the members of a certain locality constituted a Church, not Churches, and that they were addressed by the Apostles, as a unit and not a plurality. Even if it be conceded, therefore, that the number of elders, found in the primitive Churches, was rendered necessary by their habit of assembling in different places of worship, this does not affect the congregational character of these Churches; since each body of elders was addressed as the officers of "the Church," plainly evincing that the community to which they were attached, constituted a single society.

3. From the large number of distinct Churches which are mentioned in the New Testament.

Churches seem to have been instituted upon the principle of local convenience. Whenever a body of converts were found, who could conveniently assemble together for the discharge of the duties of Church members, there a Church was organized. Hence we find separate Churches contiguous to each other. The Church at Cenchrea was only nine miles from that at Corinth.⁶⁴ In the epistle to the Colossians the names of four distinct Churches occur, located within a distance of five miles.⁶⁵ Five and thirty different Churches are referred to in the New Testament, besides a great many more that are comprehended in the general designation, "Churches of Asia," "Churches of Macedonia," &c.⁶⁶

This view of a Christian Church is so obviously scriptural, as to have commanded the assent of a large number of historians and theologians. The following are a few of many authorities that might be cited:

"The simplest conception of a Church is that of a community of believers, dwelling in the same place, and associated for the promotion of Christ's kingdom." Schleiermacher. *Kurtze Darstellung des theol. Stud.* §277.

In the primitive age "a Church and a diocese seem to have been, for a considerable time, coextensive and identical. And each Church or diocese, and consequently each superintendent [i. e. bishop or elder], though connected with the rest by the ties of faith and love and charity, seems to have been perfectly independent, as far as regards any power of control." Archbishop Whately, *Kingdom of Christ*, p. 136.

"A Church I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves

⁶⁴ Rom. 16: 1.

⁶⁵ Col. 4: 13–16. Calmet states that Hierapolis and Laodicea were five miles apart, and Colosse midway between them.

⁶⁶ Punchard, on Congregationalism, p. 49, gives a list of the thirty-five churches. Also, Dr. Curtis, *Bible Episcopacy*, p. 97.

together of their own accord, in order to the public worshipping of God, in such manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls." Locke, Letter I. on Toleration. Wks. fol. 2, p. 235.

"In no approved writers, for the space of two hundred years after Christ, is there any mention made of any other organical, visibly professing Church, but that only which is parochial, or congregational." J. Owen, Wks. 20, p. 132.⁶⁷

CHAPTER VI. MEMBERS OF A CHURCH.

THE primary and indispensable qualification for membership in a particular Church, consists in a connection with the general Church, or body of Christ. "Every one is so far a member of Christ's Church as he is a member of Christ's body."⁶⁸ Each particular Church seeks to represent, in itself, the kingdom of Christ, and ought, therefore, to be composed entirely of spiritual materials. It is no part of its design to embrace unbelievers, and prepare them for the kingdom of heaven. They have no right to its privileges and blessings. They are intruders at its ordinances. No ecclesiastical recognition of them as children, can change their relation as aliens and strangers; and they who introduce them contravene the declared will of the great Head of the Church. The gates of his kingdom are open to none but converted men. It is, therefore, the imperative duty of the Churches to admit to membership none but such as give satisfactory evidence that they have been born again. This was the practice of the apostles.⁶⁹

That the Churches planted by them were composed of such as they deemed real believers is evident,

1. From the addresses of the different epistles:—"Paul, to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called saints. To the Church of God at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints. To the Saints which are at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus. To the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi. Peter, to them that have obtained like precious faith."

2. From the general tenor of the epistles. In proof of this position, it is simply necessary to refer the reader to these inspired compositions themselves. Every allusion to the origin of the Churches; every description of the character of the members; every exhortation, rebuke, and warning; all directions with respect to their government and discipline, bear ample evidence that they were contemplated by the authors of the epistles, as comprising

⁶⁷Haldane, *Social Worship*, chap. 5, §1. Leonard Bacon, *Manual for Church Members*, p. 15.

⁶⁸T. Jackson on the Church, p. 19. Phila., 1844.

⁶⁹"No one," says Marheinecke, "is a member of the Church by birth: he becomes one first by the new birth." *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik*. §693.

only those who had made a credible profession of their faith in the Redeemer. Had the apostles sanctioned the admission of unconverted men into the Churches, their practice would have been at variance with the spirit of their subsequent communications to them. To address such persons as the children of light and the temples of the Holy Ghost, would have been to use language without meaning, or singularly delusive. The limits of this work forbid an extended investigation of this topic. The reader is requested to consult the following passages of Scripture, in which the character of Church members is clearly exhibited:⁷⁰ Col. 3: 9; 1 Thess. 5: 5; 1 Cor. 6: 19; 5: 7; 3: 9–17; 2 Cor. 7: 8, 18; 6: 14, 18; Acts 8: 26–40; 1 Pet. 2: 5.⁷¹

3. The design of Christian Churches affords additional evidence that none but believers were contemplated in their organization. This part of the subject has been presented in so just and beautiful a view by a pious pedobaptist writer, that I cannot do better than to transcribe his words:—“The Church is a sacred enclosure taken in from the world—brought into cultivation by the Divine Husbandman, and intended to be filled exclusively with the plants of righteousness. He designed the Church to be his own *peculium*: it is the only fortress which he holds in a revolted world; and he intended, therefore, that no authority should be known in it, no laws acknowledged, but his own; that no parties should obtain admission, but those ‘who are called, and chosen, and faithful;’ so that to open its gates for the entrance of any of the revolted, however specious the pretext, is a betrayal of the most sacred trust, and treachery to the great cause of Christ.” Harris, Great Teacher, p. 214.

So writes Dr. Smyth, and, indeed, every evangelical writer, when not thinking of infant baptism. “Only those who make a credible profession of their faith in Christ, can be admitted as members of the Church of Christ; because its privileges, by their very nature, are intended only for those who, in the judgment of charity, are disciples of Christ.”⁷²

If these views are just and scriptural, it is evident that no place is provided, in a Christian Church, for such as do not, or cannot profess their faith in Christ. As infants belong to this class, they are excluded by the original and divine constitution of a Christian Church. Upon the same principle they

⁷⁰In the famous controversy between Pres. Edwards, and Solomon Williams, concerning the half-way covenant, the former took the broad scriptural ground, that none but such as gave credible evidence of their faith in Christ should be admitted to the Lord’s Supper. But, as a pedobaptist, he was obliged to admit that those who had been baptized in infancy were “in some sort members of the Church.” In this they were both agreed. Here Williams erected his strong battery, and managed it with great effect. He proved that the position of his opponent, if maintained, would annihilate infant baptism. Either that ordinance must be given up, or Edwards must surrender. He did not choose to abandon infant baptism, and was vanquished, not by the truth of his opponent, but by his own error. Edwards, Humble Inquiry, Works 4, p. 423–428. Curtis, Bib. Episc. p. 173.

⁷¹Haldane, Social Worship, ch. 6. Punchard Congregationalism, pp. 40–47.

⁷²Eccl. Catechism, p. 80. This is excellent. But we find, in the same work, among the meanings ascribed to the word Church, the following: “The whole body of those, *with their children*, who profess the true religion.” p. 10, Dick Theol. 2, p. 380, 460. Punchard, p. 40.

are excluded from baptism, since the ordinance is the appointed method of professing our faith in the Redeemer. The grounds upon which the right of infants to baptism is based, are various and contradictory; they are all alike unscriptural. "It is a common sentiment," observes one of its advocates, "that the baptism of children makes them members of the Church; but this is an error. Their baptism does not make them members, it only recognizes their right of membership already existing; their membership is not founded upon their baptism, but their baptism upon their membership."⁷³ But another affirms⁷⁴ that "the children of the members cannot be considered as members of the Church, being incapable of fulfilling the duties of that relation." A more recent writer teaches that baptism "brings the child into the Church of God, to which he has promised his favor and blessings—translates it from the kingdom of darkness into the visible kingdom of God's dear Son, on earth."⁷⁵ There is plainly a schism on this point among pedobaptists, according to the views of the respective denominations to which they belong. The Papal and Episcopal Churches maintain that the infant is made a member of the Church by baptism; while the Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches contend that it is entitled to the ordinance, because it is already a member.⁷⁶ To the former class the Methodist Episcopal Church seems to belong. Mr. Wesley says: "By baptism we are admitted into the Church, and, consequently, made members of Christ, its Head."⁷⁷ Dr. Bond has taken a different view. "Baptism is not properly the *initiating* ordinance, by which we become subjects of this kingdom, [Messiah's] but the ratifying or sealing ordinance, by which we are so acknowledged by the Church and ministry of Christ. Children are initiated into the kingdom at their birth."⁷⁸ This, it will be perceived, throws the door open to all children. But pedobaptists have usually restricted the ordinance to the offspring of believers. Even upon this point, however, there is another schism.⁷⁹ It is

⁷³ Rev. S. Helffenstein. The Church of God. Am. Bib. Repos. 2, p. 314. C. C. Jones, Catechism, p. 246.

⁷⁴ Haldane, Social Worship, p. 321. He afterwards renounced infant baptism. Indeed it is surprising, that one who could write such a book should practice it.

⁷⁵ Rev. W. Hodges, Infant Baptism tested by Scripture and History, Phil. 1844, p. 243.

⁷⁶ C. G. Neudecker. Lehrbuch der christl. Dogmengesch. §56, where he says that the "Lutheran, Reformed, Roman and Grecian Catholic Churches supported infant baptism against the fanatical Anabaptists and Mennonites, and against Schwenkfeld on the ground that it was, in general, necessary to salvation." Hinton's Hist. Baptism, p. 338.

⁷⁷ Preservatives, p. 146–150, quoted by Booth. Vindic. Bap. Sec. 1.

⁷⁸ N. Y. Christian Advocate, copied in Biblical Recorder. N. C., Jan. 27, 1844.

⁷⁹ Archbishop Leighton writes to one of his friends:

"Touching baptism, freely my thought is, it is a weak notion, taken up on trust almost generally, to consider so much, or at all, the qualifications of the parents. Either it is a benefit to infants, or it is not. If none, why then administered at all? But if it be, then why should the poor innocents be pre-judged of it for the parents' cause?" Works, p. 681. Baptism, in his view, "signifies and seals our washing from sin and our new birth in Jesus Christ," p. 506. The seal, however, proves to be very brittle, for "the open wickedness of the most testifies against them" that though sprinkled with water in baptism, yet they are strangers to the power and gracious efficacy of it; they are swearers, cursers, drunkards, unclean," p. 223.

refreshing to turn from the conflicting opinions of men to the simple word of God, which contains no intimation of infant membership, either before or after baptism, and recognizes only baptized believers as the constituents of a gospel Church.

The abettors of infant baptism have, usually, rested its claims upon an alledged identity of the covenant of circumcision and the covenant of grace; and, assuming that baptism has taken the place of circumcision, have argued that, as children were formerly admitted to the latter ordinance, they ought now to be to the former. To examine at length all the arguments by which this subject has been mystified, does not comport with the limits of this little book. It will be sufficient, however, to expose some of the leading assumptions involved in the theory in question.

1. It involves the assumption, that the covenant of circumcision is the covenant of grace. If this were the case, all who lived before Abraham, as well as all, who, in subsequent times, are not in the line of circumcision, would be excluded from the covenant of grace. What, then, becomes of Abel and other antediluvian patriarchs? The truth is, that circumcision stands in no necessary relation to spiritual blessings. It is the distinguishing mark of a race, the members of which are determined by natural descent. The possession of spiritual blessings by the circumcised is not invariable, but accidental to the rite; and is determined upon other principles. Its design was, together with other rites and ceremonies, which were peculiar to the Jewish people, to segregate, and, consequently, preserve the nation. "These peculiarities," observes the learned historian of the Hebrew Commonwealth, "formed the foundation upon which was built the great partition wall between them and other nations."⁸⁰

2. It assumes that the covenant made with Abraham, which involved spiritual blessings, and the covenant of circumcision are identical. But it is evident, from the third chapter of Galatians, that these covenants are distinct. The former was made, according to the statement of the apostle, four hundred and thirty years before the delivery of the Law. This computation makes it coeval with the calling of Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, an event which occurred twenty-four years before the covenant of circumcision.

3. It confounds the natural with the spiritual seed of Abraham; the children of the flesh with the children of the promise. These are clearly distinguished in the word of God.⁸¹ The argument on this point is simple and direct. The passages which are cited in support of infant baptism, in connection with the Abrahamic covenant, must refer either to his natural, or his spiritual seed. If to the former, Gentile infants are excluded, since they are not the lineal descendants of the patriarch; if to the latter, all infants are

⁸⁰Jahn. Heb. Com. p. 38, 138. So Photius and Chrysostom and Theodoret, quoted by Dr. Brantly, Baptist Library, 3, p. 400.

⁸¹Gal. 3: 18, 29; 4: 28, cf. Rom. 9: 7, 9.

excluded by the very terms which designate the relation. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."

The above remarks are sufficient to expose the flimsy foundation upon which this theory is built; the weakness of which is so apparent, that it has been abandoned by many pedobaptists themselves.⁸²

The recognition of unconverted persons, as members of a Christian Church, is an evil of no ordinary magnitude. It throws down the wall of partition which Christ himself has erected and obliterates the distinction between the Church and the world. A society composed of believers, and sustained and extended by spiritual instrumentalities, has the promise of the Redeemer pledged for its perpetuation. Such a community is indestructible. The body,

"Vital in every part,
Cannot, but by annihilating, die."

It becomes the disciples of the Saviour to guard well the door of admission into their fraternity. Upon their fidelity, in this respect, depend its efficiency, prosperity, and safety. An accession of nominal Christians may enlarge its numbers, but cannot augment its real strength. A Church that welcomes to the privileges of Christ's house, the unconverted, under the specious pretext of increasing the number of his followers, in reality betrays the citadel to his foes. They may glory in the multitudes that flock to their expanded gates, and exult in their brightening prospects; but the joy and the triumph will be alike transient. They have mistaken a device of the enemy for the work of God. They hailed, as they thought, an angel of light; they have received Satan. I admire and love the many sincere and zealous Christians that are found in such Churches; but I fear that this Trojan horse will finally prove their ruin.

On the subject of infant baptism, and what seem to me to be its legitimate tendencies, I have recorded my sentiments without reserve, and, I trust, without offence. I impeach no man's motives; nor do I question the piety and sincerity of those of my Christian brethren who believe that this practice is sanctioned by the divine command. Many pedobaptists are among the lights and ornaments of the age; their ministry has been blessed of God to the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, and their Churches present numerous examples of pure and unaffected piety. Such men would not, knowingly, contravene the law of Christ. They would welcome the obloquy of the world, and even the agonies of martyrdom, in obedience to the command of their Lord and King, and rejoice that they were counted

⁸²Stuart on the O. T. p. 394. Letters of David (Jones) and John (Dagg) on the Lectures of Dr. Woods, Lec. 3. Carson on Baptism, p. 214, 237. Hinton, ch. 5, §1.

worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. It is impossible not to admire and love men whose faith and practice associate them with Baxter, Leighton, Edwards, and Martyn, and who breathe their heavenly spirit. While I think I see and regret their errors, I would extend to them the same indulgence which I ask for my own.

CHAPTER VII. RIGHTS OF A CHURCH.

As it was manifestly the design of the Redeemer that his Churches should embrace only such as professed his name, and submitted to his will as the law of their life, so, also, he has entrusted to them the high privileges of self-government under Him. The New Testament, which contains the charter, constitution, and discipline of these voluntary societies of Christians, defines and limits their rights. Whatever powers have been expressly delegated to them, they may exercise: the assumption of others is an unauthorized usurpation. The Churches are bound to retain the full possession of the rights and privileges committed to them by Christ. They have as little authority to diminish, as to increase them. Acquiescing in the wisdom of the divine plan, and grateful for the advantages it secures, they should firmly resist every invasion of its supremacy, or violation of its spirit.

The divine constitution of the Churches is equally illustrative of the wisdom and the condescension of the Redeemer. In committing the government of his chosen people to themselves, he has graciously evinced his confidence in their fidelity and love. And this confidence has not, usually, been betrayed. The enormous evils which, under the guise of Christianity, have cursed the Church and the world, were the legitimate fruits of priestcraft, prelacy, and hierarchical domination. The great body of the people, when left to themselves, have always retained their loyalty and love to their invisible king.

1. Every Christian Church possesses the right of discipline, formative and corrective. With its divine constitution in its hands, defining the qualifications which entitle to membership, it is its province to determine as to the possession of those qualifications, in the case of every applicant. Its nature as a voluntary society, involves the right to admit and to exclude. Primitive Christians constituted a voluntary compact; they gave themselves first to the Lord, and then to one another; and were always addressed as those who had decided for themselves on the solemn subject of adherence to Christ.

The fundamental principles of Church discipline are laid down in Matt. 18: 15–18. Here the Saviour enjoins the course to be pursued towards an offending brother, and designates "*the Church*" as the tribunal of ultimate appeal. What, then, is the Church? The context affords a satisfactory reply.

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I.” This is the Church to which Christ alludes. It is gathered in his name, and blessed with his presence; and is, therefore, competent to decide a question involving the interests of his cause. The Scriptures recognize no higher authority. It is worthy of remark that in the organization of this ecclesiastical court for the trial of offences, the officers of the Church are not even mentioned. Their presence is not considered indispensable. “No officer is here. It is not the Church clerk, nor the parties that have neglected to summon him. The Church’s Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, has left him out.”⁸³

To evade the force of these remarks, and take from the people the discipline of the Church, it is contended that the word, in this place, refers to the officers or representatives of the Church.⁸⁴ But, surely, nothing but the most imperative critical necessity would justify such an unusual interpretation: an interpretation which, so far from being demanded by the exigency of the case, is positively excluded. Some of the best critics, even among Episcopalians, sustain this, the natural and usual explanation of the passage.⁸⁵ The correctness of this interpretation is supported by the directions which were subsequently given to the Churches by the apostles. Rom. 16: 17; I Cor. 5: 9–13; II Thess. 3: 6, 14, 15. If the reader will turn to those passages of Scripture, he will see that they recognize the right of the Churches to discipline offenders, and demand its exercise.

If any thing further were necessary to vindicate the rights of God’s people, and sustain them against the assumptions of clerical supremacy, it would seem that the case of the Corinthian Church is unambiguous and decisive. On an occasion which demanded the most stringent application of corrective discipline, even an apostle does not venture to trench upon the prerogatives of the brotherhood. He does not interfere, in virtue of his apostolic authority, to coerce them; he does not address their officers; but takes occasion, in an epistle “to the Church of God which is at Corinth,” to suggest a proper method of procedure. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan [i. e. to cast him out of the Church and send him back to the world, which is the kingdom of Satan,] Purge out, therefore, the old leaven.” I Cor. 5: 4–7, 13. The faithful exercise of discipline in this case, seems to have been blessed by God to the restoration of the Church’s purity and peace. The incestuous person was led to repentance. The apostle again tenders the brethren his advice. “Sufficient to such a man is this *punishment, which was inflicted* of many, [that is excommunication by the majority of the Church] so that ye ought, rather,

⁸³Curtis, Bib. Episc. p. 145.

⁸⁴Smyth, Eccl. Catech. 1, §1, 6. Dr. Miller, Presbyterianism, p. 58.

⁸⁵“The Church or particular community of which he is a member.” Bland, Bloomfield. The old English versions of 1539 and 1541 render: “Tell it to the congregation.”

to forgive him and comfort him. Wherefore I *beseech* you that ye would confirm your love to him." II Cor. 2: 6–11. "The apostle does not here," observes Punchard, "speak as one having alone the key of the Corinthian Church; but contrariwise, as one who recognized the power 'of the many' to act in the matter. He does not command the Church to restore the penitent, but he '*beseeches*' them: much less does he restore the excommunicated person by the authority vested in himself as a minister of the gospel of Christ."⁸⁶ The tone of rebuke with which the apostle addressed the Church, not its officers, shows that the responsibility rested with them, and that they were chargeable with gross dereliction of duty. Had this not been the case, his censure would have been equally unjust and unkind.⁸⁷

The Christian system involves a provision of mercy for the human race, irrespective of natural distinctions. It is the divinely appointed remedy for guilt and depravity; and as these are the universal characteristics of our fallen race, it proffers its redeeming and sanctifying grace to woman as well as to man. But it is no part of its design to disturb the natural relation of the sexes, or obliterate the distinctions which the Creator has himself appointed. Hence, in the organization of the Church it has pleased divine wisdom to sanction and perpetrate the subordination of woman to man, by excluding her from any share in the administration of its government. To woman was assigned the distinguishing honor of giving birth to the Saviour of mankind; and this fact alone is sufficient to redeem Christianity from the imputation of depreciating or slighting the sex, even though it confers upon her no other prerogatives in the church than silence, obedience, and the personal illustration of the graces appropriate to her high vocation. "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."—1 Tim 2: 11–12. This passage, compared with 1 Cor. 14: 34, amounts to a total exclusion of the sex from the public instruction and government of the Church.⁸⁸ It has been supposed that 1 Cor. 11: 5, conflicts with the other passage of the epistle to which I have referred. "We must account for this apparent contradiction," says Neander, "by supposing that Paul, in the second passage, (1 Cor. 11: 5,) cited an instance of what occurred in the Corinthian Church, and reserved his censures for another place."⁸⁹ For Mr. Mercer's views, which accord with my own, with respect

⁸⁶ Congregationalism, p. 65. Haldane, p. 346.

⁸⁷ Coleman, Prim. Ch., ch. 5, p. 90. Bacon, Manual, p. 22. Walker, Church Discipline, §10. King, ch. 7, §3.

⁸⁸ Vid. Macknight and Bloomfield, in loc.

⁸⁹ Planting of the Church, p. 38. We have an example of the same method of teaching in ch. 8. T. Grantham thus explains the passage, "Every woman praying or prophesying," &c. He says: "The whole Church is said to do a thing, when it is actually performed by one person or a few," cf. ch. 14: 23, 24. Hence a woman is said to pray, when she does so through the person who prays in the Church. Christianismus Primitivus, Part II B. III. c. 7, §2 London, 1678.

to the participation of females in the government of the Church, see his *Memoirs* by Rev. C. D. Mallary, App. p. 447. The Discipline of the Charleston Association, p. 132, declares that "female members are excluded from all share of rule or government in the Church." Some of our Churches practice otherwise. Mr. Punchard says: "It is generally thought desirable that the female members of a Church should be present at the transaction of all ordinary business, for their satisfaction and instruction but it is utterly inconsistent with established usage, for females to take any part in business transactions."—p. 170.⁹⁰ This unscriptural custom originated, probably, in that spurious delicacy which induces some ministers, on baptismal occasions, to administer the ordinance to the women first, a species of refinement which partakes more of modern chivalry than primitive Christianity. Women who appreciate their true position will decline the honor.

2. A Church possesses the right to choose its own officers.

The evidence of the Scriptures in support of this position is clear and conclusive. They record instances of the election of an apostle, and of deacons, delegates, and elders, each by a popular vote. It need excite no surprise that the position has been vigorously assailed.⁹¹ The importance of the principle at stake, justifies both the attack and the defence. If the clergy have been invested with the sole power of appointment, they are right in contending for it. If, on the contrary, the Head of the Church has deposited this prerogative with those whose interests are most intimately involved in its exercise, it becomes them to resist clerical encroachment, with the vigilance and firmness of Christ's freemen.

The first instance on record is the appointment of an apostle.—Acts 1: 15–26. If the apostles had considered themselves authorized, in any case, to act upon their own responsibility, it would have been on this occasion, when a vacancy was to be supplied in their own body. But we hear nothing of the apostolic power of appointment. They settle at the outset the principle which is to determine such matters, by committing the choice of an apostle, under God, to the people. The Church at Jerusalem was vested with the appointing power. Even if this extraordinary case were an exception, it would not negative the evidence in favor of popular suffrage, which is derived from other instances. These will now be examined.

In Acts 6: 1–6, the election of deacons occurs. The apostles call together "the multitude of the disciples," and propose the matter to them. The "whole multitude" unite in the choice of the seven, and "set them before the apostles for prayer and the imposition of hands." No satisfactory expla-

⁹⁰Benedict, *History Baptist*, 2, p. 472. "There were some fanatical sects in the ancient Church, such as the Montanists and, Collyridians, who authorized and encouraged women to speak, dispute, and teach in public. But the sentiment of the Church has uniformly been opposed to such indecencies." Coleman, *Christ. Antiq.* p. 118.

⁹¹Taylor, *Spir. Desp.* p. 324–333.

nation of this case can be given, but that which supposes that in the judgment of the apostles it was the prerogative of the Church to choose its own officers.⁹² The comment of a distinguished Episcopalian on this transaction is worthy of notice. "The apostles, the heads of the Church, prescribed the qualifications for the office, the people chose the persons who were thus worthy, and the apostles ordained them to the appointed office. Every Church, we infer therefore, is entitled and bound to follow this plan of conduct. . . . The same rules which were on the present occasion prescribed, we have reason to suppose, were observed likewise in the nomination of bishop and deacons in the Churches."⁹³ Although he denies that any possible authority can be derived from this portion of Scripture to sanction the laity in taking upon themselves the choice and appointment of their respective ministry," he makes every concession for which Congregationalists have usually contended. They insist upon the right of the laity to elect their own officers, but admit that the act of a presbytery is necessary to induct them regularly into office.⁹⁴

The position which I have taken is confirmed by the fact that even in the appointment of individuals to less important duties than those which appertain to official station in the Church, the apostles invited the counsel and cooperation of the brethren, and submitted to their choice. Acts 15: 22–29, (comp. II. Cor. 8: 19,) records an instance of the election of delegates. "Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole Church, [at Jerusalem] to send chosen men [having chosen men from among themselves to send them⁹⁵] of their own company to Antioch." The letter which they bore was addressed in the name of "the apostles and elders and brethren," evincing the participation of the Church in the Mission to Antioch.⁹⁶ On this point Neander remarks: "It is evident that the first deacons, and the delegates who were authorized by the Church to accompany the apostles, were chosen by the Churches themselves. From these examples we may infer that a similar method was adopted in the appointment of elders."⁹⁷

The instances cited above are amply sufficient to determine in whose hands is deposited the right to appoint to office in a gospel Church. They are clear and explicit. The proof derived from them cannot, therefore, be invalidated by the citation of those equivocal cases upon which the abettors of prelacy have expended so much of their strength. No rule of interpretation is more indisputable, than that obscure portions of Scripture are

⁹²Punchard, p. 59. Coleman, p. 56.

⁹³Townsend, N. T. Part 9, note 30.

⁹⁴Punchard, p. 164. Church Discip. Charleston Assoc. ch. 2. Haldane, ch. 7.

⁹⁵Bloomfield.

⁹⁶Potter cuts the knot here, by rejecting "*and*" from the the text, and reading "the apostles and elders, brethren." The design of this artifice is obvious. Church Government p. 291. London, 1839.

⁹⁷Pflantz und Leit. der ch. Kirche. S, 703.

to be explained by those which are perspicuous. These remarks are applicable to the transaction referred to in Acts 14: 23, 24. "And when they, (Paul and Barnabas) had *ordained* them elders in every Church," &c. Attempts have been made to sustain the doctrine of popular rights, by showing that it is implied in the meaning of the term *ordained*. Beza went so far as to render the passage "when they had created elders by suffrage;"⁹⁸ for which he has been severely censured by Campbell.⁹⁹ Many modern writers have followed Beza's example.¹⁰⁰ A recent advocate of episcopacy contends that the word does not necessarily imply a popular election.¹⁰¹ In this I am compelled, on critical grounds, to concur. The term, (which is composed of two words signifying *to lift up the hand*,) did originally signify to choose by suffrage, in accordance with the custom of the Greeks; but it acquired, in common use, a secondary signification, and was employed to express an appointment in any way. It is manifestly so employed by Josephus.¹⁰² It does not appear, therefore, that any proof can be derived from this instance in favor of a popular election. With as little reason can it be employed on the other side. In a succinct history, like Luke's, it is not to be expected that he should enter into the details of every transaction which he records. It is sufficient that he has furnished us with indubitable instances of election to office by the suffrages of the brethren. All other cases must be settled in conformity with the principle there laid down or exemplified, so that wherever he informs us that the apostles ordained elders, it is to be understood that it was with the consent and concurrence of the people.¹⁰³

On this point it has been well remarked by Haldane: "That the pastoral relation between teachers or pastors and a church can only be formed by mutual consent, is not only manifest from the conduct of the Apostles recorded in the Scriptures, but is necessarily implied in the nature of this relation, considered in every view. It is not less absurd to maintain, that because we have no direct example of a church choosing its own elders, that this matter is left undetermined, than it would be to argue, that since the word of God has not declared the marriage union is to be entered into by mutual choice, it is doubtful whether this be required. Such obvious principles as necessarily result from our nature and circumstances, are frequently taken for granted in Scripture."¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸Quumque ipsi per suffragia creassent presbyteros.

⁹⁹Gospels. Diss. 10 Part. 4, 7.

¹⁰⁰Coleman, p. 51. Punchard, p. 59.

¹⁰¹Chapin, Primitive Church, p. 155, New Haven, 1846.

¹⁰²Antiq. 1, 13, 2, 2.

¹⁰³"When Paul gives Titus power to appoint rulers of the Church," says Neander, "who had the requisite qualities, nothing is thereby determined as to the nature of the election; it does not necessarily follow that an election by the Church itself is absolutely excluded." Church Hist., p. 108, Augusti. in Coleman. Antiq. p. 131. Neander, in Coleman's Prim. Ch. Introduction, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴View Sec. Worship, p. 210.

The evidence in support of this position is so clear and full that it is admitted by the highest authorities in ecclesiastical history.

"In those primitive times each Christian Church was composed of the *people*, the *presiding officers*, and the *assistants or deacons*. . . . The highest authority was in the people, or the whole body of Christians. . . . The assembled people, therefore, elected their own rulers and teachers, or by their authoritative consent, received them, when nominated to them. They also, by their suffrages, rejected or confirmed the laws that were proposed by their rulers, in their assemblies; they excluded profligate and lapsed brethren, and restored them; they decided the controversies and disputes that arose; they heard and determined the causes of presbyters and deacons; in a word, the people did everything, that is proper for those in whom the *supreme power* of the community is vested." Mosheim, Ch. Hist, I. pp. 82, 143.

"Each communicant, as member of the Church, had the right of taking part in all the transactions of that body, especially in *the choice of the clergy*, and in the discipline of the Church." Augusti, in Coleman's *Antiq.* p. 60. See also chap. 5.

"In ancient times there was not any small Church which had not a suffrage in the choice of its pastor." Barrow on the Pope's Supremacy, Supp. 6, §12.

"In the earliest government of the first Christian society, that of Jerusalem, not the elders only, but the whole Church, were associated with the Apostles." Waddington, Ch. Hist. p. 41.

"As it is plain, by the general epistles, that *all* Church power was in the *people*, so we find them, before these were written, exercising this power." Tindal, *Rights of the Christian Church*, chap. 4, §46, quoted in Hanbury's *Historical Memorials*, I. p. 9. London, 1839.

"The discipline of Christian Churches was primitively popular." Harrington, *Popular Government*, B. 2, chap. 5.¹⁰⁵

3. It is the right and duty of a Church to interpret for itself the laws of Christ, and to enforce obedience, on the part of its members, to the system of faith and practice which it derives from the word of God.

"The Socinians hold that, as the Scriptures are the rule of faith, the essential articles of faith are so few, so simple, and so easily gathered out of clear explicit passages, that it is impossible for any man who has the exercise of his reason to miss them; that all mistakes and differences of opinion amongst those who search the Scriptures, respect points which are not essential, and concerning which it is both vain and hurtful to try to establish an uniformity of opinion; that it is in all cases a sufficient declaration of Christian faith to say that we believe the Scriptures; that no harm can

¹⁰⁵So also Hullmann, *Kirchenverfassung*, S. 21, 196. Curtis, *Bib. Episc.* p. 129. Burton, *Church Hist.*, ch. 12, p. 262. Punchard, *Hist. of Congregat.* ch 10.

arise from allowing every man to interpret the Scriptures as he pleases; and that, as Scripture may be sufficiently understood for the purposes of salvation, without any foreign assistance, all creeds and confessions of faith, composed and prescribed by human authority, are an encroachment upon the prerogative of the Supreme Teacher, an invasion of the right of private judgment, and a pernicious attempt to substitute the commandments of men in place of the doctrine of God. According to this plan, there is left to the Church, and its ministers, in their teaching, merely the office of exhortation.”¹⁰⁶

Such is the substance of the argument against human creeds, against the right of a Church to maintain its own views of divine truth, and require a concurrence in them on the part of all who are received to its fellowship. This position of the Socinians, the effect of a violent reaction against the extreme doctrine of the Papists, on the subject of tradition and church power, has never received the sanction of the great body of Protestants, who have insisted, both by precept and practice, upon the right and duty of a Church to set forth the main articles of its belief, in what is usually called a confession of faith. This has been the practice of the Baptists, both in their primary organizations, as churches, and in their general combinations for the spread of the Redeemer’s kingdom. The Baptists in Great Britain, through the elders and brethren of upwards of a hundred churches, put forth, in the year 1689, a confession of faith, generally known as the Century Confession, together with a Catechism for the use of the young. These were adopted by the Philadelphia Association, in this country, in 1742, and subsequently by the Charleston, Savannah River, and other Associations. As Associations are composed of delegates from the Churches, their acts merely expressed the will of these bodies. The General (Arminian) Baptists of Great Britain published their confession of faith in 1663.¹⁰⁷

The Century Confession embraces the following doctrines:—The unity of God; the existence of three equal persons in the Godhead; the just condemnation and total depravity of all mankind by the fall of our first parents; eternal, personal, and unconditional election; the proper divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ; the necessity of his atonement, and its special relation to the sins of the elect only; justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone; effectual calling; perseverance of the saints; believers’ baptism by immersion only; the Lord’s Supper, a privilege peculiar to baptized

¹⁰⁶Hill’s Divinity, p. 754.

¹⁰⁷The Century Confession was republished, with other valuable matter, by Rev. D. Sheppard, Charleston, 1831. It coincides in doctrine with the Westminster Confession, from which, indeed, it was taken; and this latter was designed to be an exhibition of the faith of English Protestantism. Vid. Dr. Smyth’s Hist. Westm. Assembly, Sec. 2. The copy of the Baptist Catechism in my possession, which is in fact the Shorter Catechism of the Assembly, adapted to our own views, in certain particulars, was published in Charleston, S. C., 1813. The Confession of the General Baptists, entitled, “A brief Confession or Declaration of Faith, set forth by an Assembly of Messengers, Elders, and Brethren of the Baptized Churches,” may be seen in Grantham’s *Christianismus Primitivus*. London, 1678.

believers, regularly admitted to Church fellowship; the resurrection of the body and general judgment; the final happiness of the saints, and misery of the wicked, alike interminable; the obligation of every intelligent creature to love God supremely, to believe what God says, and practice what God commands; and the divine inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, as the complete and infallible rule of faith and practice.¹⁰⁸

The reasons which are now assigned for departing from this time-honored custom, are not sufficiently cogent to justify such a course, especially as our churches are as much as ever exposed to the irruption of a lax or false theology. It has been observed by a writer who argues against “the propri-

¹⁰⁸The above brief compend of doctrine was drawn up by the Rev. Dr. Dagg. The following document presents another very excellent digest of the Century Confession:

ARTICLES OF FAITH

Of the Mississippi River Baptist Association, adopted October 2d, 1846.

1. We believe in one triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; the same in essence, equal in power and glory.
2. We believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were given by the inspiration of God, and are the only rule of faith and practice.
3. We believe in the fall of Adam from original rectitude; in the imputation of his sin to all his posterity; in the total depravity of human nature, and in man's inability to restore himself to the favor of God.
4. We believe that God has loved his people with an everlasting love; that he chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world; that he called them with a holy and effectual calling; and, being justified alone by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, they are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation.
5. We believe there is one Mediator between God and man-the man Christ Jesus, who, by the satisfaction made to law and justice, in becoming an offering for sin, hath, by his most precious blood, redeemed the elect from under the curse of the law; that they might be holy and without blame before him in love.
6. We believe that good works are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, and are evidences of a gracious state; and that all believers are bound to obey every command of God from a principle of love.
7. We believe in the resurrection of the dead, and a general judgment; that the happiness of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked will be everlasting.

GOSPEL ORDER.

1. We believe that the visible Church of Jesus Christ is a congregation of faithful persons, who have given themselves to the Lord, and to one another, by the will of God and have covenanted to keep up a godly discipline, agreeably to the gospel.
2. We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, the only Lawgiver; that the government is with the Church.
3. That Baptism and the Lord's Supper are Gospel ordinances, appointed by Jesus Christ, and are to be continued in his Church until his second coming.
4. That the immersion of the body in water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is the only Scriptural way of Baptism, as taught by Christ and his Apostles.
5. That none but regularly baptized Church members, who live a holy life, have a right to partake of the Lord's Supper.
6. That it is the privilege and duty of all believers to make a public profession of their faith, by submitting themselves as subjects for baptism, and as members of the visible Church.
7. That it is the duty of every regularly organized Church to expel from her communion all disorderly and immoral members, and who hold doctrines contrary to the Scriptures.

ety of having any human selection or compilation, as a standard of faith and practice":—"If it be said that the compilation thus prepared contains what is in the Bible, the question comes up, why then form the compilation? Why not use the Bible as the standard. Can man present God's system in a selection and compilation of some of its parts, better than God himself has done it, as a whole, in His own book? Suppose the legislature should select portions of the constitution of the State, and compile them into a book, and set it forth as the standard by which its laws should be made. Would the people allow it?"¹⁰⁹

This objection proceeds upon an erroneous conception of the nature and design of a creed. It is not a compilation of some of the parts of God's system, nor does it consist of select portions of the Scriptures. It is a digest of the whole, presenting in a small compass, and in the shape of distinct propositions, the great principles which constitute the system of revealed truth. In the Bible, these principles are not merely exhibited, they are expounded and defended at large. Moreover, a creed is not intended to supersede the word of God, as the standard of faith and practice; for it derives its validity and authority solely from its agreement with that word. It is a standard or rule of faith only in a secondary sense, and only to those who adopt it as the exponent of their views. It does not create, it simply expresses the truth; and is to be viewed, not in the light of an authority but a testimony. The adoption of a creed on the part of a church indicates not what is to be, but what is already believed. It is an expression of its cordial reception of the truth, and "sets forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among" its members.¹¹⁰

The right of a Church to frame for itself a summary of Christian doctrine is evident from the nature of its organization. If "two cannot walk together except they be agreed," much less can professors of Christianity constitute a harmonious and efficient body, unless they concur in their views of what Christianity is. If it be proper for them to have correct views, it is proper to express them; and if it be proper to express them orally, it is equally so to express them in a written form. Again, each member of a church is bound to bear his testimony to the truth. But with what show of reason can it be affirmed that a duty, which is incumbent on members of a Church, in an individual, is not obligatory upon them in a collective capacity? It has been proved that a Church is charged with the discipline of its members, in reference both to faith and to practice. In a case of discipline,

¹⁰⁹Dr. Johnson, *Gospel Developed*, p 197.

¹¹⁰Luke 1:1. A creed is not *norma normans*, but *norma normata*. It contains the very kernel and essence of the Scriptures — *ipsa medulla* scriptures. Of confessions of faith it has been well said — non imprimunt nobis credenda, sed exprimunt a nobis credita. Twesten, *Vorlesungen*. I § 21, S. 296. Or, as Turretin has it, they are *normæ secundariæ*, non veritatis sed, *doctrinæ* in aliqua ecclesia receptæ, quoniam ex illis quid cum ecclesiæ doctrina conveniat, quidve ab ea discrepet, perspicui potest et dijudicari. *Theol. Elenc. Loc. XVIII. Quæst. 30, § 9.*

who is to pronounce judgment—the Church, or the party accused? To this question there can be but one reply. The Church, in the exercise of its legitimate prerogative, is to decide as to what is truth, and what constitutes a departure from the faith. But if a Church possesses this right, when an offender stands arraigned before it, it must have possessed the right previously,—the right to define its views of Scriptural truth, and require its members to conform to the same. “It has been asked,” says Andrew Fuller, “by persons who disapprove of all church proceedings, on account of difference in religious principles, who is to judge what is heresy? We answer, those who are to judge what is immorality, in dealing with loose characters. To suppose it impossible to judge what heresy is, or to deny that the power of so deciding rests in a Christian Church, is to charge the apostolic precept with impertinence.”¹¹¹ Again: “If a Christian society have no right to judge what is *truth*, and to render an agreement with them in certain points a term of communion, then neither have they a right to judge what is righteousness, nor to render an agreement in matters of practical right and wrong a term of communion.”¹¹²

Such being the unquestionable right of a Church, it simply remains to show that there is an obvious propriety and duty in having “human compilations,” or summaries of doctrine. “Whether the united sentiments of a Christian society be expressed in writing or not, is immaterial, *provided*, they be mutually understood and avowed. Some societies have no written articles of faith or discipline; but with them, as with others that have, it is always understood that there are certain principles, a professed belief of which is deemed necessary to communion.”¹¹³ It will be perceived that the *writing* of Articles of Faith is accidental, not essential, and involves no principle which is not implied in holding them.

In the decision of this question, regard must be had to the dictates of reason and the lessons of experience. Had the author of revelation been pleased to give us truth, in naked propositions, arranged with scientific symmetry, in a regular system, the necessity of framing such a system for ourselves would never have existed. But he has not so chosen; and in this respect, there is a beautiful harmony between nature and revelation, indicating that both proceed from the same divine author. As in nature (to select a single example), the various vegetable productions which beautify the surface of the earth, and adorn the caverns of the sea, are not found arranged with reference to their respective genera and species, according to the classification of the botanist, but are scattered promiscuously over the globe, soliciting the labor of science to classify them, and rewarding it by unfolding new and glorious views of the wisdom, power, and benevolence of the

¹¹¹ Works, II. p. 466 Boston, 1833.

¹¹² Works, II p. 630.

¹¹³ Fuller, Works, II p. 630.

Deity, so the truths of revelation, the several parts of a beautiful and glorious system, lie scattered over the pages of the Bible, to be gathered by the hand of pious diligence, and reared into a temple to the divine glory. This method subserves the purposes of moral probation and discipline; for the character of the system which each inquirer derives from the Bible depends, in a great measure, upon the moral qualifications with which he consults its sacred pages.

Were the results of such inquiries always the same, did the various bodies which profess our common religion hold the same sentiments, specific Articles of Faith might be dispensed with; but when it is remembered that these bodies, although they take their position upon a common platform—the word of God—profess diverse and even opposite sentiments, the necessity of such articles is evinced by the most plain and cogent considerations. Our Lord warned his disciples against false prophets, who would come in sheep's clothing, while inwardly they were ravening wolves. The Apostles witnessed the fulfilment of his predictions; and their epistles abound with complaints of false teachers, who corrupted the word of God, brought in damnable heresies, subverted whole houses, and wrested the Scriptures to their own destruction.¹¹⁴ Against these, Christians are exhorted to “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” and to be on their guard against “the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”¹¹⁵ These and similar directions “teach clearly that an acknowledgment of the truth of Scripture is not a sufficient security for soundness of faith, because they state a perversion of Scripture by those who have received it, as not only a possible case, but as a case which then actually existed; and consequently they imply that it is lawful for the ministers of religion (and the churches) to employ some additional guard to that ‘form of sound words,’ which they are required to hold fast and defend.”¹¹⁶ These observations expose the futility of the demand which is sometimes made, that Confessions of Faith should be expressed in the language of Scripture, or in general terms. “The very purpose for which they are composed being to guard against error, it is plain that they become nugatory if they deliver the truths of religion in those words of Scripture which had been perverted, or in terms so general as to include both the error and the truth.”¹¹⁷

The only plausible objection which is urged against the use of human creeds as the condition of Church fellowship, is that it restricts freedom of

¹¹⁴Matt. 6: 5. 2 Cor. 2: 17. 2 Tim. 2: 18. Titus 1: 11. 2 Peter 3: 3–16. 1 John 4: 6.

¹¹⁵Eph. 4: 13. Heb. 13: 7. Tit. 1: 9.

¹¹⁶Hill's Divinity, p. 756.

¹¹⁷Hill, p. 760. It is well known from the history of heresy, that the use of Scripture language, in a sense opposed to orthodoxy, is one of the most common disguises of errorists; and as to the use of general terms, it has been the refuge of heresy in all ages.

inquiry, and interferes with the rights of conscience. "If," says Andrew Fuller, "a subscription to Articles of Faith were required without examination, or enforced by civil penalties, it would be an unwarrantable imposition on the rights of conscience. But if an explicit agreement in what may be deemed fundamental principles be judged essential to fellowship, this is only requiring that a man appear to be a Christian, before he can have a right to be treated as such. Suppose it were required of a Jew or an infidel, before he is admitted to the Lord's Supper (which either might be disposed to solicit for some worldly purpose), that he must previously become a believer. Should we thereby impose Christianity upon him? He might claim the right of private judgment, and deem such a requisition incompatible with its admission; but it is evident that he could not be entitled to Christian regard, and that, while he exclaimed against the imposition of creeds and systems, he himself would be guilty of an imposition of the grossest kind, utterly inconsistent with the rights of voluntary and social compact, as well as of Christian liberty."¹¹⁸

The use of a confession of faith, so far from disparaging the authority of the Bible, as a standard, really exalts it. It insists upon a correct interpretation of the word of God, a cordial reception of its truths, and an entire submission to its directions. A Church, rearing this rampart around the sacred volume, guarding every entrance with jealous vigilance, and carefully questioning every comer who essays to gain admission under false colors and with "feigned words," protects the divine repository of truth against the insidious artifices of those who would corrupt it or handle it deceitfully. If they choose to wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction, the responsibility rests with themselves. The Church will never fraternize with them in their unholy designs, nor suffer them to pollute her sacred enclosure. Thus she fulfils her high mission as the "pillar and ground of the truth." As pillars, in ancient time, bore the written edicts of the potentates of the earth, "seen and read of all men," so the Church stands forth, with the great principles of divine truth graven upon her front,—the living, faithful witness of her invisible king.

Such are some of the reasons which justify the Churches in the use of definite articles of faith. The custom is thought by some inquirers into the usages of antiquity, to have been apostolical, or, at least, sanctioned by apostolic precedent. It is supposed that the sermon on the mount, which

¹¹⁸Works, II, p. 629–630. "The persons most ready to bring forward this objection are those whose system excludes some of the doctrines which the great body of Protestants agree in receiving. In their manner of stating the objection, they are careful to conceal their disbelief of particular doctrines, under a zeal for liberty of conscience, and the right of private judgment; and instead of affirming that a confession declares what is false, they choose rather to say, that by the particularity with which it states the received opinion, it abridges and invades that freedom in every thing that concerns religion, which Christians derive from the spirit of the gospel." Hill, *Divinity*, p. 760.

presents a digested system of Christian ethics, the Lord's Prayer, the use of the baptismal formula, and the allusion to a "form of sound words,"—all point to such an observance. But however this may be, we possess incontestible evidence that, soon after the age of the apostles, when the rise of heresies began to threaten the peace and purity of the Churches, it was deemed necessary to embrace the leading facts and principles of the Gospel in a compendious system, and present them, for concurrence or subscription, to candidates for baptism and church fellowship;¹¹⁹ and in all succeeding times, the supporters of truth against error have deemed it their sacred duty to bear their explicit and unequivocal testimony, in terms which neither friends nor enemies could misinterpret; some of them, in circumstances in which a mere general assent to the truth of the Scriptures, would have saved them from the appalling agonies of martyrdom.¹²⁰

The propriety of the course which has been adopted by Christian Churches, with reference to a formal enunciation of their distinctive principles, is illustrated and confirmed by analogous procedures in other bodies. Thus the government of the United States is administered, according to the provisions of a written constitution. Under this constitution different parties have arisen, sustaining the same relation to it which the various denominations of Christians sustain to the Scriptures. It is not deemed sufficient by any one of these parties, to require, on the part of its adherents, a simple subscription to the constitution; for this is the common basis of them all. Each party sets forth its own construction of the constitution, and states distinctly the principles upon which it is based. If an individual were to suffer himself to be chosen as a representative of one of these parties, and were then to betray their confidence, by giving his support to the measures of another, in vain would he plead in justification of his treachery, that the constitution was his political confession of faith; all parties alike would denounce him as a deceiver.

If it be the duty of each church, as a separate and independent body, to bear its unequivocal testimony to the truth, it is equally so when it is united with others. A union of churches upon grounds that permit the rejection of principles which each is separately pledged to sustain, is an absurdity so gross and palpable, that it is surprising it should find any advocates. It has indeed been said that "uniformity is not to be secured and preserved by

¹¹⁹Coleman's *Christian Antiq.* p. 253. "From the earliest organization of the Church, some confession and rule of faith must evidently have been necessary. This rule of faith must have been derived from the teaching, either oral or written, of the apostles; and may have been earlier than the writings of the New Testament in their present form. Luke 1: 1–4. Gal. 1: 11. As the preaching of the Apostles preceded their written instructions, so an oral confession may have preceded a written one, comprising an epitome of the gospel. From such a source may have sprung the great variety of forms which were known previous to the council of Nice."

¹²⁰Mosheim, *Ch. Hist.* 1. chap. 3. Gieseler, 1. §49. Munscher (Ed. Von Coln), 1. §12. Barrow's *Works* (Am. Ed.), II. p. 569.

confederacies of churches, confessions of faith, or written codes or formularies framed by man, as bonds of union for the churches of Christ.”¹²¹ To this it may be replied, that while it is true that the recognition of a common confession does not always secure real uniformity, and this will always be the case, so long as deceivers exist who are base enough to profess what they do not believe, yet this method affords the nearest approximation which can be made to so desirable a result. Real uniformity can exist only among those who “all speak the same thing, and are perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” 1 Cor. 1: 10. A union of contradictions is an impossibility. Agreement in sentiment is the bond of Christian union. “I have heard a great deal,” says the judicious Fuller, “of union without sentiment; but I can neither feel nor perceive any such thing, either in myself or others. All the union that I can feel or perceive arises from a similarity of views and pursuits.” All other grounds of union are impracticable and worthless, and all the hopes of ecclesiastical prosperity or denominational enlargement which are based upon them will prove deceptive in the end. “Christian enlargement is not accomplished by extending our connections, but by confining them to persons with whom we can have fellowship, communion, concord, and a mutual participation of spiritual interests”¹²²

If the views which have now been presented with reference to the rights and powers of Christian churches be correct, they are placed in a position of great eminence and responsibility. All the authority which Christ has not reserved to himself, he has delegated to them. They are the guardians of his cause upon the earth. To them he has committed a solemn and responsible trust. It is their imperative duty to retain it in their own hands, and discharge the duties involved in it, with a zeal and fidelity proportionate to the honors and privileges it confers. The fact itself is a noble and affecting appeal to their best sentiments, and it should be the aim of the churches to vindicate the wisdom of the Redeemer in their organization, by proving that the trust has not been bestowed in vain.

CHAPTER VIII. INDEPENDENCE OF THE CHURCHES.

It has already been proved, that, according to the Scriptures, each Church of Christ is charged with the reception and discipline of its members, the

¹²¹ Dr. W. B. Johnson. *A Church of Christ*, a Sermon, p. 26. Ripley and Barnes in loc. Curtis, *Bib. Episc.* p. 131.

¹²² Dr. Burton is an Episcopalian. How different the language of another writer of the same Church, who has ventured to assert that “the system of Independency is totally without the remotest support from either Scripture or Antiquity.” Townsend, N. T. Part 4, note 2.

election of its officers, and the general management of its affairs. This being the case, the independence of the Churches follows as a necessary consequence. The simplicity of this system of organization may not comport with the suggestions of human expediency. A more close and extensive combination, which should consolidate the Churches, fuse them into a compact and homogeneous mass, and centralize power in the hands of a select body, or of an individual, as the representative of sovereignty, may be preferred as best suited to develop and combine the energies of its component parts. But if this be the system which Divine wisdom has chosen, it is doubtless the wisest and the best. Experience has proved it to be so. It agrees best with the free spirit of Christianity, and is best adapted to the development of Christian life in the individual. It combines greater advantages, and is embarrassed with fewer difficulties, than any system which human ingenuity, pride, or the lust of power has ever devised.

It has been supposed that the transaction recorded in Acts 15, furnishes a precedent for a higher tribunal than a single independent Church. Writers on ecclesiastical polity have detected in the meeting at Jerusalem, a court of review, a synod or a general council, according to the bias with which they have, respectively, contemplated it. There is no just foundation for any of these suppositions. The case was altogether an extraordinary one. It sprung out of an exigency which could only occur in the incipient state of Christianity; and cannot, therefore, be pleaded in justification of subsequent assemblies, which undertake to legislate for the Churches, review their acts, and reverse their decisions. "In the above case there was no council of Churches held by their delegates. One Church sends messengers to ask information on a given subject. The answer is satisfactorily returned, and the instructions of the Holy Ghost are added concerning points of duty, in which all the Churches were interested. What assemblage of men, uninspired of God, can now say, "The Holy Ghost puts his seal to the decree which we send you, and you must keep it?" The above case then furnishes neither example nor authority for authoritative councils of Churches by their delegates."¹²³

The independence of the Churches is attested by the highest authorities in Church history, as well as by many other distinguished writers.

"All the Churches in those primitive times were *independent* bodies; or none of them subject to the jurisdiction of any other. For, though the Churches which were founded by the apostles themselves, frequently had the honor shown them, to be consulted in difficult and doubtful cases, yet they had no judicial authority, no control, no power of giving laws. On the contrary, it is as clear as the noonday, that all Christian Churches had *equal*

¹²³Dick, Theol. 2, p. 491. Hill, p. 695. Smyth, Catechism, p. 103, where, also, may be found the other objections which are here examined.

rights, and were in all respects on a footing of equality. Nor does there appear in this first century, any vestige of that consociation of the Churches of the same province, which gave rise to *ecclesiastical councils* and to *metropolitans*. Rather, as is manifest, it was not till the second century that the custom of holding ecclesiastical councils began, first in Greece, and thence extended into other provinces. “Mosheim, I. pp. 86, 142. cf. Gieseler, I. p. 103. King, ch. 8.

“Every Church had its own spiritual head or bishop, and was independent of every other Church with respect to its own internal regulations.” Burton, *Hist. Ch.* p. 262, New York, 1839.¹²⁴

“Every society of Christians formed within itself a separate and independent republic.” Gibbon, I, p. 273.

“It is certain that during the first century from the death of Christ, the several Churches which had been instituted by the apostles, or their successors, were entirely independent of each other.” Tytler, *Universal History*, 2, p. 4. Guizot, *Hist. Civilization*, p. 52.

Some objections have been urged against the independent polity, which demand at least a passing notice. These are:—

1. It destroys the visible unity of the Church.¹²⁵ It has been proved, in a former chapter of this work, that the visible Church Catholic is a figment of the imagination, destitute of Scriptural authority. If this be the case, the objection possesses no weight. The only kind of ecclesiastical unity contemplated in the Scriptures can be as well secured among independent Churches as any others. The principle of Christian union is the law of love. This divine element pervades the bosoms of all true followers of the Redeemer, and unites the various societies, into which they are divided, in one affectionate sisterhood. No other decrees are necessary to perpetuate this union, except the solemn command of their divine Master; and all attempts to effect the result by authoritative decisions of councils or coercive measures will prove abortive, or at best secure only a constrained and deceptive uniformity, the uniformity, not of faith and love, but of hypocrisy or servitude. Ecclesiastical systems, the growth of worldly policy, and stamped with the wisdom of human expediency, may *dove-tail* the Churches together, so as to present a vast and imposing visible confederation: the power of divine love alone can *weld* them in spiritual unity, and make them one family of Christ.

2. Another objection urged against our Church polity, is that it places too much power in the hands of the people. It is alledged that many Christian

¹²⁴R. Watson, *Institutes* part 4, chap 1. Mr. Wesley said: “We are no republicans;” and his followers seem content to repeat the confession.

¹²⁵Curtis, *Bib. Episc.*, Lec. 6.

Churches are incapable of self-government; and one writer particularly deprecates, with pious fervor, the idea of “referring every decision to numbers and suffrages, and placing all that is good, and venerable, and influential among the members themselves at the feet of a *democracy*.”¹²⁶ It is readily admitted that the Bible system of Church governments is suited only to a Bible constituency.¹²⁷ If churches are composed only of such as give credible evidence of having been taught by the Spirit of God, they may safely be entrusted with the management of their own interests. But when the door of admission is thrown wide open, and merely nominal professors are introduced, it becomes necessary to coerce and restrain them by powers higher than themselves; to curb them by courts and councils, or awe them by a hierarchy. It will generally be found that in proportion to the facility of admission into any Church is the stringency of its government. The Baptists recognize only believers as the constituents of a gospel Church and commit its government to its members. The Presbyterians, who, although they consider infants as “in some sort” members of the Church, yet exclude all but believers from full membership, are essentially republican in their form of government. They elect their own rulers. The Methodists receive applicants to their communion without the requisition of personal piety; and then excluding them from all participation in the government of the Church, rule them by clerical conferences. The Roman Catholics would cheerfully admit to the Church, by baptism, the whole human family, and then proceed to erect over them a ghostly tyranny, reducing them to due subjection by the rack, the stake, purgatory, and hell.

3. It is further alledged against the system of Independency, that it unfits the Church to perform, in her distinctive character, and through her own organization, her appropriate duty of extending the kingdom of the Redeemer throughout the world. To this it is sufficient to reply by an appeal to facts. The Churches of the New Testament were, as has been, constituted on this principle, and yet within a century after the death of Christ, they had pushed the conquests of his cross to the remotest limits of the civilized world. It is an indubitable fact that, in modern times, Churches founded on the principles of Congregationalism, gave the first impulse to the missionary enterprise; and they are, at the present moment, acting a conspicuous part in all the great religious movements of the age. Their sovereignty, as independent bodies, presents no obstacle to their cooperation in measures

¹²⁶1 Cor. 12: 28; Eph. 4: 11. Neander, Apos. Church, ch. 5.

¹²⁷Barnes, Episc. Exam. p. 2–5. Curtis, Bib. Episc. Lee. 2. Punchard, p. 71. Smyth, Pres. and Prel. chap. 4. Haldane, chap. 7. Bacon, Manual, p. 32. Campbell, Eccl. Hist. Lee. 5. Even Townsend, an Episcopalian, says, that to be made a witness of the resurrection with us” is equivalent to “being raised to the apostolate.” N.T. part 9, note 2.

of common utility, in education, Bible and Tract distribution, and in general movements for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom.

CHAPTER IX. OFFICERS OF A CHURCH.

THE permanent officers of a Church are of two kinds: elders (who are also called pastors, teachers, ministers, overseers or bishops) and deacons.

The Scriptures furnish us with an enumeration of all the gifts which were bestowed upon the apostolic churches. They mention apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers; deacons, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, and diversities of tongues.¹²⁸ It is evident that many of these must have been extraordinary, designed to meet the peculiar exigences of Christianity in its incipient efforts for diffusion. That miraculous and prophetic gifts have ceased is unquestionable. So have others. It was the design of Christ to provide for only two permanent officers in the Churches, bishops and deacons.

It has been strenuously contended that the apostolic office is permanent, and that it is continued in a succession of Bishops who profess a superiority in ministerial power and rights over the elders and the Churches. The weakness of this assumption can be easily exposed. The qualifications of an apostle were such as none of their pretended successors can be shown to have possessed.

1. The apostles were witnesses of Christ. To qualify them for this important office, our blessed Lord selected the twelve as his personal attendants, communicated to them his plans and purposes, and made them the witnesses of his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. These are the great facts upon which the Christian religion is founded. It was indispensable, therefore, that they should be sustained by the most clear and unimpeachable testimony. To bear this testimony, and thus lay the foundation of the glorious edifice of the Christian faith, was the primary and peculiar design of the apostolic office. "He ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out devils:"—Mark 3: 14 ; Matt. 10: 5. The same view is presented by Christ, after his resurrection. In his last interview with his disciples, he thus addressed them: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are *witnesses* of these things." Luke 24: 45–48. So the Saviour spoke, and so the apostles understood him. This is

¹²⁸Eph. 2: 20. Rev. 21: 14.

manifest from the words of Peter, when an apostle was about to be selected to fill the vacancy occasioned by the defection of Judas. "Of these men which have companied with us *all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us*, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a *witness with us*, of his resurrection."—Acts 1: 21, 22. That this was the distinctive character of the office, is further evinced by the account which is given of the labors of the apostles. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof *we are witnesses*." Acts 2: 32; 5: 32; 10: 39–41, etc.

The representation which has been given of the apostolic office derives strong confirmation from the case of the apostle Paul. He was called to the apostleship after the ascension of Christ. He had not had, therefore, that opportunity for personal observation which was necessary to qualify him to be a witness of Christ. How was this defect supplied? By supernatural revelation. Christ appeared to him on his way to Damascus, and transformed a bitter persecutor into a noble and unflinching apostle of his cause. We have three distinct accounts of his conversion and of his appointment to the apostolate. In each of these the design of the office is stated. "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee," said Ananias to the future apostle of the Gentiles, "that thou shouldst know his will, and *see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth*; for thou shalt be his *witness* unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard."—Acts 22: 14, 15. "I have appeared unto thee *for this purpose*, to make thee a minister and a *witness*."—Acts 26: 16. This latter was the language of Christ to Paul in the original commission. That it was understood by the apostle himself in the manner in which it has just been represented, is manifest from his own subsequent appeal in 1 Cor. 9: 2. In reply to those who challenged his claims to this high office, he asks most triumphantly: "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" Nothing can be more clear than that to have seen Jesus Christ was an indispensable qualification for the office of the apostleship, and that its main design was to bear witness to the cardinal facts of Christianity.¹²⁹

2. The apostles were distinguished by special prerogatives, which descended to none after them; receiving their mission directly from Christ. The power of conferring the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, and the knowledge, by inspiration, of the whole doctrine of Christ.

3. They were universal bishops; the whole of Christendom was their charge, and the whole earth their diocese.

4. We have full proof that no idea of succession to the office was entertained in their own age, or in the times immediately succeeding; for no one,

¹²⁹Kingdom of Christ, p. 128. The argument is stated with great force, by Chillingworth. Chap. II. Answer, §§64–68.

on the death of one apostle, was ever substituted in his place; and when the original college became extinct, the title also became extinct. The apostles were the ambassadors of Christ. Having delivered their message, and committed it to writing for the future use of the churches, their office became obsolete at their decease, and it was unnecessary that successors should be appointed.¹³⁰

A fatal objection to the notion of apostolic succession, and the consequences derived from it, consists in the fact, that no such succession can be established by historical evidence. The links of the chain are broken, and lost beyond the possibility of recovery. The transmission of apostolic grace is no longer practicable; for the wires of the mystic telegraph are disconnected, tangled, and, along a portion of the pretended line, nowhere to be found.

The vanity of the episcopal claim to an uninterrupted apostolical succession has been happily exposed by Archbishop Whately.

“There is not a minister in all Christendom, who is able to trace up, with any approach to certainty, his own spiritual pedigree. The sacramental virtue (for such it is that is implied, whether the term be used or not in the principle I have been speaking of) dependent on the imposition of hands, with a due observance of apostolical usages, by a bishop, himself duly consecrated, after having been in like manner baptized into the church, and ordained deacon and priest; this sacramental virtue, if a single link of the chain be faulty, must, on the above principles, be utterly nullified forever after, in respect of all the links that hang on that one. For if a bishop has not been duly consecrated, or had not been, previously, rightly ordained, his ordinations are null, and so are the ministrations of those ordained by him, and their ordination of others (supposing any of the persons ordained by him to attain to the episcopal office); and so on, without end. The poisonous taint of informality, if it once creep in undetected, will spread the infection of nullity to an indefinite and irremediable extent.

“And who can undertake to pronounce, that during that long period, usually designated as the Dark Ages, no such taint ever was introduced? Irregularities could not have been wholly excluded, without a perpetual miracle; and that no such miraculous interference existed, we have even historical proof. Amidst the numerous corruptions of doctrine and of practice, and gross superstitions that crept in during those ages, we find recorded descriptions, not only of the profound ignorance and profligacy of life of many of the clergy, but also of the grossest irregularity in respect of discipline and form. We read of bishops, consecrated when mere children; of men officiating who barely knew their letters; of prelates expelled,

¹³⁰ Bacon, *Church Manual*, p. 35. Discipline, Charleston Association, chap. 2. Walker, *Church Discipline*, §2.

and others put in their places by violence; of illiterate and profligate laymen, and habitual drunkards, admitted to holy orders; and, in short, of the prevalence of every kind of disorder, and reckless disregard of the decency which the apostle enjoins. It is inconceivable, that any one, even moderately acquainted with history, can feel a certainty, or any approach to certainty, that, amidst all confusion and corruption, every requisite form was, in every instance, strictly adhered to by men, many of them openly profane and secular, unrestrained by public opinion, through the gross ignorance of the population among which they lived; and that no one, not duly consecrated or ordained, was admitted to sacred offices.”¹³¹

The attempt to prove that an order existed in the ministry of the primitive churches as successors to the apostles, and therefore superior to elders, proves a failure. We may therefore consider it as comprising only elders and deacons. These are all that the Head of the Church has embraced in its ordinary and permanent organization. Even these are not indispensable. The Church at Jerusalem was in existence some time before it was found necessary to institute the order of deacons; and many other churches seem to have had no officers of either description. Paul and Barnabas, in their first missionary excursion from Antioch, passed through Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia, and planted churches. After the lapse of about four years, they returned through those regions, “confirming the souls of the disciples,” and “ordaining them elders in every Church.” Up to this period, therefore, there had been no elders in the churches. The same is true of other churches. It would seem, therefore, that “the officers of a church are not essential to its being, though they are to its well being.”¹³²

The apostolic churches seem, in general, to have had a plurality of elders as well as deacons. The apostle addressed his epistle to the Church at Philippi “with the *bishops* and deacons;” sent for “the *elders* of the Church at Ephesus;” and Paul and Barnabas as well as Titus “ordained elders” in the churches of Asia Minor and Crete. It seems, therefore, a fair inference that this was their usual practice. Of the reason of it we are not informed; but the existence of the practice seems unquestionable. Perhaps the explanation given by Elsley and others is the most satisfactory. “In that age,” he remarks, “Christians had no public edifices, but held their meetings in private houses. When they were numerous, these meetings, and the inspectors or bishops who presided over them, were multiplied in proportion.”¹³³ The

¹³¹Annotation on the Gospels and Acts, p. 562 In proof of a plurality of elders see Haldane, ch. 7, p. 210–224. Smyth, Name, Nature, &c., of Ruling Elders, p. 38. Coleman Primitive Church, chap. 6. Bacon, Manual, p. 39. Woods’ Lectures on Church Government, p. 50. Gieseler, Church History, 1, 29. Neander, Apostolic Church, p. 35, 92. Milman History Christ, p. 194–199. “The plurality of ministers over the same church continued, even to the fourth century, to be the order of the churches.” Planck Gesell, Verfass, 1, 551.

¹³²Calvin, Com. in loc. Smyth, Ecclesiastical Catechism, chap. 3, §6. Miller, Presbyterianism, p. 58.

¹³³1 Tim. 3: 2; Titus 1: 9.

number of officers, whether elders or deacons, necessary to the completeness of a church, is not determined in Scripture. This must be decided by the circumstances of each case, of which the party interested is the most competent judge.

A distinction has sometimes been made between teaching and ruling elders. This was formerly the custom of Congregational churches, and obtains, at the present time, in the Presbyterian Church. For the support of this distinction, the passages of Scripture principally relied on are 1 Tim. 5: 17; 1 Cor. 12: 28.¹³⁴ The latter passage is too indefinite in its phraseology to establish the distinction, and would probably never have been supposed to contain it, had not an erroneous interpretation of the former passage previously led to the belief that such a distinction really existed. The passage in the first epistle to Timothy reads as follows: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine." The attempt to establish the distinction in question on the authority of this passage, is encumbered with many and weighty difficulties. (1.) The appellation *elder* is, every where else, used to designate ministers of the Gospel. It is interchanged with *bishop*, and must therefore refer to the same officer. The qualifications necessary for a teacher are the same as those of presbyters. It was, therefore, foreign to the design of the apostle to draw the line contended for between ruling and teaching elders, and confine the members of each division to a particular sphere of duty.¹³⁵ That the term elder is used only with reference to teachers or ministers of the Gospel, is conceded by many advocates of the Presbyterian polity.¹³⁶ (2.) The Scriptures connect teaching and ruling together as the appropriate work of those to whom the care of the churches is committed. "We beseech you to know them which labor *among you* and are *over you* in the Lord, and *admonish you*." These separate divisions of duty must be the province of the same officer, unless we suppose that an order has been instituted for the purpose of *admonishing* the Churches, as well as for ruling and teaching them. Compare Heb. 13: 7, 17, 24. (3.) The total absence of any directions with respect to the qualification of ruling elders, proves that no such officer is contemplated in the New Testament. If these are necessary to the completeness of Church organization, it is unaccountable, that while the other officers of the Church are plainly specified, and their qualifications enumerated, no provision should be made for ruling elders. On these grounds, we contend that an order of men in the Church, whose sole business is to assist the pastor in its government, is not warranted by the precept or practice of the apostles.

¹³⁴Smyth, Office of Ruling Elder, p. 48. Pres. and Prel. B. I. chap. 6.

¹³⁵Punchard, Congregat. p. 81. Upham, Ratio Discipl. §38. Pictet, Theol. Christ. Lib. XII. c. 10

¹³⁶Lehrbuch des Naturrechts. §281.

What, then, it may be asked, is the distinction to which the apostle refers? The reply is obvious. It has been shown that a plurality of elders was customary in the apostolic Churches. Many of these, after the example of Paul, labored with their own hands for support; and as they were stationary, might do so with little inconvenience. Others felt impelled by the Spirit, to make missionary excursions into the contiguous settlements, and devote themselves to the preaching of the Gospel. While the apostle urges upon the Churches the duty of supporting all their elders, he commends to their *special* regard those of them who had consecrated themselves to this laborious and self-denying work. The distinction is not one of officers, but of duties belonging to the same office.¹³⁷

An elder who devoted himself exclusively to the preaching of the Gospel in destitute regions, was termed an evangelist, a title which occurs only thrice in the New Testament. Acts 21: 8; Eph. 4: 11; 2 Tim. 4: 5. Although not located in any particular place, he belonged to the Presbytery (or Bishops) of some particular Church, by whom he was sent forth to evangelize the nations, found Churches, and extend the kingdom of the Redeemer. As the religion of Jesus Christ is essentially aggressive, this class of ministers will be needed until the world is converted to the faith. Modern missionaries have succeeded to the duties of the primitive evangelists.

A careful examination of the Scriptures has thus led us to the conclusion, that Christ has provided for his Churches only two classes of officers; bishops, or elders, and deacons. These officers are chosen by the people, and derive all their authority, under the Great Head of the Church, from the consent of the governed. Their position involves the most solemn responsibilities. It is their duty to provide for the welfare of the particular flock which has been committed to their charge; watch over and feed it with the bread of life, and minister to its comfort and security while on its journey to the celestial fold. They are not to lord it over God's heritage. Any attempt on their part to restrict the privileges of believers, to invade their just rights, and deprive them of the liberty with which Christ has made them free, should be firmly and steadfastly resisted by all who are interested in preserving the institutions of the Gospel, as the only Lord and Master has delivered them. "The ecclesiastical office," says Gros, "is a service of the Church (*ministerium*), not a lordship (*imperium*), over its members."¹³⁸ A hierarchy claiming a divine right of jurisdiction over the servants of Christ, is as alien to the spirit of the Gospel, as it is hostile to their moral and spir-

¹³⁷Lex. N. T. p. 315; Neander, Apost. Church, B. 3, chap. 5, p. 92.

¹³⁸In the postscripts to the epistles to Titus and Timothy, these evangelists are called bishops. But these postscripts are spurious, not having been annexed to the epistles until the fifth century. "Certain it is that in the first three centuries, neither Timothy nor Titus is styled bishop by any writer." Campbell, Ecclesiastical History, Lecture 5, p. 79, where the absurdity of magnifying Titus into a metropolitan bishop is fully exposed.

itual interests. The growth of ambition, avarice, and corruption, its embrace is pollution and death.

CHAPTER X. IDENTITY OF BISHOPS AND ELDERS.

In examining the arrangements which Christ has made for the external development of his kingdom, we have seen that he has instituted only two officers in a Christian Church. In opposition to this, it has been maintained that bishops and elders (presbyters or priests) are different officers, that deacons are preachers of the Gospel, and hence that the christian ministry is composed of three orders: bishops, priests and deacons. This is the episcopal scheme. The nature of the deacon's office is shown in its appropriate place. It is my object in this chapter to prove that the Scriptures make no official distinction between bishops and elders, that these are only different appellations for the same officers. The position is sustained,

1. By the import of the terms, and their interchange by the sacred writers.

The term elder is of Jewish origin, and imports the wisdom and dignity of age, while the other term bishop, which was borrowed from Grecian usage, designates the object for which the office was instituted. "This name," says Robinson, "was, originally, simply the Greek term equivalent to *elder*, which latter was derived from the Jewish polity."¹³⁹ That this statement is correct, is evident from the usage of the sacred writers.

One of the most unequivocal passages relating to this subject is found in Acts 20: 17, compared with v. 28. The apostle Paul, in his interview with the *elders* of Ephesus, addresses them in the following words:—"Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *overseers*, (or bishops,) to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." Here the appellations are used interchangeably, the term bishop indicating the nature of the office to which elders are called.

Another passage equally clear occurs in the first chapter of Paul's epistle to Titus. "For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, [to the complete organization of the churches] and ordain *elders* in every city as I had appointed thee." Then in enumerating the qualifications of elders, he continues, (as if to show that elders and bishops were the same officers,) "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Bishop Onderdonk, *Episcopacy Tested by Scripture*, p. 12. Waddington, *History Church*, chap. 2, §2. Bloomfield, N. T. note on Acts 20: 17. Maurice, *Kingdom of Christ*, p. 370.

¹⁴⁰Reformation in England. Wks. p. 19. 11

This position is still further confirmed by 1 Pet. 5: 1–4. “The *elders* which are among you, I exhort, who also am an elder. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the *oversight* thereof, i. e. acting the part of a bishop.”

The scriptural use of these terms is so clear that it has been conceded even by Episcopalians. “The name bishop, which now designates the highest grade of the ministry, is not appropriated to that office in Scripture. That name is given to the middle order, or Presbyters.”¹⁴¹ Every elder is, therefore, a bishop; and “were it not,” as Milton has said, “that the tyranny of prelates under the name of bishops had made our ears tender and startling, we might call every good minister a bishop, as every bishop, yea the apostles themselves, are called ministers, and the angels, ministering spirits, and the ministers again angels.”¹⁴²

2. No intermediate officer is mentioned between bishops and deacons. The apostle, in his instruction to Timothy, 1 Tim. 3: 1–7, after specifying the qualifications of a bishop, proceeds, immediately, to those of deacons. That this omission was not accidental, is evident from the fact that he afterwards alludes to the *presbytery*, 4: 14. If these had constituted a separate grade in the ministry, he would certainly have given directions with respect to their qualifications. His omission to do so proves that, in his view, they were identical with bishops.

3. The qualifications of bishops and elders are the same.

In proof of this, it is merely necessary to consult 1 Tim. 3: 2–7; Tit. 1: 6–10. The matter was so understood as late as Jerome; for in speaking of these epistles, he remarks—“In both epistles, whether bishops or presbyters are to be elected (for with the ancients, bishops and elders were the same, the one being descriptive of rank, the other of age) they are required each to be the husband of one wife.”¹⁴³

4. Their rights and duties are the same.

If the terms, bishop and elder, are applied indiscriminately to the same person, it follows, of course, that whatever is ascribed in the Scriptures to the one, appertains also to the other. But there is here an independent source of proof. The sacred writers, in describing the rights and duties of bishops in some passages, and of elders in others, employ language which shows that these were not different officers, but one and the same. Heb. 13: 7, 17; 1 Thess. 5: 12; 1 Tim. 5: 17; 1 Tim 4: 14; 2 Tim. 1: 6, etc.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹Ep. 83, ad Ocean, Coleman Primitive Church, p. 132.-Gieseler, Church History 1, §29, note 1. Coleman. Christ: Antiq. p. 98.

¹⁴²Coleman, Primitive Church pp. 133–145. Barnes, Episc. Exam. Pp. 130–133. The subject of this chapter is discussed, at large, by Dr. Smyth, in his Presbytery and Prelacy, B. I. Turretin, Theol. Elenc. Loc. XVIII. Quaest. 21.

¹⁴³Punchard, History Congregat. chap. 10,

¹⁴⁴Punchard, P. 197. The sentiments of the Reformers are exhibited by Burnet, History Reformation; and Neal Hist. Puritans.

There is scarcely a subject on which the testimony of antiquity is more uniform and explicit than the original equality of bishops and elders. A well known passage from Jerome has already been cited; and many others might be referred to. It will be sufficient, however, to quote a few of them:

"It were a grievous sin to reject those who have faithfully fulfilled the duties of their *episcopal* office. Blessed are those *presbyters* (or elders) who have finished their course, &c." Clem. Epist. ad Cor. §44.

"*Elders* who, with the succession of the *episcopat*, received the gift of truth." Irenaeus contr. haeres. IV., 26, §2.

"There is no difference between a bishop and an elder." Aetius. ap. Epiphani. haeres. LXXV., p. 906.

To the same effect might be cited the testimony of Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, and others, but the limits of this work forbid it. The reader will find the passages in the works to which reference has been made above.

The best ecclesiastical historians and critics concur in the view which has been taken of the equality of bishops and elders.

"I can discover no other difference between the *elders* and *bishops* in the apostolic age, than that the first signifies the rank, the second the duties of the office, whether the reference is to one or more." Neander, Apost. Church, B. III ch. 5, p. 92. Comp. Gieseler, I. §29.

"The official designations, bishop and elder, had, in primitive times, the same signification." Hullmann, Kirchenverfassung, S. 17.

"It is most manifest that both terms are promiscuously used in the N. T. of one and the same class of persons." Mosheim, Church History, 1, p. 82.

To this view the Reformers were led, with great unanimity, by the study of the Scriptures. Even in England, Wickliffe and a host of others contended for the original equality of bishops and elders.¹⁴⁵ Dr. John Reynolds, an Episcopal divine, who, according to Calamy, "was universally reckoned the wonder of his age," asserted, in the year 1588, "that they who, for these five hundred years, have been industrious in reforming the Church, have thought that all pastors, whether called bishops or presbyters, have, according to the word of God, like power and authority."¹⁴⁶

The perfect parity of all the ministers of the Gospel, derives strong confirmation from the spirit which our divine Master enjoined upon his disciples. On that memorable occasion, when the weakness of a mother's partiality menaced the fraternal union of the chosen band, by a request, which, springing from unhallowed ambition, sought to exalt the sons of Zebedee to a position above their brethren, he interposed his counsel and authority,

¹⁴⁵ Dr. Johnson, Gospel Developed, p. 78.

¹⁴⁶ Haldane Soc. Worship. pp. 242-248. See an excellent sermon by Andrew Fuller, in his Works. IL p, 226. Boston: 1833.

and taught them that the path to real greatness and glory lay through humility and self-abasement. He refused to recognize any distinction among his followers, except that which arises from their personal devotion to him and his servants. "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. Even as the son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He thus rebuked all aspirations after rank and power among his followers, summoned them to laborious and self-denying service as the only criterion of greatness in his kingdom, and incited them to the pursuit of substantial honor and influence, by his own spotless example.

CHAPTER XI. RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF BISHOPS.

The episcopate is an office; and involves, therefore, the possession of certain rights, and an obligation to perform specific duties. If this were not the case, the office would be superfluous, and the officer himself a shadow. As these rights and duties necessarily involve each other, it will be unnecessary to treat of them separately. An enumeration of the various functions which have been appropriated to the office of a bishop by inspired authority, will sufficiently indicate both his rights and his duties.

1. It is appropriate to this officer of a Church, to administer the rite of baptism. This is evident from the commission of the Redeemer to the apostles, in which the same persons are empowered to preach and to baptize. Those who were "added to the Church" on the day of Pentecost, were first baptized by the apostles. Philip baptized the eunuch upon his own authority, as a Christian minister; and Paul refers to the ordinance, as administered by himself, in such a manner, as to show that he considered that he alone was charged with the responsibility of the act. Every minister of the Gospel is authorized, by the divine commission, to baptize. Although, for the sake of convenience, the applicant for the rite is examined before the Church, that the members may, at the same time, judge of his qualifications for Church membership, the authority to administer it rests with those to whom the commission of the Saviour has been delivered.

It is, therefore, the special duty of the minister to examine the applicant, carefully, with reference to all the points which are implied in a credible profession of faith in the Son of God. As one who watches for souls, it is incumbent on him to deal faithfully with those who seek baptism at his hands, and receive none who do not afford satisfactory evidence that they

have “passed from death unto life.” The temptation to relax the terms of admission to this sacred rite; to be satisfied with slight or equivocal evidence of a change of heart; and receive promiscuously all who apply, in order to augment the number of apparent converts and acquire the reputation of a highly successful preacher of the Word, is one to which no conscientious minister will ever yield.

2. Another prerogative of the bishop is the right to rule.

This officer of the Church is denominated an overseer—a ruler—terms which imply the exercise of authority in its government. 1 Thess. 5: 12, 13; Heb. 13: 7, 17, 24; Acts. 20: 17, 18, 28; 1 Tim. 5: 17; 1 Pet. 5: 1–3. This authority involves no legislative power or right; it is ministerial and executive.¹⁴⁷ It is of much importance to understand the nature of the subjection which is enjoined by Christ to the pastor of a Church. From misapprehension on this point, many offences have arisen in churches. A pastor, on the one hand, is persuaded that he is to rule; on the other hand, the people know that he is not to exercise lordship; and mutual jealousies arise. He thinks he is only contending for the legitimate exercise of an authority committed to him for the good of the Church. They, on the contrary, conceive that in opposing him, they are only maintaining their just rights, and resisting clerical encroachments. He deprecates the confusion which may ensue from the want of pastoral authority; they fear the evils which priestcraft has so often inflicted upon the servants of Christ.

“But when we turn to the inspired constitution of the Church, and ascertain that a pastor is to execute only the laws of Christ; that his power is restricted within these wholesome and well-defined limits, all just grounds of jealousy are removed; he and his people are equally under obligation to the Redeemer. It is his duty to see that they obey, faithfully, the laws of his kingdom. He is to warn and rebuke the disobedient, and, if they prove obstinate and perverse, to bring their cases before the Church, for its solemn adjudication. Should it be objected that this leaves the Churches without a government sufficiently effective for the preservation of peace and good order, the only answer that can be made, is that no other government is warranted by Scripture.”¹⁴⁸

In virtue of his position, as ruler of the Church, the pastor possesses the right to preside at all its meetings.

3. The pastor, or bishop, is entitled to a competent temporal support.

It is one of the most obvious principles of reason and justice, that the laborer is worthy of his hire. This principle is universally recognized, in reference both to religious and secular concerns, and has obtained among all nations; for even idolaters and pagans support the ministers of their reli-

¹⁴⁷Num. 18: 20; Deut. 10: 8, 14; 27: 18; 1.

¹⁴⁸1 Cor. 9: 13, 14.

gion. It was enforced, by inspired authority, in the law of Moses. The tribe of Levi was set apart to the special service of the Most High, denied an inheritance in the land, and committed to their brethren for support.¹⁴⁹

As the reason of this law is permanent in its character and equally applicable to all ages, the principle has remained unchanged, under the gospel dispensation. So the apostle argued, when he said to the Corinthians, "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things [under the law], live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel."¹⁵⁰

The apostle here informs us that the right of the pastor to just compensation for his services, rests upon a divine statute. Of the enactment of it, we have an account in Matt. 10: 5–16. "The workman is worthy of his meat." This statute, originally applicable to the apostles, was afterwards extended to the seventy disciples;¹⁵¹ and Paul affirms that its obligation is perpetual, having reference to all, in every age, who are called to preach the Gospel. This law, or ordinance of our Lord, is clearly recognized in the teaching and practice of the apostles. "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth in all good things."¹⁵²

It is clear from these passages, that a minister of the Gospel has a divine warrant for claiming an adequate temporal support; and to deny it, is to contravene an express ordinance of Christ. It is equally clear that he is entitled to nothing more than a support. He is to live of the Gospel, not to accumulate property, and acquire an inheritance among his brethren. Having food and raiment, he ought therewith to be content, and not make his sacred calling subsidiary to his worldly interests.¹⁵³

The possession of this right, on the part of the preacher of the Gospel, involves the corresponding duty to give himself wholly to the ministry. He must preach, teach, and exhort; visit the people of his charge, especially the sick; be ready, at all times, to aid them by his counsel and advice; detach himself, as far as practicable, from all temporal concerns, and devote his time and labor to the care of souls.

It has been remarked, in a previous chapter of this work, that a plurality of elders was customary in the apostolic Churches. This, if not universal, was, at least, quite common. Some of these elders seem to have combined a secular occupation with their calling as Christian ministers. Others

¹⁴⁹Luke 10: 12.

¹⁵⁰Gal. 6: 6. 1 Cor. 9: 7–11. 16: 17. Phil. 4: 15–20. 2 Cor. 11: 8, 9. 1 Tim. 5: 17, 18, where the word *honor* means reward, stipend, or wages.

¹⁵¹Howell, on the Deaconship, chap. V. Haldane, p. 226. Gospel Developed, p. 86.

¹⁵²Acts 6: 2. The brokers, or money-changers, sat upon tables; in the market or other public places. Hence the import of the expression, *serve tables*, is to take care of money affairs, to have charge of temporalities, alms, &c. Robinson, Lex. N. T., p. 830. Bloomfield, in loc.

¹⁵³Acts 21: 8.

devoted themselves entirely to the work of the ministry. It is probable that, at that early period, each Church needed several elders; whilst the poverty of its members generally, and the contributions which they were called upon to make to the relief of their persecuted and suffering brethren, at home and abroad, rendered them unable to furnish an adequate support for these elders. Hence, some of them resorted to secular pursuits for maintenance; and in thus adapting themselves to the exigency of the case, they followed the example of the apostles. The same course is lawful at the present day. The pastor of a feeble Church may properly derive his support, in part, from some secular avocation; but he is, in no case, to resort to it for filthy lucre's sake. On the other hand, every Church, if able, is solemnly bound to sustain its pastor, so that he may give himself "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

CHAPTER XII. THE DEACONSHIP.

Our blessed Lord enumerated among the evidences of his divine mission, the interesting and instructive fact, that "the poor have the Gospel preached unto them." There is much in the promises which it discloses, and the hopes which it inspires, to claim the attention of those upon whom the blight of poverty has fallen. It is not surprising, therefore, that a large proportion of the early converts to the Christian faith, were drawn from the humbler walks of life. In consequence of such an accession to the community of the disciples, a new sphere of labor was demanded; since, in addition to the care of their souls, some consideration was due to their physical necessities. To have left them to endure the pressure of poverty, without any attempt, on the part of their brethren, to lessen its burden, would have been a reproach to the benevolent spirit of the new religion. Hence provision was made for their relief and support.

Whilst the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was small, the apostles could perform all the duties which the care of the Churches imposed on them. But when, in consequence of the rapid progress of the Gospel, the Church was greatly enlarged, a division of labor became necessary; and they requested the brethren to select suitable persons to attend to the disbursement of their charities. The reason assigned by them for instituting this new office was, "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God [the preaching of the Gospel] and serve tables."¹⁵⁴ A separation was thus effected between the spiritual and the temporal affairs of the church; and the supervision of the latter was entrusted to a body of officers denominated deacons.

This term, which is now appropriated exclusively to a particular officer

¹⁵⁴Smyth. Presbytery and Prelacy. B. I. chap. XI.

of the Church, means a minister or servant; and was, originally, applied to servants of all classes, whether their department were temporal or spiritual. But as each of the other classes of servants was distinguished by some more specific appellation, the term deacon was afterwards employed to designate a particular officer of the Church, to whom the charge of its temporalities was committed. Hence it is the appropriate business of the deacons, to serve tables. The distribution of the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, in which they are now employed, is a mere matter of custom or convenience, and forms no part of the original design of the office.

The nature of the deaconship is thus defined, by the history of the origin of the office. The official duties of the deacons, are the opposite of those which are assigned to ministers; and the very object contemplated in the institution of the order, was to relieve preachers of the Gospel from the management of secular interests, by placing them under the direction of others. If, therefore, the deacon is also a preacher, as some contend, the matter rests precisely where it did before his appointment; and those who give themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word," are employed in serving tables contrary to the "reason" and practice of the apostles. It is, indeed, objected that Philip, "one of the seven," did preach and baptize; but this does not affect the argument; for as a deacon, he had no right to do either. The only legitimate inference from the facts of the case is, that he preached as a minister of the word, after he had ceased to be a deacon, and had been ordained an evangelist.¹⁵⁵ The two offices are incompatible. He could not have filled both at the same time."¹⁵⁶

As the deaconship was not designed to meet a temporary exigency, but is suited to a state of affairs which must subsist as long as there is a Church upon the earth, it is a permanent institution. The *reason* of the office remaining unchanged, the office itself must be equally immutable. Every Church must have a place of worship, a pastor to be supported, and poor members who need assistance. It is the duty of every Church to contribute to the spread of the gospel, at home and abroad. For all these purposes, money is needed; and it is the duty of the deacons to collect and disburse it. In many churches, the deacons neglect altogether the appropriate duties of their station, and satisfy their consciences with the discharge of an extra-official matter with which they have no special concern; the distribution of the elements at the Lord's Supper—as if the solemn ordination of men of rare qualifications, by the imposition of hands, contemplated no higher object than the handing round of bread and wine; a service which any member of the Church is competent to perform. This lamentable defection from the order established by the apostles has rendered the office of deacon, in many of our Churches, a mere nullity, if not a grievous incumbrance.

¹⁵⁵So also among the Greeks, according to the testimony of Cornelius Nepos, in the Preface to his Lives.

¹⁵⁶Macknight and Bloomfield in loc.

In the primitive Churches, the peculiarities of Eastern manners and customs¹⁵⁷ rendered necessary the employment of females in services similar to those of the deacons. These were styled deaconesses. They were aged women, usually widows. To these females reference is made in 1 Tim. 5: 9, 10. "Let not a widow be taken into the number (that is of deaconesses) under three score years old," &c. Their qualifications are specified by the apostle in connection with those of deacons. 1 Tim. 3: 11, "Even so must their wives be grave," &c. The Greek term which our translators have rendered "*wives*," is supposed by the best interpreters to refer to deaconesses, and should have been rendered "the females."¹⁵⁸ The expression cannot refer to the wives of deacons or of ministers, because they do not stand in any official relation to the Church.¹⁵⁹

In occidental countries where no such restriction is imposed upon the intercourse of the sexes, this class of servants is unnecessary. Hence it has fallen into desuetude. "Morinus offers several reasons for the abrogating of this office in Syria, which were briefly, that the services of the women became less important after the cessation of the *agapae* of the primitive Church,—that the care of the sick and the poor, which had devolved upon the Church was in the time of Constantine assumed by the State,—that after the introduction of infant baptism, their attendance at this ordinance became of less importance—and finally, that they, in their turn, became troublesome aspirants after the prerogatives of office; in a word, the order was abolished because it was no longer necessary."¹⁶⁰ These helps were needed only for a time. The circumstances which required them have passed away; and as they sustained no official relation to the Church and were not embraced in its regular and permanent organization, no such class exists at the present day.¹⁶¹

CHAPTER XIII. ORDINATION.

It is the practice of all societies, ecclesiastical as well as civil, to induct persons into office by a solemn and formal inauguration. In reference to the officers of a Church, this ceremony is called ordination; although the word

¹⁵⁷The existence of such a class is illustrated by Pliny, in his letter to Trajan, who calls them *ministrae* Ep. Lib. X. p. 96. Comp. Romans 16: 1; Timothy 6: 3; Titus 2: 2; Phil. 4: 3.

¹⁵⁸Coleman Christ. Antiq. p. 118. Punchard p. 85. Neander Ch. Hist. p. 108. Apos. Ch. B. 3, chap. 5, p. 97. Haldane, p. 227–235.

¹⁵⁹On the subject of this chapter see King, Prim. Church, chap. 5, §1. Hullmann, Kirchenverfassung, S. 15. Bacon Manual, p. 40. Punchard, pp. 92, 10. And for a thorough discussion of the whole subject, Howell, On the Deaconship. Phila, A. B. P. S. 1848.

¹⁶⁰Acts 14: 23; cf. Tit. 1: 5.

¹⁶¹Gospel Developed, ch. xii–xv.

properly implies the whole of the transaction by which an individual is authorized to discharge official duties. To render it complete, two things are necessary, the choice of the Church, and the imposition of the hands of the Presbytery, with prayer and fasting. It has already been proved that a Church possesses the right to elect its own officers; and from this principle it has been inferred by some, that election is equivalent to ordination, and comprehends all that is included in that ceremony. The act of the Presbytery is therefore superfluous. If this were the case, and ordination were complete without the intervention of the Presbytery, there would have been no propriety in affirming, as the Scriptures do, that Paul and Barnabas “ordained elders in every church,” &c.¹⁶² In the efforts which have been made to sustain this position, great stress has been laid upon the term ordain, which signifies simply to appoint;¹⁶³ but from the mere use of the term, nothing definite can be inferred, since it may relate to one kind of appointment as well as another. What we are inquiring after is the thing—the entire transaction which is included in the ceremony to which the term ordination is applied. This embraces the act of the Presbytery, as well as the act of the Church. Upon no other supposition can the different accounts which are given of the ceremony in the New Testament, be harmonized. In some cases the Church is said to ordain, or appoint, its officers; in others, the Apostles are represented as doing the same thing. All this is in accordance with an obvious figure of speech, by which a part is put for the whole; the initiatory or the consummating act, in this case, being employed to designate the entire transaction. The same rhetorical figure is used by the sacred writers on other subjects. Thus, the Lord’s Supper is called breaking of bread;¹⁶⁴ we are said to be justified by the blood of Christ, by his righteousness, by faith, by grace. The use of one of these terms does not exclude the others; in each case a part is put for the whole. On a subject of such importance as this, I am happy to avail myself of the concurrence of Dr. Howell, in the following observations, which are equally philosophical and scriptural. “In the government of states, whatever its form, checks and balances between the several departments are, by experience, found to be necessary to secure the interests of the parties concerned. They have, accordingly, been adopted by all civilized nations. In the Church of Christ they are instituted by divine authority. We have now before us a striking example. The ministry have no right to ordain any man to the Deaconship, not previously elected by the Church to that office. The consent of the Church is positively necessary, otherwise he would be a deacon “at large,” having no place in which to exercise his functions. On the other hand,

¹⁶²Acts 2: 42; 20: 7.

¹⁶³The Deaconship, p. 65; King, Prim. ch. p. 1, ch. 3–4; Crowell, Church Member’s Manual, p. 106. Boston, 1847.

¹⁶⁴Acts 6: 6.

though brethren may be elected by the Church, they are still, unless ordained by the ministry, not deacons. There must be a concurrence between the Church and the ministry to create the officer. True, they do commonly concur, but not always, nor is it by any means a matter of course. Similar checks and balances exist with regard to the ordination of pastors and evangelists, and the baptism of candidates for membership in the Church. [That is, the minister may baptize, but the Church is not on that account bound to receive the candidate to membership.] Thus a double guard is thrown around all the most important interests of the kingdom of the Messiah.”¹⁶⁵

The imposition of hands is a very ancient custom, and was practised for various purposes. It was symbolical of benediction, consecration, healing, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Its import, when employed in ordination, may best be learned from the case of the Levites, noticed in Num. 8: 10. It is well known that the tribe of Levi was consecrated to “the service of the Lord,” in the place of the first born of all the children of Israel. To indicate this consecration, the following ceremony was commanded, “Thou shalt bring the Levites before the Lord, and the children of Israel shall put their bands upon the Levites. And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the Lord for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the Lord.” A similar practice was observed when any thing was dedicated or consecrated to the Lord. There is nothing mysterious or magical in this ceremony. The children of Israel put their hands upon the Levites, to indicate by this symbolical act, that they gave them to the Lord. Such is its import in ordination. The laying on of the hands of the Presbytery, in the case of a person who has been chosen to office by the suffrages of the Church, means nothing more than that his brethren have set him apart to a specific service. It is a public and authentic declaration of the fact. As such, it was observed by the primitive Churches. When the deacons were appointed, the Apostles prayed and laid hands on them, thus ordaining or appointing them to the office.¹⁶⁶ If employed in the ordination of deacons, it certainly must have been in that of elders; and the Scriptures furnish sufficiently clear indications that this was the case. 1 Tim. 4: 14; 5: 22. As the Apostle in the latter passage is speaking of elders, it is plain that he alludes to their appointment.

“It is evident,” says Haldane, “that laying on of hands was used in separating men to the ministry in the primitive Apostolic Churches. It was not

¹⁶⁵Social Worship, ch. viii, p. 254; Smith. Presbytery and Prelacy, B. 1, ch. vii. §2; Coleman, Prim. ch. p. 140.

¹⁶⁶Smyth, Presb. and Prel. B. I. ch. vii.-x.; Apostol. Succession, Lec. xx, note A; Coleman, Prim. ch. pp. 176-198; Dr. Woods, Objections to Episcopacy, Lec. IV.; King, Prim. Ch. P. I, chap. 3; Fuller's Works, II. p. 660.

confined to occasions on which the Holy Ghost was conferred. It was used in ordaining elders and deacons who required only the ordinary gifts. There is nothing in the word of God setting aside this usage. It ought, therefore, to be observed where this can be done, according to the example given us in Scripture.”¹⁶⁷

The abettors of prelacy, dividing the ministry into three grades, restrict the power of ordination to the highest—the episcopal. But the Scriptures, as I have before proved, furnish no authority for such grades. With them, bishop and elder, or presbyter, are only different designations of the same officer; and therefore no provision is made for the possession of this power by one class of ministers, to the exclusion of the rest. As to the notion that some mysterious virtue—some magic fluid—is transmitted in ordination, that the Holy Ghost is conferred upon the subject of it, to be conveyed by him to his fellowmen by means of the sacraments, it is utterly unscriptural and absurd; and can subserve no other purpose except the exaltation of the priesthood, and the tyranny of ecclesiastical domination.¹⁶⁸

CHAPTER XIV BAPTISM.

CHRISTIANITY is preeminently a spiritual religion. Its germination and growth in the heart are dependent upon the influence of the Holy Ghost. The external means of grace possess no intrinsic efficacy, but derive their tendency to confirm and strengthen the saints solely from the appointment of God. None of them are invested with the agency of an *opus operatum*, a power to convey grace by their inherent efficiency. This is particularly true of the Christian ordinances. They sustain no direct relation to the salvation of the soul; since the great transformation of character which is necessary to qualify for the bliss of heaven, must have been experienced before an individual is prepared to receive them. They are not saving ordinances; they can be approached by those only who are among the number of “such as shall be saved.”

The New Testament contains traces of only two Christian ordinances. These are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Of the two, the latter alone is strictly a Church ordinance. A Church is composed of baptized believers. Baptism is indispensable to their admission into it, but it does not make them Church members. The ordinance itself will now claim our attention.

In the prosecution of this inquiry, it will be necessary to determine what is baptism, and who are the subjects of the ordinance.

¹⁶⁷Analogy, P. II. Chap. 1.

¹⁶⁸Westlake, Gen. View of Bap. chap. 1. Booth, Pedobap. Exam. P. 1, chap. 1. Carson on Bap. Preface.

I. To a devout mind, it cannot be a matter of trivial interest, that the ordinances of the gospel not only derive their validity from the appointment of the great Head of the Church, but are hallowed and commended to our imitation by his own example. It would seem, therefore, that the sole object of a conscientious inquirer, would be to ascertain what was the form of the ordinance which was sanctioned by Christ himself. This having been determined, no other inquiries need supervene. The path of duty is plain. Having clearly discerned the footprints of his divine Exemplar, the Christian should wait for no additional incentives to "follow his steps." That Christ was baptized only in one way, is an obvious inference from the fact that he was baptized only once. This way it is important to ascertain. A serious and careful examination of the subject is demanded by the highest considerations; and the temper of indifference which passes it over as a matter of little moment, can claim no fellowship with the spirit of Him who has taught us by his own example, to "fulfil all righteousness."

There is another aspect of this subject which claims our most profound consideration. Baptism is a positive institution. "Moral precepts," says Bishop Butler,¹⁶⁹ "are precepts, the reason of which we see; positive precepts, are precepts, the reason of which we do not see. Moral duties arise out of the nature of the case itself, prior to external command; positive duties do not arise out of the nature of the case, but from external command; nor would they be duties at all, were it not for such command, received from Him whose creatures and subjects we are." The obligation to obedience, in either case, is the same; but the grounds upon which it rests are different. It is, moreover, the peculiarity of a moral precept, that it may be obeyed, when only the spirit of it is complied with. But in reference to a positive precept, no such distinction exists. Positive institutions derive their validity solely from the authority of the law-giver. They are obligatory, because he has made them so; and they are valid only in the form in which he has thought fit to appoint them. To mutilate or abridge them, is not simply to modify, but to subvert them.

If, therefore, the ordinance of baptism is a positive institution, resting upon the supreme will of the Head of the Church, and that will is expressed in positive commands, the obligation to a strict compliance with them cannot be denied. To alter the ordinance, or substitute any thing else in its place, is not to obey the command of Christ; and such a procedure involves either a reflection upon his wisdom, or a contempt of his authority. It is universally conceded, that the use of water is essential to Christian baptism. Immersion in any other liquid, although impregnated with the costliest perfumes, and rolling, like the fabled Pactolus, over a bed of gold, would not be Christian baptism. But in a positive ordinance, such as this, we have as little right to change one part as another, to determine the quantity as the

¹⁶⁹Booth Pedobap. Exam. P. I., chap. 2. Hinton Hist. Bap. page 55.

quality of the liquid to be employed in its administration. It is manifest, therefore, that there cannot be several modes of baptism. Baptism is itself a mode; the word defines the ordinance; and in making a profession of religion, the use of water in any other mode than immersion, is a counterfeit of man's devising, and not a Christian institution.¹⁷⁰

That immersion alone is baptism, is proved,

1. By the primary and ordinary meaning of the term. The founder of a system of religion, in communicating it to mankind, would doubtless select a medium of communication sufficiently clear and explicit to convey his meaning to those for whom that system was designed; and as the Greek language is the chosen medium for the communication of the Christian revelation, it is proper to inquire whether, upon the supposition that immersion is baptism, this language contains a word that conveys distinctly and clearly that meaning. The copiousness of the Greek tongue, and its wonderful adaptation to the expression of the minutest shades of thought, have often excited the admiration of the scholar. It would, therefore, be exceedingly strange if it lacked a term for the expression of so simple an idea as immersion. This, however, is not the fact.

There is a Greek verb, the primary and usual import of which, is to dip or immerse; and the corresponding noun signifies immersion. Of this fact we have evidence the most abundant and conclusive. I proceed to adduce some portion of it, confining myself to those who are not baptists in practice.

Robinson Lex. N. T. *Baptizo*, to immerse, to sink.

Donnegan Greek Lex. *Baptizo*, to immerse, submerge.

To the same effect is the testimony of Leigh, Schoettgen, Parkhurst, Stephanus, Pasor, Scapula, Hedericus, Wall, Bretschneider, and other Greek lexicographers.

Booth and other writers have collected together a cloud of witnesses on this point. I shall cite only a few of them, adding some others which I have met with in my own reading.

Witsius. It cannot be denied that the native signification of the word *baptizo*, is to plunge or dip. Econ. Foed. IV.: 16, 13.

Salmasius. Baptism is immersion, and was administered, in ancient times, according to the force and meaning of the word. Now it is only *rhan-tism*, or sprinkling; not immersion, or dipping.

Prof. Stuart. *Bapto* and *baptizo*, mean to dip, plunge, or immerge, into any thing liquid. All lexicographers and critics of any note agree in this. Bibl. Repos. 3; p. 298.

Gomar. *Baptismos* and *baptisma*, signify the act of baptizing; that is, either plunging alone, or immersion and the consequent washing.

Buddeus. The words *baptizo* and *baptismos*, are not to be interpreted of aspersion, but always of immersion.

¹⁷⁰This common sense principle of interpretation, is recognized by Daehne Paulin. Lehrbegr. S. 93.

Vitringa. The act of baptising, is the immersion of believers in water. This expresses the force of the word.

Hospinian. Christ commanded us to be baptized; by which word it is certain immersion is signified.

Casaubon. This was the rite of baptizing, that persons were plunged into the water, which the very word *baptize* signifies.

Bossuet. To baptize, signifies to plunge, as is granted by all the world.

Turretin. *Baptizo*, to baptize; to dip into, to immerse.¹⁷¹

Bland. The metaphor of baptism, or immersion in water, or being put under floods, is familiar in Scripture, to signify a person overwhelmed with calamities. Annot. on Matt. I.; p. 43. Cambridge. 1828.

Elsley. Immersion in waters, or under floods; called here (Matt. 20: 22) baptism. Annot. p. 193. Oxford. 1844.

It is thus apparent, that the primary and ordinary meaning of *baptizo*, is to immerse. This being the case, the burden of proof is shifted upon those who affirm that it means something else; since it is an acknowledged principle of interpretation, as laid down by Ernesti, that "the literal meaning is not to be deserted without reason or necessity." This necessity must be plain and imperative; and even if cases could be cited in which the word, in its secondary meaning, is susceptible of a different interpretation, this fact would not invalidate the evidence which sustains its primary and usual import. This remark is peculiarly applicable to those cases in which the word is employed in a figurative sense. The figure is to be explained by the meaning of the word, and not the meaning of the word by the figure.¹⁷²

But the advocates of immersion take a higher position than is implied in the suppositions which have just been made. Dr. Carson has proved by an array of facts and a conclusiveness of argument, not to be resisted, that "*baptizo* not only signifies to dip or immerse, but that it never has any other meaning."¹⁷³ In this position he is sustained by Prof. Stuart.¹⁷⁴

2. Circumstances attending Baptism.

A consideration of the circumstances attending the administration of this ordinance, confirms the opinion which has been expressed with respect to the import of *baptizo*. They are such as comport most naturally and fully with the idea of immersion. No necessity exists for departing from the original and proper meaning of the word. Let us consider some of them.

Matt. 3: 16. Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water. The most obvious import of the phrase here employed is, that Jesus came up out of the water into which he had descended for the purpose of being baptized.

¹⁷¹On Baptism; pp. 13, 79. N. Y. 1832.

¹⁷²Bibl. Repos. 3; pp. 292, 293.

¹⁷³Bland, Annot. on Matt. I. p. 74.

¹⁷⁴Ripley, Exam. of Stuart, pp. 62-15. Carson, Jewett, Hinton, and Hague.

John 3: 23. John was baptizing in Enon, near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came and were baptized.

That the phrase “much water,” is equivalent to an abundance, or large body of water, and not to many rivulets, is evident from the usage of John, in other portions of his writings. Examine Rev. 1: 15; 14: 2; 19: 6. It is obvious, that in these passages the sacred writer had reference to an abundant mass of water. Compare Rev. 17: 1, 15. On this point, a learned Episcopalian remarks, “That the baptism of John was by plunging the body, seems to appear from what is related of him; namely, that he baptized in Jordan: that he baptized in Enon, because there was much water there; and that Christ being baptized came up out of the water; to which that seems to be parallel. Acts 8: 38. Philip and the eunuch went down, &c.”¹⁷⁵

The case of the Ethiopian eunuch is equally decisive, in reference to the external act of baptism. Acts 8: 36-39. “They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch.” For what purpose Philip went down into the water, unless to immerse the eunuch, it does not appear. The obvious and natural interpretation of the entire transaction coincides with the idea of immersion.

I might proceed to the examination of all the cases in the New Testament, in which the circumstances attending the rite are detailed. But it is not necessary. If *baptizo* means to immerse, and is never used in any other sense, an actual immersion must have taken place in all the cases in reference to which it is used. I have cited the instances above, merely to show that the circumstances connected with the rite, harmonize most naturally and clearly with the meaning which is invariably ascribed to the word by the highest authorities in Greek philology and criticism. For a more extensive discussion of the subject, the reader is referred to the works mentioned in the margin.¹⁷⁶

3. By the meaning of the ordinance.

Baptism is symbolical. It is expressive of certain great facts or truths which are essential to the Christian system; and so beautifully and appropriately does it represent the sublime central fact of our religion, the resurrection of the Redeemer, and its cardinal doctrine, the spiritual renovation of man, that even in the absence of any inspired teaching on the subject, the mind would naturally associate it with these fundamental truths. But the Scriptures have not left us to conjecture on this point. They furnish plain and explicit intimations that such is the design of this significant hieroglyphic of the Christian economy. They teach us that baptism is an emblem of the resurrection of Christ, involving, of course, its immediate antecedents, his death and burial; and of that moral death and resurrection

¹⁷⁵Works III. 890. Hague, Bap. Ques. 107. Crowell, Church Member's Manual, 152.

¹⁷⁶Booth, Ped. Exam. Part I. ch. 3, ch. 6. Westlake, ch. 3, 4.

which defines the character of his true followers. This is clearly the import of Rom. 6: 4; Col. 2: 12; 1 Pet. 3: 21.

A few modern interpreters, among whom are Hodge and Stuart, deny that there is any allusion to the external act of baptism in Rom. 6: 4; but in this they are at variance with the great body of commentators, as well as with the manifest import of the passage itself.

Macknight. He [Christ] submitted to be baptized, that is, to be buried under the water by John, and to be raised out of it again, as an emblem of his future death and resurrection. In like manner, the baptism of believers is emblematical of their death, burial, and resurrection.

Bloomfield. There is a plain allusion to the ancient custom of baptism by immersion.

Leighton. Where the dipping into the water is referred to, as representing our dying with Christ and the return thence, as expressive of our rising with him. Comm. on 1 Pet. 3: 21.

Hammond. It is a thing that every Christian knows, that the immersion in baptism refers to the death of Christ. The putting of the person into the water, denotes and proclaims the death and burial of Christ.

Hoadlay. If baptism had been then performed as it is now amongst us, [the Church of England] we should never have so much as heard of this form of expression, of dying and rising again in this rite.¹⁷⁷

The practice of immersion is commended to the disciples of Christ, by the symbolical exhibition which it makes of his own sublime and consummating act of grace. With inarticulate, yet expressive and touching power, it speaks of Him "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." It is sad to reflect that Christian hands have mutilated and disfigured this beautiful ordinance, and deprived it of its emblematic import; so that in our efforts to reinstate it in its original honor, and restore it to its primitive form, we have to contend, not with the enemies, but the friends of our common Lord. I would ask every pious, unimmersed reader who may peruse these pages, to pause, and ask himself, whether he is not lending his influence to overthrow one of the most significant monuments of the Saviour's resurrection. If immersion be emblematic of a truth so dear to the believer; if it so truthfully represents his own "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," shed on him "abundantly by Jesus Christ, our Saviour;" and if, moreover, as Dr. Wall concedes, "it was, in all probability, the way by which our blessed Saviour, and for certain was the most usual and ordinary way by which the ancient Christians did receive their baptism," what should prevent all the friends of Christ from uniting their suffrages in its behalf, and combining to uphold and perpetuate this noble institution of our common Christianity? It affords matter of devout gratitude to God, that recent events present cheering indications of a return to scriptural baptism. The affusion of adults has become

¹⁷⁷Augusti Denker, VII. 77, remarks: "This passage contains distinct evidence of the custom of immersion."

an exceedingly rare occurrence; they almost invariably demand immersion; and if infant baptism—which, by forestalling inquiry, perpetuates error—were abolished, this emblematic rite of the New Testament would stand forth in its primitive symmetry and beauty.¹⁷⁸

4. Practice of the Primitive Churches.

The earliest uninspired records of ecclesiastical history, labor under the disadvantage of being justly suspected to be, to some extent, spurious, corrupt, and interpolated. Their evidence, therefore, is to be received with caution. It is clear to all who have examined the writings of the apostolic fathers, in connection with the productions of the evangelists and apostles, that their views of Christian truth are entitled to very little consideration. But the allusions which their writings contain to the ordinance of baptism, where the genuineness of the passages themselves is admitted, may be safely credited; for as baptism is an external act, appealing to the senses, the testimony of an honest and unsuspected spectator of the ordinance, is all that we require or have a right to demand. It is on this principle, that we unhesitatingly reject the notions of the fathers, with reference to the efficacy of baptism; while we yield our unsuspecting assent to their testimony, with respect to the external act. The following passages disclose to us the practice of the early Churches:

Barnabas. Ep. ch. 11. We descend into the water, and come out of it.

Hermas. Pastor, 3. Men descend into the water, but ascend out of it.¹⁷⁹
Vid. also, Herm. Simil. IX. 16. Iren. III. 17, 2.

The testimony of later writers is equally explicit, and is moreover free from all suspicion.

Justin Martyr, (†164) towards the conclusion of his, so-called, Second Apology, thus alludes to the administration of the ordinance: “Those who believe and are persuaded that the things we teach and inculcate are true, and who profess ability thus to live, are directed to pray, with fasting, and to ask of God the forgiveness of their former sins, we also fasting and praying with them. Then we conduct to a place where there is water; and they are regenerated [baptized] in the manner in which we have been regenerated [baptized;] for they receive a washing with water, in the name of the Father.” &c.¹⁸⁰

Tertullian (†220.) We are immersed in water. Adv. Prax. 26. De cor. mil. 3.

Cone. Tolet. V., (A.D. 633.) The immersion, in water is, as it were, the descent to Hades, and the emersion from the water, the resurrection.

¹⁷⁸I have given the translation of Dr. Murdock, in his edification of Mosheim, I. 167. Prof Emerson, of Andover, more correctly renders the last clause “for they then perform the ablution in the water.” Christian Rev. VI. 305. The original may be seen in Munscher, Dogmengesch. (Von Coln) I. 99.

¹⁷⁹Cyp. Epis. 76 (69) ad Magnum.

¹⁸⁰Eccl. Hist. VI. 43. Valesius, in his note on this passage, says: “As baptism properly signifies immersion, *perfusion* could scarcely be called baptism. “I take this note of Valesius from Dr. Sears (Christian Rev. 111. 106), although admonished by his inaccurate citation of Eusebius, of the hazard of quoting at second hand. Hinton, Hist. Bap. p. 166.

It is thus clear that the practice of immersion continued in the Churches, from the age of Justin Martyr down to that of the Council of Toledo. It would be easy to cite other intervening witnesses, such as Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil, Gregory Nyssen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Theophylact, Ambrose, &c.; but the above are sufficient to establish the general custom. During this period, immersion was the universal practice, except in cases of dangerous sickness. In such circumstances, pouring or sprinkling was tolerated by some of the Churches; but neither of these was ever supported on the ground of tradition or apostolic practice. Cyprian, the great advocate and apologist of affusion, as the substitute of baptism, never pretended to place it upon the only ground upon which it could securely rest—primitive practice—but attempted to justify it by the “pressing necessity” of the case. In his judgment, baptism was necessary to salvation, and hence, he concluded that “God’s indulgence” would permit an abridgment of the ordinance, in the cases of those whom sickness prevented from submitting to it in the usual form.¹⁸¹

This position is maintained by the most learned and impartial historians. Eusebius informs us that when Novatian received baptism, by pouring, he was “attacked by an obstinate disease, and supposed to be at the point of death;”¹⁸² and that his ordination “was opposed by all the clergy, and many of the laity, as unlawful, because of his clinic perfusion.” Gieseler, Ch. Hist. I. §68. It was often necessary to baptize the sick, and in that case sprinkling was substituted for the usual rite.

Munscher. (Von Coln) I. §199. Only with the sick was baptism administered by aspersion; and, it was deemed necessary to salvation, unless its place was supplied by the baptism of blood, i. e. martyrdom.

Fleury. Moeurs des Chrétiens, §5, p. 192. Baptism was usually performed by immersion: yet aspersion was deemed sufficient in cases of necessity, as for the sick.

King. Prim. Ch. P. II, ch. 4, §§5, 6. Their usual custom was to immerse or dip the whole body. Perfusion, or sprinkling, was not accounted unlawful; but, in cases of necessity, that was used, as in clinic baptism.

To the same effect is the testimony of many other writers, who nevertheless practise sprinkling, Salmasius, Pamelius, Grotius, Rheinwald, Neander, Stroth, Du Fresne, Burnet, Towerson, Wall. It is worthy of remark that the same principle is now recognized in the Church of England, although the

¹⁸¹Hist. Inf. Bap. II. ch. 2, p. 462. We may contrast with these sensible remarks, the *refinement* of some recent American writers. “It [immersion] is indelicate. It violates a natural and healthful sense of propriety for females to expose themselves in water, with and before the other sex. Though modesty forbids the statement of this objection in all its force, it is enough to say that the sacrifice of female modesty, in a religious rite, is an offering not required at our hands.” Hints to an Inquirer. By Parsons Cooke and Joseph H. Towne. Boston: 1842. p. 59. The use of such an argument in support of affusion, presents an instance of what Cyprian might well denominate a “pressing necessity.”

¹⁸²Journal from his embarking for Georgia, p. 11.

practice is very different, the Rubric requiring that the “priest dip the child, unless it be certified that it be weakly.”

The primitive practice of immersion is so clearly sustained by ecclesiastical history, that it is conceded by every candid inquirer. The few among those who are not Baptists, who sometimes venture to deny it, are soon overwhelmed by the multitude of witnesses, that appear in their own ranks. Some of these will now be brought forward.

Dr. Wall. Their [the primitive Christians] general and ordinary way was to baptize by immersion, or dipping the person, whether it were an infant, or grown man or woman, into the water. This is so plain and clear by an infinite number of passages, that as one cannot but pity the weak endeavors of such pedobaptists as would maintain the negative of it; so also we ought to disown and show a dislike of the profane scoffs which some people give to the English anti-pedobaptists, merely for their use of dipping. It was, in all probability, the way by which our blessed Saviour, and for certain was the most usual and ordinary way by which the ancient Christians did receive their baptism.¹⁸³

John Wesley. Mary Wesh, aged eleven days, was baptized according to the custom of the first Church, and the rule of the Church of England, by immersion.¹⁸⁴

Bossuet. We are able to make it appear, by the acts of councils, and by the ancient rituals, that for thirteen hundred years, baptism was thus administered throughout the whole Church, as far as possible.¹⁸⁵

Von Coln. Immersion in water was general until the thirteenth century; among the Latins it was then displaced by sprinkling, but retained by Greeks.¹⁸⁶

Munscher. Baptism was generally performed by immersion. The baptism of the sick, which was performed by aspersion, is mentioned for the first time, in the third century.¹⁸⁷

Usteri. The rite of baptism, by which the persons baptized were entirely immersed in water. Such is the testimony of the ancient witnesses.¹⁸⁸

Klee, Roman Catholic Professor of Theology in the University at Bonn. Immersion was the mode of baptism ordinarily observed in the primitive age, in connection with which baptism by aspersion occurs as an exception to the rule.¹⁸⁹

Prof. Stuart. “It is,” says Augusti, “a thing made out,” viz. the ancient

¹⁸³Stennett against Russen. p. 176.

¹⁸⁴Dogmengesch. 11. S. 203; also S. 208, where he cites the following passage from Thomas Aquinas. In immersiones expressius repræsentatur figura sepulture Christi, et ideo hic modus baptizandi est communior et laudabilior. Summae, P. III. Qu. 66. Art. 6.

¹⁸⁵Dogmengesch 11. §231.

¹⁸⁶Paulin. Lehrbegr. S. 224.

¹⁸⁷Lehrb. der Dogmengesch. II. S. 147.

¹⁸⁸Bibl. Repos. 111. 359.

¹⁸⁹Vol. 111. 413, 414.

practice of immersion. So indeed all the writers who have thoroughly investigated the subject. I know of no one usage of ancient times, which seems to be more clearly and certainly made out. I cannot see how it is possible for any candid man who examines the subject to deny this.¹⁹⁰

Penny Cyclopaedia. The manner in which it [baptism] was performed, appears to have been at first by complete immersion. John baptized in the Jordan; and in Enon, because there was much water there. The Ethiopian eunuch went down into the water to receive baptism from Philip. The words *baptism* and *to baptize* are Greek terms, which imply, in their ordinary acceptation, *washing*, or *dipping*. It was the practice of the English Church from the beginning, to immerse the whole body.¹⁹¹

Kitto's Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature. The whole body was immersed in water.¹⁹²

The views which have been submitted, with reference to the nature of the external act of baptism, derive strong confirmation from the universal and invariable practice of the Greek Church. It is to be supposed that the members of that communion are acquainted with their own language; and therefore their mode of administering the rite of baptism affords a very satisfactory explanation of the meaning of the word. This has uniformly been immersion. Neudecker informs us, on the authority of the Orthodox Confession of the Greek church, Metrophanes Critopulus, Stourdza, and others, that this is their present practice.¹⁹³ This church has always strenuously

¹⁹⁰Art. Baptism. 1. 288. See also Coleman's Christian Antiq. p. 275, and the citations in Christian Rev. III. 99–108. Hinton, Hist. Bap. 197–2, 08. Booth, Pedobap. Exam. P. I. ch. 4.

¹⁹¹Min Manscher, Dogmengesch. ed. Neudecker, 111. 618, where the requisite quotations are found.

¹⁹²Klee, Dogmengesch. II. 149. Mosheim, II. 502. Hague's Baptismal Question, p. 17. Coleman, Chr. Antiq. p. 266.

¹⁹³The history of sprinkling is as curious as it is obscure. We have seen how pouring was introduced in the case of Novatian, and sustained by the authority of Cyprian († 258). The passage of Cyprian was introduced by Gratian into his Decretum (de Consecr. Dist. 4. cap. 126) A.D. 1150. Yet in the time of Thomas Aquinas († 1274), immersion was the more common practice, as we learn from the angelic doctor himself. He gives it as his judgment that although it is safer to baptize by immersion, because this was the more common, affusion or aspersion will answer the purpose, particularly in case of necessity. This necessity exists when, 1, there is a great multitude to be baptized; 2, water is scarce; 3, the administrator is feeble; 4, the candidate is feeble. A case occurred, under the first head, in the baptism of the Lithuanians, A.D. 1387. (It ought to be mentioned that the first ecclesiastical authority for sprinkling was given by the Council of Ravenna A.D. 1311. The case of Stephen, referred to by Hinton, p. 191, seems somewhat apocryphal. Basnagu Monumen. I. Praefat. V. 4. Robin. Hist. Bap. 429). The circumstances were these: Jagello, Grand Duke of Lithuania, aspired to the hand of Hedwig, the heiress of the Polish crown; but neither she nor her subjects would favor his pretensions unless he became a good Catholic. Hence, although he had been baptized twice before, he consented to receive baptism again, in Cracow. Many of his subjects followed his example; and the Duke rewarded each of them, for this pious act, with a new suit of clothes. This was too great a temptation to the rest of the Lithuanians; they came in crowds to be baptized and get a new coat. *Et quoniam labor immensus erat*, &c., because the labor of baptizing such a multitude was too great, they were filed off into separate companies, and sprinkled, each company receiving a Christian name; as the company of Peter, of Paul, &c.; and every member of a particular company, bearing the name by which it was designated. Gieseler, Ch. Hist. §124. Von Coln, 11. 209. The only persons who opposed immersion on any other ground except necessity, were Theophronius and Eutychius, the disciples of Eunomius, who poured water upon the head and arms. The reason which they gave for this practice is not fit to be repeated here. Vid. Klee, 11, 148.

asserted the necessity of immersion to the validity of the ordinance; and has, in consequence, condemned and rejected the affusions of the Latin Church. An effort was made to unite the Oriental and Western Churches, at the session of the Council of Florence, A.D. 1439; and the Roman pontiff employed rewards, threats, and promises, to induce the Greeks to accede to his terms of accommodation. Mark of Ephesus, who was present at this council, maintained, in an encyclical letter addressed to all the Greek bishops and churches, the absolute impossibility of such a union, and that, too, upon the ground that the baptism of the Latins was an entirely different thing from that of the Greeks.¹⁹⁴

It is a fatal objection to that perversion of the ordinance of baptism, which has become so common in western Christendom, that it is utterly destitute of support from apostolic or primitive practice, is at variance with the general practice of the Latins, for thirteen hundred years, and the uniform practice of the Greeks, down to the present day. Affusion was first tolerated in the third century, on the plea of necessity, a necessity founded on a most unscriptural and portentous error. This error, the alleged necessity of the rite to salvation, gave rise, as I shall presently show, to infant baptism; thus nullifying the ordinance, both in its mode and its subjects, and evincing the intimate connection which subsists between corruption in doctrine and error in practice.¹⁹⁵

II. Subjects of Baptism.

The genius of Christianity is peculiar. Recognizing no proxies or representatives between the sinner and the Saviour, it urges its claims upon each individual of the race to whom it is sent, and its ultimate issues are suspended upon the personal reception or rejection of its gracious provisions. Salvation is found only in connection with the actual existence of the conditions which it demands in those upon whom the blessing is conferred. The commands of Christ must be obeyed in person, or not at all. That one individual should be baptized for another is absurd, as is universally conceded; but that one should perform for another the conditions on which

¹⁹⁴Antiq. B. 18, c. 5, §2.

¹⁹⁵Infant Baptism, by Wm. Hodges, A.M., Phila., 1844, p. 168. The practice of proselyte baptism among the Jews in the age of the apostles, by which this writer, after Wall, proves the existence of infant baptism, cannot itself be proved. Dr. Gill assures us there is no mention made of it, either by the Jewish doctors or the Christian fathers of the first three or four centuries. Dissertation on Pros. Bap. Dr. Lardner considers it "a mere fiction of the Rabbins by whom we have suffered ourselves to be imposed upon." Letter to Dr. Doddridge. "It is at length settled by the great critics of Germany, that the existence of a proselyte baptism, as a Jewish institution in the time of Christ, cannot be proved." Christian Review, 3, p. 203. This is the judgment of such men as Neander, Olshausen, Hase, Bottiger, Winer, &c. But proselyte baptism, if admitted to have existed at that time, would be decidedly against the practice of pedobaptists. Children that were born *after* the parents' adoption of the Jewish religion, were *not* to be baptized. Analogy would require that the children of Christian parents should not be baptized; only the children who were born *before* the parents came to the rite would be entitled to participate in it.

alone the ordinance possesses any significance or value, although not so generally admitted, is equally opposed to the dictates of reason and conscience. The principle of substitution is, indeed, the grandest feature of the Christian scheme; but it relates solely to the vicarious work of the man Christ Jesus, the substitution of the innocent for the guilty; it does not affect the relations of the guilty among themselves. No moral being can do for another that which God requires at his own hands; and if repentance and faith are required of every individual to whom the message of the gospel comes, it is manifest that the existence of these graces in one can exert no direct influence upon another, nor change the relation in which he stands to God. Christianity, from its very nature, excludes all human mediators, proxies, or sponsors.

Such being the genius of the Christian revelation, if we proceed to examine the character of those upon whom its duties are imposed, we may justly expect to find in them those qualifications which define and constitute a moral agent. If any individuals of our race are destitute of these qualifications, we may fairly conclude that the gospel is not addressed to them. Infants and idiots are not moral agents; Christianity therefore demands nothing at their hands. They may, we believe they do, share in its benefits; but they do not come within the sphere of its requisitions. No Christian duty is enjoined upon them, for the obvious reason that they can perform none. The gospel does not require a natural and physical impossibility.

Baptism is a Christian duty, and is obligatory only on moral agents. Believers are the only proper subjects. This position is sustained:

1. By the evidence of the Scriptures.

The commission which imparts validity and force to this ordinance was given in the following words: "Go ye unto all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16: 15, 16 ; cf. Matt. 28: 19. Here baptism is subsequent to faith, and is contemplated as the duty only of one that believeth. When this commission was given, the ordinance was already in existence and was familiar to the disciples. It is, therefore, relevant to revert to its previous history, to ascertain the meaning which they must have attached to the commission. Going back to "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ," the baptism of John, we find that he preached repentance, and the people were baptized of him, "confessing their sins." Such is the testimony of Josephus, who affirms that John's baptism was administered on the supposition that "the soul was purified before by righteousness."¹⁹⁶ "Adult Jews," says Scott, in his comment on this passage of Mark, "were the only persons, so far as we can find, whom John admitted to baptism." We search the gospels in vain for any instance of infant bap-

¹⁹⁶Crowell, Church Member's Manual. Boston, 1847. P. 158.

tism. Children were brought to Jesus. They were blessed, but not baptized; for it is expressly said that Jesus baptized not. John 4: 2.

Such was the state of the case when the apostles received the commission. The practice of baptism was settled, so that even if that commission had been given in general terms—if it had embraced simply the command to baptize, they could have had no hesitation with respect to the subjects of baptism. But the commission is not general nor ambiguous; it is specific and plain. The direction to baptize is limited, in its application, to believers.

The efforts which are made to evade the obvious import of the commission are more plausible than forcible. Thus it is alleged, by a writer who assumes that infant baptism was already in use in the time of the apostles, that “in giving directions, or issuing a command, certain things are always taken for granted as being well known, and we only aim to be explicit enough to be clearly understood. For instance, a messenger is sent to the post-office. The order issued is, ‘go and bring my *papers*,’ or simply ‘*go to the post-office*.’ The messenger goes and brings *letters, newspapers, and pamphlets*, and he *acts* in accordance with *the intention of him who sent him*.”¹⁹⁷ A command issued in terms so loose as these may suit the case which has been suggested; but it could never find its way into any human statute, much less would it be incorporated in the great law of baptism, enacted by the Head of the Church, for all nations and for all times. The case is not a parallel one. To make it correspond with the commission, the order must be issued thus:—“Go and bring my letters; those that are *post-paid* and *addressed to me*, bring; those that are not *post-paid*, leave at the office.” If the messenger were required not only to execute this commission, but to make it known for the benefit of his employer’s correspondents, it would certainly be his duty to assure them that these terms are imperative, that a letter which was not *post-paid*, even if addressed to his employer, would not be received. Baptism is the ordinance by which an individual is *addressed* to Christ, indicated to be his; but unless the other condition be fulfilled, unless faith be exercised, he will not be received. If the letter be not *post-paid* the address will not carry it to its destination. Whether some other arrangement may not have been made by his employer, by which those who *cannot* pay may secure the reception of their letters, is another question, which is not embraced in the terms of his commission. So also, whether provision has been made for the salvation of those who cannot believe, is a distinct question, not dependent for its solution upon the commission of the Redeemer, with reference to the conditions of baptism. “This explication affords a satisfactory reply to the argument which affirms that if, according to the commission, infants cannot be baptized, they cannot be saved. The commission has no reference to infants,

¹⁹⁷Carson on Baptism, N. Y., 1832. P. 307.

and therefore does not determine the conditions of their salvation. It is addressed only to such as may be taught and may become disciples.

That the commission was so understood by the apostles is evident from their own subsequent practice. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached; many of his hearers were converted: “then they that gladly received the word were baptized, and the same day were added to them about three thousand souls. And they continued in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,” &c. Acts 2: 41. Here the ordinance is restricted to those who “gladly received the word.”

The next account of baptism occurs in Acts 8: 12. “When they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus, they were baptized, both men and women.” Nothing can be more expressive of the extent and limitation of the ordinance. The specific mention of men and women excludes the supposition that children were also baptized.

An argument in favor of infant baptism has been derived from the baptism of households. But it is founded upon the unwarrantable assumption that infants are necessarily included in a household. The baptism of entire households, upon a profession of faith, has become so common an occurrence that this argument has lost all its force. “There were eight baptized families belonging to the Karen Baptist Mission before it was as old as the apostolic mission, when the family of Lydia was baptized. The Christian Watchman of Jan. 29, 1841, presents authentic proof of the existence, at that time, of upwards of fifty baptized households, connected with Baptist churches—every member of whom was baptized on profession of faith, and added to the Church.”¹⁹⁸ Such were probably the constituents of the households mentioned in the New Testament. Cornelius was “a devout man and one that feared God with all his house.” Acts 10: 2. Peter himself testifies that they had “received the Holy Ghost,” before he “commanded them to be baptized.” In Acts 18: 8, we are informed: “Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized.” The household of Stephanus, baptized by Paul, “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,” and could not therefore have been infants.

Even admitting that these households embraced infants, the fact proves nothing in favor of infant baptism. The apostles had no authority to baptize them, and therefore could not have done it. The nature of the case excludes them. It is required of a bishop that he be “one that ruleth well his own house.” But this requisition cannot apply to newly-born infants, who are incapable of government. The nature of the case restricts it to adults, or at least to children who are old enough to be ruled. “There is,” says Carson,

¹⁹⁸Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*. Burlington, 1829. P. 220.

“no axiom in mathematics more clear, than that the households are nothing to the purpose of infant baptism. If the term household does not necessarily imply infants, then there is no evidence from the term that there were infants in those households. Again, as such phraseology is, in daily conversation, used with exceptions, so, though infants had been in those households, the known limitations of the commission would exclude them.”¹⁹⁹

The fallacy of this argument has been fully exposed by a pedobaptist writer of great logical acumen, who candidly admits “that (historically considered) there exists no sufficient *positive* evidence that the baptism of infants was instituted by the apostles, in the practice of the apostolic age. I have, I confess, no eye for these smoke-like wreaths of inference, this ever-widening spiral *ergo* from the narrow aperture of perhaps a single text; or rather an interpretation forced into it by construing an idiomatic phrase in an artless narrative with the same absoluteness as if it had formed part of a mathematical problem. I start back from these inverted pyramids, where the apex is the base. If I should inform any one that I had called at a friend’s house, but had found nobody at home, the family having all gone to the play; and if he, on the strength of this information, should take occasion to asperse my friend’s wife for unmotherly conduct, in taking an infant, six months old, to a crowded theatre, would you allow him to press on the words *nobody* and *all* the family, in justification of the slander? Would you not tell him that the words were to be interpreted by the nature of the subject, the purpose of the speaker, and their ordinary acceptance? and that he must or might have known that infants of that age would not be admitted into the theatre? Exactly so with regard to the words, ‘he and all his household.’ Had baptism of infants at that early period of the gospel been a known practice, or had this been previously demonstrated, then, indeed, the argument that in all probability there was one or more infants or young children in so large a family, would be no otherwise objectionable than as being superfluous, and a sort of anti-climax in logic. But if the words are cited as *the* proof, it would be a clear *petitio principii*, though there had been nothing else against it. But when we turn back to the Scriptures preceding the narrative, and find repentance and belief demanded as the terms and indispensable conditions of *baptism*—*then* the case above imagined applies in its full force. Equally vain is the pretended analogy from circumcision, which was no sacrament at all, but the means and mark of national distinction.”²⁰⁰

The scriptural argument in proof of our position is corroborated by the account which the apostles give of the meaning or spiritual design of baptism. “Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Christ were

¹⁹⁹Of this passage Carson remarks: “We might as well seek a warrant for infant baptism in Magna Charta, or the Bill of Rights. Baptism, p. 319.

²⁰⁰For a discussion of these points, the reader is referred to the works on Baptism. Carson, pp. 319–338. Hinton, Booth, and others.

baptized into his death. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism, into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Rom. 6: 3. cf. Col. 2: 12. Those who are baptized, are baptized into Christ's death, as dying with him, and as rising with him to a new life. Baptism is symbolical of a change, of which infants are incapable. Equally expressive is the language of Gal. 3: 27. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Here baptism implies a putting on of Christ, a fact which can be affirmed only of believers.

If the apostolic commission, the import of the rite, and the practice of the apostles clearly evince that baptism is to be administered only to those who profess faith in the Redeemer, no respect is due to the objections which have been urged against this position on the ground that certain passages in the New Testament imply the baptism of infants; such as Matt. 19: 13–15²⁰¹; Acts 2: 38, 39; 1 Cor. 7: 12–14. All these passages are susceptible of an explanation which entirely accords with the baptism of believers.²⁰²

2. The testimony of ecclesiastical antiquity.

There exists no evidence in favor of the existence of infant baptism in the first century, but there is conclusive evidence against it. Justin Martyr, A.D. 140, thus describes the rite of baptism: "They who are persuaded and do believe that these things which are taught by us are true, and do promise to live according to them, are directed first to pray, and ask of God, with fasting, the forgiveness of their former sins; and we also pray and fast together with them. Then we bring them to some place where there is water, and they are regenerated by the same way of regeneration by which we were regenerated; for they are washed with water in the name of God the Father and Lord of all things, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost."²⁰³

There is another passage in Justin, which is pressed into the service of infant baptism. "There are many persons among us of both sexes, of sixty and seventy years of age, who were made disciples of Christ from their childhood."²⁰⁴ But to employ the passage in this manner is not only to make the writer contradict the Scriptures, but contradict himself; for he has informed us, in the passage quoted above, that disciples are such as are "persuaded and do believe."

With just as little reason is the celebrated passage of Irenaeus²⁰⁵ alleged in support of this practice. It is too equivocal to constitute the basis of either argument or inference. Many of the most judicious and impartial critics, among pedobaptists, acknowledge that it affords no support for infant baptism.

²⁰¹Justin Apol. I. Wall's Translation.

²⁰²Hodges on Infant Baptism, p. 112.

²⁰³Adv. Her. Lib. XI. c. 18.

²⁰⁴Dogmengesch. S 1209. So also Engelhardt, Th. 1. S. 333. Munscher, 2, §233.

²⁰⁵De Bap. 18. Robinson and Hinton, Hist. of Bap. p. 246, contend that there is no reference here to infant baptism; but their argument is founded upon an erroneous translation of the passage. They render *norint*, "they just know," instead of "let them know."

Baumgarten Crusius says: "The celebrated passage in Irenaeus, is not to be applied to infant baptism."²⁰⁶

The earliest allusion to the practice of infant baptism occurs in Tertullian, A.D. 200, and he opposes it.²⁰⁷ A highly respectable writer in defence of infant baptism, has failed to appreciate the testimony of this Father, in consequence of following Wall, who himself confesses that he does not understand Tertullian.²⁰⁸ "He had adopted," says this writer, "the strange notion that baptism washed away all *previous sin*, whether *actual* or *original*, and hence, the longer delayed, the better, when there appeared no immediate danger of death." This strange notion was by no means peculiar to Tertullian; and, moreover, it was not the point from which he argued against infant baptism. Had Dr. Wall, and those who have followed in his footsteps, studied the theological system of Tertullian, they would have been better able to appreciate his position on this subject. He had to contend with two opposite parties, the one holding that all persons, even infants, must be baptized in order to be saved, and the other, that baptism is not necessary at all, if one has sufficient faith. Against the former, he contends in the well-known passage referred to by Wall. His fundamental principle on the subject of baptism, as stated by himself, is: "Baptism is the seal of faith. We are not baptized *in order* to cease from sin, but be-cause our hearts are already cleansed."²⁰⁹ And he opposes infant baptism because it violates this principle, by placing baptism before faith. He, therefore, insists that the baptism of children should be delayed until they are old enough to "know Christ." He does not insist, as Wall and Mr. Hodges understood him, upon a mere delay of infant baptism, but on the postponement of baptism until the subjects of it should cease to be infants. But his opponents confronted him with the passage, "Suffer little children," &c. From this we learn that infant baptism was a subject of controversy; and yet that no tradition or divine command was pleaded by Tertullian's opponents. Indeed, it deserves particular notice, that in all the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian, both of whom treat of the subject as a matter of controversy, *there is no allusion whatever* to an apostolical tradition in favor of the practice. Is it possible that these fathers of tradition could have overlooked so important a point? As Tertullian devised the method of meeting the heretics with the authority of tradition, would his opponents have spared him, if these weapons of his own could have been employed against him? His judicious reply to the passage of Scripture above quoted, was, "Let them come when they are grown up,—let them come when they understand and are taught whither they come,—let them become Christians, when they

²⁰⁶Infant Baptism, &c. By William Hodges, A.M., Rector of Bruton Parish, Williamsburg, Va. Phila. 1844. pp. 87–93.

²⁰⁷De Poeniten, 6.

²⁰⁸Christian Review, III. p. 214.

²⁰⁹Engelhardt. Dogmengeschichte. Th. 1. S. 333. Erlangen, 1839.

are capable of knowing Christ." He undoubtedly carried his caution too far in regard to virgins and widows; still the principle was a sound one, which required good evidence of piety before baptism.²¹⁰

3. The judgment of critics and historians.

In accordance with the principle which I have assumed as my guide in these inquiries, that the Scriptures constitute the only rule of faith and practice, it is pertinent to show that, even in the judgment of a large number of the abettors of infant baptism, it finds no support in the Word of God, and receives no countenance from the practice of those to whom the word of God was delivered, or of their immediate successors.

An eminent German writer, who has examined this subject with equal learning and candor, remarks: "Infant baptism was not yet customary in the first two centuries. The proofs which are alledged for its existence in the apostolic age, from the mention in Acts, of the baptism of whole families, and in the second century, from a passage in Irenaeus, in which he speaks of the regeneration of children, are not satisfactory. Tertullian declared himself, most explicitly, against it, upon the ground that it imposed too heavy a responsibility upon the sponsors, and would be more beneficial to the children themselves, when they had arrived at an age in which they could know Christ, and appreciate the importance of baptism. In the time of Origen, however, infant baptism was already customary in the Church, at least, in the Egyptian portion of it, and was deemed an ordinance of the apostles. Origen vindicated its necessity on the same ground as that subsequently alledged by Augustine, viz.: that baptism was represented in the New Testament, as, in general, necessary to salvation; and, therefore, children ought to be baptized."²¹¹

The celebrated philologist Koraes, one of the first Greek scholars of modern times, says: "Infant baptism seems to have been introduced in the third century; at first only in Africa, subsequently by degrees also in other countries. Not venturing to decide upon this matter we would only say, that even supposing infants to have been baptized in the apostolic times or shortly afterwards, the practice was neither uniformly adopted, nor always nor everywhere observed. This is evident from numerous instances of persons living in or about the fourth century, who were not baptized until after they had reached the age of manhood. Such was the case with Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory; and among the emperors with Constantine, Constantius, Valentinian, Gratian, Theodosius, and with innumerable other persons. The discourses addressed by many of the Fathers of the same century to persons deferring baptism, prove the same

²¹⁰Leslie's *Hist. View of the Baptists*, p. 33. Here we have the children of Christian parents remaining unbaptized. The first instance on record of the baptism of a child, is that of Galates, the dying son of the Arian emperor Valens, who was baptized by order of the monarch, who swore that he would not be contradicted. *Christian Review*, p. 6, May, 1846.

²¹¹Munscher (Ed. Von Coln) *Dogmengesch.* I. S. 469.

thing. It is further confirmed by the canons of several councils, and also by the well-known anecdote of Athanasius the Great, who, when a boy, on a certain occasion whilst at play, catechised and baptized his play-fellows, who, until then, had remained unbaptized. The time when infant baptism was generally introduced cannot easily be determined.”²¹²

“All the earlier traces of infant baptism are very doubtful. Tertullian is the first who refers to it; and he censures it. Origen and Cyprian, on the contrary, defend it. In the fourth century its validity was generally acknowledged, although the church Fathers often found it necessary to warn against the delay of baptism. Even Pelagius did not dare to call the correctness of it in question. Augustine pointed out the removal of original sin, and the sins of the children, as its definite object and through his representations was its universal diffusion promoted.”²¹³

“As baptism signified an entrance into fellowship with Christ, it readily followed from the nature of the case, that a profession of faith in Jesus as the Redeemer, should be made by the candidate at the time. Since baptism was thus immediately connected with a conscious and voluntary accession to the Christian fellowship, and faith and baptism were always united, it is highly probable that the custom of infant baptism was not practised in this age. From the example of the baptism of whole families we can by no means infer the existence of infant baptism. One passage, 1 Cor. 16: 15, shows the incorrectness of such an inference; for it thence appears that the whole family of Stephanus, who all received baptism from Paul, was composed of adult members.”²¹⁴

“Commands or plain and certain examples, in the New Testament, relating to it, I do not find.”²¹⁵

“There is no express command for infant baptism found in the New Testament.”²¹⁶

If infant baptism be thus destitute of support in the word of God, an inquiry naturally arises as to its origin, and the reasons for its introduction. To this the observations of a learned living historian furnish a satisfactory reply. “The first public recognition of infant baptism was A.D. 250. It may be supposed to have existed anterior to that period, and to have been gradually

²¹²Neander, in *Bibl. Repos.* IV. p. 272.

²¹³Prof. Stuart, *Bibl. Repos.* III, p. 385.

²¹⁴Knapp, *Theology*, II p. 535. Storr and Platt speak of the silence of the N. T. concerning it. *Bibl. Theol.* P. 527. See also, Gieseler, *Church Hist.* I, pp. 93, 98, 195. Mosheim, I. p. 167. Booth has collected a host of similar witnesses, in his *Pedobaptism Examined*. Part. II, ch. I.

²¹⁵Neander, *Hist. Chr. Religion*, p. 361. So, also, Meier, *Dogmengesch.* S. 132. Giessen, 1840. Mosheim, I, p. 230. Gieseler, I, p. 159, note 4. 11 If we except Tertullian,” says Wall, “Vincentius (A, D. 419) is the first man upon record that ever said that children might be saved without baptism.” Booth, *Pedobap. Exam.* P. II, ch. 3, §8,

²¹⁶Knapp, *Theology*, II. p. 555. Mosheim, I. p. 230, §3, note. Gieseler, I. p. 159. Munscher (Ed. Von Coln), I. S. 481. Meir, §68. S. 163. Hinton, *Hist. Bap.* pp. 323–330. Chillingworth, *Works*, p. 744. Phila. 1841.

working its way into the church, along with other corruptions. But the grand error, under sanction of which it obtained prevalence, was that baptism and regeneration was one and the same thing. So soon as that came to be a general belief, it was deemed necessary, in order to insure the spiritual illumination of infants, to have them baptized.”²¹⁷

It thus appears that the changes which have been introduced since the age of the Apostles, with reference both to the subjects and the mode of baptism, were founded upon a portentous error, the identity of baptism and regeneration, and, therefore, the necessity of the rite to salvation. In immediate connection with this, we find another error of equal magnitude. The great patron of affusion and infant baptism, Cyprian, furnishes the first distinct allusion to a practice, the existence of which would scarcely be deemed credible, were it not most amply attested, the communion of infants at the Lord’s supper. This practice was coextensive with infant baptism, and rested upon the same grounds, the necessity of the rite to salvation. “It was common in Africa in Cyprian’s time, i. e. in the third century, to give the sacramental elements even to children; and this custom was gradually introduced into other churches. But in the twelfth century this practice fell into disuse in the West; although in the East it continues to the present day.”²¹⁸

Infant baptism and infant communion rest on the same foundation, the authority of the Fathers of the third century.

III. Efficacy of Baptism.

On this point, professors of Christianity are divided into three great parties, the first of which regards baptism as an act of obedience to Christ, and a symbol, or sign of certain truths implied in the ordinance; the second, as a seal or pledge of spiritual blessings; while the third exalts it to the dignity of an efficacious instrument of grace, some ascribing to it a physical, and others only a hyperphysical, or moral efficacy.²¹⁹ Of these various theories, the second and third are unscriptural, and besides, are encumbered with other serious objections; so that an elucidation of the grounds upon which the first is sustained, will furnish their appropriate refutation.

The Scriptures no where ascribe to baptism any peculiar efficacy, physical or moral, essential or accidental. It is simply the appointed method of professing faith in the Redeemer; and if, in some places, a preeminence is

²¹⁷Turretini Op. Loc. XVIII. Quaest. 8. Munscher, (Ed. Neudecker) III. S. 601–628. Hinton, Hist. Bap. chap. X. “Baptism is the divinely appointed form of ratifying God’s covenant of grace with every believer . . . and is in its nature a pledge, on his part, of spiritual blessings,” &c. Crowell, Ch. Mem. Manual, p. 152.

²¹⁸Carson, on Baptism, pp. 375–377. Georgia Pulpit, p. 142.

²¹⁹Luke 7: 37–48. Matt. 9: 2. Luke 23: 39–43.

given to it over other acts of obedience, it is because it is the first of a series which are incumbent on the believer. "That baptism and the Lord's Supper are seals of the covenant, is a doctrine so common, and a phraseology so established, that it is received without question as a first principle. They who measure truth by the attainments of our ancestors, look upon the questioning of this dogma as a kind of impiety and heresy; and even the modern Independents, who have professed to be guided solely by the Bible, have very generally continued to speak in the same language. While I highly respect and value the ancient writers who speak in this manner, I strongly protest against it as unscriptural, and as laying a foundation for receiving other things on the authority of man. Is there any Jewish tradition more void of scriptural authority, than that which designates baptism and the Lord's Supper *seals of the New Covenant*? There is not in the New Testament any single portion that can bear such a meaning. And what can the wisest of men know about these things, but what God has told us? He has not said that baptism is a seal. Circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of the faith of Abraham. This was God's seal to that truth, till the letter was abolished. The spirit of the truth is the seal, and the circumcision of the heart by him, is the thing signified by circumcision in the flesh. The circumcised nation was typical of the Church of Christ; for the apostle says "we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit;" and "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter." The circumcision of the Jews was the letter, of which the circumcision of the heart in Christians is the spirit. The Christian, then, has a more exalted seal than circumcision. He has the Spirit of God, "whereby he is sealed unto the day of redemption." Eph. 4: 30. When sinners believe in Christ, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the "earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." Eph. 1: 13. The seal, then, that comes in the room of circumcision, is the seal of the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit himself, in the heart of the believer, is the seal of God's truth, there is no need of any other seal. Baptism represents the belief of the truth in a figure, and takes it for granted that they are believers to whom it is applied; but it is no seal of this. They may appear to be Christians to-day, and therefore ought to be baptized; to-morrow they may prove the contrary, and therefore they cannot have been sealed by baptism. He that is once sealed by the Spirit, is secured to eternity."²²⁰

This theory, although unscriptural, is, except in its application to infant baptism, comparatively harmless, since it supposes the existence of such spiritual qualifications in the baptized, as are connected with the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. But the third theory is open to more serious objections; for, although various representations of it are given by its different

²²⁰1 John 4: 7; 5: 4.

advocates, it involves, as its distinctive principle, the assumption that baptism sustains a direct relation to the germination and growth of the divine life in the soul; and is, therefore, in general, necessary to salvation. Whether this ordinance be described as the laver of regeneration, the bath in which original sin is washed away, or the medium through which forgiveness of sin, and the influences of the Spirit are imparted, the radical idea of the theory is the same. It makes the acceptance of a sinner with God, in some way dependent upon his reception of baptism. But if the Scriptures furnish us with such a statement of the ground of a sinner's acceptance as excludes baptism, as well as all other works, the entire theory is false. That this is the case, I shall endeavor to show.

With respect to the plan of salvation, the Scriptures are sufficiently explicit. They teach that the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God, is not any thing done by him, or in him, but is the perfect work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the substitute of guilty man, he has met all the claims of the divine government against him, has obeyed the law, and suffered its penalty; and has thus brought in an everlasting righteousness, which is imputed to the believer for justification. As soon as a sinner truly believes, he is justified, accepted, and his final salvation secured. Faith sustains this peculiar relation to justification, that it appropriates Him who is our righteousness. It is, therefore, essential to our acceptance with God; but nothing else is. To make baptism thus essential, which is not the act by which we trust in Christ, but simply an act of obedience rendered by one already justified, is to confound the consequent with the antecedent; to mistake the symbolical expression of a believer's love to Christ on account of the remission of sin—a love which manifests itself effectually by keeping his commandments—for the medium through which that remission is conferred.

That this is the teaching of the Scriptures on this subject, is evinced by the following, among many passages: "He that believeth hath everlasting life." John 5: 24; 3: 16, 36. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Rom. 10: 10. By grace are ye saved through faith." Eph. 2: 8. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Rom. 5: 1. "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Gal. 3: 7. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1: 8. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ." Gal. 3: 26. cf. John 5: 24; Acts 13: 39; Rom. 3: 21, 22, 25, 26; 4: 6; 10: 4; Phil. 3: 8–10; John 1: 12; Acts 10: 42; John 3: 14–18, 40; 20: 31; Rom. 10: 9.

The case of the Philippian jailer is decisive on this point. His inquiry had distinct reference to the plan of salvation. He came, a convicted sinner, to Paul and Silas, and sought direction. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Had they omitted in their reply anything essential, they would have misled the inquiring jailer. The circumstances of the case demanded that they should comprehend in their instructions all that was necessary to salvation. But they simply say: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be

saved, and thy house.” Acts 16: 31. The absence of any reference to baptism here shows that, in the judgment of the apostles, it has no reference to that primary act of faith, by which a penitent obtains the forgiveness of sin.

From these considerations, and others which will be adduced, it is evident that the theory which suspends the remission of sin upon the reception of baptism, is contrary to the first principle of the Gospel of Christ.

Another fatal objection to this theory, is found in the fact that cases occur, in the New Testament, of persons who received the assurance of forgiveness prior to baptism. Among these, are the woman who was a sinner, the sick of the palsy, and the dying malefactor.²²¹ Moreover, it is contradicted by Christian experience. Every converted man knows that the assurance of forgiveness is obtained by faith in Christ. Thousands of such have been brought to the knowledge of the truth, have rejoiced in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and afterwards put on Christ in baptism, not to obtain remission of sin, but because they had already been assured of possessing that blessing, and without which they would not have ventured to approach the emblematic grave. They were conscious of being constrained to do this by love to the Redeemer; and they rejoiced in the consolation that “every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God,” and “whosoever is born of God overcometh the world.”²²² In addition to this it is worthy of remark, that a large portion of the most conscientious and devoted servants of God, in every part of the world, are, in the judgment of some of the most strenuous advocates of this theory, yet unbaptized, and, therefore, must remain unpardoned. They are yet in their sins. They have no hope in Christ, no assurance of acceptance with God, and dying in this state, they must encounter his wrath in the world to come. A theory which involves such shocking sentiments, as its legitimate consequences, which comes so directly in conflict with Christian consciousness, must be a false and unwarrantable assumption.

If any thing further were necessary to expose the falsity of this theory, we might refer to Paul’s view of the relative importance of baptism. As a preacher of the Gospel, he exulted in his mission; for the gospel is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth. Rom. 1: 16. In 1 Cor. 1: 17, he says: “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” But in Acts 26: 17, 18, he affirms that “Christ sent him to the Gentiles, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God;” in other words, to accomplish their salvation. If baptism sustains the relation to salvation which is ascribed to it by this theory, the manner in which the apostle underrates it, is utterly unaccountable. If the ordinance were indispensable, in general, to secure remission of sin, he could not have affirmed

²²¹Hodge on Romans, p. 436.

²²²Grotius in loco. Calvin, Winer, Teller. See also Dr. Dagg’s detailed examination of the passage, Phila. 1839.

that Christ sent him not to baptize; for upon that supposition the preaching of the gospel, without baptism, would be a nullity. It would fail to accomplish the great end for which the Son of God was exalted as a Prince and a Saviour. Acts 5: 31.

Although this theory is thus subversive of the terms of acceptance with God, and opposed to Christian consciousness, its abettors labor to sustain it from the word of God, referring to several passages in its support. Before examining them, it may be well to make the general remark, that if they inculcated the error in question, the interpreter would find it impossible to reconcile them with other portions, as well as with the general tenor of the Scriptures. Unless, therefore, he would place divine truth in conflict with itself, he must resort to some other interpretation of these passages. It would be better to leave them unexplained than to elicit from them a sentiment so essentially at war with the whole Christian system. But these passages, so far from presenting any real difficulty, are susceptible, most easily and naturally, of an interpretation which keeps them in harmony with the doctrine of the apostles.

These passages will now be adduced.

Mark 16: 16. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

The nature of these restrictions will be sufficiently clear, if we consider that faith, implying of course regeneration, is the first development of spiritual life in the soul, and baptism is its first outward manifestation. As soon as a sinner believes, he is to confess Christ in this ordinance. This is his first act of obedience. It is therefore perfectly natural that baptism should be selected from the various Christian duties, as the representative of the whole. The meaning of the passage, therefore, is, he that believes and acts accordingly—who possesses that genuine faith which works by love, and purifies the heart—shall be saved. The language of the commission, when properly explained, attaches no more importance to baptism than to any other Christian duty. It is the spirit of obedience which it demands; and baptism is indicated as the expression of that spirit, because it stands first in the series of Christian duties. In perfect accordance with these sentiments is the teaching of Paul, in Rom. 10: 10. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness [justification], and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” The apostle in this portion of the epistle contrasts the method of justification on which the Jews insisted, which was legal, and, when properly understood, perfectly impracticable, with the gospel method of salvation, which prescribes no such severe terms, but simply requires cordial faith and open profession. Confession is the fruit and external evidence of faith, assuring us of its vitality and power, as wrought by the Spirit of God. “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.”

1 Cor. 12: 3. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God." 1 John 4: 15. Hence the necessity of a public confession of Christ unto salvation is asserted in the Scriptures. Matt. 10: 32. Luke 12: 8. It is certain that he who deliberately refuses to confess Christ will be lost, because this refusal proves that he possesses no genuine faith; but this confession may be made fully and clearly prior to baptism, and, as in the case of dying penitents, without the intervention of baptism at all. "Though faith and confession are both necessary" observes an able expositor, "they are not necessary on the same grounds, nor to the same degree. The former is necessary as a means to an end, as without faith we can have no part in the justifying righteousness of Christ; the latter as a duty, the performance of which circumstances, may, render impracticable. In like manner Christ declares baptism, as the appointed means of confession, to be necessary; not however as a *sine qua non*, but as a command, the obligation of which providential dispensations may remove; as in the case of the thief on the cross."²²³

John 3: 5. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Nothing but an invincible necessity would authorize such an interpretation of this passage as would elicit from it the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. This necessity does not exist. Many of the most learned and judicious commentators interpret the expression *water and the spirit*, by hendiadis, spiritual water. This mode of expression is common in the New Testament. Comp. Matt. 4: 16. In the region and shadow of death, i. e. the region of the shadow of death. 1 Cor. 2: 4. In the demonstration of the powerful spirit. Col. 2: 8. Acts, 17: 25.²²⁴ This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that our Lord, in contrasting spiritual with natural regeneration, in the next verse, does not mention water at all, but merely opposes the spirit to the flesh, as the original principles of these different kinds of birth. If, however, Christ be supposed to refer to baptism, it must be under the same restrictions that are found in the apostolic commission, which has already been explained.

²²³For the various forms in which this dogma is held, the reader is referred to Hinton on Baptism, chap. 8, 10; Howell on Communion, chap. XII.; Ferdinand Walter, *Lehrbuch des Kirchenrechts* (Bonn. 1839), §274, Landis' Review of Cambellism, in *Biblical Repository* (new series), vol 1, together with Mr. Campbell's reply, in the same work. Baptist Preacher, vol. 2, sermon by Rev. J. B. Jeter. The Confessions of Faith of the various denominations. The view of the Baptists is thus set forth in the Baptist Catechism: Charleston, S. C., 1813, a work originally published by the Baptists of Great Britain, A.D. 1689, and adopted by the Philadelphia Association, in 1742, "Quest. 97. What is Baptism? Ans. Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death, and burial, and resurrection, of his being ingrafted into him, of remission of sins, and of his giving himself up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life."

²²⁴1 Cor. 11: 23–26; cf. Matt, 26, Luke 21, Mark 15.

Acts, 2: 38. Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, [or, literally, unto the remission.]

This clause is easily understood by comparing it with others of similar construction. John says, in Matt. 3: 11, "I baptize you with water unto repentance." He did not mean that repentance was procured, but was professed, in baptism; for he demanded of those who approached the baptismal stream "fruits meet for repentance," the evidence that they had already repented. But Peter has given us his own views, in Acts 3: 19. "Repent ye therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," &c. If baptism is as inseparable from forgiveness as repentance is, the apostle is guilty of an unpardonable omission. If he has made no omission, but has stated fully the conditions of pardon, the dogma in question receives no support from his authority.

Acts 22: 16. Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord.

As baptism is symbolical of the purification of the soul, it is perfectly natural, because in accordance with a very common mode of speech, that the symbol should be put for the reality. Paul may be said to have washed away his sins in baptism, because in that sacred rite he made a public declaration of the fact. If this passage stood alone, it might occasion some difficulty, but taken in connection with the uniform teaching of the word of God, which suspends forgiveness of sin upon the exercise of faith in the Redeemer, it affords no countenance to the dogma of baptismal regeneration.²²⁵

CHAPTER XV. THE LORD'S SUPPER.

OUR blessed Lord, on the night preceding his crucifixion, instituted a solemn memorial of his death, to be religiously observed by his followers, until the end of time. To this the apostle refers in the following words: "I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."²²⁶ The nature and the perpetuity of this ordinance are here expressly declared; and as the apostles were instructed to teach the

²²⁵Matt 28: 20.

²²⁶Picteti Theologia Christiana, Lib. XIV., cap. 5. Turretini Theol. Elenc., Loc. XIX. Quaest. 21. Opera. III. p. 359. New York, 1847.

churches to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded them,²²⁷ the death of the Redeemer was universally commemorated among them in this manner.

The titles by which this service is known in the Scriptures are these: the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, the Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, the New Testament in his Blood, the Breaking of Bread, and the Eucharist. Ecclesiastical writers have referred to it, under other appellations, as the sacrament, the mass; but these are not to be found in the word of God.²²⁸

1. The nature and design of the ordinance.

It is simply commemorative, and might be styled a symbolical sermon on the death of the Redeemer. "The Lord's Supper was not appointed to be a test of brotherly love among the people of God. It was intended to teach and exhibit the most interesting of all truths, and the most wonderful of all transactions. The design of the great institutor was, that it should be a memorial of God's love to us, and of Immanuel's death for us; that, the most astonishing favor ever displayed; this, the most stupendous fact that angels ever beheld."²²⁹ The erroneous notion that this ordinance furnishes a test of Christian fellowship, is founded on a misinterpretation of the language of Paul, 1 Cor. 10: 16. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" The apostle is here urging his brethren to "flee from idolatry;" and his argument is as follows: He who partakes of the elements of the Lord's Supper, indicates, by that act, his communion or connexion with Christ: so also, he who eats of the sacrifices offered to idols, places himself in communion with idols. The two things are therefore inconsistent. "I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." The passage refers to fellowship with Christ, and not with each other, and furnishes additional proof that the design of the ordinance is to "shew the Lord's death."²³⁰

It is one of the enormous figments of Popery, that, in the Lord's Supper, "Christ is truly present, and indeed in such a way, that Almighty God, who was pleased at Cana, in Galilee, to convert water into wine, changes the inward substance of the consecrated bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ."²³¹ This is the doctrine of transubstantiation. Its gross absurdity is manifest both from reason and from Scripture. It is contradicted by the clear and indisputable testimony of our senses, which affirm that no change has

²²⁷Booth, *Vindication*, sec. 1. Howell on Communion, p. 105, Phila. A. B. P. S. 1847.

²²⁸This was the view of the older Baptists. See the Baptist Catechism (London, 1689), Quest. 102.

²²⁹Mohler, *Symbolism*, p. 311.

²³⁰1 Jno. 1: 3; Jno. 3: 11; Luke 24: 29.

²³¹1 Cor. 10: 16; 11: 26. Carson on Transubstantiation, *Protestant Quarterly Review*, I. p. 137-178, a most masterly argument. Storr and Flatt, *Bibl. Theol.* p. 545.

occurred in the nature and properties of the bread and wine. Confluence in the evidence of the senses is a law of our nature. If it is to be rejected, the Bible must be rejected with it, for our belief of the Scriptures rests upon the evidence of the senses.²³² This dogma is opposed to the universal observation of mankind, that all bodies (material substances,) must occupy definite portions of space, and cannot be in more than one place at the same time; for according to this tenet, every portion of consecrated bread is really the whole material body of the Saviour. His body is therefore present in Heaven and in many different places on the earth, at the same moment. Again, the bread and wine, after they are consecrated, are subject to decomposition, which would not be the case if they were transmuted into the glorified body of the Redeemer. They remain, what the apostle calls them, even after their consecration, bread and wine.²³³

So far as this monstrous dogma pretends to any support from the Scriptures, it rests upon the literal interpretation of expressions which are manifestly figurative. The words, "this is my body," are supposed to affirm the actual presence of Christ's body in the elements of the eucharist. But Christ also says, "I am the vine, the way, the door," &c. When, therefore, he affirms of the bread, "this is my body," we have his own authority for understanding him to teach us that the bread is the sign or symbol of his body. No maxim of common sense is more plain, than that language must be interpreted figuratively, whenever a literal interpretation would teach an absurdity. This principle is recognized by the heathen in a case parallel with this. "When," says Cicero, "we call fruits, Ceres, and wine, Bacchus, we employ the language of common life; for who is so stupid as to suppose that what he eats is God?"²³⁴ It was, also, applied to the interpretation of this expression of our Lord by the earliest Fathers.²³⁵

Upon this sandy foundation the papacy rears its portentous doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass for the living and the dead, by which Christ is dishonored and the Man of Sin exalted; a doctrine which contradicts the testimony of the earliest and purest witnesses to the truth, and totally subverts the glorious gospel of the blessed God.²³⁶

In consequence of the exaggerated notion of the holiness of the consecrated elements, transmuted as they were into the real body, blood, and divinity of the Lord, the practice was introduced of withholding the cup

²³²Nat. Deor, 111. 16.

²³³Tertullian, Lib. IV. contra Marc. Hoe est corpus meum id est figura corporis mei. August. Epist. ad Adimant. cap. 12, signum claret corporis sui. Vid Picteti Theol. Lib. XIV. cap. 6,

²³⁴For the history of Transubstantiation and its affiliated errors, which are of comparatively recent origin, vide Munscher Dogmengeschichte. (Ed. Von Coln, §§103, 104, 142–145. Knapp, Theol. II. §146). The Protestant's Evidence, by Simon Birckbek, p. 37. London, 1635. Dowling, Hist. Romanism, pp. 192, etc. Gibbon, Rom. Emp. IV. p. 160, who says: "Innocent III. may boast of the two most Signal triumphs over sense and reason: the establishment of transubstantiation, and the origin of the inquisition."

²³⁵Mohler, Symbolism, p. 322.

²³⁶Baptist Confession of Faith, Chap. XXXI. §7.

from the laity, and thus mutilating the ordinance, contrary to the divine command : “Drink ye *all*, of it.” With respect to the perpetrators of this impious assault upon an institution of Christ, it is said, by a sophistical advocate of Rome: “A pious dread of desecrating by spilling and the like, even in the most conscientious ministration, the form of the sublimest and the holiest, whereof the participation can be vouchsafed to man, was the feeling which swayed their minds.”²³⁷ Upon such slight pretences do men venture to annul a divine statute.

The Scriptural doctrine on this subject is, that “worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to the outward senses.”²³⁸

2. The communicants.

The Lord’s Supper is a social ordinance, and is celebrated by a church in its distinctive character, as a body of baptized believers. Whatever, therefore, determines the conditions of membership, defines also the terms of communion. That baptism is prior to the supper, in the order of their observance, and, therefore, that only the baptized have a right to commune, is so unquestionably the teaching of the Word of God, and was so manifestly the practice of the primitive churches, that we are not surprised at the almost universal agreement of Christians on this point. The splendor of a great name may, for a time, give prominence to the opposite error, which inverts the order of the rites; and a spurious charity may plead for its adoption; but the subject is too plain to admit of much diversity of sentiment or practice. It has, indeed, scarcely ever been deemed worthy of a labored discussion. All the professed followers of the Redeemer, in all ages, with the exception of a very small minority, have concurred in the opinion that the Scriptures make Baptism an indispensable prerequisite to the Lord’s Supper.²³⁹

Amid this universal agreement, with reference to the principle of communion, there could have been no diversity in practice, had all Christians concurred, to the same extent, in regard to the ordinance of baptism. It is at this point that they diverge. Had there remained one baptism, as well as one Lord, and one faith, there would have been but one communion. From this point of view, it is easy for a candid mind to understand the real nature of the difference between Baptists and other denominations, with reference to the Lord’s table. The former hold that nothing but the immersion of a believer is baptism; but as they maintain, in common with other denominations, that

²³⁷Booth, *Vindic. Bap. Sec. 1.* Remington, *Def. of Restricted communion.* King, *Prim. ch. P. M ch. vi.*

²³⁸For a more full discussion of this topic, the reader is referred to Dr. Howel’s work on Communion. Phila., A. B. P. Society. 1847.

²³⁹1 Cor. 12: 13; Eph. 4: 5; 6: 18; Jno. 17: 20–26; Rom. 16: 1, 2; 3 Jno. 8–10; Acts 15.

baptism must precede communion, they cannot receive any one who has not been immersed. It is perfectly clear, therefore, that the only question at issue between them, and the others, is as to what constitutes baptism. To represent the matter otherwise, for the purpose of arraying prejudices against them, and enlisting the passions where reason fails, is ungenerous as well as unfair. Yet upon no point have the Baptists been so frequently assailed or so generally misrepresented. To receive unimmersed persons to their communion, would amount not only to a virtual renunciation of their own views of baptism, but an abandonment of the fundamental law of communion, in the churches of Christ in general. And yet, because they refuse to do this, the cry of bigotry is raised against them. It would be well for those who are disposed to join in this cry, to consider what respect they could have for persons who would thus betray, at once, their own principles and the common principles of the Christian world.²⁴⁰

CHAPTER XVI. RELATION OF CHURCHES TO EACH OTHER.

ALTHOUGH the churches of Jesus Christ are independent bodies, yet as they are constituted on the same principles, acknowledging one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and aim at the same great end, the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom, it is their duty to maintain friendly intercourse and fellowship with each other, for the promotion of their mutual interests and their common welfare. In visible organization they are many; but in spirit, in doctrine, in design, they are one.²⁴¹

This friendly relation is evinced by admitting one another's members to transient communion, dismissing and receiving members to and from each other, and by affording assistance and giving advice in cases of difficulty or need. One church may send spiritual teachers to another. Such were sent by the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch.²⁴² They may supply each other's temporal necessities.²⁴³ In cases of perplexity menacing their peace or purity, they may avail themselves of the services of their brethren, by seeking the advice of presbyteries or councils, composed of the pastors and delegated members of sister churches. "A council has no power whatever but to examine, and give its opinion and advice. It can exercise no control. Its office is to give light, not to pronounce decrees."²⁴⁴ The decision of

²⁴⁰Acts 11 : 22-27; 15 : 22-27; 18 : 27; Eph. 6 : 21; 1 Cor. 16 : 15-18.

²⁴¹1 Cor. 16 : 1-3; 2 Cor. 8 : 1-4, 13-24; 9 : 1-15; Rom. 15 : 26.

²⁴²Bacon's Manual, p. 145.

²⁴³Acts 13 : 2, 3; 2 Cor. 11 : 8, 12; 13, 18; Phil. 6 : 10-18.

²⁴⁴"Power and Duty of an Association, by Rev. B. Griffith, adopted by the Philadelphia and Charleston Associations.

the case, whatever it may be, must rest upon the final determination of the church.

Some of the objects contemplated in the institution of Christian churches, can be best secured by their cooperation; as the general spread of the gospel, the gathering of new churches, the education of the ministry, and the circulation of the Scriptures, and other religious books. This principle was recognized by the apostles, and the churches which they founded. The church in Antioch sent forth Paul and Barnabas on a missionary excursion, and other churches cordially aided in their support.²⁴⁵ To accomplish these objects, churches, at the present day, unite in Associations, and through them, in a general Convention.

An association consists of delegates or messengers from different particular churches. As the union of the members of a particular church is founded on uniformity of faith and practice, so the union of churches in a general body rests upon the same principles. Thus constituted, an association is not armed with coercive powers. Its authority is representative, executive, advisory. To execute the wishes of the churches, in reference to the objects for which it was organized, and to offer its advice, in cases which involve the common interest of the confederation, are all that it may lawfully do. Should any of the churches included in the association depart from the principles of the union, by embracing error, abusing its power over its members, or neglecting attendance on the meetings of the association, it is the right and duty of this body to remonstrate, to advise, and if the church proves incorrigible, to withdraw fellowship from it; "for if the agreement of several distinct churches in sound doctrine and regular practice, be the binding motive, ground, foundation, or basis of their confederation, then it must naturally follow, that a defection in doctrine or practice, in any church in that confederation, or any part in any such church, is ground sufficient for an association to withdraw from such a church or party so deviating or making defection, and exclude such from them in formal manner, and to advertise all the churches in their confederation thereof, in order that all the churches in confederation may withdraw from such in all acts of church communion, to the end that they may be ashamed, and that all the churches may discountenance such, and bear testimony against the defection. Such withdrawing from a defective or disorderly church, is such as arises from voluntary confederation aforesaid, and not only from the general duty that is incumbent upon all orthodox persons and churches to do, where no such confederation is entered into, as 2 Cor. 16: 16, 17; and although an

²⁴⁵Summary of Church Discipline, ch. vi. published by D. Sheppard, in the volume before referred to. Charleston, 1831. On this subject see, also, A Treatise on Church Discipline, in the same volume, ch. x., xi. Griffith's Essay, pp. 231-237. Baptist Confession of Faith, ch. xxvii., §14, 16. Crowells Manual, pp. 86, 266. Punchard on Congregationalism, pp. 103, 119. Bacon's Manual, ch. vii. Grantham's Christianismus Primitivus, B. II. ch. x.

association ought not to assume a power to excommunicate, or deliver a disorderly or defective church to Satan (as some about us claim), yet it is a power sufficient to exclude the delegates of a disorderly or defective church from an association, and to refuse their presence at their consultations, and advise all the churches in confederation to do so too.”²⁴⁶

The benefits arising from an association of churches are many. “In general, it will tend to maintain the truth, order, and discipline of the gospel. (1.) By it the churches may have such doubts as arise amongst them cleared, which will prevent disputes. Acts 15: 28, 29. (2.) They will be furnished with salutary counsel. Prov. 11: 14. (3.) Those churches which have no ministers may obtain occasional supplies. Cant. 8: 8. (4.) The churches will be more closely united in promoting the cause and interest of Christ. (5.) A member who is aggrieved through partiality, or any other wrongs received from the church, may have an opportunity of applying for direction. (6.) A godly and sound ministry will be encouraged, while a ministry that is unsound and ungodly will be discountenanced. (7.) There will be a reciprocal communication of their gifts. Phil. 4: 15. (8.) Ministers may alternately be sent out to preach the gospel to those who are destitute. Gal. 2: 9. (9.) A large party may draw off from the church, by means of an intruding minister, or otherwise, and the aggrieved may have no way of obtaining redress but from the association. (10.) A church may become heretical, with which its godly members can no longer communicate; yet can obtain no relief but by the association. (11.) Contentions may arise betwixt churches, which the association is most likely to remove. (12.) The churches may have candidates for the ministry properly tried by the association.”²⁴⁷

Conventions are composed of delegates from associations, churches, and other religious bodies. The general principles upon which they are founded, and the uses which they subserve, are the same as those which obtain in the organization of associations. In this country, a convention is held annually in each of the States, and a general convention is held triennially, consisting of delegates from many States. The latter is an organization for missionary purposes alone, contemplating the introduction of the gospel into destitute regions, and its diffusion throughout the world.

Such is the scriptural relation of churches to each other; such are the confederations which are permitted and sanctioned by the word and the spirit

²⁴⁶Hullmann Kirchenverfassung, §§31–35. Coleman’s *Christ. Antiq.* pp. 356–367. *Prim. Ch.* chap. viii. King’s *Prim. Ch. P. I.* chap. viii. Mosheim (Ed. Murdock), I. 86, 142–4. Waddington, *Eccl. Hist.* p. 44. Gieseler, I. pp. 96, 102, 152.

²⁴⁷This obvious principle furnishes a satisfactory reply to all such special pleading as is found in Marshall’s *Notes on Episcopacy*, chapter V. It might be easily shown that the Church of England, of which this writer is so strenuous an advocate, is, in the language of one of her own sons, “the child of regal and aristocratical selfishness and unprincipled tyranny, and bears and has ever borne the marks of her birth.” Dr. Arnold. *Life and Correspondence*, p. 478. Appleton & Co., New York.

of Christ; and of such alone have we any record in the early annals of Christianity. All other confederations, not deriving their powers from the consent of the churches, and claiming a divine right of jurisdiction over them, are the growth of later and corrupt times. The history of their origin, development, and fearful ascendancy, is replete with warning and admonition.²⁴⁸

CHAPTER XVII. ADVANTAGES OF SCRIPTURAL CHURCH POLITY.

BEFORE proceeding to enumerate the advantages of the divine plan of ecclesiastical organization and government, I shall present a condensed summary of the principles which have been established in the foregoing investigations. The Scriptures teach that the Christian Church—the Holy Church Catholic—is the spiritual body of the Redeemer, and is composed of those, in every age of the world, who are spiritually renewed, and vitally allied to their Great Head. Some have already ascended to heaven, others are serving him upon earth, and an innumerable multitude are yet to be born. The number will be complete when they are assembled at the judgment seat of Christ. This church universal has its earthly representative, or antitype, in a particular visible church. Each particular church is a local society, composed of persons who have been baptized upon a credible profession of faith in the Son of God, and have solemnly covenanted to walk together in the spirit of the Gospel, acknowledging Christ as their Lord, and his word as their infallible guide. Upon such a church, Christ has conferred the prerogative of self-government, under his laws. It is the right and duty of a church to interpret these laws for itself, and to declare what it considers the will of Christ to be, with reference to doctrines, ordinances, moral duties, the terms of communion, and church order, and to govern all its members accordingly; to receive persons to fellowship and to expel offenders; and to choose its own officers. In the execution of the laws of Christ, it is responsible solely to Him. Churches are therefore independent of each other, so far as coercive interference is concerned; yet they sustain an intimate relationship; are bound to promote, in all lawful ways, each other's welfare; and to unite their efforts in the general advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom. A church when fully organized is furnished with two classes of officers, one of them having special charge of its spiritual interests, the other, of its temporal or secular concerns. In these classes, there is no distinction in grade. All bishops are of equal rank, and so are all deacons.

Such is the scriptural church polity, as adopted by Baptist churches, in opposition to all other existing systems. It differs from all sorts of prelacy,

²⁴⁸Haldane, *Social Worship*, chap. XIV.

Roman, Oriental, Episcopal, and Wesleyan, by the principle, that all the servants of Christ in the work of the gospel are of equal rank. It is distinguished from Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, by the principle that the only organized church is a particular church, a society of believers, who stately meet in one place, for the transaction of its business. It, therefore, excludes every such thing as a provincial or national church, the aggregation of churches, and the centralization or consolidation of church power. It is distinguished from all churches established by law, by asking no aid from the civil ruler, and denying to him all right to interfere with its concerns. It differs from these systems by the principle that all church power resides in the church, and not in its officers; and resides in each church directly and originally by virtue of the voluntary compact of its members, under its divine charter. In fine, it is distinguished from all other systems by the principle that every individual is personally responsible for his religious acts and exercises, that no infant is born a member of the church, nor can be made such by any ecclesiastical rite, personal piety being insisted on as an indispensable qualification for membership.

In our estimate of the advantages of scriptural church polity, it is necessary to distinguish between the legitimate tendencies of the system and its actual results. As the gospel contemplates the perfect holiness of its possessors, but, in consequence of the deep-seated depravity of the human heart, never accomplishes it in the present life, so the direct tendencies of the divine plan of church order are retarded and counterworked by other influences, which prevent their complete development, in the actual condition of the churches. An approximation to the high standard of the Scriptures is all that can reasonably be expected.²⁴⁹

I. The scriptural church polity effects an entire separation between the church and the world, the regenerate and the unregenerate. By its requisition of personal piety in all who approach its ordinances and enjoy its special privileges, it gives to the household of faith a distinctive character, and makes it a witness for God, in the midst of a world lying in wickedness. Had the true principles of church polity been universally recognized, no ecclesiastical establishments would ever have existed, empowered by the civil magistrate to subjugate the conscience, and employing pains and penalties to enforce the reception of its dogmas. The spiritual despotism of pampered hierarchies would have been unknown, and the gospel would have been left free to achieve its triumphs by its own sublime and incomparable power. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. His churches ask nothing of the civil ruler but what every citizen, Jew or Gentile, may lawfully claim—protec-

²⁴⁹"I am convinced," says Dr. Arnold, "that the whole mischief of the great anti-christian apostacy for its root the tenet of a priestly government transmitted by a mystical succession from the apostles." *Life*, p. 320. Again, "That the church system, or rather the priest system, is not to be found in the Scriptures, is as certain as the worship of Jupiter is not the doctrine of the gospel." p. 409

tion in the just exercise of their rights and privileges. They have no right to invoke the aid of government to sustain the distinctive institutions, rites, or doctrines of Christianity. Legal compulsion, in reference to the affairs of the soul, besides being absurd, is an impious invasion of the supremacy of the Most High, and the worst form which human tyranny can assume.²⁵⁰

II. Another advantage of the scriptural form of church government is, that it promotes general intelligence among the members of the church.

Where the government of a church is entrusted to one, or to a select portion of its members, the rest feel relieved of all responsibility; but where all are interested, and are solemnly charged with the management of its concerns, all must appreciate their obligation to study the word of God, devoutly and carefully, that they may become familiar with the great principles by which they are to be guided. The consciousness of occupying so solemn and dignified a position, cannot but exert the happiest influence on the mind. When it is remembered by the servant of the Lord Jesus, that it is his high privilege to share, directly, in the reception of members into the church, the exercise of discipline, the choice of officers, and everything else that affects the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, he has the strongest possible inducement to prepare himself for the proper performance of his duties. This is one of the most valuable peculiarities of our polity. Other forms may be expected to secure these advantages only in proportion as they approach the scriptural standard.

III. Scriptural church polity is best fitted to maintain the purity of the churches.

It is readily granted that the freedom of our government—the right of the people to choose their own pastors, and in every other respect to manage their own ecclesiastical affairs,—demands an aggregate of wisdom and

²⁵⁰The limits to which I proposed to confine myself, in this chapter, permitted nothing beyond a cursory glance at some of the advantages of the revealed polity. For a more extensive view of the subject, the reader is referred to Punchard on Congregationalism, Part V. Haldane's *Social Worship*, chap XIII. *Christian Review*, May, 1846.

The Following anecdote was communicated to the *Christian Watchman* several years ago, By the Rev. Dr. Fishback, of Lexington, Ky.

"Mr. Editor.—The following circumstances which occurred in the state of Virginia, relative to Mr. Jefferson, was detailed to me by Elder Andrew Tribble, about six years ago, who since died when ninety-two or three years old. The facts may interest some of your readers. Andrew Tribble was the pastor of a small Baptist church, which held its monthly meetings at a short distance from Mr. Jefferson's house, eight or ten years before the American revolution. Mr. Jefferson attended the meetings of the church for several months in succession, and after one of them, asked Elder Tribble to go home and dine with him, with which he complied.

"Mr Tribble asked Mr. Jefferson how he was pleased with their church government. Mr. Jefferson replied, that it had struck him with great force, and had interested him much; that he considered it the only form of pure democracy that then existed in the world, and had concluded that it would be the best plan of government for the American colonies. This was several years before the Declaration of independence. To what extent this practical exhibition of religious liberty and equality operated on Mr. Jefferson's mind, in forming his views and principals of religious and civil freedom, which were so ably exhibited, I will not say."

piety greater than is needed under other forms. But it must be remembered that the scriptural church polity involves a scriptural constituency. The members of a church become such, only after an entire moral transformation. They profess to have been born again, taught by the Spirit of God, and brought into subjection to his will. Genuine piety in the mass of the members constitutes the surest pledge of purity, and the most effectual rampart against false doctrine, heresy, and general corruption. There is much less danger that the majority of the church will become unsound, than that a few men, claiming to be their authoritative guides, will swerve from the faith.

IV. It best secures the rights of individual members.

Should a member be aggrieved by any of his brethren, whether private or official, he may apply for redress to the church. He is not subject to the control, nor liable to suffer from the caprice, of any irresponsible power. Trial by jury is justly regarded as the palladium of personal rights. In a Christian church, a member, when arraigned upon any charge, enjoys the benefit of trial by a jury of his peers, composed of all his fellow-members. There is, therefore, every reason to expect an impartial verdict.

V. Another advantage of the scriptural polity is found in the motives which it suggests to diligence, activity, and fidelity in the ministry.

The direct accountability of rulers to the people is a principle of vast importance, and its beneficial influence is clearly recognized in the best forms of civil government. An officer of the church is amenable to his brethren for the proper discharge of the duties of his station. Should he become negligent, indolent, heretical, or corrupt, he may be deposed. He cannot continue, as under some other systems, to be an incubus to the church, and a scandal to the cause of Christ.

VI. Scriptural church polity is favorable to human progress,—to the establishment of free institutions.

It recognizes distinctly the democratic principle, that the people are the source of power—the fountain of all legitimate authority—while, at the same time, it guards against its abuses, by the limitations of a written constitution. The church does not interfere with the state, it enjoins obedience to rulers, and may exist under any form of civil government; but it cannot be denied that the spirit which pervades its polity is eminently conducive to the political welfare of mankind, and the general advancement of free principles. A people thoroughly imbued with the spirit of our ecclesiastical organization, republicans in church as well as state, will be faithful guardians of the public weal, and every church will prove a citadel of defence against tyranny. The intimate relation which subsists between ecclesiastical and civil freedom is too often overlooked. They are twin sisters, and live or die together. He who surrenders his religious rights to the clergy, or commits the keeping of his conscience to them, and submits to be ruled by them, whether in councils or conferences, renounces his Chris-

tian birth-right, and, as he has become the voluntary slave of a priest, he may, at any time, be made the vassal of a tyrant.²⁵¹

VII. Another striking feature of the system which I have delineated from the word of God, and the last that I shall mention, is its simplicity.

It presents no imposing visible organization, recognizes no priesthood clothed with mysterious powers; symbolizes with none of the superstitions of the world, "gay religions, full of pomp and gold." The principles of church polity are level to the comprehension of all who are qualified for membership in a church. There are no wheels within wheels, inferior and superior courts of judicature, no intricate machinery, nothing in the government of a church which a plain man may not understand. Its practicability, under any circumstances, is one of its best recommendations.²⁵²

CHAPTER XVIII. CORRUPTION OF SCRIPTURAL CHURCH POLITY.

The simple and beautiful system of ecclesiastical polity which was established by the inspired founders of the primitive churches, retained only for a brief period its original perfection and symmetry. The innovations and corruptions which menaced it were distinctly foreseen by the apostles themselves. Paul said to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."²⁵³ John encountered the opposition of one of these disturbers of the peace, in the person of Diotrephes, who was so inflamed with the passion for preeminence that he rejected the authority of the apostle himself.²⁵⁴ Thus we find the germs of corruption existing even in the primitive churches. To anticipate their development and counteract their insidious influence, the apostles lifted their voices in solemn warning and remonstrance. Notwithstanding this, the churches began to decline from the apostolic order before the close of the second century, and even within the lifetime of some who had been contemporary with the inspired teachers. The causes and the manner of this transition will now be briefly indicated. While the early corruptions of church polity are to be ascribed mainly to the pride and ambition of the clergy, it must be confessed that other causes contributed to these deplorable results.

I. The excellences by which the primitive pastors were distinguished, proved one of the earliest occasions of corruption to the churches.

²⁵¹Acts 20:29.

²⁵²3Jno. 9. of Clem. Ep. ed Cox § 14.

²⁵³Giesler, Ch. Hist. 1, §2. Hullmann, S. 20.

²⁵⁴Coleman, Prim. Ch. p. 249. Gieseler, I, p. 103. Hullmann, S. 22, 30.

The position of a Christian pastor, in those days, was one of great peril. In all persecutions for the truth's sake, the storm spent its fury chiefly upon him; and the steadfastness with which he endured its violence, entitled him to the love and confidence of his flock. To such men, who were ready to lay down their lives for the cause of Christ, the churches naturally supposed that they might entrust their dearest rights. Their members, scattered by persecution, and prevented from meeting together for the management of their ecclesiastical affairs, were induced by the necessity of the case to commit them to the hands of their pastors, and thus an unscriptural authority was given to religious teachers. This authority was, doubtless, at first faithfully exercised, and held as a boon, not as a right; but, in the course of time, the origin and nature of the trust were overlooked, and their ambitious successors claimed a divine right to dictate to the churches and control their movements. The tendency of power to pass from the many to the few, is strong under any circumstances; but it is particularly so, when the transfer is prompted by reverence for elevated piety, and gratitude for distinguished services. This was the case with the early churches. The lamentable consequences of their defection should prove a warning to all other churches, and impress them with the importance of guarding their rights against the aggression of even the most wise and pious men. Clerical despotism reaches its imperial elevation by slow and almost imperceptible advances; it is the first step that is the most dangerous.

The sentiment of respect for superior excellence, to which I have adverted, led, also, to a change in the relations of the ministers among themselves. "After the death of the apostles and the pupils of the apostles, to whom the general direction of the churches had always been conceded, some one amongst the presbyters of each church was suffered gradually to take the lead in its affairs. In the same irregular way the title of bishop was appropriated to this first presbyter."²⁵⁵

II. Another cause of the corruption of the apostolic church polity is found in the ascendancy of the churches in the cities over those in the country.

The gospel was first preached in large cities such as Jerusalem, Corinth, and Rome; churches were founded in them, and thence, as from centres of influence, Christianity was extended in the surrounding regions. Visitants to the city were converted, and connected with the metropolitan church; and, in process of time, when their number became sufficiently large, they were constituted into churches in the country. These churches naturally looked to the mother church for aid and counsel, received their first pastors from it, and were in constant intercourse with it. They were regarded as branches of the metropolitan church. "In this connection and coalition, between the orig-

²⁵⁵Gieseler, I, p. 156. Munscher, Handbuch, iii. S. 15.

inal church and the smaller ones that sprang up around it, began that change in the original organization of the apostolical churches which gave rise to the Episcopal system, and which in the end totally subverted the primitive simplicity and freedom in which the churches were at first founded.”²⁵⁶

When the elders of the city churches came to have a president, or chief presbyter, charged with the general supervision of its affairs, his jurisdiction was extended over the country churches connected with it; and in this way diocesan episcopacy was introduced. Had the independence of the rural churches been maintained, this defection from primitive episcopacy could never have occurred.

III. The original polity of the churches was corrupted by the introduction of the doctrine that the ministers of the Christian church were the successors of the Jewish priesthood.

If this notion were true, of course the Christian ministry and the Jewish priesthood must be similar in rank and station. The bishop corresponded to the High Priest, the presbyters or elders to the Priests, and the deacons to the Levites. They were no longer incumbents in office at the pleasure of the people, and dependent upon them, but were divinely appointed to instruct and rule them. “When once the idea of a Mosaic priesthood had been adopted in the Christian church, the clergy soon began to assume a superiority over the laity. The customary form of consecration was now supposed to have a certain mystic influence, and hence forth they stand in the position of persons appointed by God to be the medium of communication between him and the Christian world.”²⁵⁷ This unscriptural and impious dogma was the source of that ghostly tyranny which presumed to extend its empire over heaven and hell, opening or shutting their gates at pleasure, and by its subsequent ascendancy kept the Christian world for centuries in a worse than Egyptian bondage.²⁵⁸

Another effect of this doctrine was the claim on the part of the clergy to tithes for their support. Moreover, they argued that “if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory”—and therefore claimed superior contributions in tithes, and offerings to Christian ministers. “And what is still more extraordinary, by such wretched reasoning the bulk of mankind were convinced.”²⁵⁹

IV. The institution of provincial synods, and afterwards of general councils, contributed its influence to the subversion of the primitive polity of the churches.

²⁵⁶Some Protestant ministers in this country, arrayed in gown or surplice, gravely pretend to these awful prerogatives. *Risum, teneatis, amici?*

²⁵⁷Campbell, *Lec. Eccl.*, Hist. X, P. 1. Gibbon's *Rome*, 1, p. 276.

²⁵⁸A.D. 160, 170. Euseb. V. 16. Gieseler, 1, p. 102.

²⁵⁹Coleman, *Chr. Antiq.* p. 364. *Prim. Ch. chap. viii.* Waddington, *Ch. Hist.* pp. 43–45. Gibbon, *Rome*, 1, p. 274. Gieseler, 1, §66.

The first of these assemblies was held against the Montanists.²⁶⁰ They were composed originally of the representatives of independent churches, selected for the purpose of deliberating upon matters which affected their common interests. From these synods the laity was excluded; at least there exists no evidence to prove that any but the clergy took part in their deliberations. They were advisory bodies, and if their decisions assumed the form of laws, it was rather by common consent than as imperative enactments. It was not long, however, before they presumed to claim the right of giving authoritative laws to the churches. Their original character, as deliberative and advisory assemblies, was exchanged for one of higher pretensions, claiming legislative and judicial authority, and thus invading the independence of the churches.

These synods needed a moderator; and as they were usually held in the capital of the province, the presiding officer of the city church was commonly chosen. The position, which was at first yielded to him from a spirit of courtesy, was afterward claimed as an official right. The institution of these assemblies thus promoted at once the aggrandizement of the clergy in general, and the exaltation of one in each province to a position of vast and irresponsible power. "The practical effect of these councils, from the beginning, was to give increasing consideration and influence to the clergy, which continually increased, until it finally ended in the full establishment of the ecclesiastical hierarchy."²⁶¹

The history of these ecclesiastical assemblies evinces that it is not without reason that the movements of similar bodies, at the present day, are watched with jealous solicitude. Associations and conventions ought to be restricted within their appropriate limits, as advisory and executive bodies. Any attempt on their part to invade the independence of the churches, by controlling their faith or practice, or assuming the supervision of matters which have not been entrusted to them, should be promptly and steadfastly resisted.

V. The doctrine of a visible church catholic may be enumerated among the causes which subverted the primitive ecclesiastical order.

This notion, which was early developed, necessarily blended the churches together under a uniform organization, which required a visible head, and led directly to the establishment of the papacy. To maintain uniformity, the central representative of sovereignty must be clothed with unlimited power over every portion of the vast confederation. That this doctrine is a misconception of the notion of Christian unity, and is unsupported by the word of God, has already been shown.

²⁶⁰Gieseler, I, §§49, 66, 82. Coleman, Prim. Ch. p. 270.

²⁶¹"There is," says Dr. Arnold, "*societas generis humani, and a societas hominum Christianorum*, but there is not one *republica* or *civitas* of either, but a great many. The Roman Catholics say there is but one *republica*, and therefore, with perfect consistency, they say that there must be one central government."—Life, p 166.

VI. The introduction of infant baptism was another cause of the corruption of church polity.

The grounds upon which this rite was introduced, by identifying it with regeneration, and making it essential to salvation, placed it in direct antagonism to the genius of Christianity. Besides imparting increased potency to the cause of corruption, which was already in existence, it exercised a direct and powerful influence upon the churches, and, in the end, effected an entire revolution in their polity. After its introduction, the churches were no longer composed of believers who had been baptised upon profession of their faith in the Redeemer; the distinction between real and nominal Christianity was obliterated; forms and ceremonies usurped the place of vital godliness; Christianity itself was virtually repealed; and the pure and benign system of Jesus of Nazareth degenerated into a profane and cruel superstition.

Editor's Note: *The following are some accolades for the first edition of Reynolds' The Kingdom of Christ, which was printed in 1846. The longer version, reprinted above, was first published in 1849.*

NOTICES BY THE PRESS, OF THE FIRST EDITION.

The following are some of the notices of the first edition:—"The Kingdom of Christ, by Rev. J. L. Reynolds, Prof. of Bib. Lit. in Mercer University, Ga., constitutes the third number of the Periodical Library. The subject is well treated by the author. We know of no work on the nature and organization of the church better suited to general circulation. It should be in the hands of every Baptist, as containing a brief, but clear and able defence of the doctrine we hold concerning the constitution of the Church of Christ."—*South Western Baptist Chronicle*.

"Prof. Reynolds shows in this little work, that he has bestowed much thought upon the subject. He has with great clearness and force exhibited the Polity of the New Testament, and traced the gradual departure from it in the Churches which succeeded those planted by the Apostles."—*Western Baptist Review*.

"The Kingdom of Christ. An exceedingly able little work bearing the above title, has just been received from the publisher. It is an able treatise on the great question respecting Church Polity. It defends the sentiments of the Baptists with much power, and we hope the day is not far distant when the distinguished author will be permitted to present the larger volume to the public."—*Chrystal Fount*.

"The style of the work of Prof. Reynolds is very handsome; it exhibits much learning and research; and we believe every position of the writer meets our hearty concurrence. We object only to its brevity. It seems to be

the abridgment of a larger design. Bro. R. will, we trust, soon write out his views on the whole subject, and place them before the public in a more perfect form. Meantime we should be glad to see this work in the hands of all our friends. It is the cheapest and best work of the kind in the nation.”—*Dr. Howell, of Tenn. Baptist.*

“The subject of this work has received a large share of attention from many distinguished men during the last year or two, but not more than it has deserved. It is important, especially in the Churches that adopt the form of Church government which Baptists have always advocated. Bro. Reynolds has done much service in this cause. The chapter on Church Membership is worth more than the price of the book. Buy and read it.”—*Mississippi Baptist.*

Corrective Church Discipline

P. H. MELL



Mell, Patrick Hughes, D.D., chancellor of the State University, and for many years a leading and influential Baptist of Georgia, was born in Walthourville, Liberty Co., Ga., July 19, 1814. In his boyhood he studied in the academies in Liberty County and near Darien, Ga., and then he spent two years at Amherst College, Mass., afterwards teaching in the academy at Springfield, Mass., and in the high school at East Hartford, Conn. In 1838, at twenty-four years of age, he returned to his native State, and, after teaching school in lower and middle Georgia for five or six years, was elected to the professorship of Ancient Languages in Mercer University. He

entered upon his duties in February, 1842, and continued a professor in that institution for thirteen years, during which time he became noted for his ability as a professor and for the firmness and excellence of his discipline. His connection with Mercer University was dissolved in November, 1855, but in August, 1856, he was elected Professor of Ancient Languages in the State University at Athens. When Dr. Alonzo Church resigned the presidency of the State University, in 1860, Dr. Mell was elected to the chair of Metaphysics and Ethics, which he still holds, although he was, in August, 1878, elected chancellor of the university, and ex-officio president of the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts. His position is one of great dignity, and has been filled by him with distinguished ability and success.

Dr. Mell's religious life began in the summer of 1832, when he was baptized by Rev. Samuel Law, at North Newport church, Liberty Co., Ga. He began to preach at Oxford, Ga., in 1840, and was ordained by order of the Penfield church at the request of the Greensborough church, Nov. 19, 1842, at Penfield. From that time to the present he has preached almost without intermission, having charge of various churches, and some of his pastorates continuing for remarkably long periods. He was pastor of the Greensborough church for ten years; of the Antioch church, in Oglethorpe County, twenty-eight years; and of the Bairdstown church, on the line between Greene and Oglethorpe Counties, thirty-three years. Since his election to the chancellorship of the State University he has resigned all his pastorates and has devoted himself exclusively to the duties of his office.

As a preacher, he is logical and argumentative, delighting in the deep doctrinal subjects of the Bible, and rendering them simple and clear to the comprehension of his hearers. The power and penetration of his intellect enable him to grasp a doctrine forcibly and present it clearly; and his skill in the art

of thinking and reasoning is so great that he always speaks logically, his conclusions having the force of demonstrations.

As an author, Dr. Mell has issued several works which have been accepted as standards, among which are his works on "Baptism," on "Corrective Church Discipline," and on "Parliamentary Practice." He has also published small works on "Predestination," "Calvinism," "God's Providential Government," the "Philosophy of Prayer," and part of a work, "Church Polity," which promises to be of great value.

As a presiding officer, Dr. Mell has manifested pre-eminent excellence, which has been recognized by his repeated re-election to the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention and of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

During the late civil war, in response to a call by the governor of the State for six months' troops, Dr. Mell, although professor in the State University, raised a company, of which he was elected captain, and when the regiment to which he belonged was organized, he was elected colonel. As such he remained in actual service six months at different points within the State.

Few, if any, have exerted a wider and more healthful influence in the denomination in Georgia than Dr. Mell.

—William Cathcart, 1881

CORRECTIVE

CHURCH DISCIPLINE:

WITH A

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCRIPTURAL
PRINCIPLES UPON WHICH IT IS BASED.

BY P. H. MELL

PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, AUTHOR OF "BAPTISM IN ITS MODE
AND SUBJECTS," "SAINTS' PERSERVERANCE."

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1860.

PREFACE.

The views which are presented in the following pages are such as have been held by the Baptist churches from time immemorial. The Author attempts to do no more than to exhibit the sentiments of our Fathers, and to defend them by showing that they are sustained by the Scriptures. It is not asserted, however, that in no instance have the principles herein set forth been departed from. In times of excitement, when party spirit ran high, or personal resentment swayed men's minds, revolutionary measures have been resorted to in some few of our churches, and these principles have been trampled under foot. Such irregularities have never failed to be disastrous to those who perpetrated them, and their influence upon the cause of Christ has been only evil, and that continually. One of the unhappy effects is that they are taken as precedents by those who are not well informed, and quoted as instances of Baptist usage.

There has been no time in our history, perhaps, when such irregularities could be more easily propagated, if quoted by an influential man, than at the present. In the extraordinary progress of scriptural sentiments on the subject of gospel ordinances, multitudes in this country have been introduced, within a few years, into our churches from Pedobaptist organizations, who are but partially indoctrinated in those opinions which make us a peculiar people. Yielding to the force of the argument on the subject of baptism, and instructed no further, they have brought into our churches confused notions of church polity, or have even retained undisturbed the views which obtained in the communions they have left. While we cordially welcome these brethren to our ranks, we should see to it that they are instructed in the way of the Lord more perfectly. Should this unpretending little essay have any influence to this end, and tend in any degree to bind the churches to the scriptural sentiments of the Fathers, its author will be more than compensated for his labor.

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA,
March 20, 1860.

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CHAPTER I.

IT is the Saviour's will of precept that the constituents of His churches shall be regenerated persons. He authorizes none to receive the ordinance of Baptism, and to have a lot among His visible people, but those who believe with the heart that He is the Son of God. His churches, however, are not composed of perfect beings. Men of passions and infirmities, of prejudices and defective knowledge,—frequently of discordant tastes and conflicting worldly interests,—are congregated together, and organized into visible local societies. In these circumstances, it must needs be that offences come. The influence of the grace of God, and the precepts of the gospel, serve to counteract this tendency; but it is never impossible for the flesh to get, for the time, the mastery of the spirit, and produce alienation among individuals, or discord in communities where brotherly love, order, and harmony usually prevail.

The Great Lawgiver in Zion recognizes the possibility of the action of disturbing elements, and has left His people in no doubt as to the remedy to be applied in every instance. He has not left us to legislate on the subject, nor to resort to expedients to meet cases as they arise, but Himself has classified offences, and prescribed the course to be pursued in every case. It only remains for us to perceive clearly the Divine discrimination, and to carry out implicitly the Divine prescription.

What then is the inspired classification of offences?—and what, under the classification, is the course of treatment prescribed by Infinite Wisdom?

The Scriptures cite us to but two kinds of offence. Matt. xviii. 15 points out the one kind, where the object of the offence is an individual,—“If thy brother trespass against *thee*;” and 1 Cor. v. to the second kind, where the object of the offence is either public morals or the Church. The former of these is usually characterized by the term PRIVATE, and the latter by the term PUBLIC. The use of these terms will be retained in this essay, though they are each liable to some ambiguity of meaning. PERSONAL is employed by some in preference to “Private;” but neither term is exactly suited to the case, since *private* may be understood in the sense of *secret*; and *personal* is not necessarily in antithesis to *public*. Nor is the term *public* more happy in conveying the idea intended, since it may be understood in the sense of *ostentatiously*—*before the world*. If this criticism be repeated in substance, it will be only to warn the reader against a misapprehension of the idea designed to be conveyed.

1. What are “private offences,” as described in Matt. xviii.?

Ans. 1. Not necessarily *secret* offences. Many “public offences” are committed secretly; as theft, fornication, &c. The thief and the fornicator select the time usually when the friendly darkness will conceal them,—when they confidently trust no eye will detect them. But theft and fornication

tion are not “private” but “public” offences, according to scriptural classification, even though the former may have been committed against a brother. But of this more anon.

Ans. 2. “Private offences,” then, *i.e.* those referred to in Matt. xviii., are those that are *personal*, committed exclusively against *individuals* as when encroachments are made upon individual *rights, interests, or feelings*. A, on the impulse of the moment, accidentally cripples B’s stock that have broken into his enclosure, or, through mistake, makes encroachments upon his territory, or speaks harshly or disparagingly of him, or accosts him in a cold and repulsive manner, or refuses to speak to him at all:—these are a very few examples of an offence specific in character, but endless in combination and manifestation. The *specific character* is that the *act* is not a crime against religion and morality, and the *object of the act* is a brother.

2. What are “public offences?”

Ans. 1. Not necessarily those that are committed *publicly* and *ostentatiously*. One church-member may publicly and ostentatiously refuse to speak to another, and in other ways unjustly treat him with contempt. But, as has been seen above, this is not a “public” but a “private” offence, since the object of it is exclusively an individual. Those who perpetrate “public offences” more frequently, though not always, try to conceal them under the veil of secrecy.

Ans. 2. “Public offences” may be subdivided into two classes:—(1.) Where they are crimes exclusively against religion and morality; and, (2.) where they are offences against the Church in its organized capacity.

(1.) A crime is committed against religion and morality exclusively when the offence has no individual or body of individuals for its object; but when it is incited for the gratification of a depraved taste or for the indulgence of a corrupt propensity; as drunkenness, profanity, lewdness, falsehood, &c.—the last not perpetrated against an individual. Here the offences are crimes not against men, but against God. The drunken church-member, *in the mere fact that he is drunk*, infringes upon no brother’s personal rights, tramples upon no brother’s individual feelings, and damages no brother’s personal individual interests. This is not the intention, this is not the result. The only object may have been to gratify a depraved appetite. He is a “public offender,” (1st,) because he has committed a grievous offence, and (2d) because the object affected by the offence is not an individual, but public gospel morality and the cause of Christ.

(2.) Transgressions committed against the Church in its organized capacity constitute another class of “public offences.” The instances of this kind of offence are innumerable, some of which may be given as follows:—

(1.) When a member of the Church openly renounces its doctrines of faith, and engages in an active and uncompromising effort to subvert them,—when he denounces its practice of restricted communion, gives

notice at the means to disregard it, and carries the annunciation into effect by the overt act,—he is a public offender. Here the object affected by the offender's act is not the individual members of the Church, but the Church in its organized capacity. Let not this citation, however, be misunderstood. No reference is made to those who are ignorant of Gospel doctrines, or who even have doubts as to the Scriptural character of those held by the Church. A gospel church is not a circle of doctrinal proficient, but a school for learners, where those who are acquainted only with the alphabet of the gospel—with the first principles of the doctrine of Christ—may receive instruction, and know as they follow on to know the Lord. The only qualification for admission into a gospel church is repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are, doubtless, multitudes in the churches who know nothing of the profound doctrines of grace, or even have misgivings as to the correctness of the interpretations put upon them, who are yet guilty of no offence, and members in good standing. Reference is had to those, solely, who declare open war against the doctrines and practices of the Church and engage in active efforts to subvert and destroy them. The Church is bound to hold these as “public offenders;” and if there is to be any difference in the treatment of their case and in that of other public offenders, it is to be found in the injunction, “A man that is a heretic, *after the first and second admonition*, reject.” Tit. iii. 10.

(2.) Refusal, after admonition, to attend upon the stated conference-meetings of the Church, is a “public offence.” Here, again, the object affected by the act is not the individual members of the Church, but the Church in its organized capacity. Nor is the act an infraction of the public rules of gospel morality, excepting in so far as it may be a violation of the member's vows when he entered into the Church. Nowhere in the Scriptures is a rule in so many words, (such as not a few of our churches have passed,) requiring attendance of members at such an hour of such a day on conference-meetings. According to the Scriptures, there is necessarily no immorality in an absence from any place on any Saturday in the month; yet our churches, acting within lawful limits, have passed such a rule, and their members have pledged themselves to abide by it. Nothing is more common than for churches to expel members, after admonition, for non-attendance upon conference-meetings. Why? What is the nature of the offence? Not “private,” certainly; because no infringement has been made upon individual rights, interests, or feelings; not public, in the sense that a crime, in the nature of things, has been committed against gospel morality, for simple absence from any time and place contains essentially no moral character; but a “public offence,” because it is committed against the authority of the Church, which the member is bound and pledged to regard.

(3.) Rebellion against the lawful authority of the Church—a refusal to heed its citations, or, in other ways, a denial of its lawful jurisdiction over

him—is, on the part of the member, a “public offence.” He neglects to hear the Church, and, if he persists,—by Divine direction,—is to be considered by her in the light of a “heathen man and a publican.” Every consideration drawn from the Scriptures, and from the Church’s sense of duty to herself and to the cause of Christ, requires her to cut off from herself a member in a state of open rebellion. But the offender may not have trespassed at all upon individuals, and he may have been guilty of no gross offence against morals,—*i.e.* such as is incited by depraved tastes and corrupt propensities. He is, nevertheless, guilty of a public offence, since he is found arrayed in open rebellion against the authority with which Christ has invested His Church.

(4) It is a “public offence to attempt to make divisions and disturbances in a church. A schismatic, one who factiously distracts the Church, and threatens to divide it, the Church is expressly commanded to excommunicate. ‘Mark them who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.’ Rom. xvi. 17, 18. Here, again, the act, because perpetrated against the Church in its organized capacity, authority, and interests, is a public offence.” These are but a few of the many instances that may be cited.

The following, then, are the conclusions to which we arrive:—

1. A “PRIVATE OFFENCE” is one in which *the act* is not essentially a crime against religion and morality, and *the object affected by it* is a brother.
2. A “PUBLIC OFFENCE” is one in which the act is essentially a crime against religion or morality, or *the object of it* the Church in its organized capacity.

But it is sometimes the case that these two kinds of offence are so blended together as to seem to constitute a third class. It is from this combination that nearly all the difficulty originates in the treatment. Further on, it will be shown that these do not constitute a distinct class. For the sake of convenience, however, they will be termed here *mixed offences*. Where *the act* is essentially a crime against religion and morality, and *the object affected by it* is a brother, we have both offences in combination. The following may be given as examples of this:—*willful* and *malicious slander* against a brother; *profane* denunciation of him; *theft* from him; *fraud* perpetrated upon him, *seduction*; personal violent assault upon him, with fist, bludgeon, or horsewhip, violent and libelous publication of him in the newspapers, or by advertisement set up in conspicuous places. These are a few of many examples which may be given. Falsehood, profanity, theft, fraud, seduction, a breach of the peace by personal violence or libelous publication, are offences against religion and morality, though they may be perpetrated against members of the Church.

CHAPTER II. THE TREATMENT OF THE TWO KINDS OF OFFENCE.

IN the treatment of “private offences,” the Saviour, in Matt. xviii., gives the course to be pursued, commonly called “Gospel steps:” “Go and tell him his fault between him and thee alone.” 1st. Go to *him* and seek a private interview. Observe, he does not say, address him a note, or employ a committee of friends to negotiate with “seconds,” who may represent your antagonist as men of the world do in their so-called “affairs of honor.” Submit the case to no second hands, but “go” yourself, and see your offending brother face to face.

Objection.—But it may be objected, “I have to deal with an unscrupulous man, who will pervert my words, or otherwise misrepresent our interview to my injury. For my own protection therefore, I must have our mutual communications in writing, or, at least, secure the presence of witnesses who may correct his misrepresentations.”

The amount of this is, you must do evil that good may come,—or, at least, that evil may be avoided. You have too little faith in the prescriptions of Christ, and must substitute expedients of your own. But, unfortunately for you, in the very unlawful precautions you use, you place yourself completely in the power of him whom you characterize as a designing man. I grant you that if your antagonist (for that is the correct term, under the present aspect) does take advantage of your disobedience and indiscretion, and use them for your injury, he goes far to prove himself the unscrupulous and wicked man you fear he is; but this development is of no advantage to you, since it does not atone for your disobedience, nor make you any the less completely in his power. You lack confidence in the prescriptions of Christ, and propose to substitute precautions and expedients of your own, and the Master may suffer you to be involved in a long train of inconsistencies, embarrassments, and suffering. The first direction, then, to be observed, is, seek an interview with your offending brother face to face.

2. “Tell him his fault.”

Tell him. Not blaze it abroad in the newspapers, nor growl about it in the presence of others; but go and tell HIM his fault, in the spirit of meekness. It is a question whether our religious newspaper press has not been used too much of late to produce and to aggravate personal differences between brethren. If the editors have themselves not been the guilty parties, have they not been too ready to yield their columns to excited persons, who have real or fancied grievances to allege against their brethren? The first that is heard, even by the alleged offender, of the thing complained of, is contained, perhaps, in a newspaper article. In this, by innuendo, by insinua-

tion, or by statement in detail, *the public* are told how greatly the writer has suffered in his person, his rights, his interests, or his feelings, by the action or the words of the real or fancied aggressor. The latter is held up as a very bad man, and the public are impliedly called upon to condemn him. If the one assailed possesses a similar spirit, rejoinder is to be expected in the public newspapers: the gauntlet thrown down is promptly to be taken up. The appeal now on both sides is to the *public*; and the effort of each is to array as partisans as many of that public as he can. This is especially true if the parties at variance are men of influence and equally matched in strength. At first but one newspaper column may be wheeled into hostile position. The war begins with a single gun on either side. Only one embrasure of the newspaper battery opens for the protrusion of the hostile ordnance. But, as the hot shot and shell, the grape and canister, tell with reciprocal execution, the excitement and the rancor rise in intensity, until progressively the whole battery is unmasked and every gun is plied with deadly execution. Begrimed with smoke and distorted by passion, the countenances of the combatants bear no longer the lineaments of followers of the Prince of Peace. The din and uproar drown the gentle voice of conscience and the sweet monitions of the Holy Spirit, while the sulphurous smoke, charged with an odor from the world beneath, poisons the upper air and shuts out from the combatants the blessed light of heaven.

This, however, is but the beginning of the fray, the distant cannonading with which the conflict opens. Forces must be raised, and resources gathered, that the issue may be decided in a pitched battle, by a hand-to-hand engagement. To attract recruits and rally forces to the standard, each plants himself upon some great principle dear to people's hearts, which, if you would believe him, he has been set to defend, and which must stand or fall with him; or the cry is raised that the religious party he represents is to be trampled in the dust in his person. The slogan of party catches the ear of the heated, the restless, and the ultra; and the cry of "principles in danger" arouses the quiet and conservative like the sound of the fire-bell at night. Vast armaments are gathered, and stand face to face in hostile force. And what then? A religious Solferino is fought. The battle rages in the midst of the cries and imprecations and slaughter of BRETHREN. And when the reputed victor, in the midst of his exhausted forces, surrounded by the dying and the dead, comes to sum up the result, it is only to find himself arrested by obstacles he cannot force, and glad to enter into a Villa Franca truce, which will end in nothing but protracted negotiations and endless complications. *The leaders, drifted whither they did not intend, invariably fail in their purposes*; while the people, their adherents, with feelings embittered and brotherly love destroyed, find their ancient landmarks obliterated, and their cherished institutions well-nigh subverted and destroyed; a-n-d—that is all!

How different, however, are the process and result when the Saviour's directions are observed!

“Tell HIM his fault,” because,—

1. You may have misconceived him through misapprehensions or misrepresentations. Your brother may be able to *disavow*, or, if he acknowledges, to *explain*, and thus remove all complaint.

2. You may thus be able to RECLAIM him. When your brother trespasses against you, he sins against God also, and against his own soul. How much more noble, then, is it for you, keeping your own heart right, to reform and “gain,” than to come off victorious over your brother in mortal conflict! “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.” “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” James v. 19, 20.

“Tell him his fault *between him and thee alone*.”

1. If you go in the first instance accompanied by others, you may seem to have summarily decided against the offender, without giving him a hearing, and thus excite in him a spirit of *independence* and *defiance*.

2. You may seem to have no confidence in his capacity to do right, and thus rouse his *resentment*.

3. Accompanied by others, you may seem to have entered into a conspiracy against him. It may appear that you are approaching him systematically as an enemy to entangle and expose him, and thus put him on the *defensive*. If he is cautious and prudent, you make him wary, but not the less an antagonist; if he is fiery and impulsive, you make him aggravate the difficulty by defiance and *wrath*.

4. You may seem to be desirous to humble him by making him succumb and confess his fault before witnesses, and thus touch his *pride*.

The great object is to “gain your brother:” therefore, make the attempt first by yourself.

Question.—“*But may a mutual friend in no instance make the effort to bring parties mutually at variance together, and induce them to talk about their points of difference in his presence?*”

Ans.—To this it is answered, that it is perfectly legitimate for a mutual friend to bring variant parties together. And, by so doing, it is often the case that much good is accomplished.

But you observe that the question proposes a case very different from that under discussion. You speak of those who are *mutual* trespassers,—who are equally at variance, and therefore both wrong. But the question under discussion relates to a case where only one is a trespasser, while the other is as yet free from blame. Our discussion relates to the duty of the one who, yet free from wrong in act or feeling, has been trespassed upon by his brother. The duty of such is to keep right himself, and to do all in his power to recover his erring brother.

After all the disinterested efforts made by yourself, the offender may remain incorrigible. What then? Become disgusted with him?—leave him to himself, and treat him ever thereafter as an enemy? Bring him before the Church? No. One step more remains to be taken.

4. “*Take with thee one or two more,*”—not partisans or enemies, but those in whom the offender has confidence:

1st, That they may be arbitrators between you. If, after they hear him, they are satisfied that he is wrong, they can tell him so, and add their influence to yours to bring him right.

2d, If he is incorrigible, they may be witnesses for you in the next step you may have to take.

The Saviour designs that His people shall not be at variance. It is His revealed will that brotherly love shall continue among them, and that they shall be of one heart and of one mind. If, however, variance should arise, He requires the parties to settle it privately between themselves; and He gives directions which, if followed implicitly, and the heart of each is right, will lead to the desired result.

He requires you to settle your difficulties privately between yourselves, because,—

1. In no other way can they be settled to the mutual, hearty satisfaction of both parties. Any other method of settlement will consist either in the condemnation of one or both of the parties, or in a compromise between them which will satisfy neither.

2. He would save His cause from the reproach of brethren publicly warring and devouring one another.

3. He would save His churches from the adjudication of personal difficulties between their members; so that they may never be the arena for personal strife, nor the field of battle for conflicting hosts.

4. But, if the offender continues incorrigible, He has provided, in the directions He gives, not only for the safety of the innocent and the punishment of the incorrigibly guilty, but for the peace and unanimity of His Church, which is to be the tribunal in the last resort. “In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” By their testimony, the “one or two” disinterested brethren may afford protection to the innocent and light to the Church, so that it may act with unanimity and unerring certainty.

If all the efforts made by the aggrieved *alone*, and in conjunction with the “one or two” disinterested brethren, fail, the case assumes the character of a “public offence;” and the last step is to be taken by the offended.

5. “*Tell it to the Church.*” Of course, in the spirit of meekness, with the hope and prayer still that the offender may be reclaimed. This idea of reclamation is distinctly implied in the words following:—“If he *neglect to hear* the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican.” He may *not* neglect to hear the Church. What then? Even then, though he has been almost lost, you may “gain your brother.” It is imperative upon the Church, when a question of mere personal variance, involving no immorality, is

brought before it, to attempt in the first instance to reclaim the offender. It is her duty to examine into the facts, and to use her arguments and moral force to bring him to a sense of his wrong and to a reparation *of it*. Never, until she *speaks* to him and he deliberately and persistently “neglects to hear,” is she, by the ultimate resort, to make him bear to her the relation of “a heathen man and a publican.”

Of the effects of excommunication by a church, more will be said anon.

Treatment of public offenses.

How should public offences be treated? When one has been guilty of open immorality, shall “gospel steps” be taken? Is it demanded that a thief, or a drunkard, or a debauchee, should be approached first in private, and then in company with one or two others, before he is arraigned in presence of the Church? Certainly not; for no private reparation can atone for, or counteract the effects of, immoralities.

1. If he does not bring the matter up himself, he should be cited to appear and answer to the charge. In this arraignment, he should have every facility to meet the charge against him; for it does by no means follow that every one is guilty who has been accused. No one should be condemned without a hearing; and, to have a hearing, he must be in possession of all the counts of the indictment against him. He must have the privilege of confronting the witnesses, and of sifting the testimony against him, that he may be able to speak effectively and to the point in his own behalf. It is not meant, though, to be asserted here that a church should go through with all the formality observed by a court of justice, but simply that no one should be forced to a trial until he becomes fully informed of all the charges and has an opportunity to sift the evidence relied upon to convict. Excepting in extreme and very complicated cases, no written documents need be employed in the citation and trial. The arraigned may hear the charge for the first time as it may be announced orally, or read from the clerk’s record, in open conference. If he pleads not guilty, and desires time to prepare himself for the trial, all reasonable indulgence should be granted, and nothing pertaining to the case should be withheld from him.

It goes far, however, to show conscious guilt, if a church-member arraigned endeavors to quash proceedings by the plea that he had not been served with written processes. *Not until he asks for information, and for the postponement of his trial*, and is refused by the Church, has he any ground of complaint. Church-trials are designed not only to convict the guilty, but to clear the innocent who have been accused. An innocent man, then, so far from trying to embarrass the action of the Church in the premises, will do all in his power to facilitate such action. It is for the interest of the innocent that the Church promptly and thoroughly investigate the charges against him, that his innocence *may appear*, and that the confi-

dence of his brethren and of the world may be restored to him. And it goes far to prove, if not his guilt, at least a heart not right, for the accused to take offence at the arraignment or ascribe it to conspiracy against him.

2. If the arraigned is proved to be guilty of a gross offence against religion and morality, he should be at once, and without delay, expelled. "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Cor. v. 13. All will grant that this conclusion is correct in regard to such offenses as murder, fornication, theft, &c.; but they do not see that *railing*, covetousness, drunkenness, and extortion may not be dealt with more gently, and forgiven upon repentance and confession. The Apostle Paul, however, places them all in the same category with fornication, and prescribes the same treatment to them all in common. "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one you ought not to eat." 1 Cor. v. 11.

It is the opinion of some—and there may be force in it, though not perceived by the present writer—that in the case of drunkenness the first offence may be forgiven on repentance and confession; since in that instance the offender may have been "*overtaken* in a fault;" and that it takes a repetition of the act to show that he is properly a "*drunkard*." Be this as it may, just so soon as these and other gross crimes are proved upon one that is "called a brother," he should be withdrawn from.

1. For the sake of public morals and the reputation of the Church, she should testify unmistakably. This course would meet with approbation more heartily from no one than from the offender himself if he is a Christian; for to such the honor of the Master and the reputation of His Church are dearer than his own good name, or even than life itself. When a confession of sin and a profession of penitence are received as satisfactory, and the offender forgiven, the act may be misunderstood by the world; but when the member is cut off, there is no room to suppose that the Church views the offence as trivial and venial.

2. For the good of the offender himself, he should be excommunicated. If he is not a Christian, he should not be a member of the Church; if he is a Christian, excommunication will not harm him. Corrective discipline, even in its highest censures, is an act of kindness to the offender, and designed not to injure but to reform. Such was the effect of the discipline inflicted upon the incestuous man at Corinth. While undisturbed by his brethren and permitted to go on in sin with impunity, he seemed not to be aware of the enormity of his crime; but after expulsion he is brought to reflection and penitence. So that we find the apostle, who had demanded his exclusion, afterwards, on satisfactory evidence of his repentance and reformation, acting as his intercessor and begging his restoration. "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted of many. So that, contrariwise, ye ought rather to forgive him and comfort him; lest perhaps

such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that you would confirm your love towards him.”

3. As a warning to others, the Church should affix to gross crime unmistakably the mark of its reprobation.

Objection—But it may be objected, “Do not the Scriptures say, ‘If a brother confess his fault we should forgive him’?”

Ans.—To this it is answered, that the injunction refers exclusively to private or personal offences. “Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against *thee*, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against *thee* seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him.”

In public offences not involving gross immorality, a milder course may be pursued, and corrective discipline may be successful and complete short of excommunication.

What course is to be pursued in mixed offences? When *the act* is a public offence, and the *object affected* by it a brother, is it his duty to take “gospel steps”? When one willfully slanders his brother, or defrauds or steals from him, or violently assaults his person, or libelously publishes him, is he the less a liar, a defrauder, a thief, an infractor of the peace, and a libeler, because his victim happens to be a member of the Church? Suppose these acts had been perpetrated against one not a church-member: would they not have been criminal? Would not the Church have been bound to take cognizance of them? And if so, under what head of offences would she have classed them? If they are crimes against religion and morality when committed against an irreligious man, do they lose their nature when committed against a member of the Church? *Whatever may be counteracted, or removed, or atoned for, so that neither individuals nor the cause may be injured*, can be disposed of by private dealing. But gross public offences, whatever may be their combinations or objects, cannot be disposed of in that way. The brother trespassed upon may be, and doubtless is, under obligations to seek a private interview with the brother *who he believes* has willfully slandered, or defrauded, or stolen from him; since in all these things he may have been mistaken. He may even pursue a like course with one who has horsewhipped or libeled him, and bring them all to confession of their wrong, and to a tender of all the private reparation in their power. But would that relieve the Church from the obligation to discipline its members for the crimes against religion and morality contained in lying, in fraud, in seduction, in theft, in a breach of the peace by personal assault and libel? Nay, if the one trespassed upon in the ways indicated above concludes to take no action in the premises, and to bear his grievances in silence, would the Church, acquainted with the facts, be debarred by this from dealing with its members for lying, fraud, theft, &c.?

The answer to be given, then, to the question at the beginning of the

above paragraph, is, If *the act* is a gross offence against religion and morality, and *the object affected by it* a brother, it is to be dealt with as other gross offences that are purely “public,” whether the aggrieved takes “gospel steps” or not.

Thus it will be seen that in “mixed offences” *the nature of the sin* is the basis of its classification, and not merely the object against which it is committed. The “private” feature is merged in and swallowed up by the gross crime which constitutes the act. This is nothing novel. The same classification obtains in legal science. Sir Wm. Blackstone, in his Commentaries, book iv. chap. 1, p. 5, says, “Murder is an injury to the life of an individual; but the law of society considers principally the loss which the state sustains by being deprived of a member, and the pernicious example thereby set for others to do the like. Robbery may be considered in the same view: it is an injury to *private* property; but, were that all, a civil satisfaction in damages might atone for it: the *public* mischief is the thing for the prevention of which our laws have made it a capital offence. In these gross and atrocious injuries the private wrong is swallowed up in the public: we seldom hear any mention made of satisfaction to the individual, the satisfaction to the community being so very great. And, indeed, as the public crime is not otherwise avenged than by forfeiture of life and property, it is impossible afterwards to make any reparation for the private wrong; which can only be had from the body or goods of the aggressor.” In like manner, in the case of theft, seduction, murder, or other gross crimes, as the offence against religion and morality can in no other way be atoned for than by the expulsion of the offender, it is a matter of no importance, so far as it relates to the question of his continued church-membership, whether or not he renders satisfaction, if possible, to the individual his victim.

And it will be seen, also, that those that for convenience have been termed “mixed” do not constitute a distinct class, but are to be ranged under the head of “public offences” and treated accordingly.

CHAPTER III. QUESTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE PREVIOUS DISCUSSION.

Question.—1. SUPPOSE the aggrieved attempt to bring strictly private offences into the Church without taking “gospel steps:” what should be done?

Ans.—It is the duty of the pastor or other Moderator to inquire whether the Saviour’s directions have been followed, and, if he finds that they have not been, he should rule as out of order the introduction of the case. If the pastor should fail to discharge this duty, then it will be competent for any

member to raise the point of order, and to appeal from the decision of the chair, if *it* be in violation of the Saviour's rule. And the Church, when thus appealed to, is in duty bound to overrule by vote the decision of its presiding officer. This is said of offences exclusively that are *purely personal*,—when the act is not a crime against religion and morality, and the object affected by it is a brother. In “mixed offences,” where the act complained of is a gross immorality,—as theft, slander, seduction, fraud, personal violence, and libel,—it will not be out of order for the Church to entertain the charge though no “gospel steps” have been taken, since, as has been shown, these and the like gross offences against religion and morality are “public offences,” though they may have been committed against a church member.

But it may be asked, “May not the arraigned himself raise the point of order?” Most assuredly. “And if raised by him, how is it to be decided?” By the ruling of the Moderator first, and, if this be appealed from, by the vote of the Church. *And the decision of the Church is final.* “But if *he claims to think* it to be purely a private offence, and that, therefore, the proceedings are premature, is it not a great hardship and injustice to the accused for the Church to entertain the charge?” Assuredly not, *if he is innocent.* In our courts of justice, parties arraigned for crime pick flaws in the indictment, and endeavor to quash the proceedings on technical grounds, when they feel themselves in doubt as to their ability to meet the main issue successfully. But when they are satisfied that they are able to clear their character from aspersion before their fellow citizens, they waive all plea from informality of proceedings, and court a thorough investigation. It would be a great outrage to withhold from an arraigned man the charges alleged against him, or to press him to trial without giving him reasonable time to prepare for it; but a slight mistake in the technical wording of the indictment is neither outrage nor injustice to him,—nor would he avail himself of it to quash proceedings, *unless he felt conscious that he needed such a plea*, and placed a higher estimate upon a mere release from trial than upon his good name and standing among his fellows. In no respect can injustice be done to the accused by what he is pleased to consider a premature entertainment of the charge. He is either guilty or innocent of theft, or fraud, or personal violence, or libel, or other gross crime committed against another, a church member or not. If guilty, no arraignment after *the commission of that act* can be premature. If innocent, he cannot too soon be afforded an opportunity to free himself from the charge. And when one thus charged strives to divert attention from the indictment, and endeavors to fix it upon some alleged informality, he goes far to show to all discerning persons that he is conscious of an inability to meet the issue; and, to say the least, he excites in their minds a strong suspicion of his guilt.

In another connection the question will be discussed as to how far responsibility attaches to the arraigned when the Church, in the manage-

ment of his case, treats as “public” that which is purely a “private” case; and what in the premises are his duties to the cause of Christ.

Strictly private offences, however, should be ruled out of order when attempted to be brought into the Church without previous “gospel steps” resorted to ineffectually. If the complainant, through ignorance, attempts to introduce it, he should be kindly instructed as to his duty. If he acts thus with willful disregard of his obligations, he should be reproved and compelled to follow the Saviour’s rule.¹

Question.—2. Suppose the complainant drops the subject and takes no further action: what then?

Ans. 1.—If he silently bears his grievance and suppresses all resentment, making it not the occasion of disturbance, his patience and meekness (if he is influenced by these) is commendable; but he is guilty of sin in not obeying his Saviour and attempting to “gain his brother.”

Ans. 2.—If the variance continues, the Church may, and is in duty bound to, arraign both parties,—one for failing to follow the instructions of Christ, the other for his trespass; and both for being, by their wrangling, disturbers of the peace.

Question.—3. Whose duty is it to arraign a public offender?

Ans.—Any one who witnessed the act, or has heard the rumor of it, or has felt the effect of it. On no plea of obscurity, or youth, or sex, can church-

¹No one has written more discriminatingly and forcibly on Church discipline than Elder Joseph S. Baker. From him the present writer took his first lessons on the subject. Bro. Baker does not seem fully to sustain me in this position, but his views are worthy of consideration. He says:—

“There is one error . . . prevalent in our Churches which should be corrected. We allude to the opinion that a violation of the rule by the aggrieved, in bringing an offender before the Church before he has pursued the course prescribed by the Saviour, relieves the Church from the obligation to deal with the individual thus arraigned before them.” After reasoning forcibly against this, he lays down two propositions; the first of which is,

1. “A Church is bound to take cognizance of every manifest violation by its members of any of the laws of Christ’s kingdom, with which it becomes acquainted, whether the information of such violation is communicated in regular order or not.

“The reasons for this rule are obvious. The Church is required to set the seal of her disapprobation on every transgression of the law of God. Her obligation to do this is not made to depend, in the slightest degree, upon the means by which she arrives at a knowledge of the transgression; for the character of an offence is not affected in the least by the manner in which it is made known. The magistrate is as much bound to have a band of robbers arrested, when information of their nets of robbery is communicated by one of their own number who has turned a traitor, as when it is communicated by an honest and orderly citizen. And so is the Church as much bound to notice offences committed, when she receives her intelligence through one who is himself an offender, as when she receives it through the most harmless and exemplary of her members. So long as she is ignorant of the offences committed by her members, she is not chargeable with them; but the moment she is made acquainted with them, if she fails to adopt measures for calling the offenders to account, and for preventing the recurrence of like offences in future, she virtually sanctions those offences, bids the offenders God speed, becomes a partaker of their evil deeds, and renders herself amenable both to God and man.”—Periodical Library, Vol. I. No. 4 (1847), pp. 262, 263.

members excuse themselves for silence and inaction, while public offenders are wounding Christ in the house of His friends. Nothing said above, though, is designed to condemn those who, on account of obscurity, youth, or sex, prefer to put the facts into the hands of more aged and influential brethren, holding themselves in readiness to act as witnesses when called on.

Caution.—It may, however, in some cases, be best to see the offender first, before you act.

1. You may have been the only one who witnessed the deed. In that case, it would be best to ascertain whether he will acknowledge it. He may, when you arraign him, plead not guilty. Should he do so, and his previous character be unimpeached, you may place yourself and the Church in an embarrassing position. Your charge will be met by his denial; and there will be simply a question of veracity between you. Now, it is not impossible for a charge of gross immorality in overt act to be brought miraculously against an innocent person. Unless, then, you can present corroborating circumstances to sustain your allegation, in the event he will plead not guilty, painful as it may be, you had better remain silent, and wait until the developments of Providence shall further expose him. Instances have been known in which Churches have been compelled to excommunicate both the arraigner and arraigned from not being able to know whether the latter had been guilty or only maliciously slandered, and because of the irritation caused by the question of veracity. When more than one, however, are able to testify to the fact, or circumstances strongly corroborate the allegation, the offender need not be seen first.

2. By seeing the offender first, he may be induced to bring the matter forward himself, and thus relieve others from an unpleasant and sometimes hazardous duty.

3. In the case of a report to the disadvantage of a brother, it is especially important that you see him first before you act. The report you have heard may not be general rumor, but a falsehood of limited circulation and recent origin. For you to announce this in the public meeting of the Church will be to give it a wider circulation. It is always proper, then, for you first to put your brother in possession of the report circulating to his discredit, and aid him to trace it up to its source. If, after this, the rumor increases, and seems to be well founded, and the brother tries to hush it up,—declining to take any further action in the premises,—it is your duty to name it in the Church, that a committee of investigation may be appointed.

CHAPTER IV. THE FEELING AND ACTIONS APPROPRIATE TO A PIOUS MAN WHO HAS BEEN UNJUSTLY ACCUSED.

The fate of the Saviour of the world is a striking proof that innocence is no infallible protection against unjust accusation and condemnation. From the

world the Christian is prepared to expect tribulation; for he that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; and if they call the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they those of his household! But in the Church of God he feels secure. From his brethren, children of the same heavenly Father and subjects of the same divine grace, he expects nothing but brotherly sympathy, encouragement, and protection. But Paul has told us of perils among false brethren; and how often are a man's enemies those of his own household!

It is not impossible for a man of true piety and unexceptionable deportment to find himself, through misapprehension, malice, or jealousy, unjustly arraigned before his brethren.

Sometimes he is a victim of PREJUDICE. His brethren have been taught in advance to believe him capable of wrong; and his acts, imperfectly understood, and seen through the medium of prejudice, may be so colored and distorted as to seem hideous. Certain causes, acting upon a peculiar nervous constitution, may produce effects in speech and manner that may appear equivocal; or he may be the victim of a train of circumstances which may seem to implicate him in a crime that his soul abhors.

Purity of heart and life is no infallible protection against the machinations and the tongue of MALICE. Nay, this very purity may be the occasion to arouse the vindictiveness of the vile and wicked. A holy life is a standing reproof against their depravity; and, while it deserves to command their respect, it as often excites their resentment. Nor is this feeling confined to the world. Often—with regret it is confessed—do the worldly-minded members of the Church feel resentment against those whose uniform consistency is a constant reproof to their laxity of principles and irregularity of deportment. In times of apostasy and defection from the truth, those who adhere to their principles, and lift up their protest against prevailing laxity, are sure to be the victims of persecution. And if their remonstrances cannot be silenced in any other way, there will not be lacking those who will suborn witnesses to sustain any accusation that may be plausibly brought against them. Especially is this true if, in their zeal for the truth, they may have been betrayed into any indiscretion of word or act.

It is sometimes the case that one becomes the victim of JEALOUSY AND ENVY. His talents, the influence he has with his brethren, the attention he attracts from the public, and his success in his enterprises, arouse the base passions of envy and jealousy in little minds of large pretensions and slender merit. The homage rendered to the one is by the other considered as so much tribute unjustly withheld from himself; and the success of the former, blighting the prospects of his competitor for pre-eminence, is considered by him a mortal offence. For this, all unconsciously to himself, the successful man is held personally responsible. Jealousy and envy first ripen into hatred, and hatred gives birth to conspiracy and intrigue. The

shadow cast upon the interests of the jealous man can be removed only by leveling in the dust the object that intervenes between him and the light.

Thus, all unconsciously to himself, one may have an enemy to watch him, to garble his sayings, to pervert his actions, and to weave around him meshes that he may find it hard to break. Thus, as has been said, it is not impossible for one deserving the love and confidence of his brethren to find himself, through misapprehension, malice, or jealousy, an object of distrust, and arraigned before the Church for crimes his soul abhors. To such an one, excepting his consciousness of innocence, the only consolation is, that the Lord reigns. When such a lot as this befalls a pious man, what are his feelings and deportment?

1. He submits himself to the divine will, and patiently accepts the position assigned him. He acknowledges the providence of God in all things; and, though he knows he is the victim of misconception or of wickedness, he accepts it as the divine will that he should be placed in these trying circumstances. He may, and doubtless does, find it difficult to realize that he is arraigned under grave charges before his brethren; but he takes consolation in knowing that God has some wise purpose to accomplish in him or by him, and that He will make the wrath of man praise Him, and the remainder of wrath will restrain. You will not find him chafing under his condition; but with strong faith he lays hold of the promise that no temptation shall befall him except such as he shall be able to bear; and he even rejoices if it should be the Lord's will that he should suffer shame for His name. Like his fellow-servant Paul, he takes consolation in knowing that his bonds will somehow or other tend to the furtherance of the gospel. To the Lord's will he bows with humble submission; and he meekly takes the place of an accused man assigned him by His providence.

2. He will in all proper ways defend himself against the charges alleged against him. This he owes not only to himself, but to his Master, whose truth is suffering in his person, and who designs that His cause shall be promoted by his good name. But,—

3. He will be careful to refrain from an indulgence of the spirit of his persecutors, and from a resort to the means employed by them. Is he reviled? He reviles not again. He has no grievous words to utter that stir up anger; but he prays for them that spitefully use and persecute him. Enormous as is the sin of his enemies, like the first Christian martyr, he prays that the Lord might not lay it to their charge. Is he the victim of misapprehension, or do circumstances seem to fasten guilt upon him? He recognizes the right and duty of his brethren to prosecute the investigation they have commenced. Nay, he encourages them to proceed, because in this way alone can he be relieved, and because he prefers to be unjustly condemned rather than that the sin which seems to attach to him should go unrebuked. Placing the best construction upon the course of his brethren of the Church, he labors candidly to remove their misapprehensions, or to unravel the

meshes which circumstances have woven around him. His traducers, perhaps, have made appeals to prejudice to prepare the public mind for the favorable reception of the charge. Shall he meet them on their own ground, considering that the end justifies the means? As soon as he receives intimation of their intentions, shall he make an appeal to the public through the newspapers, or by advertisements set up in conspicuous places, or by letters missive to all the neighboring churches, to be read in open conference? Shall he thus in advance assail the motives of these men, wicked though they be? Shall he inform the world that a conspiracy is formed against him for his destruction, and that the Church is under the control of the conspirators,—the willing instrument for the accomplishment of their nefarious designs? Shall he make an appeal to the sympathy of the public and of his brethren in the churches around, on the plea that he is to be made a victim on account of his piety or his faithfulness to sentiments they hold dear? His enemies, as he thinks, through prejudice, have in advance arrayed the Church against him. Shall he, to meet them by a like appeal to prejudice and public sympathy, attempt to array an outside influence of church-members and men of the world to OVERAWE the Church? Shall he form a party of outsiders to clamor in advance against the threatened arraignment, to attend at the trial, and, with lowering looks and disorderly utterances, to stand around him as his “friends,” and, if the worst should happen, and he be expelled, to unite, with him at their head, in a combined assault upon the Church, with the intention to annihilate it, and, after accomplishing, as they suppose, their purposes, to march off with flying colors, proclaiming that not he, but the Church, has been excommunicated, and that he is the most proper church member of them all? These are actions that are to be expected, not from a pious but a wicked man, who has no defense to make for his crimes, or who desires to organize for himself a sect that can sustain him in his wickedness and give him a victory over his hated rivals, or who can impart to him factitious greatness, influence, or pecuniary gain.

4. An innocent man arraigned is anxious that God’s cause and Christ’s Church should suffer as little as possible, preferring to be immolated himself rather than that principles dear to his heart should be subverted. He values his reputation as dearer than life; but he is not willing that this should be vindicated at the sacrifice of the principles and the forms that Christ has prescribed to be operative in such cases. He desires earnestly to be acquitted, and to retain his place among God’s people; but even this high boon he will not accept at the price of the establishment of such principles in the churches of Christ as will make it impossible to discipline designing and wicked men. Far better, in his estimation, that he should be unjustly excommunicated, than that the churches should in effect give up the power to withdraw fellowship from all offenders, excepting from the weak and helpless. Never will he seek to obtain release on the ground that the Church has

not the power of putting away from Christ's professing people the wicked man who may be artful and influential. A pious man who is unjustly accused desires to be justified before the Church and the world; but he uses only the forms and appeals only to the principles that Christ has instituted, and which have been sanctioned by immemorial usage. He acknowledges the jurisdiction of the Church over him, and will accept of no justification before the world in terms, excepting that which he can obtain through the Church. And if, after all his lawful efforts to relieve himself, he should be finally condemned, he meekly submits to the Lord's will of purpose, knowing that He who has promised that all things shall work together for his good has some wise purpose to accomplish in him or by him. Suppose his enemies do glory over him, or the thoughtless point the finger of scorn at him: better these, infinitely, than triumph and notoriety and emolument at the expense of truth and a clear conscience. God not infrequently permits his servants to pass through the fiery furnace, not only that the dross may be consumed, but that the pure GOLD MAY APPEAR. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

CHAPTER V.

WHAT IS "THE CHURCH" TO WHICH THE NEW TESTAMENT GIVES JURISDICTION OVER OFFENCES?

THE evangelists record but two instances in which the Saviour used the word "church." In each of these instances He employed it in a different sense. In Matt. xvi. 18, referring to the confession of Peter, He says, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it;" and in Matt. xviii. 17, "Tell it to the church," &c. The most casual glance will show that He could not have had in view the same object each time. The inspired penmen of the New Testament make the same distinction in its use. A careful collation of the passages in which the word is found will show that, in its relation to the kingdom of Christ, it has two meanings.

1. It is used to express the whole company of those who are saved by Him,—from righteous Abel down to the last one who shall be redeemed by His precious blood. The following passages may be cited to sustain this meaning: "Gave him to be head over all things to the church." Eph. i. 22. "Unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end." Eph. iii. 21. (Here, this glory is to Him in the church in heaven, world without end,—long after all local churches shall cease to exist.) "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." Eph. iii. 10. "The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church." Eph. v. 23, &c. "But ye have come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innu-

merable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the first born which are written in heaven." Heb. xii. 22. Other passages of a like nature may be quoted; but let these suffice.

The Greek word *ecclesia*, which is translated "church," signifies an assembly. It is objected that it cannot with propriety be applied to the whole company of believers, since they never have met in an assembly on earth. The last passage quoted, however, meets this objection, by suggesting that the place of assembling is not earth, but heaven.

The constituents of this assembly are those who have been called by God's grace, regenerated by God's Spirit, and redeemed by Christ's blood. From the time of Abel they have been gathering together to the place of meeting. In all time, and from all regions, they have been converging to the heavenly Jerusalem; and when the last of the redeemed shall be prepared to answer to his name, they will constitute in fact what they always have in God's purpose, the general assembly and church universal of Christ gathered together in heaven.

This cannot be the body to whom the Saviour has given jurisdiction over offences. It possesses visibility excepting in the persons of the individual members of it who so live as to show the power of Divine grace; it contains no external organization or officers; and it never will meet together in time. It is maintained by some that the church universal is composed of the aggregate of Baptist churches,—that the Baptist denomination and the church universal are synonymous terms. To this opinion there are the following difficulties:

1st. This would be to include in the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, some who have never been converted, and who will finally perish. Every one will grant that many, if not all, the Baptist churches, may contain persons who will live in hypocrisy or self delusion, and die in impenitence and go to perdition.

2nd. This would be to exclude from the general assembly and church of the first born many who have been converted and saved in heaven. On this principle, all the Old Testament worthies would be excluded from the universal church; though we are told that Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven. These and multitudes of others now in glory died before the formation of the first Baptist church in Jerusalem. On this principle, the thief on the cross will be excluded, though the Savior said to him, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise;" and even John the Baptist, the Forerunner of Christ, would be shut out; since he never was baptized and never was a member of a Baptist church.

If Christ was made head over all things only to the aggregate of Baptist churches, then He does not and never did bear that relation to Abraham and a vast multitude of others, though they were redeemed by His precious blood.

3d. This would be to use the term "church" in the sense in which we deny it to the Romish hierarchy and other organizations of vast territorial extent.

The Baptist denomination, since the dispersion of the disciples in

Jerusalem, never did and never will meet together in one assembly on earth. If, then, the Baptist denomination in the world, which cannot meet together in one assembly, can be called a church, how can we deny to the Methodist Episcopal organization, or the Presbyterian organization, the name of church, on the plea that they cannot thus meet together? The Baptist (and we think the scriptural) local organization is called a church, because it constitutes an assembly capable of meeting together in one place. Upon what principles, then, can we call the Baptists denomination a church, when it is composed of distinct churches, that by the very theory of their organization must remain distinct, and which will lose their distinctive characteristics and become annihilated when they are merged into one general organization? If they are merged together in fact, they are annihilated in fact; if the merging is a mere mental conception, then the mental conception is an annihilation of the true scriptural conception. According to the signification of the word ECCLESIA, it is as easy to conceive of the church or assembly of all the Romanists in the world as of the church or assembly of all the Baptist churches in the world. Nay, easier, since in their case nothing prevents but the physical impossibility, while in the case of the Baptist churches to this physical impossibility are added the thousands and thousands of barriers afforded by the organization of each. An assembly composed of individuals, however impossible, may be conceived; but what imagination can picture an assembly whose components are local churches? But

4th. If it is correct in any sense to call the aggregate of Baptist churches A church, where and what is the general organization? A number of machines placed in contact side by side do not become one vast machine: so the array of thousands and thousands of Baptist churches do not in fact or mental conception constitute one general church. They still remain what they were before,—the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are organizations; but where is the organization *par excellence*? Where is the head of this church, either in the form of Pope or Bishop, or Pastor—where its place of meeting and what its functions?—Let the constituents of the church universal be regenerated persons, the place of meeting heaven, and the period when they shall completely assemble, the time when all Christ's redeemed people shall gather together in one, and we can perceive the propriety of the term applied to it,—“the general assembly and church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.” Then can we see the pertinence and truth of the apostle's declaration when he says, “Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it;—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,*” Eph. v. 25-27. Christ's church universal is composed exclusively of regenerated persons from all Christian organizations, and from no organizations, who have no external bond of union, and who will never all meet together until they constitute the general assembly above.

But this cannot be the church to whom Christ gives the jurisdiction of offences.

2. The word “church” is used again in the New Testament to designate a local society, composed of those, and those only, who profess regeneration and faith in Christ, and who have been immersed upon a profession of that faith,—who are able to meet together in one place, and who observe the ordinances and maintain the worship of God. This is the only external organization which the New Testament designates by the term “Church.” To these local churches the followers of Christ unite themselves, securing first their fellowship by convincing them that they have believed with the heart unto righteousness, and submitting to the ordinance of baptism, which is an indispensable prerequisite to membership. These bodies in the management of their internal affairs Christ makes *independent* of each other and of all the world besides; and to these he delegates *sovereignty* over their members, enjoining them to watch over them in love, to instruct them in the truth as it is in Jesus, to comfort the feeble minded, to warn the unruly, to restore the wandering, and, if need be, to put away from among themselves wicked persons. It is the *Local Church*, then, to which Christ has given jurisdiction over offences.

CHAPTER VI. THE RELATION THE PASTOR SUSTAINS TO CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE.

What relation does the pastor of the church bear to corrective discipline?—and what are his duties in the premises? There is no question more important than this. Often have difficulties been aggravated, and churches torn to pieces, because pastors did not have a clear conception of the relations they sustain to cases of discipline. The question at the head of this paragraph will be answered, 1st, Upon the supposition that the pastor is, himself, involved in the difficulty; and, 2d, Upon the supposition that he is free from entanglement.

1. Should the pastor be involved as one of the parties at variance, or be charged with a public offence, what should be the course of proceeding?

Ans.—Precisely that which is prescribed in the case of a private member of the church. He should lay aside his authority as presiding officer, and take his seat among his brethren; for surely no man would assert the claim to preside in his own case. If he has a private grievance against one of his brethren, he is to pursue the “gospel steps” prescribed to others; and if, in the last resort, he tells his grievance to the Church, he is to stand aside, and permit the Church to appoint, temporarily, an officer in his place. If he is charged with a “public offence,” he is to be dealt with like a private member, with the single exception that an accusation is not to be *received* against

him except from the mouth of two or three witnesses. The question whether a minister can be dealt with and expelled without the intervention of a Council or Presbytery will be discussed in a succeeding number.

2. Upon the supposition that the pastor is himself free from entanglement, what relation does he sustain to corrective discipline? This question will be answered, 1st, In relation to cases of "private" dealing; and, 2d, In relation to cases of "public" dealing.

1st. What is the pastor's duty in regard to cases of variance between brethren? To this it is answered,—

(1.) To instil into his members in advance, by his ministry, such principles as to *prevent* variances; and after their occurrence, to enlighten them with such instructions from the Scriptures as to show them how to manage them according to the mind of Christ. Ministers of the gospel should see to it, that their members, young as well as old, are thoroughly instructed in regard to scriptural polity; and that in this they are perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

(2.) It is his duty to see that every case of "private" dealing, if brought into the Church at all, be introduced according to the Saviour's directions.

(3.) It is his duty to maintain the strictest neutrality as between the parties. *Questions of order* he is to decide: *principles* which are applicable to the case, he should announce in conference, and in the pulpit, with boldness and plainness. But as soon as he begins to decide upon questions of fact, or to announce as to who, in his opinion, is guilty or who innocent, he trenches upon the prerogative of the Church, which alone has the right to decide upon such points. He should keep profoundly locked in his breast his opinions of the facts, and of the guilt or innocence of the contestants. Just so soon as he indicates an opinion, he ceases to be an umpire between those at variance, and the moderator of the Church, and descends to be the head of one of the parties which may be formed or forming in the Church. The pastoral relation, with ministers who violate this principle, can never survive more than one serious church difficulty.

(4.) *Where all believe that he is in fact a neutral as between the contending brethren*, the pastor has it in his power to bring the pulpit to bear with telling effect upon the adjustment of the difficulty. And this he should not fail to do. In serious difficulties, he should direct his attention to the accomplishment of two objects: *First*, to prevent the formation of two parties in the Church, with the members at variance at the head of each respectively; and, *second*, to make the combatants themselves ashamed and tired of their relations. In every case of variance of long standing, where both parties are wrong in feeling and equally matched in strength, the attempt of each inevitably will be to array to himself in advance as many partisans in the Church as possible. This the pastor in the pulpit can prevent. It should be his purpose to isolate the case,—to fence the contestants off to themselves, and, if they must fight, to make them fight it out alone. To accom-

plish this, he should never in the pulpit refer directly to the case. This would be very *malapropos*. The Scriptures abound in principles which he can so discuss as to make the pious members of the Church afraid to involve themselves, or by their act to encourage either of the parties in his course. The particular case should never be mentioned; but the remarks should be so directed as to graze along by it, and suggest it to the mind of the hearer. When the members of the church have been thoroughly drilled into neutrality and silence, then the case becomes more simple; and the pastor can bring all the artillery of the pulpit to bear upon the individuals at variance. To these we should give no rest, and afford no consolation. They should not be permitted ever to retire from the sanctuary without being wounded and bleeding. They should be made to feel that the gospel has nothing for them but condemnation. To accomplish this, no little address is necessary. The pastor should never in the pulpit refer to the case in terms. This would be a personality and offensive. But the contending brethren should be compelled to believe that, somehow or other, he is preaching to nobody but to them; and yet they must find nothing in his remarks to complain of him about. What he says must be in the form of principles equally applicable to both in common, so that the blow leveled may not be weakened by the suspicion that he is discriminating for or against either. In this way, *if they are thoroughly convinced that the pastor has not taken sides in the issue between them*, and they are Christians, it will not be long before they become heartily sick of the position they occupy, and ready to hail with pleasure a proposition of some mutual friend to mediate between them. In the management of cases of this kind, time, prudence, and faithfulness are all-important.

2. What relation does the pastor sustain to cases of “public” dealing? The same principles that are to govern him in private dealing hold good here. The reader may make the application for himself. It will be enough to say that *it is never his duty to arraign one before the Church*, or to charge him in private with any offence he has not confessed, unless he (the pastor) witnessed the commission of the act. In the pulpit and the chair, the pastor bears, in many respects, the same relation to the Church in the trial of public offenders, that the judge upon the bench does to the court in the trial of criminals. It is the duty and prerogative of others to arraign the offender, to array the testimony, and to prosecute to conviction. To the pastor it is reserved to see that the trial is commenced and prosecuted upon gospel principles. From the beginning to the end, he is to intimate no opinion, publicly or privately, of the guilt or innocence of the accused who pleads not guilty; but to hold the scales of justice even. The Saviour has devolved upon His *Churches*, and not upon His ministers, the responsibility and the duty of condemning and putting away from them wicked persons. If, however, the Church permits immoralities to be perpetrated by its members with impunity, it is the prerogative and the duty of the pastor—avoiding personalities—to give a scriptural delineation of the crimes

committed; to hold them up to public reprobation; and to give the Church no rest until it is willing to do its duty. And all this, too, without saying in terms that the crime has been committed by any of his members, or tolerated by his Church.

In answer, then, to the question, What relation does the pastor sustain to a case of discipline? it is said,

1. He has entire control of all the *principles* that are operative in the case; and he should announce them on all proper occasions from the pulpit and the chair.

2. He has nothing to do with the *facts*, or with the guilt or innocence of parties; and he should keep profoundly silent on these, giving no one occasion to infer what his opinions are. By this means,—

1st. He will be an umpire between the parties—and he can gain unobstructed access to them for the gospel principles with which he would influence their judgements and their consciences.

2d. He will retain an influence with all which he can wield for the good of the church in the progress of the trial.

3d. He will avoid the formation of a faction against him, which may embitter his existence, cripple his influence, and terminate in the severance of the pastoral relation.

CHAPTER VII. DEDUCTIONS FROM PREVIOUS PRINCIPLES— CHURCH SOVEREIGNTY AND INDEPENDENCE

DEDUCTION 1.—Local churches have exclusive jurisdiction over their members. This proposition asserts two things:—first, a local church has jurisdiction over its members; and second, this jurisdiction belongs to it exclusively. But they can both be proved by the same process. Here there is no room for abstract reasoning. The only proof admissible is that derived from the New Testament. To the New Testament alone, then, let the appeal be made. To the churches belong exclusive jurisdiction over their member, because,—

1. The Saviour *gave* them such jurisdiction. This is clearly implied in His directions to the offended brother, “Tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Matt. xviii. 17.

2. Paul *acknowledges* this jurisdiction when he exhorts the Corinthians to discipline the incestuous man. “Do not ye judge them that are within? [*i.e.* your own members.] Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” 1 Cor. v. 12, 13.

3. In the Revelations the Saviour *commends* one church for exercising it. To the church at Ephesus He commands John to write, “I know thy

works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." Rev. ii. 2-6.

4. He *condemns* other churches for not exercising it, and enforcing discipline. To the church at Pergamos He says, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to thee quickly," &c. Rev. ii. 14, 15, 16. To the church at Thyatira He says, "Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." Rev. ii. 20.

Now, jurisdiction implies supremacy and power. If "that woman Jezebel" could have refused to be tried, or in other ways to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Church over her, then the church at Thyatira could have pleaded that it lacked the power to call her to account; or if others, either churches, church officers, or committees, had joint jurisdiction, the Church might have shifted the responsibility, and pleaded that she had been disabled by the opposition or indifference of others. No. It was the duty of the Church to restrain, or to put away to the professed followers of Christ, wicked persons; and the Church was vested with the power to do so. Hence the condemnation passed by the Saviour *upon her and her alone*. Under Christ, every local church has supreme jurisdiction over its members. It can, without permission asked of an offender, or of any other individuals or organizations in the world, arraign him, try him, condemn him, and, if need be, expel him. This jurisdiction is commonly expressed by the term *sovereignty*. Against the use of this term, of late, strenuous objection has been urged. This objection may be leveled either against the appositeness of the term to convey the idea, or else against the idea itself designed to be conveyed by it.

First.—Why is not the term an appropriate one? It is answered, "It is absurd to call that a *sovereign* body which is *subject* in all things. Christ is the only King in Zion, and, therefore, the only sovereign." This objection is urged by those who grant and maintain that every church is *independent*. The so-called independence of the churches, and the consequences drawn from it, constitute the main ground of their arguments against church sovereignty. Now, upon the same principles upon which they repudiate sovereignty, how easy will it be to show that there can be no such thing as independence. If the Church cannot be sovereign because it is subject to Christ, then it cannot be independent, either, because it is dependent upon Christ in all things. So, you see, it is as broad as it is long; and if there is no

sovereignty, then there is no independence either. Upon the principle of the objections there is not now, and never has been, a *sovereign State* in the world; for God reigns supreme, the only absolute sovereign in the universe. In relation to God, all nations are subject and dependent; but in relation to their subjects and to one another they are sovereign and independent. So gospel churches, in relation to Christ, are both subject and dependent in all things; but in relation to their own members and to one another they are both sovereign and independent. So it will be seen that not absolute and incoherent, but *delegated, sovereignty*, is claimed for gospel churches. And all that is meant is, that under the law of Christ, in the enforcement of discipline, they have supreme jurisdiction over their disorderly members.

Second.—But it may be that the objection is leveled at the idea legitimately conveyed by the term “sovereign.” Will any one maintain that a church has no right to arraign, try, and expel an offender, that in these things her members are not *subject* to her? Will any one maintain that it is optional with the member whether or not he will submit to a trial, when arraigned on charges before his church, and that a church, when endeavoring to put away from her number a wicked person, cannot succeed, unless she obtain his consent, and the consent of those that are without? If so, then is there no such thing as *corrective church discipline*. Members may withdraw from the church, but there can be no such thing as withdrawing fellowship from them; and excommunication will mean nothing more than that the disorderly member has given his consent to relieve the church from any further responsibility for him. If churches have not the Power to deal with and excommunicate disorderly persons without their consent, then, when the Saviour instructed the offended to carry the offender before the church, He but MOCKED HIM; when He praised the church at Ephesus for trying the false apostles, He gave them credit for that which was but TEMERITY and PRESUMPTION; and when He chided Pergamos and Thyatira for tolerating wicked persons, He *unjustly held them accountable for that over which they had no control*. It was their misfortune, and not their fault, that these disorderly persons were retained, since, according to the supposition, they had not the *power* to put them away. Surely, on reflection, it must be granted that, under Christ, every local church, in enforcing discipline, has supreme control of its offending members—that, in administering the laws of Christ, it has the power to discipline its members without asking the consent of them or of anybody else.

Sovereignty and independence are not synonymous terms. In an earthly kingdom, *sovereign*, as a term, is the correlative of *subject*, and implies the power to *govern*, either under law or without it, as the sovereign may be limited or absolute in power. *Independence* in a State marks its relations not to its own people, but to *other States*, and signifies *freedom from control by other States*. So church sovereignty marks the relation the church bears, not to other churches, but to its own members, and signifies *her*

power to govern them, under the laws of Christ. Church independence marks the relation that the church sustains, not to her members, but to other churches, and signifies *her freedom from their control*. The *sovereignty* of a church is subverted, when her members successfully rebel against her authority; as when a member under charges refuses to be tried, and successfully tears himself free from her jurisdiction. The *independence* of a church is infringed upon when other churches, associations, or councils, either voluntarily, or at the instigation of her recusant member, interfere with her discipline, or otherwise attempt forcibly to control her. Under Christ, a local church is both sovereign and independent. It is not claimed, however, that she has the power to make laws. It is granted and maintained that Christ is the only law giver, and that all that is left for the Church to do, in the case of offences, is to administer and execute the law. It has no legislative power; but Christ has invested it with *judicial and executive powers*.

First.—The Church is invested by Christ with the power to arraign and try its members.

Question 1.—“But may not a member refuse to be tried?”

Ans.—He may SAY he refuses; and so may a citizen under the jurisdiction of one of our courts say he will not heed a citation. But what will be the result? If the suit be a civil one, and he refuses to appear, either in person or by attorney, it goes against him by default; if it be a criminal one, then one of two things will inevitably happen: either he will fall into the hands of the power he endeavors to elude, and be tried anyhow, or he becomes a fugitive from his country. A church-member in disorder may say he refuses to be tried; but if the church be true to Christ, to herself, and to the culprit, he will be tried notwithstanding.

Question 2.—“Suppose he does actually refuse to be tried: what then?”

Ans.—He only adds to his other sins those of contumacy and rebellion. “He neglects to hear the church” in its citations; and if he were innocent in all things else, persisting in this attitude, she is bound to make him bear the relation to her of “an heathen man and a publican.” There is not a church in Christendom that would not feel itself in duty bound to expel one maintaining this attitude, whatever may be his characteristics in other respects.

Question 3.—“But suppose the arraigned differs from the Church in regard to the kind of offence and the method of proceeding?”

Ans.—The church is the only judge of the law and the fact; and her decision is final. Either the church or the arraigned is to decide all questions raised. If the arraigned, then no guilty person could be punished; for he would always quash proceedings on some plea. In the language of Bro.

J. S. Baker, in another connection, "Satan and his subjects are ever fruitful in inventions. An offender, therefore, will seldom want for a plausible objection to every rule of discipline that is applicable to his case, even though such be expressly given in Scripture." (p. 270.) In a previous number, it was shown that, in no event could injustice be done to an innocent man, if the church rule his offence to be "public," when he thinks it to be strictly "private." But it may be asked, "Is not something due the cause of Christ from an innocent man accused? and does he escape responsibility and sin, if he permits the church to go on in violation of the law of Christ?" To this it is answered, that if he raises the point of order, and the church overrule him, not he, but the church, is responsible. Whatever sin there may be in the sight of God and man, he is free from it. But, besides, what else can he do to stay proceedings, without himself committing a greater sin than that he so conscientiously protests against? Shall he conscientiously attempt to arrest proceedings by rebelling against the authority Christ has committed to His Church, and refusing to be tried any further? Strange conscientiousness that, which attempts to prevent another from committing a sin by perpetrating a greater sin itself! And, besides, conscientiousness in this connection can with difficulty be distinguished from an attempt to evade justice. This is precisely the course a wicked man would pursue,—one who is fighting for victory, or to thwart an adversary in the church,—if he dared to do so, and was convinced that he had a sufficient number outside of the church to sustain him. A man does not show his conscientiousness by acting on the principle, "Let us do evil that good may come."

Question 4.—"But does not a church that rejects the law of Christ as laid down in Matt. xviii. cease to be a church of Christ, and is not the member released from all obligations to it?"

Ans.—Please stick to the original proposition. The case before us is this:—On a point raised by the arraigned, *the church thinks* the offence comes under 1 Cor. v., while *he thinks* it comes under Matt. xviii. Here the church rejects not the law, *but the offender's interpretation of it*. The most that can be said, then, is that the church has willfully or inadvertently misapplied the law. The latter will always, in a judgment of charity, be ascribed to her. In "mixed offences," (see Chap. I. of this series,) where the act is a crime against religion and morality, and the object of it a brother, it is always easy for an offender who is a designing man, or whose head is confused, to mystify the minds of others by raising a point of this kind. Bear in mind, however, that, according to the supposition, the church does not avowedly reject the law of Christ, but only commits an error in its application. If, then, the objection contained in your question has any force, see to what it brings us. See what is the general principle that must be deduced for the offender to stand on and be sustained in his rebellion against the

church. It is this:—*Whenever a church commits an error, it becomes annihilated.* On this principle, there is no church now in the world; for all have, during their existence, made mistakes and committed errors. We are happy, however, to know from the Scriptures that such an effect does not follow from such a cause, and that the world is not in this sad and irretrievable condition. The church at Corinth for a long time permitted an incestuous man to remain quiet and undisturbed in her communion; and division and party spirit raged within her borders. Some were for Paul, and some for Apollos, and some for Cephas, and some for Christ. Here were grave errors, serious omissions of duty, and reprehensible sins. Was the church at Corinth annihilated? Paul did not seem to think so. And we nowhere read that the incestuous man, when arraigned, raised this point, and barred off the infliction of the penalty due to his crimes by declaring the church annihilated. Against the majority of “the seven churches which are in Asia,” Christ brings serious accusations. To one He says, “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love;” two others He chides because they retain among themselves disorderly and wicked persons; to another He says, “I have not found thy works perfect before God.” “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead;” and to another still He brings the charge of lukewarmness, threatening to spew it out of His mouth. Yet His apostle, in addressing these very things to them, styles them “the seven churches which are in Asia.” It cannot be true, then, that when a church commits an error in the application of the law in Matt. xviii., or in any other way, it becomes annihilated.

But suppose we grant, for the sake of the argument that the commission of an error by her will annihilate the church: then the question comes up, who is to decide that an error has been committed, and that the church has been annihilated? The arraigned man? If so, what designing and wicked persons can be tried? How easy will it be for an unscrupulous man to join issue with the church on some point he may raise, whether pertinently or not, and thus annihilate the church and ward off from himself the retribution due to his crimes! How many criminals arraigned before our courts of justice would be condemned, if it was the prerogative of the prisoner at the bar to decide all the points of law raised by his counsel, with whom he is in collusion? Nay, more: what prospect would there be of enforcing the criminal laws of the country, if the prisoner at the bar had the power to disband and annihilate the court whenever IT differed from him in the interpretation of law? Whenever one arraigned before a church makes such a plea as this, it proves nothing more than that he has no better plea to urge.

On the subject of the right and duty of a church, when even a purely “private” case has been informally brought before it, Bro. Joseph S. Baker speaks conclusively and forcibly as follows:—

“A. charges B. with trespasses committed against himself, before he pursues the course prescribed by the Saviour. B., in return, charges A. with a

violation of the rule to which we have referred, and pleads, perhaps, that the church has no right to deal with him, as the case was informally brought before it. Such a plea is evidently invalid. The truth is, they are both offenders, and the church is bound to investigate and to act on the cases of both. But, as she cannot act on both simultaneously, the question may arise, which case should be first taken up? We answer, unhesitatingly, the case of B.; and that for two reasons: 1st. Because the offence of B. was committed prior to that of A., and was first brought to the notice of the church. 2d. Because A's offence grew out of that of B. Properly, therefore, to adjudicate the case of A., we must acquaint ourselves with those circumstances in the conduct of B. which tended to aggravate or palliate the offence of the former. But to do this it would be necessary to enter fully into the investigation of the conduct of B. The case is as clear as the sun in a cloudless sky at noonday.

"We have frequently known churches to dismiss cases indefinitely, because there was some irregularity in the manner in which they were brought before them. These generally prove, too, FINAL dismissals. If we are right in the views expressed in the preceding part of this article, that church is wrong which pursues either of these courses. 'He that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' By parity of reasoning, that church which knows of the existence of an evil in it, and neglects to correct it promptly, must be viewed as guilty before God.

"When an individual is charged with criminal conduct, if, instead of replying to the charges brought against him, he endeavors to criminate others, he affords strong presumptive evidence of his own guilt. He acts upon the same principle with the thief, who, when the officer of justice and the mob are at his heels, raises the cry, and cries loudest of all, 'Stop thief! stop thief! 'His principle is to evade justice by diverting attention from himself to some other individual. To prevent your plucking the beam out of his own eye, he would set you to picking at the mote in his brother's eye.'"—*Periodical Library*, Vol. 1, No. IV. (1847), pp. 264, 265.

It must be granted that the church possesses judicial power,—that it has the right to arraign and try its disorderly members.

In the last number it was shown that the Church, in the exercise of delegated sovereignty, has the right to arraign and try its disorderly members; and that such members can in no way escape her jurisdiction. To what was said there, it might be added, If the Church has not such jurisdiction as will enable it to arraign and try its disorderly members, then one of two things must be inevitably true: either the disorderly members are irresponsible and can be arraigned by nobody, or else they are subject to a jurisdiction outside of the Church. If the former be true, then the Scriptures authorize no corrective discipline, and there is no remedy for disorder and crime. If the latter be true, then to whom does such jurisdiction belong? To preachers and committees? Then should brethren cease their denunciations of

Methodist circuit-riders and their committees for exercising this very prerogative. Does this jurisdiction belong to other churches, to associations, or to councils, whether directly or by appeal? Then are we Presbyterians in fact, if not in name. Surely it must be granted that local churches have the power to arraign and try their disorderly members. Now, if in these things disorderly members are *subject* to their churches, in these things have their churches the *sovereignty* over them. It remains to be shown in this connection—

2. That the Church has *executive* authority. She can expel all whom she tries and condemns. “Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” 1 Cor. v. 13.

Question 1.—“But can a church expel by majority?”

Ans.—It is always desirable that in a matter of such serious import as the expulsion of one from the privileges of the fold of Christ, there should be unanimity. In some of our churches, therefore, there is a rule requiring that in all matters touching fellowship the vote shall be unanimous. And the custom is to inquire of the minority whether they will acquiesce in the decision of the majority. If they consent to submit, and thus promise not to make this difference of opinion the ground of alienation and confusion, the inquiry proceeds no further, and the decision of the majority is recorded. But if the minority refuse to acquiesce, then the custom is to labor with them to bring them to right feelings and right views. This effort is to be made with patience and perseverance. It may be that the majority may become convinced that the opposition is well founded, and that they may be induced to stay proceedings, and to reconsider their action. But if it be manifested that the opposition is factious, then it is customary *to require* the minority to submit, and, if they refuse to obey, to treat them as public offenders, and, if necessary, to expel them. While the design of all this is to produce, if possible, harmony and unanimity, it is, at the same time, an assertion of the *right of the majority to rule, and the duty of the minority to submit*.

The assertion implied in the question at the beginning of the above paragraph is, *No one can be expelled excepting by a unanimous vote; i.e.* if any member objects. If this proposition be true, then if the woman whom the incestuous man at Corinth was claiming as his wife had been a member of the church, or if any other man in the church had been guilty of the same crime, he could not have been “put away.” If but one should vote no, to the proposition to expel, the vote would not be unanimous. Then two wicked and abandoned men may mutually retain each other in the church, though one thousand should vote to put them away. Can a principle be correct which involves such consequences as these? Bro. Baker, in reasoning against the absurd proposition that the minority can “demand the exclusion of an individual whom the majority believe to be innocent,” incidentally,

but conclusively, answers the question above. After showing from the Scriptures that the decisions of the Church were ordinarily made by the lifting up of the hands of its members, he observes, "Now, we cannot account for this voting, by the lifting up of the hands, if it was not to ascertain the will of the *majority*. But we are not left to infer from *general* principles the course pursued by the primitive Church in the exclusion of members. We have the *express* testimony of an inspired apostle that in at least one case of exclusion the individual was excluded not by the *few*, but by the *many*. 'Sufficient to such a man [one that had been excluded] is this punishment WHICH WAS INFLICTED OF MANY.' 2 Cor. ii. 6. The word here rendered 'many' is pleionon, which signifies the *greater part*,—the *majority*. On this subject, then, the Scripture is explicit and *conclusive*: NOTHING CAN BE MORE SO. That passage is sufficient, of itself, to show what was the practice of the Church in apostolic times."—*Per. Lib.* p. 324.

Question 2.—"But may a minority never pronounce a majority to be no longer a church of Christ, and declare themselves to be the true Church?"

This question is answered unhesitatingly in the affirmative. There are cases in which a minority may pronounce the majority no longer a Church. But please notice the discriminations that are made, and the grounds upon which alone the question is thus answered. Whenever the Church, not only in fact, but *ostensibly* and by *profession*, departs from the faith and order that Christ has given, it ceases to be a Baptist church. For instance: If it, *by act* and *by profession*, denies the parity of the ministry, and introduces episcopacy; if it denies that the immersion of a professed believer is alone baptism, and avows and practices infant sprinkling; if it rescinds its articles of faith, and substitutes for them avowedly the doctrines of Campbellism or any other heresy; if it should by resolution deny church sovereignty, *i.e.* its jurisdiction over its disorderly members; if it should deny church independence, and subject itself with other churches to a form of Presbyterianism, making appellate tribunals in a series rising from conferences through councils, associations, and General Associations, up to General Conventions; if she should by vote and record declare that drunkenness, lying, fornication, theft, libel, profanity, and other crimes that the Scriptures reprehend, are no crimes, and avowedly encourage her members to practice them; if by vote and record she decides to do these, or any one of them, a minority may pronounce themselves the true church, and the courts of the country would sustain them in their claim. But, you perceive, this is not the case before us. In my admission, the persons protesting and unchurching are not the parties arraigned, or otherwise personally involved, but those who, having nothing personally at stake, are standing up solely for the honor of the Master and the constitution of His Church. They are struggling not to keep off censure from themselves, but to prevent the Church from

being metamorphosed into a synagogue of Satan, or into another form of Christian organization which they do not consider scriptural. But this has no pertinence to a case of discipline, where the charges are for such things as are recognized to be crimes by the Scriptures.

This is the question you ought to have asked:—"Can an arraigned man and his supporters, the minority, pronounce the majority no church, because of the manner in which they conduct his trial? and can they relieve him from expulsion by proclaiming themselves as alone the true Church?" To answer this question in the affirmative, and to practice on this principle, is to make it impossible to discipline a plausible and wicked man, and to rend a church into fragments every time it may attempt to enforce discipline upon a man of this kind. How easy would it be for such a one to plant himself upon some great scriptural principle, which he may arbitrarily insist is applicable to the case, and, if the church should deny its applicability, to go off accompanied by his relations, his personal friends, and his business associates! If he is adroit, he may even succeed in mystifying many honest and disinterested minds. But my objector wishes to bring me back to the admissions I have made in answer to his first question; and he wishes to inquire,—

"Are not the Saviour's directions for the government of private offences of vital importance? If, then, the majority of a church, in the management of a case of discipline, disregard those directions, cannot the minority (leaving the arraigned out of the question) stand up for the Saviour's rule, and unchurch the majority?" Let us see what you mean by "disregard." *First*. The Church may honestly *mistake* that for a public which is merely a private offence; or, *Second*, Knowing and acknowledging it to be a private offence, prematurely introduced, it may decide to entertain it anyhow. Let us see whether either of these is a "disregard" of the Saviour's directions, and whether they furnish sufficient grounds for the minority to unchurch the majority. If the majority honestly *mistake* the nature of the offence, it has only committed an error; and we have shown in the previous number that a church is not annihilated whenever it commits an error. For the same reasons, a mistake made by the church in reference to the nature of an offence does not furnish sufficient grounds for a minority to unchurch the majority. But, *second*, Suppose the majority, knowing and acknowledging that it is a private offence prematurely introduced, should nevertheless entertain it: what then? I answer, they may, like Bro. Baker, and other distinguished writers on church discipline, believe that these directions are addressed primarily to the offended, to guide *his* deportment, and that the church has the *right*, if it think best, to take into consideration the conduct of her offending member, even though the case may have been irregularly and, if you please, wickedly brought before her. In all this these writers may be mistaken; and the church, in acting on this principle, may commit an error without designing to "disregard" the instructions of Christ.

Now, as has been shown already, an error unintentionally committed does not annihilate a church, nor does it afford ground sufficient for a minority to unchurch the majority. Infallibility does not reside in a church, either in its majority or in its minority. On a question whether a church can entertain a private offence prematurely and irregularly introduced, honest differences of opinion may be tolerated; and surely a mistake on the subject cannot involve annihilation. If a church were *by vote and record* to resolve that it would “disregard” or erase from the Revelation received by it the 18th of Matthew, or any other part of the Scriptures, great or small, it would resolve itself into an infidel fraternity, and the *believers* in its midst should repudiate and denounce it. But surely *the avowed rejection* of the 18th of Matthew, and the *erroneous application of its law*, while its binding force is acknowledged, are very different things.

So it will be seen that a member under dealing cannot escape expulsion by retiring with a minority of the church; and that such minority, so far from shielding him by their rebellion, subject themselves to the same penalty he endures. There is not a church in Christendom, true to the Master and to herself, that would not, in these circumstances, expel all her recusants. And if the revolters should afterwards, with or without organization, call themselves *the church*, or *a church*, whatever else they may be, they are not a Baptist church, which we consider to be synonymous with a gospel church. Whatever may be their pretensions or their claims, *they are excommunicated Baptists*, and should be so regarded and treated by all who reverence the authority of the King in Zion.

In conclusion, then, it must be granted that in the exercise of delegated sovereignty the Church has *executive authority*. She can expel all whom she tries and condemns.

Question 3.—“Can a church expel a minister without the intervention of a Council or Presbytery?”

The answer to this question must be reserved to the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII. CHURCH SOVEREIGNTY, CONTINUED— TRIAL OF MINISTERS.

Question 3.—“Can a minister be tried and expelled without the intervention of a Presbytery or Council?”

Direct expressions in the Scriptures, as well as the general principles laid down therein, authorize us, in our opinion, to answer this question in the affirmative. Not a few distinguished and deservedly influential names, however, may be quoted against us. Baker, Crowell, Sands, the lamented

Meredith, and others, all give a different answer, and fortify it by many plausible arguments. It becomes the present writer, then, to express himself with diffidence, and to proceed no further than he can plainly show that he is sustained by the Scriptures.

1. My first remark, then, is that no passage in the Bible, in *direct terms*, instructs the church to call in a Presbytery or Council when she would try a minister holding membership with her; nor is a single example given in the Scriptures where one was tried with such intervention. No one, it is presumed, will call this in question. If so, let the precept be quoted or the example cited. The church is told how she is to “receive an accusation against an elder;” but it is not hinted to her that she cannot proceed, in other respects, in his trial, in the same way in which she conducts the process against any other member accused. This of itself is significant. But,—

2. Paul *directs* the Galatians to excommunicate the false ministers who were teaching that it was necessary to be justified by the law. “I would they were even cut off which trouble you.” v. 12. “And this they were to do in the exercise of their Christian liberty. v. 13.” (Crowell.) To the church alone the address is directed; and no hint is given that it needed the help of a Council or Presbytery. But, it may be said, these were *false* teachers. True: it was not to be expected that Paul would exhort to the excommunication of *true* teachers. Nor is it said here that a church is authorized to excommunicate orderly and true ministers. If the church in Galatia was satisfied that these teachers were false, they had the right, it seems, to cut them off. So, in all time, churches that after trial convict ministers of crime can cut them off without any external assistance. Paul does not say, call a Presbytery to look into their ministerial credentials and expose them if they are impostors, or to take away their ministerial credentials if they have properly forfeited them, and then exclude them from membership. But the exhortation is, cut them off.

3. Christ *praises* the church at Ephesus for excommunicating false apostles. “And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.” Rev. ii. 2. Now, these men professed to be apostles. So far as the church at Ephesus *knew*, they really were such, and, on investigation, their claims *might* have been sustained.

It did not follow that their claims were spurious simply because they were doubted. On this principle, Paul’s apostleship would have been invalidated; for IT was called in question. The true state of the case was ascertained by investigation. The church tried them, and the church found them liars; and Christ praised her for it. Not one hint is given that she did this in cooperation with a Presbytery. If the church at Ephesus was *praised* for trying and cutting off false apostles, surely the Scriptures will sustain a church in modern times in trying and cutting off, in the same way, false ministers.

4. Peter, though he was an apostle, acknowledges the sole jurisdiction over him of the church in Jerusalem, of which he was a member. After the

baptism of Cornelius, they of the circumcision at Jerusalem brought the charge against him that he had gone in to men uncircumcised, and eaten with them. Acts xi. We do not find that Peter claims to be tried by "his peers," and demands that a Council of Apostles, or even of elders, should be called to decide upon the validity of his defense; but he expounds to the church the facts of the case, and seeks their approval of his conduct. I do not present this as technically an arraignment in the sense of church dealing, but only claim that Peter acknowledged that the church was able to decide upon the propriety of his course, and to acquit him of blame, without external assistance.

These instances appear to us to furnish decided evidence from the Scriptures that a minister can be tried, condemned, and expelled without the intervention of a Council or Presbytery.

Objection 1.—But, it is objected, "The ministry was conferred by a Presbytery or Council; and it requires the same power to unmake that it does to make."

To meet this objection, it will be necessary, as a preliminary, to inquire, 1. What is a minister? 2. What is ordination? 3. What relation does a Presbytery or Council bear to ordination?

1. *What is a minister?* A minister has two functions. 1st. He can preach the gospel; 2d. He can administer the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

1st. The first he does not possess as a prerogative peculiar to himself. All male members of the church have the right, and are in duty bound, to tell to others all they know about the Saviour. By conversation, or, if able, in set speech, sitting, walking, or standing, on the floor, or, if more convenient, in a pulpit, they are authorized to proclaim to sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to point inquirers to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world; and this with all the impressiveness and eloquence at their command. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." 1 Peter iv. 10. But, while it is the privilege and duty of all to proclaim the truth, Christ has set apart a special body of men to the work of the ministry, as preachers, whose business it is to give themselves, with all their energies, to the proclamation of the truth,—to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. A minister, then, in part, is one whose duty it is to preach the word.

2d. Some believe that any church-member is authorized to administer the ordinances; but, with very general unanimity, Baptists hold that only ordained ministers are authorized to do so. The answer, then, to the question, Who is a minister? is, One who preaches the gospel and administers the ordinances.

2. *What is ordination?* and what relation does it bear to the ministry?

Ans. 1.—Whatever it may be, it does not impart any grace, or intellectual or spiritual qualification. There is no invisible gift imparted by the imposition of hands; nor does the ceremony bring the subject into a line of succession from the apostles, or make him a link in a ministerial chain from primitive times. This may do for Popery and High Church Episcopacy, which depend upon superstition and credulity; but the Scriptures make no intimation of the necessity or the existence of such a line of succession. And if a Presbytery of Baptist ministers profess that ordination is designed, and that their manipulations are intended to bring a candidate into this mystical—not to say superstitious—line of succession, it may be well for them to be called upon to prove in advance that THEY are THEMSELVES in that line.

Ans. 2.—Ordination is not designed to AUTHORIZE the subject to preach. God gives that authority, and not the Presbytery. Men are ordained, not that they might become preachers, but because they are preachers already. God calls them to be such, bestows upon them the gifts and qualifications, rolls upon their hearts the burden of souls, kindles a fire in their bones, and compels them to cry, “Wo is me if I preach not the gospel.” And when they prove themselves to be preachers, then the Presbyter lays hands on them, not that they might be preachers, but because they are so already. How many “licensed preachers” are there in our churches? Paul was called to be a preacher, and the call announced to Ananias, before his (Paul’s) baptism,—to say nothing of ordination. (Acts ix. 15.) A head to know, a heart to feel, and a tongue to utter fluently and forcibly, the truth as it is in Jesus, are the qualifications that make the preacher, and not the external ceremony of ordination. These gifts and graces God bestows, and not the Presbytery. An ardent desire for the glory of God and for the salvation of sinners, and not the authorization of the Presbytery, is that which impels men to preach.

Ans. 3.—In answer, then, to the question, What is ordination? I would say, Ordination is, by ceremony, A SOLEMN PUBLIC RECOGNITION of one whom, it is believed, God has called to preach His gospel and administer His ordinances.

3. *What relations does a Presbytery bear to ordination?*—In other words, why is a Presbytery necessary to take a part in this solemn recognition?

Presbytery is derived from the Greek word *presbuteros*, and implies a company of elders or ministers. In our churches in the Southern States, the ordaining body is exclusively a company of ministers selected by the candidate and the church to which he belongs. But in the Northern States it is customary for the church calling to ordination to invite neighboring churches to send their pastors and messengers, who shall together constitute what they call a Council, to inquire into the propriety of ordaining the candidate. This latter body consists of private members, as well as ministers. While this custom is liable to misconstruction, in the fact that it may

be supposed that, as other churches send messengers to this body, the power to ordain belongs to an association of churches, it tends to correct a superstition which we are in danger of imbibing from Rome, that the body performing the ceremony of ordination communicate through themselves some spiritual gift, or, by virtue of being in that condition themselves, impart to the candidate ministerial succession, or make him, like themselves, a link in a ministerial chain from the apostles. The private members of these Councils are non-conductors of the ministerial fluid, and have not, in themselves, the ministerial succession to communicate. If it be said that not the private members of these Councils, but the ministers, lay hands on the subject, it is replied that the ministers do so, in part, by the permission and under the direction of the private members. In the mouth of a Romanist or a High Church Episcopalian, apostolic succession, and ministerial qualification imparted by the laying on of hands, are superstitious and presumptuous; but in the mouth of a Baptist Council they are simply nonsensical and ridiculous. But to return.

Why is a Presbytery or a Council necessary to the solemn recognition of a minister? I answer, God designs (1) to prevent unworthy and incompetent men from entering into the ministry; and (2) to provide for the endorsement of worthy and competent men, so that they may be received with confidence by other churches and the world, who, for themselves, may not have the opportunity or ability to pass upon their character and qualifications. To secure the former, He makes the candidate pass through two ordeals. He has first, by his gifts and qualifications, to attract the attention of his church to himself, and convince it that God has called and qualified him for the work of the ministry; and then, having convinced the Presbytery or Council that he has gifts of mind and utterance that qualify him to edify, he must stand an examination before them which is conducted to see whether he has experienced a work of grace; what are his reasons for believing that God has called him into the ministry; what his motives for desiring to enter upon the work; and what are his views of Scripture doctrine and church order. If on any of these points he fails to give satisfaction, it is the duty of the Presbytery or Council to refuse to ordain him. And thus an unworthy or dangerous man fails to be turned loose to work mischief among the churches. If, however, on all these points the examination be satisfactory, they proceed to his ordination. In other words, by a solemn ceremony, well calculated to arrest attention, they, in concert with the church, declare to the world that, in their opinion, God has called this man to minister in holy things. This opinion they submit to writing, and place in the hands of the ordained, that it may be a testimony for him to the strangers among whom his lot may be cast, that, in the opinion of this church and these brethren composing the Presbytery or Council, God has called and qualified this man to be a minister of the New Testament.

Let us return now to the objection. I will repeat the words of it:—"The

ministry was conferred by a Presbytery or Council; and it takes the same power to unmake that it does to make.”

To this it is replied by denying that the Presbytery or Council CONFERS the office or MAKES the minister. All that they do is to RECOGNIZE and ENDORSE him as a minister. God, and not Presbyteries or Councils, makes ministers. Paul says, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, PUTTING ME INTO THE MINISTRY.” 1 Tim. i. 12. To the latter part of the argument it is replied by denying that it takes always the same power to unmake that it does to make. The Ephesian Dome required many years and much treasure for its construction; but a madman and his torch consumed it in a few hours. A well established reputation requires long years of patient continuance in well-doing to build it up; for “confidence is a plant of slow growth.” But one startling crime may, in a short hour, destroy it. So it takes many particulars to give confidence that one is a minister of Jesus Christ,—a renewed heart and faith in Christ; a knowledge and love of divine things; an utterance ready and forcible; an ardent desire to promote God’s glory and the salvation of sinners; the conviction on the part of the church and Presbytery, or Council, that God has called and qualified him for the work; but one crime against religion and morality will, as soon as it is known, convince that all these evidences were deceptive. And, besides, if we were to grant that it takes the same power to unmake that it does to make, it is not pertinent here as an argument; for God alone makes ministers. If any interposition, then, is necessary, God, and not the Presbytery, is the power that must interpose. This interposition God does make, by investing His church with delegated sovereignty over ministers as well as others that are members, and encouraging it to “try them that say they are [ministers,] and are not,” and to prove them “liars.”

Objection 2.—It is objected again, “On your own principles, a Presbytery or Council was necessary in ordination to give the world confidence that, in the judgment of competent men, God designs the man to be a minister. On the strength of this endorsement, other churches and the world give him their confidence. Is not the same testimony necessary to authorize and induce them to withdraw that confidence?”

To this it is answered, it requires much stronger testimony, and that of different nature, to establish one’s ministerial character and qualifications, than to show unworthiness and crime. In the former, we need knowledge of the Scriptures, penetration into human character, renewed hearts of variety of disposition to appreciate the exposition of gospel truth,—in short, just such evidence as the concurrent testimony of a church of mixed members and a Presbytery of pious, intelligent, and experienced ministers can afford. But, in the latter, nothing is needed but the proof that he has been guilty of a crime against religion and morality. Now, a church is as able to

investigate and pass upon the charge of crime alleged against a minister as the same alleged against any others of its members. And the testimony of her act in expelling him for falsehood, or adultery, or drunkenness, or any other great crime, needs no corroboration, and as effectually neutralizes and withdraws the testimony given in ordination, as though her act was concurred in by ten thousand Presbyteries.

***Objection 3.*—“The assertion of a right to try and expel a minister without a Presbytery, implies the assertion of the right on the part of the church to ordain a minister without a Presbytery. Now, if she were ordaining a man for herself exclusively, this might do; but, as ordination is designed to give him access as a minister to other churches also, and to the world at large, she cannot ordain him by herself, and, by parity of reasoning, she cannot depose him by herself.”**

To this I answer, Why is a church UNABLE to ordain one of her members herself? When the church at Jerusalem was the only one in existence, with the apostles in her membership, was she unable to ordain? At the present time, in this country, it is inexpedient for a church to do so; nay, I will go further, and say it is WRONG for her to do so; not, however, because the ordination would be invalid, but because it would not be influential. Ordination is designed as a solemn testimony, by those engaged in it, that, in their opinion, God has called this man and qualified him for the ministerial work. Now, Scripture and common sense teach that, to make this testimony influential, it must be above the suspicion of bias or incompetency. Whenever, therefore, a church at the present time, in the ordination of a minister, fails to fortify her testimony by the concurrent testimony of a Presbytery or Council, she gives evidence that there is something in the candidate's character or doctrinal belief which will prevent the approbation and endorsement of an honest, capable, and unbiased Presbytery. So far, then, from her sole endorsement giving the ordained currency, it stamps him as spurious coin. We have a noted instance of this kind which has recently occurred in one of the Northern States. Even those who differ from me in the views expressed above, will grant that if a church has in her membership two ordained ministers besides her pastor, they, with the pastor, are competent to form an ordaining Presbytery; and if they admit that it would be inexpedient for the church to set apart to the ministry another of her members by the aid of such a Presbytery, they can explain that lack of expediency only upon the grounds upon which I have placed it, viz.: that it would not be sufficiently influential as an endorsement,—unless the ministers composing the Presbytery have an overshadowing reputation.

But the assertion of the right to try and expel a minister by the church alone, does not imply the assertion of the right to ordain him without the intervention of a Presbytery. The two ideas are not correlative. While the

church may acknowledge that it is not so well able of itself to ascertain whether a candidate possesses ministerial grace and qualifications, and feels confident, therefore, that her sole endorsement will not be influential enough to give him circulation everywhere, it may assert, and the world may well grant to it, the right and the capacity to decide and act upon the crime committed by her member.

The church does not propose to ordain him for herself, any more than the churches which contributed members to the Council propose to ordain him for themselves; but only to endorse him as one worthy to be received as a minister everywhere, and qualified to be the pastor of any church that may wish HIS services. Ordination does not make a man a pastor, or give him official relations to any church. There are many ordained ministers that have no pastoral or other official relations to a church.

Objection 4.—“But ought not a man to be tried by his peers?”

I answer, Yes. But the members of the church constitute his peers. “One is your master, and all ye are brethren.” Were a minister to be tried before the courts of the country on a criminal charge, likely as not, the jury of his peers that would sit upon his case would be a petit jury composed of individuals not distinguished for their intelligence or moral worth. But do you mean by “his peers” his colleagues in office? If so, and your principles be right, then should all Deacons under charges be tried by a Council of Deacons!

It would seem, then, that it must be granted that ministers, like others, are subject to the churches to which they belong; and that, should they be guilty of crime, the church, in the exercise of delegated sovereignty, can arraign them, try them, and expel them, without the intervention of Presbyteries or Councils.

So much would I say in regard to the RIGHTS of the churches. I would not be understood, however, to maintain that a church, in dealing with her minister, CANNOT call in the aid of a Council; nor to intimate that in many instances it would not be HIGHLY JUDICIOUS to do so.

CHAPTER IX.

DEDUCTION (CONTINUED)—CHURCH INDEPENDENCE.

DEDUCTION 2.—*The decision of the church is final.* “If he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

The admission has been incautiously made by good writers on the subject of discipline that in extreme cases, where it is evident that gross injustice has been done, one church may receive to membership the excluded member of another. They all plead, though, that it must be an extreme case, and recommend to the use of great caution in the exercise of what they call

the right,—a recommendation, however, that is never observed; for it is only in cases involving extreme excitement that there is any temptation to take such a step.

Baptists boast that they have a “thus saith the Lord” for all their principles and practices. They claim that on the subject of doctrinal faith and church order the New Testament is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness; and that, with this manual in their hands, they are perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. In the matter of the discipline and expulsion of a disorderly member, the New Testament is plain and explicit. Is it silent on the subject of excommunicated persons? Does it lead us through a path flooded with light to the point of their excommunication, and then leave us profoundly in the dark as to their relations, if any, to the church expelling, and as to the means of their restoration to the ranks of Christ’s disciples, should they desire it? It would be strange were this so. The New Testament is not thus silent; and to a candid inquirer it gives an answer plain and unmistakable. That answer is, that the action of the church is final; that one church cannot receive to membership the excluded members of another; and that such excluded members can be restored to fellowship only by the action of the church expelling them. This I am prepared to show:—

1. BY POSITIVE PRECEPT. 2. BY INSPIRED EXAMPLE. 3. BY GENERAL PRINCIPLES LAID DOWN IN THE SCRIPTURES.

1. We have a precept, *first*, as to what is to be done with the incorrigible under each class of offences; and, *second*, as to our feelings and deportment towards those who have received the penalty prescribed.

First. If, in a personal offence, the offender refuse to give reparation to the one trespassed upon; if he decline to listen to the remonstrances of the one or two disinterested brethren who labour with him; and, finally, if he neglect to hear the church, he is to be withdrawn from. I suppose all will grant that this is in accordance with the Scriptures. If any one that is called a brother be convicted of a gross crime against religion and morality; as, for instance, if he be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, the precept is, “Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.” Here all is clear; and there is no room to doubt. A private offender that cannot be brought to repentance and reparation, and a gross public offender, are, according to the precept, to be excommunicated. But this is not all the instruction we receive on the subject from the Scriptures. We are told,—

Second, What are to be our feelings and deportment towards the excommunicated? Do we ask the Saviour what relations do we sustain towards one cut off for incorrigible wrong towards his brother? His answer is, “Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Do we address the same inquiry to the great Apostle of the Gentiles in regard to offenders of every type? We have, in effect, the same reply: “Now I beseech you,

brethren, *mark them* which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned, and avoid them.” Rom. xvi. 17. “Now I have written unto you not to keep company” with them. 1 Cor. v. 11. “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.” 2 Thess. iii. 6. In regard to the disposition a church should make of a disorderly member, and the relations all churches and church-members bear to him when thus disposed of, the Scriptures are plain and explicit. He is to be excommunicated; and all are to withdraw themselves from him, to keep no company with him, to avoid him, and to make him bear towards them the relations of an heathen man and a publican. Now, whatever may be the meaning of these precepts when carried out into practice in detail, no one will maintain that in them can be found encouragement or authority for one church to receive the excluded member of another. Every one must grant that they, by strong implication, forbid such interference. These precepts are enough; but they do not constitute all the support that the Scriptures furnish to our position.

2. *Scripture example* shows that the excommunicating church alone can restore to membership. But one example is given in the Scriptures of the exclusion and restoration of a member. The incestuous man at Corinth was, at the instance of Paul, excommunicated; and when he had given satisfactory evidence of repentance and reformation, at the solicitation of Paul, he was restored to membership by the same church. There was a large number of others in existence at that time besides the church at Corinth. Paul was not compelled, therefore, to apply to it because it was the only one extant. Now, Baptists claim that inspired *example* is as binding as inspired precept. In this way alone do they discover the form and organization of a gospel church. Nowhere in the New Testament is to be found a precept containing a rule for the organization and government of a gospel church. For our ideas and our practices upon these subjects, we are dependent exclusively upon inspired *example*. And in no instance do we reason against our Pedobaptist friends more forcibly and conclusively than when we maintain the binding force of New Testament example. Now, can we be honest when we denounce others for disregarding inspired example in the organization and government of the church, if we refuse to receive that same example as binding on any other subject? We ask, How can an expelled man be restored to membership? and are answered, by New Testament example, that he is to be restored by the same church that expelled him, after satisfaction rendered. Now, if we decline to receive the answer, while we sin against God, we lay ourselves open to the retort from our Pedobaptist friends, “Physician, heal thyself.” Inspired precept *and* example, then, forbid one church to receive the excommunicated members of another, and declare that, when a church expels, her action is final. Nor is this all.

3. The *general principles* laid down in the Scriptures forbid one church

to receive the excommunicated members of another. Let the following be noted:—

1st. All the churches are under Christ's jurisdiction. He is their Sovereign, and upon Him are they dependent. He gives the form of their organization, furnishes the regenerated materials of which they are to be composed, prescribes the laws by which they are to be governed, and fixes the relations they are to sustain to each other. Christ is the great King in Zion, and of Him no church is independent. Now, if this be true, the church cannot say, "I am independent, and I will do what I please;" but "Christ is my Sovereign, and I will do what He commands or permits." Now, Christ does not command or authorize one church to receive the excommunicates of another, but by precepts and example forbids it to do so. The first general principle I lay down, then, is, that the church, not only in its organization, duties, and rights, but also in its relations to other churches, is just what Christ, the Sovereign, makes it. This needs no proof.

2. Christ has constituted every church independent,—not of Himself, but of other churches. This all grant. Now, the question is, what is the meaning of independence? I have already said, it means *freedom from control*. A State is independent of other States when it is free from their control. So a church is independent of other churches because, in like manner, it is free from their control. Now, if it can be shown that the reception of the excluded member of a church is an attempt to control it in its internal affairs, it will be evident from this general principle of the Scriptures that such an act is forbidden. Nothing is easier than to show that such an interference is a total subversion of church independence. If the church at A. can, without her consent, give membership to a man whom the church at B. excludes, whatever may be said of the independence of A., that of B. has been subverted; for she has been involuntarily *controlled* in her discipline by the interference of A. Is it said that A. does not interfere with B., since she takes one that has no connection with her? I answer, she just as unequivocally takes away B's member as though she had entered into the church and forcibly removed him while his trial was progressing, and before sentence of excommunication had been passed. The design of corrective discipline, even in its highest censures, is not to injure, but to reform. The Scriptures command the church to excommunicate a disorderly member, *that he might be brought to repentance and reformation*. They require it, "To deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, *that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*." 1 Cor. v. 5. "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, *that he may be ashamed*." 2 Thess. iii. 14. Now, the church at B., in obedience to the commands of the King in Zion, is pursuing a course of discipline designed to bring the offender to his senses; but midway in the process, just as soon as the regimen begins to take effect, A. interferes and rescues from her jurisdiction her excluded *member*. For he is still her mem-

ber, with the descriptive prefix, *excluded*. From *rights* and *privileges* in the church he is "cut off," and as it regards *fellowship* and *fraternity* he is as an heathen man and a publican; but in relation to the discipline of the church he is still the subject of her reformatory process. Her disciplinary grasp upon him can never be relaxed until he reforms or dies. Now, this act of A. is just as decided an interference as though she had interposed at the instant of the arraignment, or at any time during the progress of the trial, before the final result. The discipline is never complete until it brings the culprit to repentance and reformation. When, therefore, the church at A. successfully interferes with the attempt of B. to bring the offender to a sense of his wrong, she just as effectually *controls the discipline* of B. as though she had dragged the arraigned from her bar. Had she done the latter, she would have protected him from *trial*; if she does the former, she rescues him from the intended *effect* of the discipline. Surely, if brethren will reflect, they need not wait for it to be proved to them by argument that their proposed action is designed to be an *interference*.

The reception of an individual into the membership of a church, and his expulsion from that same fellowship, are not "correlative" or "commensurate" ideas. Before he is received, he bears *no relation* to the church; but when he is expelled, he sustains the relation of one who is the subject of its reformatory discipline. He has passed through the discipline of *remonstrance* and trial, and is now the subject of the discipline of *correction* and *reformation*. This proposition seems to be very plain; but it receives additional support from the fact that such an one can never be received again in the same way as he was from the world at first. *Then*, he was *admitted* by experience and baptism; *now*, he must be not admitted, but restored, according to the Scriptures, by satisfaction rendered, without baptism. Expulsion does not leave a man in the same condition that reception found him. Therefore, reception and expulsion are not commensurate ideas nor correlative terms. The expelled man is still the subject, in a sense, of the church expelling him; and its discipline, which is designed to reform him, is just beginning on him its salutary influences. Now, this power and duty Christ conferred upon each church; and, that it might effectually feel the obligation and exercise the power, He made it independent of all others,—in other words, made it free from their interference or control. When one thus interferes, then it exercises not a right, but a usurpation; it shows not independence, but lawlessness. Do you ask me, in reply, "Is every church bound by the action of others?" Without stopping to expose the fallacy contained in the word "bound," I reply, every church is bound to obey the commands of the Master; and *they* prohibit it to interfere with the internal discipline of its neighbors.

It is the Saviour's design not to envelop the earth in the folds of one vast hierarchy, but to dot its surface with local organizations, each having independent jurisdiction within its restricted territories, and all responsible to

Him, the great King in Zion. This has been forcibly illustrated by reference to our county courts. The territory of the county constitutes the limits of its jurisdiction, the people of the county the subjects of its administration. When one tribunal arraigns one of its subjects before its bar, he cannot be removed from its jurisdiction by any process from another; and when it condemns and sentences him, he cannot appeal to another for relief. Why? Because they are independent of each other, but are all subject to a superior power, viz.: the organic law of the State, which marks out the limits of their jurisdiction severally, and the extent of their responsibility. If the circuit court of Clarke County interfere successfully with that of Oglethorpe, it not only destroys the independence of the latter, but it rebels against the constitution and law of the State. So when one church arrests another in the enforcement of its discipline, and removes away from the condemned the censure which was designed to work his reformation, she not only subverts the independence of the latter, but shows rebellion against the authority of Christ, who marks out the metes and bounds of their jurisdictions, and responsibilities severally, and makes them all mutually independent, *i.e.* free from each other's control. Independence, then, so far from authorizing, forbids one church to receive the excommunicated members of another.

3. But, again, in the exercise of his sovereign prerogative, Christ not only established the rights and duties of each church, but He settled the relations they are to sustain to each other, and the bonds by which they are to be united. He not only made them independent in their own jurisdictions, but He united them together by the bond of Christian union. He prays His Father that they all may be one; in faith, in love, in effort. His design is that no root of bitterness should spring up between them, to trouble, to distract, and to divide. Now, can it be believed that He who is infinitely wise should desire and pray for their *Christian union*, and yet should so organize them,—should invest them with such prerogative as, if exercised, will produce, inevitably, antagonism, alienation, and heart-burning? No church can arbitrarily rescue a member from the jurisdiction of another, and welcome him into her fold, without destroying fellowship and Christian union. This Christian union Christ intended to exist between His churches; and, in infinite wisdom, we adapted the means to the end. He could not, therefore, have designed that one should arbitrarily overrule the decisions or recklessly trample upon the feelings of another. For the same reason, He could not have intended that one should receive to fellowship the excommunicated member of another.

We have given the teachings of the Scriptures on the subject. By direct precept, by plain example, and by unmistakable general principles, they teach us that an excluded man can in no way be restored to fellowship but by the action of the church expelling him. Shall we not accept this as satisfactory? Shall we rather attempt to settle the question by appeals to expe-

diency and convenience? If so, then let our mouths be shut when Pedobaptists make a like appeal to expediency and convenience in regard to church organization and government, or gospel ordinances.

But brethren who oppose these views present plausible pleas by way of objection. These I would classify as:—1. *The plea explanatory*; 2. *The plea from expediency*; and, 3. *The plea from exceptional cases*. Let us consider them.

1. THE PLEA EXPLANATORY. They say, “We do not claim that one church has the right to restore an excluded man to membership in the church expelling him, but only, by virtue of its independence, to receive him into its own. This certainly is no interference.” To this I answer,—

1st. You do restore him to the fellowship of the church expelling, or else you destroy Christian union. Christian union remaining between the two churches, whenever the table of the Lord is spread, he, as well as other members of your church, can sit down to it, though formally excluded from it by vote of the body; and whenever he is present at the “conference” of the church, he can accept the usual invitations, dictated by Christian union, to take seats and aid in deliberations. Through your action, the excluding church will either be compelled to make to him all the expressions of Christian fellowship, though it has professed to withdraw it from him, or else to withdraw fellowship from you; and thus Christian union will be destroyed. But,—

2d. Your act will certainly be an interference with its discipline, as has been already shown; since it is designed to prevent the intended effect of that discipline.

2. THE PLEA FROM EXPEDIENCY. It is said, “It is a great hardship for one to be unjustly expelled; and surely there ought to be a remedy for it. If the church perpetrating the injustice cannot be induced to repair the injury, surely other churches ought to be at liberty to remedy the evil.”

Ah! You would then propose to supply the defects in the enactments of the Lawgiver! But how do you propose to counteract the evil? I answer, by introducing a greater. At present, one individual suffers. This you propose to remedy by the introduction of an expedient that would destroy Christian union between two churches, and thus produce discord, confusion, and division. This is bad enough, when union is destroyed between two churches alone. How much, though, is the evil enhanced when the rescued is a professed minister! If he permits you to restore him, he is influenced by a spirit of resistance to the church expelling him. The same spirit of resistance will lead him to seek expressions of fellowship and endorsement from as wide an extent of country as possible, and from all such religious bodies as can, either directly or indirectly, indicate such fellowship. And thus we shall have presented to us the strange spectacle of a religious demagogue, under your sanction, traveling, over the country soliciting support and gathering to himself a party. Wherever he goes, he will find some who

reverence the authority of the King in Zion, and who are compelled, therefore, to treat him as an excommunicated man. His presence introduces divisions and heart-burnings into every church whose majority receives him as a minister. Wherever he goes, he has his own feelings injured by the words and actions of the faithful men who dare to abide by the law of Christ. Thus, you do not alleviate, but increase, his sufferings; and you make him the wedge which you drive home to the rending apart of the people of God over a vast district. Surely, it is not expedient to attempt to remedy a limited evil by the application of another so great and unlimited. And, besides, it will be all in vain. The man you propose to protect cannot maintain the position your sympathy and his resentment assign him. He will either be permitted by God's providence to go to such lengths as to make you ashamed of the support you have given him, or else he will see his error and return back from whence he departed. If he is a Christian, this latter will be the inevitable result. There is too much faithfulness to Christ in the great Baptist heart, and too much knowledge of the Scriptures in the Baptist mind, for them to be long misled. He must either come back whence he departed, or else come to nought. This is the history of all such cases. Happy will it be for him and for Christian union in the churches if his rebellion be of short continuance. When you see that such will be the deplorable results, tell me not that your action is designed, in the fear of God, to counteract evil. Ascribe it rather to amiable weakness, to sympathy, to willfulness, to partisanship, to personal resentment,—to any thing, rather than to a regard for the authority of God's law or the honor of God's cause.

3. THE PLEA FROM EXCEPTIONAL CASES. It is asked, "Suppose a church should expel a member for joining the Masons or Odd-Fellows, or another should expel its member for favoring the missionary cause, or, if he is a minister, for maintaining that the gospel is to be preached to sinners: will it not be lawful in these cases, or in either of them, for a neighboring church to receive the excluded? Now, if you answer in the affirmative, you, in effect, give up the principle; for you acknowledge that, for sufficient cause, one church may receive the expelled of another."

To answer this question, it must be analyzed and the parts classified under different heads.

1. One church expels its member for doing that which the Scriptures do not in terms forbid, but which they do not require him to do. A member joins the Masons or Odd-Fellows, not because he feels bound to do so conscientiously, in the fear of God, from a sense of duty, but because he deems it expedient and feels inclined to do so.

2. The other church expels its member for practicing, that which he and we believe to be enjoined in the Scriptures. He acts from a sense of duty and in the fear of God, and does just what we conscientiously believe it is his duty to do. Now, you perceive, we must give very different answers to these questions. Let us take them up separately.

1. If a church expels one for joining the Masons or Odd-Fellows, is it lawful for a neighboring church to receive him? I answer, No. I have not a word to say in disparagement of these highly respectable institutions; and I grant that I can see nothing sinful in becoming connected with them. But then it is the duty of a church-member to seek the harmony and brotherly union of his church when he can do so without sacrificing his conscience. Paul said that all things were lawful, but all things were not expedient for him. Though it was lawful for him to eat meat, he announced it as his determination never to do so while the world would stand, if it would cause his brother to offend. Some of the best brethren we have in the land are those who were Masons before their conversion, or who became so afterward without being aware of the strong objections—or prejudices, if you please—of their brethren. But as soon as they became aware of the opposition, they consented to discontinue their attendance upon the Lodge. They esteemed their church privileges higher than their relations to any worldly associations, however honorable and useful. And they stood ready to sever any relation dictated merely by expediency and convenience, rather than destroy the peace of a church composed—if you please—of only ignorant and weak brethren. Now, when a member allows himself to be expelled on this ground, it is because he is headstrong, because he offends against charity, and because he esteems that which is merely expedient to him of more value than the peace of the church and the confidence and affection of his brethren. A simple promise to discontinue his attendance on the Lodge will remove all the difficulty. Now, if the church, proposing to reverse the sentence of expulsion, conscientiously believes that it is the duty of every individual, in the fear of God, to join the Masons, and makes this profession a part of its creed, if it professes that this, as an obligation, is enjoined in the Scriptures, it may then receive the member, because it can at the same time withdraw from the expelling church on the ground that it professes rebellion to God by refusing to join the Masons and by prohibiting its members to do so. A church, in conscientiously expelling a Mason, may act very foolishly; but her evil cannot be removed by the introduction of a greater,—viz., the destruction of church union,—unless you are prepared to withdraw fellowship from her for maintaining that Masons should be expelled. This is a case that calls not for anathemas, but for light. “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.”

2. But when a church expels a member for favoring the missionary cause or for preaching the gospel to sinners, it is clearly of a different denomination from us, or has so departed from the faith as to authorize us to withdraw fellowship from it. In that case, church sovereignty is not violated if we receive those who are martyrs to the same truth we conscientiously hold ourselves. The principle here is that which I avowed in a previous number,—that when a church ceases to be a Baptist church we may withdraw fellowship from it. But you observe that this principle is not operative

in a case in which we receive one excluded by a church professing to be of the same faith and order,—one who was arraigned and tried upon such charges as, if they had been proved upon him, would have made him, in our opinion, worthy of expulsion. The church must not only appear to us to act in opposition to what we consider the law of Christ, but it must avow that to be its intention, before we can be authorized to withdraw fellowship from it and afford a refuge to its excluded members. A mere difference of opinion from us in the interpretation of a law of Christ which it professes to hold as tenaciously as we—the law in Matt. xviii., if you please—cannot be sufficient ground with us for declaring it to be no longer a Baptist church. Who gave to us such infallibility as to make our interpretations of Scripture always unerringly right? And whence do we obtain the arrogance which authorizes us to deny all ecclesiastical claims to any body that may differ from us in opinion? The “Primitive Baptists” have declared non-fellowship for us because we maintain boards and conventions for promoting missions. They have, in effect, declared themselves a denomination distinct from us. When, therefore, we take them on their own terms, and receive those of their members who have been excluded for conscientiously maintaining the same truths on whose account we ourselves have been withdrawn from, we violate no church comity, we disturb no Christian union.

It is always best for us to be governed by Scripture instruction, however great may be the injustice done us or our friend, and however much we may be excited in consequence. And the Scriptures—by precepts, by examples, and by general principles—assure us that, if an excommunicated man be restored at all, he must be restored by the church that expelled him.

Question 1.—“May not the expelled member who thinks himself unjustly treated find relief by appealing to his Association or to Council?”

I answer, The Scriptures recognize no such bodies as Associations and Councils. The church is the highest and the only ecclesiastical body known to the New Testament. Some have endeavored to find the germ of Associations and Councils in the meeting held in Jerusalem by the apostles, elders, and brethren, to consider and to give advice on the matters of difficulty presented by the church at Antioch. But this only shows how easy it is to pervert the plain and common-sense transactions of apostolic times to the purposes of superstition, and to the acquisition of materials for the foundation of an unscriptural hierarchy. The Jerusalem Church was the first planted by the apostles, and, therefore, the Mother Church. Now, certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren at Antioch, that except they be circumcised after the manner of Moses they could not be saved. These sentiments were vehemently opposed by Paul and Barnabas. But when the church at Antioch found they were not able to settle the question, they sent Paul and Barnabas and certain others to Jerusalem to inquire of the church,

and the apostles and elders, whether these men properly represented their sentiments, and what was their opinion on the subject. The whole multitude assembled together, and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, repudiated these teachers, and solved the difficulty. This was a simple and common sense transaction. Nothing is more natural than the inquiry, and nothing more natural than the means adopted to answer it. But here was no permanent body, composed of messengers from contiguous churches, to meet at stated times, organized upon a written constitution, and called an "Association;" nor a transient body, composed in like manner of messengers from churches, and called a "Council." It was simply a meeting of the whole church with the apostles and elders then in Jerusalem. But suppose it be granted that Associations and Councils are modeled after the same form and organized for the same purpose. The meeting in Jerusalem assembled to give advice to a church which had asked it, and this, too, not on a case of discipline, but on a point of doctrine. It received and entertained no appeal from a man under dealing.

Associations are institutions of modern date. They are not opposed to the general principles of the Scriptures; and as advisory councils, and a means of promoting Christian union and cooperation,—if they refrain scrupulously from infringing upon the internal rights of the churches, and from lording it over God's heritage,—they may be made to subserve a valuable purpose. But it is not necessary for the completeness of a church that it should be a member of such a body. One of the most ominous signs of the times, and a marked indication of a disposition on the part of these bodies to transcend their legitimate bounds, is a resolution passed in the meetings of some of them, inviting ministers to seats who are in good standing in their own churches *and Associations*. This implies that, if the minister's church belongs to no association, his ecclesiastical relations are incomplete. On this principle, Paul and all the other apostles, if present, would be ruled out as undeserving a seat, because of their defective ecclesiastical relations. In what respect does this differ in principle from Presbyterianism? There, the minister is not in full connection because he does not belong to a Presbytery; here, he is defective because he is not in Associational connection. Are these bodies blind and unconscious of the claim implied here? or are they fully aware of its extent? If the latter be true, how long will it take for the churches to become mere societies and component parts of an unscriptural hierarchy, fast approximating to the organization of "The Man of Sin"? So impossible is it to avoid sounding the profound abyss of error, when unscriptural expedients are used to counteract what we consider injustice and oppression! An Association may give a church advice in regard to scriptural *principles* when it asks it, which advice it may follow, or not, as it thinks best; but an Association may never interfere, directly or indirectly, with the internal affairs of a church, nor listen to the appeals of its member whom it is making the subject of its discipline.

When a church needs assistance in the management of a case of discipline, it may ask the aid of contiguous churches. These may appoint their wisest men, who may together constitute a COUNCIL, or, as it is sometimes called, a COMMITTEE OF HELPS. These may attend upon the meeting of the church, and, after hearing the case, may give her the benefit of their mature judgment, leaving it to her to receive or reject their opinion, as to her may seem best. They may never authoritatively decide a case, nor obtrude their advice when it is not asked. None but a church can call them into being, and when they perform the office the church assigns them, they are dissolved again into their original elements. If the church asks their aid in case of discipline, to the best of their ability, they may render it; but they can never take the case out of the hands of the church. Least of all can they arraign the church, and sit in judgment on its acts. They are a mere advisory body; and after the church hears their advice, it may reject it and go counter to it, and nobody will have any right to complain. It never can be a body to whom an appeal can be taken from the church; nor can it ever owe its existence to a member under discipline, nor to a minority of the church. "We have no such custom, neither the churches of God." A member unjustly expelled, then, can find no relief from a Council; for such a body cannot exist, according to Baptist usage, except it be created by the church.

Question 2.—“But may not churches err?”

To this I answer, ten thousand times, yes. More frequently, however, by retaining unworthy members than by expelling the worthy. How often are members tolerated in covetousness which is idolatry; in frequenting improper places of amusement; in quaffing the inebriating cup, till some of them die, church-members, with delirium tremens; and in the indulgence of an improper spirit, and the utterance of improper language toward their brethren! Where one is unjustly expelled, hundreds are sinfully retained in church connection. If God has aught against his churches, as to discipline, it is for their neglect in enforcing it, rather than for their reckless and cruel execution of it.

Question 3.—“What remedy, then, has one conscious of unjust expulsion?”

I answer again, none, according to the Scriptures, excepting from the church expelling him. But then, if she is unrelenting, or tardy in her return to justice,—

1. An opportunity is afforded him to submit humbly to the will of God. He knows that God's will of purpose is frequently accomplished through the ignorance or wickedness of men. Even the crucifixion of Christ, that event ordained by infinite Grace, was brought about by the wicked action of wicked men. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-

knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." God's way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters. And though it is inscrutable to him, he sees by the event that it is the Lord's will that he should be an excommunicated man. He knows that his Father, who has promised that all things shall work together for his good, has some wise purpose to accomplish in him or by him; and his language is, "The will of the Lord be done." However great may be the outrage he suffers, and however trying to the flesh its indication, he is more than compensated if it is sanctified to bring him, like a little child, uncomplainingly and uncomplainingly, at the feet of the Infinite Sovereign.

2. If he has been mistreated because of his principles, an opportunity is afforded him to suffer as a martyr for the truth. The primitive disciples did not esteem it an intolerable hardship thus to suffer. *They* "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." One thus meekly suffering for such a cause knows, by experience, what the Saviour meant when He said, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." And he can "rejoice and be exceeding glad," knowing that "great is his reward in heaven." Nor need have any fear that scriptural principles will be overthrown by his fall; for he knows that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

3. If his brethren have acted through misapprehension, it remains for him to show, by a well-ordered life and a godly conversation, that they have misunderstood him. If they have willfully mistreated him, he can wait patiently in hope that God's providence and grace, and the quiet operation of outside public opinion, will revolutionize opinions in the church and bring it right. But if the worst comes, he has the consolation to know,—

4. That expulsion from the church is not expulsion from the kingdom of heaven. His brethren, through mistake, or wickedly, have erased his name from the church-book; but by infinite grace it stands recorded on the Lamb's book of life. He is cut off from communion with those with whom he was wont to take sweet counsel; but his fellowship is still with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ. He is denied any further membership with God's visible people; but the church universal recognizes his right to membership. God has given him a position in that glorious company; and no earthly power can deprive him of it. Regenerated by God's Spirit and called by His grace, kept by His power and guided by His counsel, he will ultimately be received into glory, where he shall be welcomed to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Apostles and Prophets, in the General Assembly and church of the first-born that are written in heaven. His brethren may avoid him, or view him with repulsive or lowering looks; but he basks in the smiles of God's countenance, and Christ is to him a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. Men may say that he is not worthy of a name among God's people; but the heavenly comforter bears witness with his Spirit that he is a child of God, and gives him the spirit of adoption, by

which he can say, Abba, Father. And when, driven near to God by these afflictions, he attains to the full assurance of faith,—when, trusting only in Christ, he makes his calling and election sure,—condemned though he is by frail and erring mortals, he can adopt for himself the exulting language of the apostle, “Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things I am more than a conqueror through him that loved me. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Manual of Church Discipline

REV. ELEAZER SAVAGE

Rev. Eleazer Savage was born in Middletown, Conn., July 28, 1800; entered Hamilton in 1820; was ordained in Rochester in 1824; was pastor in several other communities in New York, in which he baptized more than 400 souls; published a valuable work on Church Discipline. Mr. Savage was a very useful minister, and an honored and faithful servant of Jesus; one of his daughters is the wife of the able president of the Rochester Theological Seminary.

—William Cathcart, 1881

CHURCH DISCIPLINE,
IN TWO PARTS,¹
FORMATIVE & CORRECTIVE;

IN WHICH IS DEVELOPED
THE TRUE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

“A Christian is the highest style of man.”
“He that winneth souls is wise.”
“It must needs be that offences come.”
“By mercy and truth, iniquity is purged.”

BY REV. ELEAZER SAVAGE

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

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PREFACE.

Two editions of Four Thousand copies of “The Manual of Church Discipline,” upon “offences” and their treatment—which now constitutes the Second Part of this work—have been published and sold. A re-publication of that work, is now called for, alike by the wants of the Churches, and the wishes of those best acquainted with its merits.

It has been thought best to enlarge the work, by prefixing a *Part upon Formative Church Discipline*; a subject truly *first*, both in the order of nature, and importance; and were Formative Church Discipline, closely studied, and well understood in its intrinsic nature and vast importance; and vigorously carried forward in the Churches, we fully believe, that there would be far fewer offences occurring; and so far less Corrective Church Discipline, required. The First Part of this work will be of great value to all classes of Religious Teachers; as clearly showing them the *nature* of the work they have in hand, in forming men to the true Christian Character, by the culture of depraved mind, with inspired truth. And as showing, also, that it is the intelligent, earnest, laborious, prayerful Teacher, alone, that succeeds in his work; and attains unto “the honor that comes from God only.” Such success and such honor were reward enough, for doing the highest work of human hands, in the best possible manner.

And, if this little Volume shall shed any such new light upon the subject of Religious Teaching, as shall induce and ensure the greater efficiency of Teachers, through their own thorough personal culture, its very highest end will have been gained.

The Second Part of this work, will be found, we think, by all Church Members, to contain instructions of vital interest to them. For certainly, the *peace* of the Church of Christ, as flowing from her purity; and as opposed to “bitter envying and strife; to wars and fightings,” is manifestly a paramount interest. And yet, what spiritual interest beside, is so greatly exposed and so frequently assailed, as the peace of the Christian brotherhood? There are a thousand *forms* of “offence” to disturb it; and twice as many *forms of treating* those offences which disturb it more.

It is a matter of most serious question, whether the difficulties of the Church do not arise more, by nine-tenths, from the *wrong manner* of treating offences, than from the offences themselves.

And there are two very obvious reasons of this fact. One is, disciplinary measures, as they exist, are more frequently the offspring of *passion*, than principle. Passion fixes its own end; which is to punish, instead of restore. It makes its own law, instead of leading to the inspired one, made and provided for the case. And passion thus legislates, and executes, and works mischief because it has never been subdued to the obedience of Christ, by the application of revealed light to the understanding and heart, by the Holy Spirit. Another reason is, there has been almost *nothing written* on the sub-

ject of Church Discipline, to scripturally instruct Church members, as to the *different kinds* of offences, by which they and the cause may be injured; and the *proper methods* of treating them.

It has appeared to the writer, that no interest, so great as the peace of the Church; that no interest, so much exposed as this, both by offences and their improper treatment, has been so much overlooked and left so unprovided for, by the appointed feeders of the sheep and lambs. We have volume upon volume, treating upon well nigh every doctrine and duty of revealed religion besides; but how little have we written upon this subject.

In the Second Part of this work we have attempted the *classification of offences*, and the *specification of the rule* for the treatment of each class. Each class has its distinctive feature and its absolute rule. Such exceptions to the classification as would naturally arise, are noticed, accurately defined, and provided for. Still, defects, and even errors, will doubtless be detected. It were no easy task, perhaps an impracticable one, amidst offences of an endless variety of type, to do more than to deal in a few general principles and rules. And then we have studied simplicity and brevity, in strict imitation of the Master and his inspired servants, on this subject; that the mind might not be greatly burdened with many things; but deeply impressed with a few, which should serve to hold it amidst the greatest provocations and the sharpest trials, to the certain exercise of brotherly love; to the accurate estimate of wrongs; to the careful consideration of evidence; to the due respect for inspired law; and to the truest regard for the honor of God.

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CHAPTER I. CLASSIFICATION OF OFFENCES

The simple announcement of this subject, may awaken in many hearts a degree of *pain*; because, it is at once seen, as necessarily involving the consideration and the correction of the *sins* of professing Christians. We feel a pungent sympathy with all who may be the subjects of such an emotion; and we would have avoided the occasion of these painful exercises, could we in faithfulness to our high trust, have done so. Our present situation awakens a lively fellow-feeling with the physician. He has portions of professional duty exceedingly painful and trying. Nevertheless, he may not shrink from them through the twinges of delicate feeling, or the gushings of rising sympathy. Nor may the ministers of religion. To treat on the imperfections and sins of Christian professors, and the methods of correcting them, is to imitate the Oracles of God. The Bible takes things as they are; and so must we. It proceeds, in its instructions of every form, upon the principle, that the best men in the Church, *may fall* by sin; and that the mere professor and hypocrite *will fall*; that “offences must needs come;” because, remaining and prevailing depravity will induce them; and, therefore, that certain rules of procedure—certain methods of treatment, would be indispensable, in all such cases. The precept, therefore, is provided against the time and the occasion for its employment—against the “coming of offences.”

And the sole design of this work, is to bring out that provision. It is not to make new laws of Discipline; but to explain old ones. It is not to be understood ourselves, independent of the Lord; but to have the Master of the house understood, independent of all men; when he speaks, describing the “*offence*,” and specifying the *rule* for its treatment.

Corrective Church Discipline is “*the right treatment of offending members*.” That is, the application of right principles, in a right spirit, to their wrong conduct. An offending member is one, who has transgressed some law of Christ’s kingdom; for, “where there is no law, there is no transgression”—no “*offence*.” Offences, as to their magnitude, are to be estimated by the importance of the law violated. Hence, as there are different laws of Christ’s kingdom—laws having different degrees of value and importance, just as there are different laws in a State; so there are different kinds of offences—offences of various magnitude; and, of course, requiring different treatment.

The consideration, therefore, of the *nature and kinds* of “offences,” with their *proper methods of treatment*, must constitute the theme of that volume, which professes to treat Corrective Church Discipline, in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

There are Five Kinds of offences, namely, *minor*, the smaller offences; such as should be borne;—*private*, or such as cannot be proved;—

personal, as when one brother injures another in his person, reputation, or property, and there is proof of the fact; *public*, or such as equally injure all the members, and for which all require an equal satisfaction; and *insufferable*, that is, offences of such enormity as require the immediate and positive removal of the member from the body, for the honor of the cause.

Before entering upon the particular examination of these different kinds of offences, with the rule of treatment required by each, we wish to make a few general remarks, anticipating some exceptions to the classification of offences which we have made; and showing the reasons on which it is based.

Under some one of these *five heads*, we think, every offence may find what, on the whole, may be justly considered its proper place. Yet there are what might be regarded, at first view, apparent exceptions. For example, a *minor offence* may inflict, to some extent, a personal or a public injury; and therefore, be, in some sense, a personal or a public offence; and yet, because it is one of such nature, as to require us to act on the rule of forbearance, we place it under the distinct head of minor offences. Again; a *private offence* is a personal one, and might be said to be one class of personal offences; but the ground on which the distinction is based, is *the total lack of evidence* in the case; and, consequently, the requisition of a different rule of treatment. For, if there are two cases, in one of which there is no evidence, and in the other, proof, do not all see that necessity will give birth to different rules of treatment? In this first case, nothing can be done beyond private interviews. In other cases of personal offence, that is, where there is proof, investigation may be carried on to any desirable extent, because the means of conviction are in the possession of the injured brother. Hence, the ground of the distinction between private and personal offences, is the *lack* of evidence in the one case, and the *possession* of it in the other; and the *necessity* of treating them by different rules. Again; there might seem to be another exception in the case of certain personal offences which are *quite public*, and therefore nearly allied to public offences. But mark the ground of the distinction here. All real *public* offences, properly so called, equally injure all the members; but *public personal* offences do not equally injure all. All, by such an offence, may be injured, and all, because it is public, may require satisfaction; but is not one member, after all, injured more than all the other members taken together? And will he not, therefore, feel more sensibly; and by a natural necessity take hold of the work of correction? Moreover, the two cases require different *rules* of treatment. In all cases of public offence, the offender may be called upon by the church, if he be present, directly; or, if absent, in any kind, efficient manner, to give satisfaction. But in all cases of personal offence, there requires private interviews, with a view, if possible, to settle the matter of difference; and prevent its being brought to the church. The reasons of this position will appear in their proper place. Once more; a case of *insufferable* offence, that is, one which requires immediate exclusion, may

be personal or public; and yet, because it is an offence of so high an order, as to demand prompt excommunication, it receives the appellation of *insufferable*. For example, *forgery*. An offence of this kind may be to the special injury of a brother, and therefore, be personal. It may be against a man of the world, thus equally injuring all the members, and therefore, be a public offence; and yet, is properly denominated *insufferable*, because the rules specially applicable in other cases, are at once superseded, and the only true rule—the *ascertainment of the fact*, is promptly acted upon; and his excision is made, at once, as far as it can go, to wipe out the deep crimson stain upon the reputation of the church and the cause.

It will be perceived, then, that the grand reason for the classification of all offences under the preceding five heads, lies in the *nature and necessarily different treatment* of offences. Offences are almost endlessly various in their aspects; and yet, each offence, when duly considered in its attendant circumstances and degree, will readily suggest its own class, and thus fix its own rule. Every offence is, on the whole, *minor*, requiring gentle admonition and forbearance; or *private*, requiring private correction, but justifying no farther proceedings, for want of evidence; or strictly *personal*, requiring the employment of the three steps of labor, according to the 18th of Matthew, if the wrong be persisted in; or *public*, requiring the notice and public correction of the church; or *insufferable*, demanding prompt exclusion for the honor of Christianity among men.

Having made these remarks by way of justifying the foregoing classification of offences, we proceed to the particular examination of the different kinds of offences; and the rules prescribed for their treatment.

CHAPTER II. FIRST CLASS OF OFFENCES; MINOR.

To the first class of offences belong *minor* ones; the smaller offences; what are commonly called *imperfections* of Christians; such as should be borne.

For example, *Levity*, a light and trifling deportment, a want of becoming seriousness and stability. *Irritability*, the susceptibility of being easily exasperated; soon angry; habitually fretful. *Loquacity*, a propensity to talk too much; to speak imprudently. *Forwardness*, a tendency to overact; to go too far; to be obtrusive; to be the greatest. *Backwardness*, an inclination to fall upon the back-ground, to never come up to the line of duty; a shrinking from obligation and responsibility; a hanging, like a dead weight, upon the wheels of devotion and usefulness. *Littleness*, a disposition to stick and contend for one's own way in unimportant matters. It may be seen, also in thinking more of cents, than liberal men do, of dollars. And many other like features of character. To which may be added, many of the minor and ordinary defects in Christian sentiment and Christian practice.

Now there are three views to be taken of these infirmities of Christians: why they may *properly* be considered offences; the *reasons* for forbearance; and the *rule* of treatment.

1. Why they may *properly* be considered offences. They may be so considered, because, they are plain violations of the principles and precepts of the gospel. Here, gravity, meekness, slowness to speak, humbleness of mind, readiness to every good work, liberality, in a word, *amiability*, are directly opposed to levity, irritability, loquacity, forwardness, backwardness, littleness, in a word, *unloveliness* of character. So that, these imperfections cannot exist, without constant violations of some of the finest portions of Divine requirement. Of course, when they are seen in their fellow-members by good men, they will be, they must be, sources of lively regret; and it may be, under certain circumstances, of constant injury and suffering. Moreover, these traits of character are the more trying, because so difficult of correction. Seen in her members, they seem entailed upon the Church; and often become a living affliction to her. She sighs over repeated foibles and failures, and feels the keen anguish of an affectionate parent over an unlovely child. Still, they furnish the occasion for forbearance, as well as faithfulness.

2. We notice the *reasons* for the exercise of forbearance in such cases. In the first place, they may be *constitutional* infirmities. There is, doubtless, a very great difference in the original constitution of men; a difference, both in their mental and physical structure, as well as a difference arising from early habit and peculiar circumstances. We have numerous specimens of such difference, not only in the members of every church, but, the children of every family. We see and acknowledge the difference; and readily admit the impracticability of making the dissimilar members alike, because, the cause of the difference lies deep, having its seat in the texture of the mind—in the gristle and bone. Cecil says of Melancthon and Luther, that “Melancthon was like a snail with his couple of horns; he puts out his horns, and feels—and feels—and feels. But Luther dashes in saying his things; cuts everything to pieces; is like a case of instruments.” The difference was constitutional. And Paul has said, “Every man has his peculiar gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that;” a truth, which, whether it allude to differences in the elements of the constitution given, or in the degrees of grace imparted, equally challenges the kind consideration of our brother’s peculiarities.

Hence, the reason for forbearance is this, those unhappy traits which are constitutional; or the result of early habit and peculiar circumstances, are *exceedingly difficult*, if not *impossible*, of correction, whether the individual or the church undertake the labor. Besides, it costs some men, owing to peculiarity of constitution and habit, as much again to live Christian lives, as it does others. This consideration, alone, should induce large forbearance.

We often indulge in censoriousness, where we ought to exercise commiseration. Bold Peter condemns modest John.

Again; we should remember that there are some things, perhaps, that may be viewed in the light of *constitutional deficiencies*. Well, "that which is wanting, cannot be numbered." If one scholar in your school, were naturally duller than the rest, would you not rather help, than hurt him?"

All, perhaps, again, have their constitutional defects. We, ourselves, may have *our* imperfections, if not of the same kind, or so glaring and unhappy as those of others. And we are taught, while we attempt to correct others, to "consider ourselves, lest we also be tempted." If "in the same condemnation" to any extent, we do well to be lowly, rather than lifted up; sympathetic, instead of severe.

And, once more: this class of offences furnishes the *only occasion* for the exercise of forbearance. Forbearance is often enjoined as a duty. It signifies, to bear with another. But, of course, not in all cases. There are instances of high offence, where the exercise of forbearance would be a *sin*, a cringing meanness; on other and counter occasions, a *high virtue*, a generous magnanimity. And such, we conceive, are the occasions we have just had under consideration.

3. We proceed next to examine the *rule* of treatment.

First, we premise; always consider, when an offence of the SMALLER KIND has been committed, *whether it should be the subject of Christian forbearance, or discipline*. This is the first thing to be determined, although it may sometimes be difficult to say where forbearance should terminate, and discipline begin. If, in the light of the nature of Christian infirmities, and the reasons for bearing with them, you conclude it your duty to exercise forbearance in the case, then, the *rule* is at hand. It is very simple, and striking in its application, as simple. It is found in Romans, 15:1.

"We, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

We, then, that are strong; not *strong*, to knock down; but strong, to bear up; strong, to sustain burdens; strong, to receive a weak brother; strong enough, to go without meat, if it make him to be offended; strong, to please him for his good, to edification.

The rule, however, includes, not only sympathy, but *aid*; the free, faithful pointing out of defects, with the best method of overcoming them. The spirit of the rule forbids our suffering sin, or even infirmity upon a brother, provided we can aid him in working its riddance. The spirit of the rule is benevolence.

But perhaps you may determine the offence properly *disciplinable*, and not demanding forbearance. For, we believe there is one exception to the principle laid down. And, in concluding our remarks under this head, it is proper to say, that there are cases when members may be regarded, on the

whole, as Christians; and their repeated offences, as constitutional infirmities, or, at least, as infirmities rooted by education and riveted by habit and therefore, well nigh impossible of correction; and yet, they are so great dishonor to the cause, and so great grief to their brethren, as to require their removal from the church. In the case of many, we do know it extremely difficult for them to live so, as to do honor to the cause. In the case of a few, it seems utterly impossible. And when this fact is once ascertained, they should be removed, painful as exclusion in such case may be. It is a forcible remark of some one, that “it will be time enough to know some Christians, when they get to heaven.” And why some want to be known as professors, when to be known is to be despised; why they wish membership in a church, when they cannot adorn it, is a problem we are utterly unable to solve on any principle, which would do honor to their understandings, or their hearts.

CHAPTER III. SECOND CLASS OF OFFENCES; PRIVATE.

To the second class of offences belong *private* ones, or such as *cannot be proved*.

We have already said that private offences are personal, in a sense, because they occur between two individuals; yet, because there is *no evidence* in the case to convict the offender of his wrong, we call it a *private* offence. For example; one brother takes the property of another, yet is seen by no person except the owner; and there is an entire absence of all circumstantial evidence.

Now the rule of treatment, in such case, is the *first part* of the whole rule for personal offences, given in the 18th chapter of Matthew.

“Go tell him his fault between thee and him alone;” or, in the corresponding direction of Solomon: “Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself, and discover not a secret to another.” —Prov. 25:9.

Here the Saviour and Solomon are both seen, enjoining a *private measure* for the correction of a *private offence*. The sum of the rule is this: Go to your brother alone; seek satisfaction; seek the recovery of the property, and a confession to you of the theft. “If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” If he shall say, “I took it; here it is; I am sorry;” thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear you, then mark this direction—mark it well!—REBUKE IN SECRET, AND LEAVE IT WITH GOD. You must not whisper it in any ear; much less publish and emblazon it to the world. The rule says: “Tell him his fault between *thee and him alone*,” and “discover not a *secret* to another.”

Now the *reason* on which the rule is based, is this; if the injured brother declare the wrong, he involves himself, because, he has not the proof in the

case which the Bible requires. Suppose, for example, he presume to go one step further, and take one or two more brethren with him, to labor the matter, (for witnesses, he has none to take.) In their presence the charge of theft is made and denied. The two attending members ask for proof; but there is none. And what can they do? They hold the two brethren in equal estimation. The word of the one, is as good as that of the other. They cannot decide, therefore, that the brother's charge of theft, however true, is sustained at all. But, on the other hand, they must become witnesses in a case *against him*, though he is perfectly innocent as to the truth of the charge. He cannot prove that the real offender has stolen; but the real offender can now prove that he is guilty of defamation. And, for example, the new trial proceeds, and he is found guilty by the testimony of the two brethren, before whom he made the unlawful exposure; and by his own admission of having charged his brother with theft, when he had no sufficient evidence of the fact to convict him before others. He is required to confess, or suffer exclusion. He cannot confess that he has lied; for he knows, before God, that he has told the truth. He is, therefore, excluded, for the church can act only on evidence. Her Lord has told her, that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established."—*2 Cor. 13:1*. And he, failing to meet the requirement, must unavoidably suffer.

Now, how much better it had been for him, having dealt faithfully with his offending brother *in private*, to have left the matter; and borne patiently the trial from which Providence had, as yet, furnished him no means of escape; rather than to suffer, in addition to the first trial, the loss of his place among the brethren, the loss of his reputation, besides all the trouble and dishonor, totally unavailing to him, he has brought upon the church. His first case was bad; the last, worse. Hence, in all cases of *private offence*, nothing can be done for their settlement, beyond *private interviews*.

Some, however, are not satisfied with this view of the treatment of private offences. They would feel justified in the *exposure of sin*; nay, would feel it their duty to make the exposure; and do believe that God would, in some way, vindicate them. But, we ask, can they reasonably expect that God will justify them before men, when they set aside his *law of evidence*? Has he not said, once and again, to the number of seven times, that "every word shall be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses?" If, then, this is God's way of establishing the guilt of offenders, who dare presume on a *new way* of exposure, without proof? Let all such pause and examine the statute: "*One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.*"—*Deut. 19:15*. "Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death, by the mouth of witnesses."—*Num. 35:30*. "At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death, be put to death."—*Deut. 17:6*. "He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy,

under *two or three* witnesses.”—*Heb. 10:28*. “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before *two or three* witnesses.”—*1 Tim. 5:19*. “In the mouth of *two or three* witnesses shall every word be established.”—*2 Cor. 13:1*. “Take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of *two or three* witnesses every word shall be established.”—*Matt. 18:16*.

Next, listen to the counselings of the wise man on this subject: “Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself; discover not a secret to another, lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away!”—*Prov. 25:8–10*.

CHAPTER IV. THIRD CLASS OF OFFENCES; PERSONAL.

To the third class of offences belong *personal* ones. Personal offences are such *injuries*, of one brother by another, in person, reputation, or property, as *can be proved*. The case in the inspired statute is thus stated: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee.” The parties here, are *thy brother* and *thee*—two members of the same church. The offence is indicated by the term *trespass*, and means, either an abuse of thy person, an attack upon thy character, or a depredation upon thy property.

Now, in case of such trespass or offence, three things must be settled in your own mind, before you take a step, or say a word.

1. Determine the *real amount* of the wrong committed.

This, of course, may be less or more, and must be something. What it really is, should be accurately determined. It should not be magnified, nor diminished. There would be injustice done to him, or you, in either case. Were we now studying and teaching policy, and not principle, we would say, rather make the wrong too small, than too great. But we do not say this. Every thing right, and sacred, and fair, demands the wrong, the whole wrong, and nothing but the wrong.² This determined, then,

2. Ascertain what *certain proof* you have in the case. If you have no

²The wrong, whatever it is, in nature and name, you would do well, at this time, to reduce to *writing*. There are two reasons for this: 1. Sometimes a matter of difference is more *imaginary* than real; and looks much larger in the mind, than it would on paper. If you write it, therefore, you will, by necessity, think more closely upon it, and will be likely to reduce it, and make it as small as possible, and give it a right name. 2. The wrong thus reduced to writing, will be, so far, *ready for the church*, if it have ultimately to be presented there. We believe it is considerably common, and certainly a very business-like and safe way, for the injured brother to present to the church, *in writing*, a statement of the wrong done, with the testimony of witnesses, and a history of his course in the case. Such a paper, you perceive, contains *three* parts: 1. A statement of the injury received; 2. The testimony of the witnesses to prove it; and, 3. A history of the steps taken by the injured member, to gain his erring brother. *Now* is the time for you to begin this paper, by a statement of the wrong done, in the prayerful hope that you may never have occasion to finish it.

proof, the offence is a private one; and you have only to see your brother alone. If you have good and substantial proof to sustain all you prefer, you are so far ready for any extent, to which the labor may possibly proceed. But, if you have not proof, equal to your complaint, then you must reduce your complaint to your proof. You can cut down your charges, and now is the time to do it; but you cannot stretch your proof. This done,

3. See whether *the offence would exclude him* should the brother persist in his wrong. If he has injured you, even only in a small degree, it is your privilege and your duty to see him alone, and try to show him his wrong, and to obtain satisfaction for it. But it is an **INDISPENSABLE RULE**, *never make that a matter of discipline, and take not only the first and second, but the third steps of labor; which, if persisted in, would not exclude the offender*. Because, it would be alike an injury to your brother, and a mortification to you, to go through all the solemn formality of a regular course of labor, and, after all, be judged by the church, as having little or no cause of action. “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished.”—*Prov. 22:3*.

These *three preparatory steps* taken, the next thing is your *rule*. This, for all cases of personal offence, properly so called, you have in Matt. 18:15–17.

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou has gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”

We will first, explain this rule, in its simple, regular operation; and then, notice an *exception* which some make, touching its applicability to which those cases of personal offence, which have been quite publicly committed.

This rule involves *three steps of labor*, as they are commonly called.

The **FIRST STEP** is, “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him, alone.”

This, in its simple meaning, maybe thus drawn out: *Go* to thy brother; visit him. Do not stay away, and lock up the disagreeable matter to sour in thy bosom, to fester in the flesh of thine heart. *Go*. Take the trouble to see him, and have a good understanding immediately effected with him, and thus gain thy brother. “No!” you say, “he has done all the wrong, and he ought to have all the trouble. It is not my duty to go after him. It cannot be, in the nature of the case. It is his duty to come to me, and when he gets here, to make a pretty humble confession too!” Stop, my brother; you are making a new rule. The Master has settled this matter. He has spoken, specifying the *case* and giving the *rule*. He has said “If thy brother trespass against thee.” Is not this thy case? Well, then, the rule. He has also said, “Go and

tell him his fault.” Here is the case, and the rule for it. And then the *principle*, at the base of the rule. He has laid down the same principle for you, which he acted upon himself. He came to save you, though in all your sins. Now he commands you to go and save your brother, notwithstanding his. Moreover, he *cautions*: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.” And he *reasons*: “How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine that went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” And it should not be your wish that one of them should perish. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise *rebuke*, and not suffer sin upon him.” You must visit him, then.

But, further; go and visit him, not only, but “tell him his fault.”

FIRST, *state the matter of grievance fairly and fully*. You have already determined what it is. Now state it. Neither magnify it through anger, nor diminish it through fear.

Then, SECOND, if he deny it, *convince him of his wrong*, by adducing your sources of proof; for so the word *tell* means. The original word is employed in several passages, where it is translated *convince*. For example, *Titus 1:9*: “Holding fast the faithful word, that ye may be able, by sound doctrine, to *convince* the gainsayers.” And again, *John 8:46*: “Which of you *convinceth* me of sin?” So that the direction, “tell him his fault,” means *convince him of his wrong*. And this is to be done by laying the wrong and the way you can prove it—the whole wrong and whole source of proof, so before him, that he will see just what he has now to meet, and just what he must meet again, if the labor proceed further.

And if your ground is right and well sustained, you can hardly fail of producing conviction on his mind. Then add to this, plain, but kind reproof, if necessary; another idea, included in the original word. Entreat, also, as well as convince and reprove. And whether you gain your brother or not, you have done your duty so far.

Next, let the interview be a *private one*, “between thee and him alone.”

Your business now is private reproof, not public reproach. Avoid, therefore, giving publicity to the matter of difference, far as you can. “A just man will not be willing to make of his brother a public example.” Besides, suppose you have spoken of his fault to others; and suppose, also, that your pursuit of the “astray sheep,” result in your returning with it on your rejoicing shoulder; suppose a free, friendly, faithful, private interview heal the difference; how unhappy, that you have dishonored yourself, and your brother, and the cause of religion, by publishing it!

And, again; the avoidance of publicity is not, by any means, the whole idea. The direction, “between thee and him alone,” is not only in the

strictest accordance with heavenly prudence, but natural policy. When we have business to do with men, we want to find them alone; and the more especially, if it be business of a delicate or difficult character. And so it should be in this case, even though the offence itself, be quite public. “Between *thee and him alone*.” Who could suggest a wiser policy than this of our Lord? Who dare presume to think of the suggestion? It is admirably natural, safe, and divine!

Then mark, with great care, the *three things* included in this FIRST step of labor. 1. Go and see your brother; 2. Convince him of his fault; and, 3. Do it in private. Do it all. Do it with a right spirit and with a right aim. Aim to “gain thy brother;” and do it in a spirit of meekness and love. Remember that much, perhaps every thing, depends on success here.

To this explanation of this part of the rule under examination, we add *one word of caution* in employing it. Do not, for a moment, entertain the false idea, that this first step of labor, was *primarily designed to prepare the way for future steps*. It is very true, that this step, having been faithfully taken; and having failed to “gain our brother,” does prepare the way for subsequent proceedings; but this was not its first design. It was primarily designed to *settle the difficulty and stop all further proceeding*. Let, then, this first great design of the step, be your design in taking it. Do not think of *future steps* with your offending brother. Be all absorbed with this one step, as though it were the only one, and the only hope. An almost uniform cause of failure here, is a want of thoroughness. Be thorough, then. Here, in all probability, you gain or lose your brother.

“But if he will not hear thee,” then take the SECOND STEP.

“Take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”

Here two questions very naturally arise in your mind. You ask, *who are the “one or two?”* And what is the *precise character* of this transaction?

Three remarks, we think, will satisfactorily answer these questions; and make the whole business of the second step of labor, plain to you and to those who may go with you.

1. The business of the first step, you recollect, was visitation, conviction, reproof, advice, entreaty; and all of it was done by you in the most retired manner possible, and with a view to gain your brother; the business of this step, is of the same nature, precisely; it includes the same parts of service, a corresponding manner, and the same end.

As before, so now, you must still aim to gain your brother. Now, also, you must visit him. Visit him with some others. Not many. “One or two more;” that is, one or two *more* than went on the first visit; one or two in addition to yourself. Before, you visited him alone; now, you need and must have some with you. And here is the number, “one or two.” Take these, and you will have all that will be necessary for every purpose—all the law allows. Take no more; and thus have an interview as near as possible, again,

“between thee and him alone.” If your brother’s wrong is known to you and the “one or two,” only; and you are all so wise as not to mention it to others; and so happy as to gain him, it will need to be known no further.

But you must visit him with one or two more, not only; but, as in the first step of labor *convince him of his wrong*. The same wrong, described in the same language. You must not change your ground, nor your language. It must be the same wrong which you defined and settled, before you commenced the labor; which you stated distinctly to him, at the time of your first visit; and which you now repeat. Your object, now, is *conviction*. But, if you waver, you can not fasten conviction on his mind. State the wrong, then, in the same language as before; and proceed, if necessary, to “establish every word” of it. This is to be done by the aid of the “one or two,” as “witnesses.” And hence you are directed to take them for this very purpose. “Take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.” Every word of your complaint is to be established, by adding the testimony of *one or two more*; that is, one or two *besides* yourself. You are a witness against your brother. But, by your testimony alone, his guilt could not be established before others. His contradiction would just balance your complaint. But, if you take “one, he, with yourself, would make “two;” and if you take “two,” they, with you, would make “three.” And thus, every word would be established by *two*, in the first case; and by, *three* in the second, just as the rule and the whole Bible require. The result of this increased and combined testimony would be, to *produce conviction* of his wrong, in the mind of your brother, if it is in your power to do it.

But, this does not finish the business of this step of labor. As in the first, you added reproof, and advice, and entreaty, to conviction; so, now, you must have your “one or two” *fellow laborers* do the same. “And if he shall neglect to hear them,” the second step of labor is at an end.

Having thus drawn out this step, in its simple process, we subjoin a remark, in the next place, showing its admirable *business character*, as well as its divine simplicity.

2. The second step of labor involves a *trial*.

This is clear from the fact, that the “one or two” are represented as “*witnesses*.” Who are witnesses? Persons, who bear testimony in a case, pending between contending parties, in order that the truth of every word of a charge preferred, may be established. If, then, this is an interview for receiving the testimony of witnesses, with a view to present conviction, how clearly it is a *trial*. But are the “one or two” *witnesses*? Mark the language: “Take one or two more.” This points out the duty of the prosecuting brother. “That in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” This shows the *object* to be gained, by taking them along with himself, as *witnesses*. He, then, has the *true end* of this step; and the *right way* to gain it. But to gain this end, by the one or two, as witnesses, there

must be a *trial*—a proceeding which shall bring out the complaint; and the admission, or proof of its justice. Either an admission of the justice of the complaint by the offender; or its justice, established by the testimony of witnesses, make a trial of it, less or more. It is very true, that a formal and particular examination of the complaint, and of the evidence on which it rests, may not be necessary for the information of the parties, or the witnesses. The facts in the case, may all have been previously known, to each and to all of them. Still, is there not form to the interview? And what is it? Why, all having come together, the parties, and the witnesses, the offence is stated, by the injured brother. The offender pleads not guilty to the alledged charge. The “one or two” witness to the truth of “every word” of it. They know him to be guilty; and, therefore, testify to the fact; and advise him to give satisfaction. Now is there not *form* here? Indispensable form? All the form, too, and reality of a *regular trial*? Hence, the second step of labor, involves a trial.

Before leaving this point, we subjoin a word, upon the heavenly wisdom and the vast importance of this measure. A thorough trial, had in the second step of labor, and the church is saved much time, and spared much perplexity and reproach. Here, matters of difference among brethren in a retired manner, are carefully examined, rejected, settled, or well prepared for the church. No language can sufficiently express the importance of the idea of a trial; a regular trial, substantially, not only here, but in all steps of discipline. All discipline, as we now use the term, supposes “offences.” Offences suppose an offender, and one offended. These terms suppose, almost of course, the preferment of a complaint, by the offended, against the offender, before some tribunal. A complaint thus preferred, supposes witnesses to sustain it; and a decision upon the case, by said tribunal. And the whole supposes satisfaction rendered, or punishment inflicted. Now, in each of the three steps of labor, we have all these regular features of a trial. Even in the first, where the offended and the offender are “alone.” The injured brother is the complainant, the witnesses and the judge. He states the wrong done; and not only testifies to the fact, but mentions other sources of proof in the case, which he has. And if he fail to “gain his brother,” in this interview, he goes again, with “one or two more witnesses.” Here, again, the same process; the complaint, the testimony, the decision against the offender. And if all this is unavailing, the case and the result go next to the Church, the Supreme Court of Christ, to pass, with like regularity, under her solemn review; and to receive her final sanction.

How obvious, then, the idea of a *trial*, in every step of discipline; and how vastly important, that all of us take its deep impression upon our hearts, in order to prevent haste; and ensure regularity and safety in all our disciplinary doings.

3. The second step of labor, not only involves a trial; and makes the “one or two,” witnesses; but it also represents them as *advisors* in the case.

This is clearly implied in the language, which last mentions them. "If he shall *neglect to hear them*;" that is, refuse to hearken to, and obey *their* advice; as the original word means. This view places the "one or two," in a very important and responsible light. They are seen as *advisors* in the case; and, of course, as judges, as well as witnesses. For, advice supposes judgment, and judgment, knowledge. Their knowledge of the facts in the case, qualifies them to bear testimony, not only; but to form a sound judgment, and to give appropriate advice. And to all this service in the case, they are most evidently called.

Their advice may respect two things. They *first*, advise the offender to give satisfaction, fully and promptly. "If he neglect to hear them"—refuse to heed their advice; they, *second*, advise the injured brother, to "tell it unto the church."

And their advice may be called for *in another* case. Suppose wrong has been done, and that they were witnesses of it; but a wrong of such nature as could not result in exclusion, if carried to the church; and as requires the aggrieved brother to administer simple admonition; and then act on the rule of forbearance. In such case, they should advise him to relinquish the labor; and if it be a burden, to bear it.

This whole view carries, upon its face, the idea that the "one or two" are *brethren*—members of the same church with the parties, as a probable and a general thing; although others, might be the only "witnesses." Facts are in harmony with this construction. Injuries inflicted by one member on another, are commonly known to other members of the same church. And fellow members are generally "witnesses" and advisers, in cases of personal difficulty and discipline. And then, the rule places the "one or two" on an exact level with the injured brother and the church, as *advisers*. Mark the language.

"If he will not hear *thee*." "If he shall neglect to hear *them*." "If he neglect to hear the *church*." They, hence, are advisers in the case, as much as the prosecuting brother and the church are; and, therefore, need to be pious men; and doubtless are, generally, brethren.

Regarding the "one or two" as brethren, then; and their service, as highly important and responsible, we subjoin a few *hints* to such, calculated, if heeded, to insure success in their painful labors.

Such persons should be "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." Their service is highly, a spiritual one. "Ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." They should be men who fear God supremely; and who will feel an equal sympathy for their differing brethren, and the suffering cause; men, who are, and who will be felt to be, impartial men, by the trespassing brother; otherwise, he will not, of course "hear them." They should solemnly consider, that they are called upon to testify, judge, and advise in a case of difference between brethren; and that some, even

slight, defect in their temper, testimony, judgment, or advice, may turn the scales against success.

And as a successful termination, depends much upon a right beginning, it might be well for them, in every case, and as soon as convened, to inquire whether the *first step of labor has been duly taken*. Because, if it has not, they should not act in the case. The Saviour has placed the first step of labor, before the second; and so must the injured brother, if he will walk correctly. If, upon inquiry, then, they find it has not been taken; that it has been passed over, on any account, whatever, the parties should be left “alone,” to make an attempt, at an amicable adjustment of their differences. But, if they find the first step of labor, declared on the one hand, and admitted on the other, to have been duly taken, the trial may lawfully proceed.

If, now, the questions return: Who are the “one or two?” And what is the precise character of this transaction?

We answer: The second step of labor is a trial; held in a retired manner; by an injured brother, attended by his witnesses; in order to convict an offender of his fault, and gain him.

And the “one or two” are witnesses, judges, and advisers, in the same sense, substantially, that the prosecuting brother is.

And they naturally become “witnesses,” also, before the Church; provided the case is carried there. The knowledge they have gained from the trial, in addition to what they before possessed, highly qualifies them to bear an intelligent and hearty testimony, before the Church, to the guilt and desert of the offender; and, also, to the faithfulness of the injured member, in laboring to gain his brother. And to this service they would, of necessity, be called, upon the presentation of the case to that tribunal, by the prosecuting brother. Without their presence, and their testimony, he could not be sustained, either in his charge of wrong, or declaration of faithfulness in attempting to correct it.

“And if he shall neglect to hear them,” take the THIRD and LAST STEP of labor. “Tell it unto the Church.”

This is made the duty, the last duty, of the prosecuting brother in the case. “Tell it unto the Church.” Now, mark the *proper manner*. Address the Moderator. Say to him, “I have a matter of personal difficulty to lay before the Church.” Here stop. Do not state what it is. Call no names. If he understand his duty, he will ask *six questions*, principally to you; thus preparing the way for its proper admission.

1. Have you taken the first step of labor? You answer, “I have.”
2. Have you taken the second step? “I have.”
3. Did you, in this last step, have “one or two” with you, as “witnesses” and advisers; and are they present? “I had, and they are here. Brother B. and Mr. S.”
4. Brother B. and Mr. S., are all these things so? “They are.”

5. Have you notified the offending brother, that you should tell your grievance unto the Church today? "I have, and he is present."

6. Have you the complaint with the testimony of the witnesses, in writing. "I have."

These precautionary steps being thus taken, the Clerk reads the complaint, and the testimony of the witnesses. And the Moderator calls on brother B. and Mr. S. for their testimony, that this same complaint was preferred and examined, in a second step of labor; and that it was fully sustained according to this paper. They testify to this effect. And thus in the mouth of witnesses, again, every word of the complaint is established.

The case thus before the Church, the Moderator calls on the offender for *satisfaction*; or to show cause why he does not render it. His reply satisfies no one; except it be of his guilt. The brethren next, generally expostulate with him. But "he neglects to hear the Church."

His exclusion, by *unanimous vote*, next follows; and that, with the reasons of it, is accurately entered upon her blushing records. He is now to be regarded "as an heathen man and a publican;" that is, as the worst of men, in the estimation of a Jew. He should be furnished with a letter, containing the fact of his exclusion, with the reasons of it.

Or, suppose, the case, (and such a case there might be,) that some of the members of the Church are not *entirely satisfied* to exclude now. Suppose they wish a review of the case. This may be had.

Or, suppose again, that the Church are *seriously divided* in opinion, respecting the case. The importance of unanimity, would suggest moderation; and, as the next best measure, an invitation to some two, or three, or more, able and impartial ministers and brethren to attend the next church meeting, as *counsellors*, and *sit with the Church*; and hear the case; and aid to an amicable and unanimous decision. A course, we are frank to say, which we prefer, decidedly, before ordinary councils.

For, be it remembered, the sole power of decision upon all cases of Discipline, is in the Church. This is the divine constitution. Touching the ultimate reference of all matters, the direction is specific and final. "Tell it unto the church; but if he shall neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican!" This makes the *Church* the only proper judicatory, before which matters of difficulty can be brought; and the only proper court, wielding the power of ultimate decision.

In strict accordance with this view of the Saviour, is the direction of the Apostle to the Corinthian believers. He writes them as a Church; and as a Church, he directs them, "when gathered together to deliver their incestuous member unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh; to put away that wicked person."—*1 Cor. 5*. In his second letter to this same Church, touching this same case, he expresses his judgment, that the punishment of the excluded member, inflicted by the majority, had been "sufficient," and

directs them to “forgive him and confirm their love to him;” that is, restore him. *2 Cor. 2*. So, in writing the Thessalonian Church, he recognises her power and her duty, in the discipline of “disorderly walkers.”—*2 Thess. 3*. Hence, the exclusion and the restoration of persons, lie with the Church, and of course, all the processes connected with them.

Still, there may be cases, in which the Church may need assistance. And when, on any account, she may be too weak to bring forth judgment, it may be as highly advisable, as it is admissable, for her to invite two or three or more *able and impartial ministers or brethren, to sit with her, hear and advise*. Then, no decision will, or ever can be spoken of, but that of the Church. These men do not *vote*; they *only advise the Church how to vote*. They aid her; but do not supersede her. They make her, and leave her, *all and in all*, just as her Maker and Master did.

In connection with this examination of personal offences, and the proper rule of treating them, it will be proper to consider that *particular case* of personal offence mentioned in the 6th chapter of 1 Corinthians, with the *rule* laid down for its treatment; and its admirable accordance, in principle, with the rule in the 18th chapter of Matthew, which we have just been considering.

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? If, then, ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge, who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame! Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No! not one, that shall be able to judge between his brethren! But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.”

On the face of this paragraph, we may see *five things*:

1. That the difficulty among the Corinthian brethren was of a *pecuniary* character; about property; “things that pertain to this life.”

2. That they had recourse to the *law* to settle their matters of difference; and that before heathen judges, under pretence that their brethren were incompetent to judge. “But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers; before the unjust and not before the saints.”

3. That the holy Apostle *spurns this idea*, and argues their competence from the fact, that they shall “judge the world and angels.” “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we

shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? I speak to your shame! Is it so, that there is not a *wise man* among you? No! not one that shall be *able* to judge between his brethren?"

4. That he established a *rule*, which provides for the happy adjustment of all "matters" of pecuniary difference.

It is this: *Refer your matters of difference to your brethren*. Mark his language. "If, then, ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, *set them to judge which are least esteemed in the church*." That is, not those who are justly held in low estimation, in view of their intellectual and moral worth; but, brethren, who are now, in fact, as the original word simply means, *undervalued, neglected, and set at naught, by you*, notwithstanding they are "wise men"—men, "able to judge between their brethren." The rule, then, is, *leave all matters of pecuniary difference to wise and able brethren, instead of going to law*.

5. We see, also, that there is an *admirable accordance*, between the principle, laid down here by Paul; and that laid down by the Saviour in the 18th chapter of Matthew, for the settlement of personal difficulties.

We have defined personal offences to be injuries of a brother's person, reputation, or property. Here we have a case of the latter kind. The injury of a brother's property. Now, suppose a brother, thus injured, take the rule in the 18th chapter of Matthew for his guide. He first, makes a fair attempt to settle the matter "between himself and his brother alone." And this by the by, would be a natural way, in the case, whether a member of a church or not, if he meant to do right and avoid difficulty. But, not succeeding, instead of suing him at the law, he "takes one or two more;" "sets wise men;"—able to judge between their brethren, and, if possible, to testify, also; *precisely* as the Saviour and Paul have directed. They hear the charge. They witness to its truth; or hear it witnessed to. They judge the alledged offender guilty. They advise him to make reparation. He does so, and the matter is amicably settled. Or, suppose he refuse to give satisfaction. They advise the injured brother to lay the case before the Church. He does so, and the matter eventuates in the offender's exclusion; and in his exposure to prosecution, as another man.

Who now, but sees the Saviour, and his servant Paul, agreeing in their principles of discipline? And who, but must see, that the rule laid down by the Saviour, and thus sustained by the apostle, must operate most efficiently, and therefore properly in every case of personal offence, where there is proof?

But, we suppose again, while on the subject of suing at the law. Suppose a case of pecuniary injury, in which it is *impracticable for the law for personal offences to operate*. For example, a brother is on the point of removal; or is removing; is not only in debt, but is becoming an absconding debtor; or, is just putting his property out of his hands: then, and in that case, the question is, *What is it right to do?* Well, the Gospel allows no sue-

ing at the law; and let us remember, if we do sue, in any possible case, its operation should not be inconsistent with the public mind, the honor of the cause, the real good of the parties, and the strictest principles of justice and benevolence. We “speak this, not of commandment.”

We are now brought to consider the *exception*, which we promised to notice. It is this; that the rule in the 18th of Matthew is not necessary to be observed in those cases of personal offence which have been *quite publicly committed*.

On this exception, and the rule itself, we make two remarks.

1. We believe the rule in the 18th of Matthew is primarily and peculiarly applicable to all those cases of personal offence, which are but a *little known when first committed*. Because, the majority of personal offences, are of this character; and the right employment of this rule, was designed and is calculated, to heal budding difficulties in private; and avoid painful exposures of our erring brethren.

2. We also believe, that this rule is applicable to, and therefore, should be employed in, every case of personal offence, *however publicly committed and generally known*.

This opinion is founded upon the five following reasons:

1. The rule is plain, absolute, and *without exception*, as laid down by the master. “If thy brother trespass against thee; go and tell him his fault; take one or two more; tell it unto the church.” This is the rule for the case; the only rule; a rule without the exception in question. *Secrecy* does not qualify the transgression; but the *measure* for correcting it.

2. The rule cannot operate at all, beyond the first step, unless the offence be *public*; or at least, *known to some extent*. It must be known to witnesses, or there can be no trial; and there must be a trial, “that every word may be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses.”

Now, if *some degree* of publicity is the life of the rule, who will undertake to say that *much* destroys it.

3. The rule operates most efficiently in every case of personal offence, *however public*, and, on that account, aggravated it may be. The chief difference, in the two supposed cases, is, the one offence is more generally known, than the other; and, therefore, the greater for this reason; and consequently, the greater satisfaction is required. Now let the rule operate. The prosecuting brother requires, in the nature of the case, *a satisfaction ample as the injury to himself and the cause*. He is satisfied, when the public, as well as the personal reproach is wiped away. His demand is precisely what, that of the church and the public, is. Taking this rule, and going upon the principle, that all who have been witnesses of the wrong, must also be witnesses of the reparation, every man will, at last, be satisfied with the full confession, or the fearful excommunication of the offender.

4. The faithful employment of this rule ensures *universal approbation*, as well as absolute success, in all cases of personal offence, however

public. You employ this rule, and none will presume to fault you. You neglect it, and some will censure you. The one course is plain, the other, doubtful.

5. This rule will operate well, even in a *mixed case*. We mean, when the same “trespass” is both against a brother and the church. For example, should one brother slander another in church meeting. This would be a violation of the *order* of the church, and an *abuse* of the brother. Now, suppose the offender should be asked by the brother, or the church, either, to make satisfaction; and should refuse to do so. Of course, nothing could be done, at that time. But every one knows, that something must be done. He must be waited upon in some way. Now for the rule of procedure. Suppose you appoint a committee to wait upon him and report. This may answer. It may bring him to make satisfaction, both to the church and the injured brother, at the next church meeting. But, it is a rule of your own invention. And what is it better than the rule of Christ?

Now, see that operate, in this same case. The injured brother estimates the *whole offence*. He feels the *slander* personally; and the *disorder*, in common with others. He goes to his brother and when he is cool, and “alone;” tells him his fault; tries to convince him of his wrongs of disorder and slander. Does not succeed. “Takes one or two more,” (of course, acquainted with the case,) to expostulate with him. Fails again. Next, it comes to the church, where it began. The church do not ask proof of the offence; they witnessed it. They ask, has every thing been done to gain him? Now what committee could make a better report, than the injured brother and his “one or two” fellow laborers? Who does not see that while he *has done his own duty*, in correcting a personal injury; he has also served the church, in bringing an incorrigible public offender to her bar for punishment? And all in a most natural, inoffensive, and efficient way—his Lord’s own appointed way.

We, therefore, cannot see why the rule, in question, should not be employed in every case of personal offence, *however public*; although primarily and peculiarly applicable to cases less known.

CHAPTER V. FOURTH CLASS OF OFFENCES; PUBLIC.

To the fourth class of offences, belong *public* ones. A public offence is one which equally injures all the members of the church; and for which all require an equal satisfaction.

It may not be improper, in this place, to notice a distinction, we have before made; and which should be clearly seen, between *public personal* offences, and *public* offences, properly so called.

While, in a case of simple public offence, all the members are equally injured; the same is not true, in case of a personal offence, however publicly, it may have been committed. All may require satisfaction, in the latter case; but not as much as the injured brother.

Two examples will illustrate the distinction. Suppose a brother be guilty of *profane swearing publicly*. This would be a *public* offence, and would equally injure all the members. But suppose again, the same individual be guilty of *circulating false reports* against a member. This would be a public personal offence, injuring an individual more than all the members besides. In the former case, the case of profanity, he would not consider himself called upon, more than the other members were, to correct the offender. But in the latter case he would. The public offence, would arouse the Church; the personal one, the individual. Now all this is natural. So it is in State as well as Church. A breach of the public peace would be prosecuted in the name of the people. In a case of personal injury, the injured individual seeks redress in his own name and way.

Having thus defined public offences, we proceed to consider *some cases*, mentioned in the Apostolic Epistles, with the methods of treatment required. And, as what is very strongly marked, we notice, in the first place, "*heresy*."

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ; but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."—*Rom. 16*. "There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth; shall be evil spoken of."—*2 Pet. 2*. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing; but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth; from such withdraw thyself."—*1 Tim. 6*. "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."—*Tit. 3*. "And of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—*Acts. 20*. "Of whom is Hymeneus and Phyletus; who, concerning the truth, have erred, saying, the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."—*2 Tim. 2*.

What, now, is the precise character of the offence, mentioned in these passages? It is *heresy*. By which is meant, however, something more, than the term is generally supposed to mean. "An heretic," in the scriptural sense of the word, was a man *unsound in doctrine, and the leader of a faction, or*

head of a new sect. Hence, such men are said to be “subverted;” that is, overturned, as to their professed faith in the gospel. And “not to consent to the doctrine which is according to godliness;” to “bring in damnable heresies;” to “cause divisions contrary to the doctrine learned; and by good words and fair speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple;” and “to draw away disciples after them.”

The *grand characteristics* of an “heretic” are strictly four: unsoundness of sentiment, selfishness of aim, flattering pretensions, and successful generalship. The case, then is a plain, and not an uncommon one. For example, a brother becomes a Mormon, in sentiment. Of course he will preach his peculiar views; and, almost of course, if a man of ambition, tact, and influence, will succeed in seducing the artless and unsuspecting; and drawing them away with him. Such, now, is a case of *heresy*.

The case is a plain one, and the *treatment* required and to be employed, is equally plain. 1. “*Mark them which cause divisions. Mark them!* that is, eye their movements with waking jealousy and keenest vigilance. 2. Administer “*the first and second admonition,*” that is, plainly and with repetition, point out their errors; and faithfully exhort them to abandon them. 3. And finally, if they do not repent of the pernicious influence of their new sentiments and measures, *promptly exclude* them; as three directions in the case require. “*From such withdraw thyself.*” “*Avoid them.*” “*Reject a man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition.*”

In the 5th chapter of 1 Corinthians, we have grouped together a number of *public offences*. “But now I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard; or an extortioner; with such a one; no, not to eat.”

Let us briefly examine these cases:

First, “*fornication.*” That particular case of fornication, which is the principle subject of this chapter, was regarded by the holy apostle, as a case of incest, most notorious and aggravating; and which demanded immediate exclusion. It, therefore, falls under the head of *insufferable offences*; the last class of offences to be considered. But cases of *moral impurity*, far less aggravating, may occur; and may justly require moderation and labor, on the part of the church. Such are, therefore, properly *public offences*.

Immediately associated with this case, is *covetousness*. “If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator or *covetous.*” That is, a covetous person; one who, as the original word means, has an inordinate craving for gain; a “greediness for filthy lucre;” that is, an eagerness for dishonorable gain. And who, for the sake of gain, not only withholds; but defrauds, and perhaps, even steals. Covetousness is a sin of so common and so flagrant a character as to require to be very distinctly marked. It is a disease, (might we so liken it,) when far advanced and deeply sealed, which is attended with three very plain symptoms.

1. By a *groaning or grumbling about poverty*, amidst real and unconcealable wealth. The tongue, in this case, bears the marks of a very reddish falsity.

2. By an *entire absence of all warmth and sympathy* for the cause of religion in the region of the heart. This manifests itself by shiverings, and shuttings and lockings up of “the bowels of compassion;” and by a receding of the life-current, from the extremities, the moment you begin to take the hand, and feel for the pulsations of interest for the cause.

3. And by a *uniform muttering of complaints*, as well as excuses. This is one of its most prominent features.

Covetous men are not content with making refusals; they must utter *complaints*. They have a fault-finding spirit. Whatever the object, they must raise some objection. We have never known such men to do much good, for two reasons: They are so occupied with their money, they have not the time; and so in love with it, they have not the disposition. A man who is liberal with his money, is liberal with every thing else. These men are liberal with nothing, except complaints. If so, they must do hurt, rather than good, under a Christian profession. And if so, their guilt and their desert are alike obvious. The apostle often mentions this sin, and that, in connexions, showing its fearful enormity. “Be not not deceived; neither fornicators, nor thieves, nor *covetous*, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor *covetous man who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Now, if the sin of covetousness is so utterly inconsistent with an admission into Heaven, is it not, also, plainly inconsistent with a standing in the Church? Most certainly it is. And hence its classification with fornication, and other like sins, is not only to show its marked moral deformity, but positive desert of severest punishment. Hence covetousness is a *public offence*, easily detected; and deserves and demands the notice of the Church; and prompt exclusion, if persisted in.

While on covetousness, we subjoin a word, upon the *true principle* of raising money, for the defrayment of Church expenses, as these home “gatherings,” (strange to tell!) are among the occasions, for the development of this foul plague-spot of Zion. *Voluntary donations*, as in primitive and even olden times, should be made by each member, *according to his pecuniary ability*, for this purpose. (See *Lev. 5;7. 14;21. Ezra 2;69. Neh. 5;8. Acts 2;44–45. 4;32–37.11;29. 1 Cor. 16;2. 2 Cor. 8;11–14. 9;5–7.*) And when a member, in the judgment of the Church, does not do *his part*, he should be instructed in his duty, if ignorant; and encouraged to do his part fully; and if he refuse, he should be considered as *covetous*, and his covetousness as a *public offence*, and disciplinable.

Next, *railing*. “If any man that is called a brother, be a *railer*.” That is, a loud, insulting reviler; one who uses opprobrious and abusive language in

speaking of his fellow-men; one from whose bitter lips is constantly rushing a torrent of censorious remark.

Next, *drunkenness*. "If any man that is called a brother, be a *drunkard*." That is, not one who may have been, accidentally though imprudently, overtaken by intoxication; and who may thus have committed a public offence; but strictly one who is "known, and read," and called, "of all men," a drunkard; one who *habitually* uses intoxicating drinks, so as to disguise himself less or more.

Next, *extortion*. "If any man that is called a brother, be an *extortioner*." This offence might seem to be nearly allied to covetousness; and so it is. Covetousness is the root; this, the fruit. One describes the feelings of the heart; the other, the acts of the life. Covetousness eagerly pants for gain; extortion, ravenously seizes it. The original term, means to be rapacious, and is applied to beasts of prey. Applied to men, it means those, who, like beasts of prey, will take all they can get; and that with just as little principle. It means those who oppress for gain; who not only dare, but delight, to take more than their due; who "defraud, and that their brethren." A remarkable case of the entire destitution, both of the integrity and the benevolence of the gospel.

It may be observed, in this place, and before noticing the rule here laid down for the treatment of these several offences; that although usually public offences, two of them, namely, *railing* and *extortion*, become *personal* when committed against a member in the same church with the offender. Then, and in that case, the rule for personal offences, should operate. The injured brother, instead of the Church, should take the laboring oar. But, when these offences are committed against persons out of the church, and in the society, we have no law, requiring such injured individual to correct our erring brother. The offence is a public one; and for his correction the Church is held responsible; and she must, by prompt action, show all whom it may concern, that she both understands her duty, and is ready to do it.

And the *rule* is before her. The same rule is laid down as equally applicable to each of the five public offences, here mentioned. "But now I have written unto you, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, *not to keep company with such an one; no, not to eat.*" This rule, proceeding upon the principle that the offender is irreclaimable; and therefore, necessarily and promptly removed from the church; includes and enjoins *two things*, designed to regulate our conduct toward excluded persons, who are high offenders; and to add merited weight to the excinding blow.

1. *A strict avoidance of free and familiar intercourse*. "I have written unto you not to keep company with such an one." There should be friendly feeling towards such guilty and unhappy individual; but, after exclusion, he should be made to feel the amazing weight of the solemn sentence by

corresponding conduct, on the part of *every* member of the Church.³ To each and to all, he is to be as alien, as “an heathen man and a publican” to a Jew. 2. *A refusal to participate with him at social meals.* That is, to “dine or take tea” with him, as we should express it; “No, not to eat.” This cannot mean eating at the *Lord’s table*, because, in that case, the apostle would have said, “not keep company,” *much less*, partake with him at the Lord’s table. This would have been an ascending from the less to the greater; whereas he evidently descends from the greater to the less. “Not keep company; no, not to eat.” That is not *even* to eat. Nor can this signify the avoidance of *common family meals*, which might be quite as impossible, in point of fact, as inconsistent with certain scriptural relations and duties. But it may mean, and evidently does mean a refusal of all such social interchanges; such visitings and receiving visits; and such groupings around the social board as express a familiarity with, and a fellowship for, the party, our act of disfellowship to the contrary, notwithstanding.

The substance of the rule, then, as implied and expressed, is, *exclude such and shun them*, being offenders of high *degree*.

We have another and rather singular case of public offence, in the 3d chapter of Paul’s 2d letter to the Thessalonians:

“Now we command you, brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that *walketh disorderly*; for we hear that there are some which *walk among you disorderly, working not at all: but are busy-bodies*. Now them that are such, we command that with quietness they work and eat their own bread; and if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy; but admonish him as a brother.”

The whole offence seems to be, *indolence and meddling with the affairs of others*. The term “disorderly,” originally, was spoken of soldiers who desert their ranks; and means, to be neglectful of one’s own duties; to abandon recklessly one’s own proper place and labor; in the language of the text, to “work not at all;” to live on others. It describes a set of men who

³And we add, with *emphasis*; the solemn sentence should also be enforced, by a corresponding conduct, on the part of *every* member of *every* church. Excluded persons often seek an asylum in some neighboring sister church. And often they are kindly noticed; and thus encouraged to hope that “if they cannot live *there*, they can *here*.” Now, such conduct in a sister church, or in her pastor, or any of her members, is flagrant *injustice* towards all concerned. It is a setting aside of the most solemn decision and act of Christ’s own court. It is an instance of most palpable *disrespect* of a sister and an equal. It is a doing, in this respect, as we would not be done by. Moreover, it is such a nourishing and cherishing of the guilty one, as “a brother beloved,” as heals, at once and slightly, the wound of excision, which ought to be left, ulcerating and burning, for his purification. Instead of this course, if the excluded person have been wronged, (which may be the case; but which we should be slow to believe,) our sister church should be approached with respect, and confidence, and freedom; and desired to explain; and, perhaps, review the case with the aid of counsellors. A right church, rightly approached, would cheerfully do what was right in the premises.

were drones in God's hive; consuming the common stock; who were more willing to eat than earn their bread. And it may now forcibly apply to men who are *slack in domestic duties*—the duties of home; who “provide not for their own house.”

The first part of the offence, then, is *indolence*. The other term, *busy-bodies*, which indicates the other, counter and corresponding part of it, as employed in the Scriptures, was applied to a set of individuals, who were *uselessly employed*; and *particularly officious* in other men's matters; who were as busy in the concerns of others, as they ought to have been in their own; like flies, every where present, annoying and hateful; and who of course, were exceedingly obtrusive and unamiable characters.

Now for the rule of treatment.

1. “*Note that man.*” That is, point him out—expose him to all. Let him know that he is an object of the godly jealousy of the Church. “Exhort him, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness he work and eat his own bread,” and thus mind his own business. And if he do not reform:

2 “*Withdraw yourselves from him.*” That is, withdraw the band of fellowship from him—exclude him. “Now, we command you, brethren, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly; for we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all; but are busy-bodies.”

3. “*Have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.*” That is, be not familiar; treat such, coolly. Thus shame them; put them to the blush, for this is the object; that they may be ashamed; that is, of their conduct, and so reform.

4. “*Yet, count him not as an enemy; but admonish him as a brother.*” Count him not as an enemy. Do not let your dislike ripen into enmity. But admonish him as a brother. He may be a Christian, though so unlovely in character; and so undesirable in company. Therefore admonish him; point out his faults, as you may occasionally fall in with him; explain the reasons of your distance; and let him know, that, unless he reforms he must expect to be as unhappy in your presence, as you are in his.

In addition to these instances of public offence, contained in the Epistles, we include and mention several others, under the head of *Covenant-breaking*.

The Church Covenant contains a rich and beautiful summary of Christian duties; and contemplates the formation of every member to the highest excellence and loveliness of character. Every member, upon joining the Church, and signing this instrument, pledges himself to the performance of something like the following duties: 1. To control his temper; not to cherish revengeful anger. 2. To watch his conversation; avoiding jesting, evil speaking, and profanity. 3. To take heed to his company; not to associate with tavern-haunters, and the like men. 4. To study a peaceful, quiet, orderly deportment, at home and abroad, in the church and in the family.

5. To be just in all his pecuniary transactions with his fellow-men. 6. To be useful; to do good to all men. 7. To “remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” 8. To maintain family worship. 9. To watch over his fellow-members for good. And, 10. To attend the meetings of the Church, for preaching, prayer, observance of the ordinances, and business.

Now, a failure to redeem all or any of these pledges, may be called, *Covenant-breaking*; and should be corrected as a *public offence*, except the failure injure some fellow member, in which case it would be a personal one.

We can scarcely forbear, in this place, it is so important to be plain upon this subject, to specify, quite distinctly, a *few cases* of Covenant-breaking and public offence; and especially, as they are so frequently occurring, and so commonly neglected.

1. *Simple neglect of the duties, arising from church relation.*

For example, a brother, habitually or frequently neglects the Sabbath worship, the stated and special meetings of the Church; and appears to be, and is, indifferent to the interests of the cause. He has broken his covenant, and is guilty of a *public offence*.

2. *Offence with the Church, and non-submission to majority.*

For example, a brother takes offence with the Church, for some of her acts; leaves his seat at the Lord’s table, and on the Sabbath; declares non-fellowship and non-submission; and thus trifles with the feelings of the members, and with his own standing. He also, has violated his covenant obligations in several particulars; and is guilty of a *public offence*, which is attended with some circumstances of high aggravation.

Some bring into the Church, from the very nursery, their furious tempers and habits of insubordination. They used to have their own way; they mean to have it still. They are ardent, ambitious, self-willed, and impatient of restraints and failures. And when they chance to be in the minority, they rebel, and factiously disturb the peace of the church or leave it. Such men are often great troublers of Israel. They are wrong, altogether wrong; their offence public, and severely disciplinable; *provided always*, that the Church has been open, deliberate, and fair, in canvassing and deciding the disputed question. In such case, each member has freely and fully expressed his views, and voted as he pleased. He can ask no more. He must submit, or suffer exclusion.

3. *Leaving our place at the table of the Lord, because some member has injured us.*

For example, a brother receives a real injury from another member, and feels so keenly tried, that he knows not how to commune with him; and so leaves his place, during the time of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. He has committed a two-fold offence; a *public offence* against the Church, by neglecting the ordinance which he covenanted to observe, without any such exception as he now makes; and a *personal* one against the brother

implicated, by such a method of exposure. We say exposure, because a faithful Pastor and Church will inquire after the reason of neglect. And they are entitled to the true reason. This given, and behold! the untimely exposure of the erring brother! Now, there was a right way to expose him, had he refused to give satisfaction in private interviews. The statute points it out; but alas! he has presumed to take this way to do it. Before the hour of communion, he was innocent; now, he is guilty of a two-fold offence, and exposed to a two-fold punishment. He must now, according to strict justice, confess to the Church and acknowledge to the brother; or suffer exclusion.

And we may further remark, this brother's mistake is a common one; one fearfully common. A mistake, which arises from a prevailing misapprehension of the *design* of the ordinance. It is supposed to be intended to express, primarily Christian union and fellowship; whereas, this is only incidental. The primary design was to "*remember*" *Christ*; and not each other. The eye and heart of each communicant, are on the crucified *one*; and not on his fellow. And suppose he love his Lord so intensely; and remember Him with such absorbing interest, as to forget all around him; what harm? The existence of union and fellowship, we do not deny; but they are not direct; they are circuitous and consequential. They are like the union and fellowship of distant members, through the medium of the body. The sacred stream runs, like the life-blood, from one extremity to the other; from member to member; but it is through the medium of the heart. So that, if we meet at all, and taste the sweets of Christian union, and Divine fellowship, at the table of the Lord, it is in Christ. And this, at best, is a *consequence* resulting from the primary design.

Be it remembered, therefore, by all, that, if we so magnify Christian union and communion with one another, as to eclipse communion with Christ; and so much remember our brother's sins, as to forget our Saviour's sufferings, we have fulfilled one law of our own; but broken two, of Christ's. He has given two distinct laws, for the two distinct cases. His law of Commemoration, and his law of Discipline. His law of Commemoration is; "This do ye, as often as ye do it, in remembrance of Me." His law of Discipline: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church." So that, if a brother refuse to fill his place at the table of the Lord, because another has injured him, he has broken his covenant in several particulars; and is guilty of a public offence, as well as a *personal* one.

4. *Reckless failures to meet contracts.*

We mean, particularly, the common, careless failures of some members, to pay their current debts, according to engagement. For example, a brother is in the habit of contracting debts, with the promise of paying them promptly at a specified time; but, in fact, without the prospect of doing so.

Or, to vary the case, if the time of payment is not specified, the debt is contracted with the common business understanding, that it shall be seasonably met, when he knows of no way he can do it. Or, to vary the case again, the debt is contracted, the time of payment either expressed or understood; and the means of payment are in the hands of the debtor; but a failure takes place, because he is as *slack* as he ought to be punctual.

Now, all these cases, and all similar cases of recklessness in business, which involves the interests of others, savor of *dishonesty*; and are so construed by the world. Such acts are personal offences, when committed by a brother in dealing with a fellow member; and *public*, when against another person, being a palpable violation of his covenant, in which he pledged himself to be “just in all his pecuniary transactions with his fellowship.”

5. *Desecration of the Lord's Day.*

There are multitudes of church members, on whom Sabbath restraints sit very lightly. They not only fail to come up to the standard of its requirements; but fail, also, to keep within the range of its prohibitions. Some engage in those kinds of business which compel them to work on this holy day of the Lord, less or more. Others travel or visit on this day; and, it would seem, deliberately make their arrangements to do so.

Such and similar instances of the desecration of this hallowed fraction of time, it should be well understood and deeply felt by every Christian, are utterly inconsistent with the high spiritual ends of the institution; and are, alike, an infraction of the Ten Commandments, the Gospel of Christ, and the Covenant of the Church; and, therefore, are *public* offences.

6. *The greatly prevalent and hateful sin of backbiting*; nearly allied to common *gossiping* and *tattling*.

Backbiting might seem to be near of kin to “railing,” mentioned by the apostle in 1 Cor. 5 and already noticed. And so it is. Railing and backbiting both consist in evil speaking; and the chief difference between them, lies in the manner of it. Railing is the loud, open, angry species of evil speaking; backbiting the low, secret, mischievous, mean sort of the same kind of business; as the structure and imagery of the term plainly indicate. The word, *backbiting*, means the act of secretly faulting one to another. Figuratively and etymologically taken the last part of it, *biting*, indictates the act, as malicious in its origin, and painful in effect; and the other and qualifying part of it, *back*, indicates meanness of motive and measure; a meanness and maliciousness that can inflict a stinging, secret injury, without cause. The maliciousness and the meanness of this sin, have scarcely a parallel in the gloomy catalogue of sins; and, certainly, have no alliance with common decency; much less, “pure and undefiled religion!” If a church member, then, be come a *backbiter*, he should be regarded as guilty of an offence both aggravating and intolerable; a *public* offence, being a violation of his covenant, in which he pledged himself to “watch his conversation, *avoiding evil speaking*, as well as jesting and profanity.”

It is an important rule, in estimating the *degrees* of offences, and the just measure of punishment due each; to distinguish, carefully, between faults which are the consequence of *sudden temptation*; and those which are the result of *premeditation and habit*. For example, a brother, overtaken by intoxication for the first time, accidentally or carelessly, presents a great contrast to one, whose inclination and habit render it quite certain, that he will overdrink, if exposed. The sin of Peter in once denying his Lord, was small in comparison with that of Solomon, who was habitually licentious and idolatrous.

On this point we have specific instruction. "Of some have compassion, *making a difference*, and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."—*Jude* 22–23.

The various species of public offences thus examined, we come next, to consider, *the general rule of treatment*.

This rule is found in 1 Tim. 5:20. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

That is, "them that sin" *before all*, "rebuke before all." Them that sin publicly, rebuke publicly. A public offence requires a public punishment; at least, a public correction. The punishment of public offences, in the church, like the punishment of all other offences, should be according to the varying degrees of criminality. This rule includes two of the *lesser degrees* of punishment, which gives it a universal applicability to public offences; an applicability to the smaller offences, by its milder punishment; and to the greater ones, by paving the way, for the severest penalties.

The term, "rebuke," signifies, 1. *To point out* plainly and convincingly, to them that sin publicly, *their offence in the presence of the Church*. And, 2. *To reprove* them, also, for it, in the same *public manner*.

This rule, then, contains the two ideas of *public statement* and *public reproof*. That the employment of this rule was designed as a public punishment, is plain from its expressed object. "*That others also may fear*; that is, that the rest of the members, witnessing the true manner of correcting public offences, *may fear* a similar, public and mortifying rebuke, for some public offence which they might commit; and so be admonished to watchfulness and prayer.

See Paul acting, in a certain case according to the letter and in the spirit of his own inspired rule; that a public offence might be publicly rebuked; and that its object might be secured. His brother Peter, on a certain occasion, had it "not walked uprightly"—had been guilty, of "dissimulation, and carrying others away with it." Paul "withstood him to the face, *before them all*, because he was to be blamed."—*Gal.* 2. "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

It should be particularly noticed, that this explanation of this rule for the treatment of public offences, *perfectly corresponds* with the import of those other directions, which we have noticed, in connection with the public offences, found in the Apostolic Epistles.

In the case of “*heretics*,” it will be recollected that the Church, as a body, were to “mark them;” to administer “the first and second admonition,” and then, “reject them.” Here was a “rebuke before all;” a public statement and public reproof which led on to exclusion. A public punishment, for a public offence.

Again: in the case of “*fornicators, covetous members, railers, drunkards, and extortioners*,” the Church were required openly to, shun their “company;” and to avoid all social interchanges with them. Such conduct in the Church towards any of her members, would require a full, open statement of the reasons on which it was based. But what would such statement be, short of a “rebuke before all?”

In the case, also, of “*disorderly walkers*,” the same avoidance of familiarity is strictly enjoined, together with the duty of solemn and direct “admonition.” A “rebuke before all.”

All these directions, then, accompanying the particular but varying cases to which they are appended, so well agree in import with the rule under consideration; and then, this rule is so striking in its application to all cases of Covenant-breaking, that it may well be considered as the great *general rule* for the correction of public offences. This rule contains all that the majority of public offences require for their correction. That smaller portion of public offences, which are too great for this rule to fully punish, may be approached by this rule; and then finished with the particular directions, appended to the particular cases.

But as this rule cannot be employed, if the delinquent member is *absent*, something like the following, would, in general, be the proper course of procedure. The Church should cite him by the clerk, or, what is better, by an individual, volunteering his services, to attend the next church-meeting, and give satisfaction for his offence. The offence, if fully known, and time of meeting, should be distinctly stated to him. If he appear, the Minister, as the organ of the Church, having ascertained, or after ascertaining the precise amount of his wrong, should point it out to him, “before all;” and then admonish him, according as age and circumstances require. If he do not render satisfaction, he should be requested favorably to entertain the views the Church have of his offence and his duty; and to attend the next church meeting. If he appear and do not show penitence for his wrong, “the admonition” should be repeated; and if its repetition is alike unavailing, he should be promptly excluded.

And provided a public offender refuse to come before the Church, the work of examination and admonition, should be conducted by some member or members who may volunteer for the purpose; and who may possess, perhaps, some qualification which would encourage the hope of their success in the case; upon whose report, if unfavorable, exclusion should take place.

Before leaving the subject of public offences we want to make two remarks.

The first, upon *public confessions*. Some difference of opinion seems to have obtained respecting the *degree* of publicity which it is proper to give to confessions. But where is there room for but one opinion? Do not common sense and common justice demand that the reparation should be as *large* as the injury? Certainly. And so it most evidently ought to be. First, the repentance should be as deep, as the wound inflicted. Then, the confession *public*, as the fault was committed; or rather public, in a sense corresponding with its notoriety. All those persons who have heard of the offence, should hear the confession, or hear of it, as satisfactory. Be they one-half of the members of the Church or all of them: be they a part of the Church and congregation, or all of them. Honest, full confessions are a salve, exceedingly healing to the wounds unto which they are applied. The fact, that such confessions *touch the spot*, is an unanswerable argument in their favor. Indeed, they more than satisfy even the world. The man who has the integrity, the humility, and the manliness, to confess his wrong; and make full reparation, rises in the esteem of all, as he ought to do; and becomes the more beloved for his full, honest-hearted confession, in spite of the sin and the shame that produced it.

Example in the case of Mr. Henry Van Antwerp. He was overtaken by *intoxication* on a public occasion; but was no sooner sober, than he was sorry; and no sooner had the opportunity, in a corresponding public manner, to confess his sin, than he did it. His return was voluntary, hearty, and more than satisfactory. He wept, and the assembly all wept with him. And we all loved him the more, for this new evidence we had that he was a good man, though fallible.

If an offender shrink from confessing, so as to satisfy all concerned, it shows, in the general, that he is not right. A real penitent will be likely to confess too much, rather than too little. His eye is fixed upon the greatness of his sin; and he wonders how he can satisfy the people so easy; while another man wonders, why it takes so much to do it. And the people in their turn, wonder why he cannot see that a *scrimped confession* must beget a *scrimped fellowship*!

Let confessions, then, be ample. Let the standard of the Church be high, and right. Let her not suffer unconfessed sin upon her members; for in that case, they are dead, deforming branches, without fruit, or flowers, or even foliage. It is the sentence of inspiration: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy."

Our second remark respects the adaptation of the rule for personal offences, in the 18th of Matthew, for the *correction of many public offences*.

We could scarcely persuade ourselves to pass from the consideration of public offences, without just hinting how admirably this rule operates in reclaiming those guilty of this kind of offence. Although the rule, as we have seen is primarily applicable to cases of personal offence, yet, *here* its operation is most salutary; and its employment by an individual, in a

case, where he has no peculiar personal concern, is nobly demonstrative of his piety, brotherly love, and abiding concern for the honor of God. For example, a brother, on a public occasion, becomes intoxicated, quarrelsome, and profane. The sad day past, he feels guilty, ashamed and distant. The news flies. Brother A. hears of it, and goes immediately to see him. He finds him alone and lonely; and approaches him with usual kindness and freedom. The afflicting fact is all talked over, and confessed; and he leaves him with the full understanding, that he will embrace the first opportunity to confess his sin to the church and the world. A. is no sooner gone, than brother B., having heard the same painful news, calls on the same errand of mercy. And so with brother C. All three have the same errand, and the same motive; but have chanced to act, without intentional concert. The brother is overcome and won by kindness, and faithfulness; and saved. He comes before the church and congregation on the Lord's day, and gives ample satisfaction; and retires with the tender, forgiving love, and sympathy, and blessing of all.

If, now, in the true spirit of this rule, brethren were thus to act, in the large majority of cases of public offence, they would be as successful as brother A., B. and C. Wanderers would be reclaimed; the Church spared vast trouble; and the honor of pure and undefiled religion, secured. And how large the Scriptural encouragements to individual effort, in this quarter! "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he that converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins!"—*James 5*.

But suppose brother A.'s visit were unsuccessful; and that he despairs of success. Let him next, notify the erring brother of his wish and intention to call again, with "one or two more" brethren. And let him do it; and then if still unsuccessful, let him carry the case to the Church. Now, what could have been better, in the case, than this voluntary though thankless service, of brother A., aided by his fellow laborers; and guided by the ever-to-be-remembered 18th of Matthew!

CHAPTER VI. FIFTH CLASS OF OFFENCES, INSUFFERABLE.

Offences of the fifth and last class, are *insufferable* ones, or such as require *immediate exclusion* for the honor of the cause. Such are cases of notorious and complicated wickedness.

Now when we take into the account the fact, that Christians themselves are only partly sanctified; subject to the sallies of carnal passion, the seductions of the world, and the temptations of Satan: and another fact, that some, perhaps many in the church, are not Christians at all, but deceived or deceivers; and another fact, still, that the sacred enclosure, in these

degenerate days, is but feebly guarded, and the influx of the foolish with the wise, very great, we have reason to *expect* that sins of great enormity will be perpetrated by church members, even high civil offences and capital crimes. For example, perjury, forgery, grand larceny, absconding in debt, habitual licentiousness, murder, treason, and such like gross violations of moral, civil, and criminal law.

Now the *rule* given by Paul for one of these cases, namely: notorious and aggravating licentiousness, is found in 1 Cor. 5:13 and is the *true rule* for all of them.

“Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

Hear the apostle, at large, on the *case* and its *treatment*. “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye have not mourned that he that hath done this deed, might be taken away from among you. For I, as present in spirit, have judged already concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such an one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

Hence the rule for such high offences, is, *exclude, without the ceremony of labor, upon the simple and certain ascertainment of the facts.*

The decision and the action, in all such cases, must be, as in case of a gangrene member which threatens the life of the body. Hasten amputation! For, be it remembered, *the honor of the cause*, bleeding at every pore in such case, is the great consideration. And this will demand prompt exclusion, as certainly in the world’s estimation, as that of the Church. All, with one voice, pronounce the offence *insufferable*; one that is not to be tolerated, “no, not for an hour.” Even strong manifestations of remorse or sorrow for the crime, must not shield from the stroke of separation. The rule is: “Put away from among you that wicked person.” This was the apostle’s own solemn inspired direction, in the case of the incestuous Corinthian, as we have seen. It was promptly obeyed; and the *results* were alike salutary upon the unhappy individual and the shame-stricken church.—2 Cor. 2.

Some may object to this view as being a course too summary, and as savoring of a spirit too uncompromising and too unforgiving, to accord to the genius of the gospel; and especially in case of *real penitence*. They may think that a transgression, however atrocious, if there be penitence in the case, should be forgiven; and the member *retained in the church*.

But it should always be remembered that there are two interests to be regarded, in every case of discipline, namely: the *honor* of God among men, and the *good* of the offender. On the one hand, those Scriptures which speak of telling offenders their faults in order to “gain” them; of “exhorting” them to obedience; of “admonishing” them; of “restoring” them; and

of “delivering them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” clearly show, that *their good* is to be one great consideration in their treatment. On the other hand, those passages which speak of the “name of God being profaned among the heathen,” by his people; of his “name being blasphemed among the Gentiles through them;” of the necessity of “having a good report of them without;” and of “letting our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven,” all show, with equal clearness, that regard in all our conduct, in the Church and elsewhere, is to be had to the *honor* of God, among those without the Christian community.

Now, in *one* given case, both these interests may be duly regarded and perfectly secured by the discipline, penitence, forgiveness, and *retention in the church*, of an offender. A large majority of public offences are of this class.

In a *second case*, both these interests may be secured by exclusion, far as they can be secured at all. Exclusion may alike clear the Church, honor God, and inflict a merited and salutary punishment upon an offender. The case of the ill-famed Corinthian was of this class.

In a *third case*, in which the offence is very great, abhorrent in its nature, and aggravating in its circumstances; is generally known and deeply felt; and in which the *penitence is real* to all appearance, but of course, lacking in that practical evidence of its genuineness, which, lies in the “forsaking” and the “fruit;” which full repentance includes; which time only can give, and which all the community seem to demand in order to satisfaction, exclusion, it must take place for the *honor* of God, as well as the *good* of the offender. And, be it remembered, the painful act, if penitence is not genuine, is just and called for in the case; and if it be genuine, will not injure the offender. He will feel that exclusion in his case, is not vindictive, but perfectly consistent with a spirit of benevolence and forgiveness, as well as justice. And, so far from being injured by it, even in feeling, will invite it for the cause’s sake. And, in his case, will be seen the truth of the Scripture: “Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation.” His sorrow will work out the practical demonstration of its genuineness—will work reformation, and ultimate restoration. And thus the awful extremity of exclusion, become the actual security of the two great interests in question: the *honor* of God among men, and the *good* of a fallen brother. A case of habitual licentiousness would be of this class.

In a *fourth case*, in which the offence is of an high order: perjury, forgery, grand larceny, murder, or treason, and so consigning the offender to the State Prison or the gallows; and in which there is every possible demonstration of *genuine penitence*, that tears, and confessions, and reparation can furnish, exclusion, of course, must take place at once, upon the ascertainment of the fact.

And, hence, the position that every offender, in case of *real penitence*

for his sin, *should be retained in the Church*, as well as forgiven, is as impracticable, in point of fact, as it is inconsistent with the universal sense of right.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

1. In the light of the subject of these pages, and as lying at the foundation of it, we have seen that *the best men in the Church MAY err; and that the worst men WILL err.*

Every thing in this world is stamped with imperfection. Here there is no perfect honor nor happiness; no perfect relations nor friends; no perfect Christians nor Churches. Sin with unhallowed footstep, advances along; and intrudes itself into every dear association on earth; separating very friends; breaking up the peace of home; and oft sundering, by its withering touch the hearts of Christians, though “linked together in many bonds.” But, if there were any bounds to its progress, these, we should suppose, would be the confines of the church; if any barrier to its advance, the threshold of God’s temple; if any *place* of its eternal exclusion, the *family* of Christ. But, even here, “offences must needs come.”

2. *Each kind of offence should be learned and remembered, in its distinctive feature and rule of treatment.*

We have reduced all offences to five classes.

1. *Minor*; the smaller offences; such as should be borne. The distinctive feature of this class is, they are *infirmities, natural or acquired.* The rule: “We, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”

2. *Private*, or such as cannot be proved. The distinctive feature of this class, is, *a lack of evidence.* The rule: “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone;” or, “Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself, and discover not a secret to another.”

3. *Personal*, as when one brother injures another in his person, reputation, or property, and there is proof of the fact. The distinctive feature of this class, is, *personal injury and proof of it.*

The rule: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

4. *Public*, or such as equally injure all the members of the church, and for which all require an equal satisfaction. The distinctive feature of this class, is, *equal injury of all, and equal satisfaction to all, the members.* The general rule: “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.”

5. *Insufferable.* The distinctive feature of this class is, *such enormity of*

offence as requires prompt exclusion for the honor of the cause. The rule, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Now this classification of offences, with the *distinctive feature* of each class; and the *rule of treatment* in each case, should be as familiar to every church member, as the multiplication table is, to every active arithmetician. To be able to class ever-occurring offences; and to select the rule of treatment, is a great and noble attainment. A good disciplinarian is a good physician. He can heal the difficulty. And why may not all become such?

Discipline is far less difficult of understanding, than we, at first, might suppose. The Saviour's provision for the correction of offences, has a most instructive simplicity. He knew that "offences must needs come;" and offences, too, of various type; and that they must be corrected. And yet, all that he himself has said, and all that his inspired servants have said, is embraced in a few, brief, simple sentences. The direction has meaning enough, for the tallest intellect; and plainness sufficient, for the weakest understanding. The *essence* of all divine principles and rules of discipline, is this. Now, your brother has done wrong. You must not suffer the sin to pass uncorrected. It would injure your brother, and hurt the cause. You must pity him and go and see him, and show him his fault. And if you do not succeed in helping him to see, and realize, and retrace his wrongs; then you must get one or two to go with you to see him; and to use their influence with him; and if still unsuccessful, you must bring his case to the Church. And if all your kindness and care and effort to save him prove unavailing; then you must, still kindly, but solemnly, and formally, and promptly, exclude him from the Church.

This, we repeat, is the *essence* of all divine principles and rules of Discipline. How plain! How easy of understanding! Why, then, are individuals and Churches so often whelmed in deepest difficulty, in correcting the wrongs of an offender? We answer; plainly, because simple, as are the principles of discipline; easy, as is the classification of offences; and plain, as are the methods of treatment, few have so *accurate knowledge of these things*, as to know what to do, in any given case. We fully believe that, in nine cases out of ten, for the want of such knowledge, the injured brother or Church has settled upon some improper course of procedure. And "Behold, how great matter a little fire kindleth!" Zion's sorest troubles have arisen, from the wrong *treatment* of offences, rather than from the offences themselves, simply considered. Let, then, all thoroughly acquaint themselves with this subject. Let each kind of offence be learned and remembered, in its distinctive feature, and rule of treatment. And we add, with emphasis, let it be done at the *right time*, when no case is on hand to bias the judgment, if possible. Discipline is generally studied, when we want the knowledge of it, rather than when we may want it.

3. *The importance of the strictest practical adherence to the laws of discipline, and the spirit of those laws, can scarcely be estimated.*

It is not enough, that these laws be understood; they must be employed in every required case, and that in their true healing spirit. The high and professed object of discipline, is the purity of the Church. In the language of Solomon, that “iniquity may be purged.” But mark the grand specific: “mercy and truth.” “By mercy and truth, iniquity is purged.” This is the celestial combination—these the two simple but sovereign ingredients, in the Divine prescription. And whosoever the subject may be, whether a wise man or a fool, learned or ignorant, rich or poor, the prescription is the same. The provision knows no lurking favoritisms, no invidious partialities. It is “truth and mercy,” for each and for all. “Truth” secures the certain application of the law; “mercy,” its kind and right application. The one consults the honor of God; the other, the good of the offender. Truth, without mercy, would lead to an unfeeling and crushing severity; mercy, without truth, to a criminal and ruinous laxness. They must both operate, but not apart; they must both be employed, but always together. And the richest results will flow to the Church and to the world. Purity, peace, prosperity, and heavenly honor, will bless and adorn beloved Mount Zion, again, “the joy of the whole earth!” Her Discipline, like the skillful pruning process, will vastly improve the fairness and the flavor of her fruit as well as her general beauty, by the removal of what is straggling and redundant; and by the rearing up of those branches, which, by their position and erectness, constitute the entire growth, extremely fine in its proportions, and attractive in its aspects. She will be seen by all, to be no place for the concealment of crime; but like a fountain, with its repulsive power. In unbelieving eyes, she will “look forth as the morning fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.”

But results so rich and splendid, cannot exist, without the strictest adherence to the disciplinary laws of Christ’s house; and the heavenly healing spirit of those laws.

Some Churches are so lax in Discipline, so indulgent with delinquent members, and even flagrant transgressors, because of property, or standing, or connexions, as to become a *very dunghill* in society, instead of being “the salt of the earth and the light of the world!” And, unless a redeeming spirit is soon enkindled, and burns with consuming strength, and visits with purifying influence, “Ichabod, the glory is departed,” will be engraven, as with a pen of steel, upon the otherwise fair heritage of God! It is a day, of most alarming *irresponsibility* among the members of our churches! A day when the mass of professedly Christian men do too well nigh what is right in their own eyes!

Now, Discipline is Zion’s salvation. It is the Lord Jehovah’s appointed instrumentality, for the correction of offences, and she must wield it. We have said it was the application of right principles, in a right spirit, to the wrong conduct of offenders. We ask then, in conclusion: Are there not offenders among *you*? Shall the application be made, then, in *your* church,

among *your* members, in every required case? Beloved brethren, it must be made! The good of every delinquent, calls for it! The health of the Church, requires it! The honor of God, demands it! Preparation to meet the returning Master, urges it now! It must be done!

“Brethren, consider what we say, and the Lord give you understanding and *faithfulness* in all things.”

Apostolical Church Polity

WILLIAM WILLIAMS



Photo courtesy of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives.

Williams, William, D.C., LL.D., Professor of Ecclesiastical History, Church Government, and Pastoral Duties in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was born at Eatonton, Putnam Co., Ga., March 15, 1821. He was converted and united with a Baptist church in 1837, and graduated at the University of Georgia in 1840. His attention was first directed to the legal profession, as a preparation for which he attended the law-school of Harvard University, where he graduated in 1847. He entered the ministry in 1851, his first pastoral charge being at Auburn, Ala. In 1856 he became Professor of Theology in Mercer University, then at Penfield, Ga. In 1859 he was elected Professor of Ecclesiastical

History, Church Government, and Pastoral Duties in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. At various times during the enforced absence of the Professor of Systematic Theology the duties of that chair were filled by Dr. Williams, and in May, 1872, he was formally transferred to that professorship, in which he continued until his death. Dr. Williams was on several occasions elected one of the vice-presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention, and was the appointed preacher of its twenty-fifth annual sermon at St. Louis, Mo., in May, 1871. He received the degree of D.D. from Mercer University in 1859, and of LL.D. from Richmond College in 1876.

He died at Aiken, S.C., Feb. 20, 1877, and was buried at Greenville, S.C., where his former students have erected a monument to his memory.

—William Cathcart, 1881

APOSTOLICAL

CHURCH POLITY.

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THE APOSTOLICAL CHURCH POLITY

When our Lord communicated the startling intelligence to his disciples, that they were soon to lose the blessed privilege of his personal presence, he comforted their troubled hearts with the assurance that it would be better for them that he should go away, because the Holy Spirit, who otherwise would not come, and whom he promised to send, would more than compensate for the loss even of his bodily presence. On the fiftieth day after his resurrection, this promise was fulfilled, and their hearts were encouraged and strengthened by the wonderful success of the gospel in the addition of three thousand persons to their number. This occasion is usually referred to as the organization of the first Christian church. Almost certainly, however, there was no organized church formed at this time, nor at any time among Jewish Christians, previous to the ingathering of the Gentiles. Notwithstanding our Saviour's teachings as to the universality of his kingdom, and his positive commission to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," yet so extremely difficult was it for them to divest themselves of long-cherished Jewish notions and prejudices, that they interpreted "all the world" to mean Palestine, and limited "every creature" to every Jew. Accordingly, for several years after our Lord's ascension, they confined the ministry to those who were Jews,—the case of Cornelius being the only exception, and that in consequence of a special divine direction.

We have reason to believe, therefore, that for several years after our Lord's ascension, all who embraced Christianity, with an exception or two, were exclusively Jews. They embraced it with an undiminished attachment to the Mosaic law, and an unabated conviction of its continued and permanent force. They did not comprehend that Christianity had superseded Judaism; they thought that it had only supplemented it by faith in a particular person as the Messiah, and by additional peculiar religious worship and ordinances. They were, accordingly, not otherwise distinguished from other Jews than by this faith and worship. They worshipped in the temple with other Jews, and like them; but, in addition, would meet as Christians in such numbers and places as convenience might dictate, to observe steadily the worship and ordinances of Christianity, much after the manner, doubtless, in which they had been accustomed to worship in the synagogue;—which term in James ii. 2, is actually applied to these various assemblies. With *their view* of the relation of Christianity to Judaism, it would not naturally occur to them to form churches as distinct organized bodies, nor would there seem to them to be any necessity for it. The term *Church*, therefore, is not probably applied to Jewish Christians with any technical meaning until after the Gentiles are received, and the fact becomes developed by the subsequent controversy growing out of their reception, that Christianity is not supplemented Judaism. Thus, in the ninth chapter of Acts it is said, "Then had the church rest throughout all Judea

and Galilee and Samaria,” where the term is applied to the collective number of Jewish Christians throughout these regions, as the similar Hebrew term is applied in the Old Testament to the congregation of Israel. In the first chapter of Galatians, the apostle, referring to his first visit to Jerusalem, and his subsequent residence in Syria and Cilicia, says, that he was, during all this time, “unknown by face to the churches in Judaea,” where the term is probably used in its popular sense of assemblies. He had never been present at any of their meetings, and was therefore “unknown by face” to them. Or, he may be using the term from his then position, and as their assemblies would then be called. So soon as churches, as formally organized bodies, come clearly into view in the New Testament, first at Antioch, and soon afterward at Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia; and in a little while throughout the most important parts of the Roman Empire by the missionary labors of the apostle to the Gentiles, three important particulars which characterized their organization deserve our attention,—their *officers*, *membership*, and *relation to each other*.

I. ORGANIZATION OF THE APOSTOLICAL CHURCHES.

1. *Officers of the Churches*.—A serious hindrance which attends the modern missionary, even in the comparatively slow progress of his mission work, is to find among his new converts from heathenism, suitable persons who can be safely entrusted with the work of religious instruction, so as to leave him free, when he has gathered a band of disciples in one place, speedily to extend his labors to other places. Much time must be spent in proving, training, and instructing, before he can safely leave the church to the guidance of a native preacher; and perhaps even then, no suitable person is found. This hindrance, which would have been much more serious, if not fatal, in the very rapid progress of early Christianity, and in the absence for many years of any written Gospel, was providentially met then by men supernaturally qualified by the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. Our ascended Lord, “exalted to the right hand of God, a Prince and a Saviour,” to give gifts unto men, gave “diversities of gifts.” “To one the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kind of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.” “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.” “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.” The apostle in these passages is not enumerating *different orders* in the ministry and several *offices* that existed in the apostolic

churches, but obviously is speaking of the “diversities” of the charismata of the Holy Spirit—the extraordinary spiritual endowments bestowed to meet a temporary emergency in the incipency of Christianity. They were, therefore, temporary in their nature, and intended to cease when the necessity for them should cease; and never, so far as we have reason to believe, to be revived in the church.

The ordinary, normal officers of an apostolic church were bishops, or elders, and deacons. As to the former, they are called indifferently bishops and elders. These are not names of different offices but different names of the same office. This is abundantly proved, if it were necessary to prove it in this day, by the fact that these names are sometimes used interchangeably in the New Testament, the same person who is called in one place bishop, being called elder in another (Acts xx. 17, 28; Titus i. 5, 7); that bishops and deacons are saluted in the beginning of an epistle (Phil. i. 1) without the mention of elders, which slight would surely not have been cast upon them if they were distinct from bishops; and that the apostle in his epistles to Timothy gives the qualifications of bishops and deacons only. But “it is a fact,” says the learned Dr. Lightfoot of the Church of England, in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Philipians, p. 93, “now generally recognized by theologians of all shades of opinion, that in the language of the New Testament the same officer in the church is called indifferently ‘bishop, and elder, or presbyter.’” Not in the language of the New Testament only, is this the case. In the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, in those of Justin in the middle of the second century, and of Irenaeus toward the close of the second century, the terms bishop and elder are applied indifferently to the same officer. Not even is Ignatius an exception, when fairly interpreted and restricted to those epistles least liable to the charge of a want of genuineness or of authenticity. But certainly in the New Testament there is no ministerial imparity—there is no episcopacy. Not anywhere are even the apostles found claiming any ministerial rights and functions that elders might not exercise. Learned men of the Episcopal Church do not hesitate to admit that episcopacy is not to be found in the New Testament, and that it was gradually introduced at a later period. Litton, of the Church of England, in his excellent work on “The Church of Christ,” p. 286, says: “In truth it does seem an arduous task to attempt to discover in the inspired record, taken alone, the existence of an order of ministers not apostles, and yet superior to presbyters and deacons.” The cases of James, Timothy, Titus, and the apocalyptic angels, he shows, are not examples of bishops in the episcopal sense. Again, he says: “So long as the advocates of episcopacy are content to rest their cause upon *post-apostolic testimony*, their position is impregnable; it is only when they attempt to *prove it from Scripture alone* that the argument fails to convince” (p. 302). Dr. Jacob, another distinguished member of the Church of England, in his recent work, “The Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament” (p. 66, *et seq.*) says: “In order

to obtain a correct conception of the Christian ministry in its primitive state, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between what the apostles themselves established in the church, and what was afterwards found to be expedient as a further development of their polity. That which may justly claim to be a beneficial and legitimate extension of apostolic order must not on that account be confounded with ordinances of apostolic institution.... These" (elders and deacons) "were established in the churches by the apostles themselves; while the episcopate, in the modern acceptation of the term, and as a distinct clerical order, does not appear in the New Testament, but was gradually introduced and extended throughout the church at a later period." After remarking, as we would expect an Anglican to do, "that it was perfectly lawful for the post-apostolic church to adopt the episcopal form of ecclesiastical government," and that all lawful exercise of church power and authority is sanctioned by Christ himself as well as by his apostles, he says: "But unfortunately, not contented with such indisputable, just, and reasonable sanctions, writers on church matters in all ages have too often evinced a tendency to represent the regulations of their own times as precisely those which were made at the beginning, and to insist upon referring to the actual institution of the apostles, or even the personal appointment of Christ himself, all the existing ordinances of their own churches. And thus, after the general establishment of episcopacy, it was often assumed and asserted that this ordinance emanated from these sources. . . . Such assertions put forth in the early centuries of Christianity have often been repeated even by learned men in later times, without any sufficient examination of their correctness and of the evidence—or lack of evidence—on which they rest; and the unlearned, if they have indulged in any thought upon the subject, have commonly taken it for granted that such assertions have been fully proved, and that there is no reasonable doubt whatever to be entertained respecting them. . . . There is evidence of the most satisfactory kind, because unintentional, to the effect that episcopacy was established in different churches *after the decease* of the apostles who founded them, and at different times." The testimony of Jerome, in the fourth century, the most learned scholar among the Latin fathers, is pointedly to the same effect. He ascribes the rise of episcopacy to ecclesiastical usage, and not to any divine institution (Comm. in Tit. i. 7). With him agree the great commentators of the Greek Church, Chrysostom and Theodoret.

There can be no doubt then, in the mind of one who examines this matter impartially, that episcopacy is a radical change in the apostolic organization. If anyone ask how this took place, the answer is easily given, as furnished by the best scholars of former and present times. In most, if not all the apostolic churches, there was a plurality of elders. The circumstances of the early churches rendered such an arrangement very advantageous, if not absolutely necessary. They were *generally* large. Christianity being a religion disallowed by the laws of the Empire, they were liable to legalized

persecution even unto death. To meet together in any large number for religious worship would more readily attract attention and call upon them persecution. As a matter of prudence, the whole church could not *ordinarily* meet together, but were obliged to meet in small companies and in retired places—private houses, vaults or caves, or other places of security. There must be a plurality of elders to instruct these several sections of the church, especially in the absence of any written word, it being about twenty years after our Lord's ascension before the first book in the New Testament was written. These churches, too, had just been gathered out of heathenism and were surrounded by it on all sides. If Christianity, in its incipency, is to make any headway against this overwhelming tide of superstition and corruption there would seem to be a demand for a greater number of preachers than one elder to every church. Besides, persecution would be most likely to fall upon the leaders, the elders; and if there had been only one to a church, it, or even a number of the churches, might suddenly be deprived of any religious instructor.

Thus, temporary reasons growing out of the peculiar exigencies of the time, would seem to demand a plurality of elders in the primitive churches, and the Saviour adjusted the supply to the demand in accordance with the temporary exigency. After the decease of the apostles, as Jerome tells us, rivalries and jealousies arose among the elders, reviving the old question, "Who shall be greatest?" and exciting corresponding parties in the churches. "The want of united action among the different presbyters of the same church when they were all of equal authority," and the order of public deliberations requiring that there should be some one "invested at least with the authority of collecting the sentiments and executing the resolutions" (Gibbon, i. c. 15) of the church, led to the appointment of one of their number as permanent president or moderator. The title bishop, which was applied to all the elders, came after a while to be applied exclusively to the president,—elder, as Justin in the middle of the second century still calls him, merely to distinguish him from his equal co-elders. He was not superior to them, but only "first among equals." But the love of rank and power is natural and strong, and needs to be jealously watched;—how jealously, experience had not yet taught the early Christians. Gradually and imperceptibly, under a political system that favored the centralization of power, and in the midst of heretical tendencies that would naturally lead to consolidation and visible unity, and stimulated more or less by carnal ambition and the love of rank and power, the president-elder, no longer continuing, as originally, merely "first among equals," assumed a position above his co-elders, and in the third century claimed and exercised the exclusive right to perform certain ministerial functions, thus constituting a new order in the ministry and originating episcopacy.

In the New Testament, however, there is only one order. The apostles were not properly an *order* of ministers. They were not officers of any par-

ticular church. They had no locality. Their appointment was temporary and extraordinary, for a temporary and extraordinary purpose, and they have and can have no successors in office (Lightfoot's Phil., p. 194).

The elders of the New Testament were all equal in rank and authority, and discharged the same duties,—the ministry of the gospel and the oversight of the government and discipline of the church. The distinction of preaching elder and ruling elder, made by the Presbyterians, rests upon a single passage of Scripture, 1 Tim. v. 17. (The passage in 1 Cor. xii. 28, and that in Rom. xii. 8, are so indefinite as to the import of the terms used, and therefore susceptible of such a variety of interpretations, that they would surely never have been thought of in this connection, if it had not been for the one in First Timothy.) The objection to making a distinction, which establishes an important office, upon a single passage of Scripture, would lose its force if that one clearly and unmistakably necessitated the distinction. But the passage in question does not. It certainly makes a distinction among elders; the only question is, what is the *kind* of distinction. Is it an *official* distinction; is it of so marked a character as to make two distinct official classes of elders, to one of which belongs the official duty of preaching and ruling, whilst the other is restricted to the official duty of ruling? Or is it a personal distinction among those of the same official class and with respect to the discharge of different duties which all might equally perform? In favor of the latter the following reasons may be given.

(a) The words translated “double honour” mean, in this passage, as the context shows and scholars are agreed, not merely high *respect*, *esteem*, but ample *temporal maintenance*. If, then, this passage does establish the office of ruling elder, it enjoins that they who hold it shall receive ample pecuniary support. This is not brought forward to show Presbyterian inconsistency in not pecuniarily supporting their ruling elders, and hence to derive an argument against the office; for one's theory may be right and his practice inconsistent; but the argument is this:—Nowhere else does Scripture, by precept or example, enjoin pecuniary support to any except those who preach the gospel. If it does here, *this is the only passage where it does*. The strong presumption then is, that it does not here, and that the interpretation is wrong which makes the distinction among elders official and not personal, and thus introduces a Scriptural rule of temporal maintenance nowhere else to be found.

(b) It has been shown that the term elder is used in the New Testament as synonymous with bishop, that is, preaching elder. If it is not so used in this passage, this is, undeniably, *the only passage* in which it is not. This creates so strong a presumption that it is not here used in a different official sense from that which it everywhere else has, that, according to an established rule of interpretation, he who affirms that it is so used, is bound to show, not merely that it *may not*, but that it *cannot* have the sense here which everywhere else it has.

(c) If the apostles appointed the office of ruling elder, they have nowhere prescribed its qualifications. In 1 Tim. iii. the apostle prescribes the qualifications of bishops, or preaching elders, and of deacons; but nowhere is anything said about the qualifications of the very important office of ruling elder. If it be said that the qualifications for the office of bishop were intended to apply as well to the office of ruling elder, the answer is, that “aptness to teach” is one of these qualifications, and what would be the use or the propriety of specifying that qualification for an office which is restricted to ruling, and from which teaching is specially excluded? The omission to give any qualifications for this office, whilst those for the offices of preaching elder and deacon are *carefully laid down*, creates a very strong presumption that there was no such office, and that the distinction among the elders in the passage in question is not an official one.

(d) The post-apostolic churches had no such office. This omission is wholly unaccountable if the apostles really appointed it. They had *every other* appointed office or ordinance, and in the course of the centuries introduced many that were never appointed. But they never had ruling elders. They were never known until Calvin invented them.

(e) The passage fairly and naturally admits another than the Presbyterian interpretation. Among a plurality of elders it may reasonably be supposed there would be some diversity of talent. Whilst all might possess the ability to rule well and to preach, yet some having a special talent for government and discipline might give themselves more particularly to that, though not to the exclusion of preaching; and others, having a special talent and zeal for preaching, might give themselves more particularly to that, though not to the exclusion of ruling well. Now, the apostle enjoins, that the elders that rule well must be counted worthy of ample maintenance, especially those of them who are laboriously devoting themselves to preaching. All of them are worthy of high esteem and ample support, but particularly those of them who are giving their time and energies specially to the more important and more laborious work of preaching.

This meaning of the passage corresponds with the usage of the word translated “especially” (if the emphasis be supposed to fall on that word, and not, rather, on the word translated “labour”), which, in other passages, does not mark distinct classes of persons, but introduces a specification of particular persons belonging to the same general class. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, *especially* unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. vi. 10);—“them who are of the household of faith” belong to the “all” before mentioned, but, for a reason, are particularized. “If any man provide not for his own, and *specially* for those of his own house, he hath denied,” etc. (1 Tim. v. 8);—“his own” (relatives) is the general class to which “those of his own house” (family) belong, but are particularized. Many other examples might be given. So, in the passage in question: “the elders that rule well” is the general class to which belong

“they that labour in word and doctrine,” but who, for the reason above given, are particularized. The passage does not distinguish two distinct classes, but persons belonging to the same class. The distinction is not official but personal, and relates to the discharge of different duties of the same office, and not to the discharge of duties of different offices.

Barnes, good Presbyterian authority, in his comment on this passage, says: “It cannot, I think, be certainly concluded from this passage that the ruling elders who did not teach or preach were regarded as a separate class or order of permanent officers in the church. There seems to have been a bench of elders selected on account of age, piety, prudence, and wisdom, to whom was intrusted the whole business of the instruction and government of the church, and they performed the various parts of the duty as they had ability.” Dr. Cunningham, late principal of New College, Edinburgh, high Scotch-Presbyterian authority, says upon this passage: “Some keen advocates for presbytery, as the word is now understood, on the model of John Calvin, have imagined they discovered this distinction in the words of Paul to Timothy. Here, say they, is a twofold partition of the officers comprised under the same name, into those who rule and those who labor in the word and doctrine; that is, into ruling elders and teaching elders. To this it is replied, on the other side, that the *especially* is not intended to indicate a different office, but to distinguish from others those who assiduously apply themselves to the most important as well as the most difficult part of their office, public teaching; that the distinction intended is, therefore, not official but personal; that it does not relate to a difference in the powers conferred, but solely to a difference in their application. And to this exposition, as by far the most natural, I entirely agree” (quoted in “Wardlaw on Independency,” p. 218). But if this passage be given up, as these authorities do, ruling elders must be given up, for there is not another in which they may even plausibly be found. For these reasons, ruling elders are rejected as extra-scriptural, and preaching elders and deacons, it is believed, were the only officers of an apostolic church.

The duties of deacons were secular and not clerical. The account in the sixth chapter of Acts sufficiently proves this. Nor does it make any difference as to this point, whether this is or is not an account of the appointment of deacons technically so-called. Perhaps it is not. Perhaps those whom the apostle calls deacons, and whose qualifications he gives in 1 Timothy, were of subsequent appointment. Yet that the transaction recorded in Acts vi. furnished the model according to which those technically called deacons were appointed, seems evinced by the fact that the post-apostolic churches for two or three centuries observed the number *seven* in the selection of their deacons, after the manner of the account there given.

These seven were appointed to be the trustees and stewards of the common fund, to distribute to each one according to his or her necessities. This had hitherto been done by the apostles. But when the number of the

disciples had so increased as to render the work burdensome and an interference with the ministry of the word, and when jealousies had arisen, and complaints of partiality, exposing them to influences injurious to their usefulness, they abandoned the work, alleging that it was not proper that they should leave the word of God and serve tables. This very reason shows that these seven did not belong to the ministry of the word. Otherwise *they* could have said the same thing, and the reason would have been good for them also. There is no evidence that Stephen preached in the usual sense of that word. He defended himself when assailed by the opponents of Christianity, as any Christian should do. And even if there were evidence that he *preached* in the apostolic churches, anyone who could might preach as occasion and feeling prompted. Preaching was not regarded as a *prerogative* of the ministry. Even women sometimes preached, until the apostle corrected this error. Philip became an evangelist.

Besides, "aptness to teach" is not a qualification of a deacon. If preaching had been included among the official duties of their original appointment, this qualification would certainly not have been omitted. Its omission would, therefore, seem to be conclusive proof that it was not. Only those qualifications are laid down which would be most likely to insure the selection of men of good business qualities, not apt to yield to those peculiar temptations to which the nature of their work exposed them—an "itching palm" and a gossiping tongue. They must be "grave" men, of more than ordinary piety, of "honest report," not "double-tongued," nor greedy of gain. Furthermore, in the post-apostolic churches, preaching was not considered as incidental to their office, nor were they at first allowed to preach. In the fourth century, by special permission, they sometimes preached and baptized, yet probably only in some places, and very occasionally: for the author under the name of Ambrose says positively that they did not preach in his time—probably the fourth century (Bingham's *Antiquities*. i. p. 90). To style ministers of the gospel of a certain grade deacons, is an abuse of the scriptural term, and a perversion of its meaning.

Deaconesses were appointed in some at least of the apostolic churches. It is most probable, however, that they were not ordained as were the deacons, as we have no account of such ordination, and were not therefore *officers*, but were merely appointed or requested to perform the same duties for the female portion of the church which the deacons did for the male portion. The rigid separation of the sexes in that day, which would debar the female members from the administrations of the deacons, rendered such an appointment at that time necessary. As, however, that which originated solely from a necessity peculiar to a particular state of society, may be discontinued when the necessity no longer exists, it should not be considered that such an appointment must be followed now by us. The principle by which we are to be guided in determining what appointments in the apostolic churches are to be considered as binding for all time, and what dis-

cretionary, may be stated thus. Whatever can be CLEARLY shown from Scripture, either by precept or example, to have been instituted by the apostles, *and which cannot be shown to have had its origin in the temporary and peculiar circumstance of their time*, is binding on us and for all time. Whatever can be shown to have had its origin in the peculiarities of that time, is not binding, the same peculiarities no longer existing. Upon this principle, deaconesses, a plurality of elders, and the “holy kiss,” are omitted now. Upon this principle also, the frequency of the Lord’s Supper is left to the pious discretion of the churches. It is believed by most, that it cannot be *clearly* shown, to say the least, *from Scripture*, either by precept or example, that the apostolic churches communed weekly. Whatever is of such importance that our Saviour would make it binding upon his people, it is presumable he would teach with such clearness that they might learn it with reasonable care and candor.

These officers—elders and deacons—were chosen by popular election. In the case of the deacons this is evident. As to the elders, Scripture is silent; but, in this case, this very silence is significant, since in every voluntary society, and a church is such, popular election is the *normal rule* and need not be expressly stated, but any other mode would *require express teaching*, and there is none such. It is said, indeed, in Acts xiv. 23, that Paul and Barnabas “appointed them elders in every church;” but this does not exclude the concurrence of the church. Some think that the word translated “appointed,” according to “its original and usual sense,” means that Paul and Barnabas *took the vote of the people*; thus merely presiding over the choice. (So Schaff, Hist. Apostolic Ch. 50l.) Others think that “appointed” means formally set them apart to their office after the church had chosen them. Whether either of these views be considered correct or not—and it is admitted that neither should be—yet, certainly, in any view justified by the original word, their *appointment* does not necessarily exclude the approbation and concurrence of the church. The apostle, possessing a better judgment as to the fitness of persons for the office of the ministry than an inexperienced church newly converted from heathenism, would, doubtless, in all the churches, that he planted, exercise a controlling influence in the selection of such persons. Very probably, he would name the persons most suitable, and the church would concur; in like manner as a Baptist missionary of the present day might do, yet always recognizing the popular right of the church, and appointing no one without its concurrence. There is, therefore, nothing said or necessarily implied in Acts xiv. 23, that shows that the apostolic churches did not choose their elders by popular election, whilst we know that this was the practice of the churches *immediately succeeding* the apostles and for many centuries afterward. The apostolic Father, Clement of Rome (close of the first century), says explicitly, his first epistle to the Corinthians, that the apostles appointed bishops and deacons “with the concurrence of the whole church” (Schaff’s Hist.

Apostolic Ch. 502). Even the Roman Catholic Dollinger says, in his "History of the Church," i. p. 242: "The election of the clergy could not canonically take place without the participation of the assembled community....They chose the seven whom the apostles ordained. In succeeding times the bishop in particular (who, to enjoy the confidence of all, required the testimony of all that he was the most worthy) was chosen by the voices of his brethren." So late as the middle of the third century, Cyprian testifies to the same practice, and contends that the right of popular election is a principle sanctioned by the sacred Scriptures, and based *jure divino* (Cunningham's Historical Theol. i. 191). This right the churches continued to exercise, although all the growing tendencies were against it, until a dominant prelacy, naturally developing into papacy, crushed out this last remaining apostolic right of the churches.

2. *Members of the Apostolical Churches.*—The *members* of the apostolic churches were all converted persons, or supposed to be converted. In the various epistles they are addressed as "saints," "faithful brethren," "the sons of God," "sanctified in Christ Jesus." The many exhortations to a godly life and a holy conversation presume that they are "new creatures in Christ Jesus;" and the motives by which they are enforced are such as could be expected to have no force upon any other presumption. Upon the day of Pentecost they that gladly received the word were baptized; "and the Lord added to the church daily those who are saved;" that is, those who were already in process of being saved, in whom a work of salvation had already commenced before they were added, and who were not, therefore, added in order to commence that work.

There are two different and opposite ideas of the nature and functions of the church, upon one or the other of which every Christian organization must practically proceed. One is that which conceives of the church as occupying a mediating position between us and God, and connection with which by baptism is therefore necessary to place us in the channel of grace and in the way of salvation. This is the Romish idea of the church, out of which naturally grow a hierarchy, infant baptism, and a mixed membership. The other is that which conceives of the church as a society of believers in Jesus Christ. They are first believers in order to become members of this society, and not first members of this society in order to become believers. This is the apostolic idea of the church. Accordingly, there was no hierarchy in the apostolic churches. The ministers of the gospel appointed by the apostles are called bishops, elders, pastors, teachers, stewards, servants, leaders, etc., but *never priests*. This is very significant. The apostles were Jews. All their religious ideas and associations had been intimately connected with a sacerdotal ministry and the priestly service of the Temple. Yet never in the New Testament are Christian ministers called priests, and never are any sacerdotal terms employed in speaking of their ministrations. There is no infant baptism in the New Testament. Dr. Jacob, of the church

of England, says: "Notwithstanding all that has been written by learned men upon this subject, it remains indisputable that infant baptism is not mentioned in the New Testament: No instance of it is recorded there; no allusion is made to its effects; no directions are given for its administration. . . .; it ought to be distinctly acknowledged that it is not an apostolic ordinance. . . . There is no trace of it until the last part of the second century, when a passage is found in Irenaeus which may possibly—and only possibly—refer to it. Nor is it anywhere distinctly mentioned before the time of Tertullian, who, while he testifies to the practice, was himself rather opposed to it. As an established order of the church, therefore, it belongs to the third century, when its use and the mode of its administration and the whole theory of it as a Christian ceremony were necessarily moulded by the baptismal theology of the time" (Eccl. Pol., pp. 270, 271). If anyone should wonder how one holding such views should yet practice infant baptism, the explanation is found in the fact that he justifies himself upon the ground of "*church authority*." Hence the difference between the Presbyterian and the Episcopalian in their admissions upon this subject. The Episcopalian holds that the church has authority to alter or to add to the apostolic ordinances when the alterations or additions are supposed to be legitimately deduced from apostolic principles. He has no difficulty, therefore, in candidly admitting that immersion was the primitive mode of baptism and believers the only subjects, because, upon his principles he can justify, by "*church authority*," his substituting sprinkling for immersion and his practice of infant baptism. The Presbyterian more properly holds that the church has no authority to alter or to add to the ordinances of the apostles by any deductions or inferences. The apostolic ordinances are certainly right, but our inferences may be wrong. He is restrained, therefore, in his admissions, and to justify *himself* in sprinkling and in infant baptism is obliged boldly to assert against Episcopal as well as Baptist scholarship, that immersion was not the primitive mode, and that infant baptism *is* found in the New Testament. The logical exigencies of his case force him to this. If he were to take any other ground, consistency would oblige him to become a Baptist, at least so far as the mode and subject of baptism are concerned. But to proceed Litton says: "All the members of the church were supposed to be true believers, and to have been baptized as such: many may have been hypocrites, but they were not baptized as hypocrites or nominal Christians. In short, St. Paul addresses Christians according to their profession, according to what, if their profession was sincere, they actually were. How far his expressions are applicable to a church composed of persons baptized in their infancy is another question; but it must never be forgotten that this was not the case of those to whom St. Paul wrote" (p. 213, note). Pressensé says: "Christian baptism is not to be received any more than faith by right of inheritance. This is the great reason why we cannot believe that it was administered in the apostolic age to little children. No

positive fact sanctioning the practice can be adduced from the New Testament; the historical proofs alleged are in no way conclusive.” (Apostolic Era, p. 376)

There was no mixed membership in the apostolic churches. If there was no infant baptism, there was no mixed membership; for there is no difference among Christians of any denomination, except Roman Catholics, as to adults. These, to be received as members, it is agreed must give credible evidence of conversion. But the apostolic churches were composed of adults only, or of those only who were capable of exercising personal faith and repentance, there being at that time no infant baptism, and consequently no infant church-membership. All, therefore, received into the apostolic churches were converted, or believed to be converted. If some were self-deceived or hypocrites, they were not received *as such*; and when their true character was found out, they were told that they had “neither part nor lot” in the church. This—a converted church membership, a membership composed only of persons who are believed to have exercised personal repentance and faith—is, of all others, the most important peculiarity that characterized the apostolic organization of the church. And when it shall come to be recognized by Christians of the present day as a necessary and fundamental characteristic of a Christian church, a sacerdotal ministry and infant baptism will find their proper places among the Jewish Pagan corruptions of Christianity. Let that Romish idea of the church cease to be entertained by Protestant Christians, which conceives of it as mediating between us and God, so that connection by baptism with it, if not necessary to salvation, yet at least places us in a more salvable condition, and infant baptism and consequent infant church-membership will be remitted to the exclusive advocacy and practice of the Church of Rome—where alone they consistently belong. For it is this unscriptural, Romish idea of the nature and functions of the church, leading to the persuasion that connection by baptism with it somehow places a child more nearly in the channel of God’s grace and in the way of salvation, that gives to infant baptism its hold upon the parental mind, and continues its practice. The Rev. Wm. Bates, Lecturer of Christ’s College, Cambridge, in “College Lectures on Christian Antiquities and the Ritual,” p. 399, propounds the following question and answer: “Why must parents and friends be careful to get their children baptized? Because by this ordinance their original sin is washed away and they are grafted into the body of Christ; so that if they die before they have committed actual sin, they are undoubtedly saved; and if this be neglected by their fault, they must answer *for putting the salvation of the children to so great a hazard.*” It is very much to be deplored, that when the Reformation took place, Protestantism did not throw off entirely all the errors of Romanism. Naturally enough, from long association, but very unfortunately, it retained and has continued to retain some of these errors, thereby giving a degree of plausibility to the charge that Protestantism is a “failure.”

3. *Relation of the Apostolic Churches to each other.*—The churches organized by the apostles were all distinct, independent bodies. Each church managed its own affairs, independently of every other, recognizing no human control or authority outside of itself. There was no consociation or confederation of several churches under one common ecclesiastical judicatory. It is believed by Presbyterians, and urged in favor of Presbyterianism, that in some large cities, Jerusalem for example, the number of Christians was too large ever to meet together as one church, and that therefore there must have been several separate churches, but all confederated under one common presbytery, and hence the “church at Jerusalem” is spoken of, and not the churches. To say nothing of the too great readiness which the advocates of this theory manifest to swell the number of disciples, in the case supposed, by taking it for granted that all the large conversions which took place at Jerusalem were additions to the church there, whereas, it is certain in some cases, and probable in all, that this was not the case to a great extent, very many of these converts being nonresidents, as on the day of Pentecost, so that we are not obliged to suppose that it was not possible for them all to meet as one body or church;—to say nothing of this, it may be remarked, that, since the term “church” in all other similar connections is confessedly applied to a single church, the inference is, that in the case supposed it means one single church, and not several confederated. This inference is strengthened by our not being obliged to suppose that the number of disciples was so large that they could never all meet together, and becomes assurance by our being expressly told that the “whole church” did come together (Acts vi. 2; xv. 22; 1 Cor. xiv. 23). It is doubtless true, that, in a large city like Jerusalem, and it may be Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth, the number of Christians *was* too large to meet as one body *ordinarily*. Prudential reasons would cause them most probably to meet in several assemblies in different places. The fallacy, however, in the above theory lies in supposing that these several congregations were several distinct churches, and not sections of the same church meeting in different places for ordinary worship, but the “whole multitude” coming together when anything of special importance required.

Reference is made to the so-called Council at Jerusalem, Acts xv., to prove that the Scriptures furnish a model of a Presbyterian Synod, “for a rule to the churches of Christ in all succeeding ages.” A statement of the facts of this case will show how erroneous this reference is. While Paul and Barnabas were laboring at Antioch after their return from the apostle’s first missionary tour, certain persons came from Judaea, more particularly from Jerusalem, as verse 24 shows, and were teaching the members of the church at Antioch, that faith in Christ *without circumcision* would not save them. Paul and Barnabas opposed their false teaching, and “had no small dissension and disputation with them.” The church determined to send Paul and Barnabas, and others of their number, to the apostles still residing at

Jerusalem, and to the elders of the church there, to inquire “about this question.” If ever a question called for inspired decision, this did. It was one of vital *doctrinal* importance, involving the fundamental doctrine of salvation by faith or by works. The apostles might have assembled alone together and decided it themselves, by their infallible authority as inspired teachers of the gospel. It was a most proper question for inspired apostolic decision. But, as these Judaizing teachers constituted no small part of the number of Jewish Christians, and as they were very bigoted in their views, and very zealous in teaching them; and as they did not perceive or recognize the character of the apostles as inspired guides (if indeed their character in this respect was, at this early period, at all generally understood); and, moreover, as the teachers had represented, as appears from verse 24, that their teaching had the sanction of the church at Jerusalem,—the apostles, instead of settling the question themselves, seem to have deemed it expedient to assemble the elders “with the whole church,” that the subject might be discussed with these false teachers, and that they might publicly settle it with the concurrence of the elders and of “the whole church.” After much “disputing” with these errorists to convince them, the church at Antioch is informed that they did not have the sanction of the church at Jerusalem, and the Gentile Christians at Antioch and in Syria and Cilicia are required to do only that which Christians in all times are required to do (Rom. xv.), namely, to make some concessions to the weak consciences of their weak Jewish brethren, by abstaining from certain things. The decision was the decision of the apostles *as such*, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the narrative shows; but, for the reasons mentioned, the more effectually to silence, if possible, these false teachers, and to confirm the confidence of Gentile Christians, it is made in a meeting of the whole church at Jerusalem, the church concurring, and goes forth as the decision of “the apostles, and the elders and brethren” there. This union of the elders and members of the church at Jerusalem with *the apostles* in promulgating the decision, does not show it to be any less the inspired decision of the apostles, nor imply that the elders and church members were inspired too; any more than when the apostle begins his Epistle to the Galatians by saying: “Paul, an apostle (not of men, etc.), and all the brethren which are with me,” this shows that it was not his inspired epistle, or that “the brethren” shared his inspiration. How unlike this transaction is to a Presbyterian Synod, both in the character of its decision, and in the character of the assembly, anyone may see. The decision of a Presbyterian Synod is the fallible decision of fallible men;—this the infallible decision of *apostles* under the infallible guidance of the Holy Spirit. This assembly is composed of the apostles, with the elders and members of the church at Jerusalem. The “certain other of them” sent from Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, do not constitute part of the assembly to discuss and decide the question, but to submit it. A Presbyterian Synod is composed of delegates elected by the various Presbyteries of the region embraced under

the jurisdiction of the Synod. To make the character of the two assemblies similar, so that one may be a model for the other, Dr. Mason (Works, ii. 117), says that, “the apostles returned thither from their excursions in preaching the gospel, accompanied *with elders, or presbyters, from the churches which they had planted* (!), and met together in ecclesiastical council, to consider about their common interest. Herein they have set us the example and left us the warrant of a *delegated body*.” It is very wonderful how anyone who reverences the word of God can get his own consent to “handle it” so “deceitfully.” What error in the world could not be proved from the sacred Scriptures, if we may thus allow ourselves to interpolate into them facts from our fancy, manufactured to suit a theory. Neither Presbyterianism nor Independency finds any support from this so-called council.

Abundant authority could be cited in favor of the independence of the primitive churches; only two, however, will be given,—the infidel Gibbon, and the archbishop Whately. Gibbon (i. chap. 15), says: “The societies which were instituted in the cities of the Roman Empire were united only by the ties of faith and charity. Independence and equality formed the basis of their internal constitution. Such was the mild and equal constitution by which the Christians were governed, more than a hundred years after the death of the apostles. Every society formed within itself a separate and independent republic.” The late Archbishop of Dublin (“Kingdom of Christ,” p. 36), says: “It appears plainly from the sacred narrative, that though the many churches which the apostles founded were branches of one spiritual brotherhood, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the heavenly Head,—though there was ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ for all of them, yet they were each a distinct, independent community on earth, united by the common principles on which they were founded, and by their mutual agreement, affection, and respect; but not having any one recognized head on earth, or acknowledging any sovereignty of one of these societies over others.” The infidel, having no ecclesiastical preferences to favor, could speak impartially; and the archbishop, having no doubt as to the “authority” of the church to change apostolic appointments, could speak candidly. To these might be added the testimony of Mosheim, Neander, Gieseler, Hinds, and others. “It is clear as the noonday,” says Mosheim.

Such was the apostolic organization of the churches as to their officers, membership, and relation to each other. They had, as officers, only elders and deacons, of equal rank, and chosen by the people;—their members were all required to be converted persons;—and the churches were all independent of each other.

II. THE OBLIGATION OF THE APOSTOLIC MODEL.

Should the disciples of our Lord regard this organization as a model obligatory upon them to adopt, or has he left the form of church polity discretionary

with his people? This is a question of great practical importance. Ecclesiastical history teaches us, that the first errors that infected the early church, leading it farthest astray, and exerting the widest influence in causing its departure from apostolic simplicity and purity, were not errors in doctrine, but in church government and discipline. And it is chiefly errors here, rather than in doctrine, that now separate the followers of our common Lord and Master. If all the true followers of our Lord could see eye to eye, as respects the scriptural idea of the nature and functions of his church, and the principles upon which its first organization proceeded, the chief differences, and most serious errors, that now divide the "body of Christ" into discordant and belligerent sects, would disappear. The question, therefore, is one of very great practical importance, and deserving a fuller consideration than may here be given to it. Whilst the importance of the form of church government should not, indeed, be unduly magnified, on the one hand, by being placed among things *essential*, yet, on the other, it ought not to be unduly under-estimated by being placed among things *indifferent*, nor that feeling indulged which would regard all questions relating to this subject as trivial and not worth the trouble of an earnest investigation.

Our Saviour intended that his disciples should form themselves into churches; and when in Matthew xviii. 17, he says, "Tell it unto the church," he has in view the societies or churches, soon to be formed, and speaks by way of anticipation. Man is a social being. The highest development of his nature as an intelligent being is found in society. In all matters that deeply interest and affect, he naturally seeks the sympathy, communion, and cooperation of kindred spirits. His religious nature is not an exception. "It is natural that those whose hopes and fears, whose joys and sorrows, are similar, should associate together that they may strengthen their faith by fraternal communion. Again: it is made the duty of every disciple to extend the spiritual reign of his Maker. Much of this labor can be carried on only by associated effort. For such reasons as these, our Lord has taught us that his disciples in any place should form themselves into fraternal societies." They are intended to subserve the highest and most important ends in the world,—individual edification and growth in grace, and the evangelization of the world. Now, if any and every form of church government is equally adapted to promote these ends, and therefore equally "acceptable to the Master," then the question proposed is no question at all. But this, surely, will not be affirmed, and cannot be maintained. It is certainly not true of any other kind of government. Any and all forms of civil government are not equally adapted to promote the true ends of government. The character, too, of a people is largely moulded, we know, by the character of the political government under which they live. Is there any reason for saying that this is not so as respects church polity? Will not the genius of the government, in the one case as well as in the other, reflect itself in the genius of the people? Will not a church polity that deals larger in rites and cere-

monies, for instance, tend to impress a formal and ceremonial religious character upon its members? Will not a polity that exalts prominently the authority of its rulers, and the acquiescence of its members, tend to destroy the exercise of the right of private judgment and the sense of individual responsibility, and to impress a religion that consists in mere submission to church authority, and is satisfied with a blind following of the leadership of others? The external encloses the internal, and has an important influence upon it. "The outward form and constitution of a church; the laws or customs which regulate its worship and discipline; the functions assigned to its officers,—the ritual observed in its devotions; and its whole action as a visible Christian body,—react with great force upon its inner life, upon the doctrines which it most prominently teaches, the manner in which those doctrines are received and held by its individual members, and the whole of their religious character and state. The importance, therefore, of the external action in any Christian church, though it must be confined to its own proper sphere, can hardly, within that sphere, be exaggerated or too highly placed. Hence in every church, a due attention to its outward organization—its regulations, ceremonial, government, and polity in general—is intimately connected with its most vital interests, and can never with safety be omitted, or regarded as a matter of slight and trivial concern" (Jacob's *Ecc. Pol.*, pp. 18, 19). The correctness of these views will hardly be denied by anyone. But if admitted, they settle the question, whether our Saviour has left the form of church organization discretionary with his people. If any and all forms are not equally adapted to subserve the high ends for which churches are divinely instituted, then there is a form better adapted than others; and if there be one better adapted than another, the Saviour would surely not leave it to fallible human wisdom to find it out. When we consider the vastly important ends for which churches are instituted, and that these ends are vitally affected,—for good or evil, for progress or hindrance,—by the form of organization, we cannot believe that the Saviour left the apostles to their unassisted wisdom in the organization which they instituted. The antecedent improbability of such a thing is too great to allow us to believe this. He must, *in some way*, have given them divine guidance in this matter,—a matter so extremely important, as we have seen, and so entirely new to them and to all their previous training. Whether in the forty days that he was "seen of them," and spake "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," he then gave them personal directions, we cannot, of course, say. But we know that they received extraordinary endowments for their great mission. To found churches was a part, and a very important part, of their mission. We must believe, in view of the important bearing of the form of their organization upon the successful or unsuccessful accomplishment of the high ends of their institution, that they were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this matter, as well as in the enunciation of the doctrinal principles of Christianity: so that the polity

instituted by them must be regarded as the expression of divine wisdom on this subject. The real question, then, seems to be this—Are we under obligation to adopt that polity which divine wisdom has pointed out to be the best adapted to promote the ends of church organization, or may we feel at liberty to change it or to substitute some other, according to our views of fitness and expediency? Such a question does not admit of debate.

It may be said in reply, that if there were a system of church government laid down in the Scriptures, certainly we should regard it as the Holy Spirit's indication of the best system, and therefore binding upon us; but there is none. Dr. Wayland, in "University Sermons," p. 228, says: "I do not perceive in the New Testament any directions on this subject. . . . I see nothing in the New Testament which would prevent any community of Christians from adopting any form of church government which they esteem most for their edification." This must be regarded as one among a few other errors of a great and good man. The antecedent improbability of this, as already shown, is so great as to make one doubt its correctness. But we need not have recourse to any *a priori* reasoning. We may appeal at once to facts. In the New Testament we learn, that the apostles appointed certain officers, elders and deacons; that they were chosen by popular vote, certainly as to the latter and by fair if not necessary inference as to the former, from the significant silence of Scripture before alluded to; that they had certain rights and duties; that there was no imparity among them; that certain qualifications were necessary for membership; that the members had certain rights and duties; and that each church had the full power of its own government, recognizing no other authority save that of Christ, "Head over all things." Now, here are certain great, leading, fundamental principles which constitute a system of church government. It is not contended that there is a system, logically propounded, and laid down in systematic form. But neither are the doctrines of the gospel so laid down; and for a wise purpose. We are thereby left to a diligent search of the Scriptures, and by comparing Scripture with Scripture, and collecting instruction from the scattered and incidental references to doctrines in the Scriptures, to arrange them into a systematic, harmonious body of doctrine. Similarly, with the great leading principles of church government. The objection of the absence of a formally propounded system no more proves that a system is not deducible and intended to be deduced from the Scriptures, than it does in the case of the doctrines of the gospel. Indeed, a formally stated system of church government is much less to be expected than a formally stated system of doctrine. It would have been inappropriate in letters to churches already formed to give forma directions as to how they should be formed. They knew that already. Nor is it contended that full and minute directions are given as to the *incidentals* and *circumstantial*s of church government. The great leading, essential principles are all that could be expected or that are necessary. Thus, minor circumstantial

stantial form is retained. There may be but one elder to a church instead of a plurality; or but one or two deacons instead of seven; but the number belongs to the circumstantial; it is the *office* that is the essential thing.

Again: it may be said, that church organization appears in the New Testament only in a *formative* state, and therefore not in a condition to be a pattern to us. This, however, is hypothesis merely. If it be true that certain leading, distinctive principles, such as have been stated, can be collected from the writings of the New Testament, they certainly furnish in full a *constitution* by which a fully organized church government may be formed. Why should the apostles leave the organization in a merely formative state, and, in a matter so important, risk the issue of an unfortunate final form? What was there to hinder them from completing the organization, and setting everything “in order,” in every case in which they commenced it?

Again: somewhat similarly, it may be alleged, whilst admitting in the main what has been said, that church polity, like the doctrines of the gospel, was intended to be a matter of progressive development, the apostles laying down the general, leading principles upon which the subsequent development was to take place. Hence, most Episcopalians—and it is they that take this ground—whilst admitting, as does Archbishop Whately, that the independent and congregational form of government was the one instituted by the apostles, yet speak of subsequent episcopacy, not as a *change* but a *development* of the apostolic regulations. To this it may be replied: In the matter of doctrine there was a progressive development, but this development was conducted by inspired men, and is recorded in Scripture. No such claim is made for the alleged development of church polity. Further, this development theory gives us a very unusual kind of development,—a development progressing *backwards*. In reference to government in general, it is conceded, perhaps universally, that a system which is founded upon the principle of self-government, in which all authority emanates from *the people* and is in the hands of the people, is the best, if they have sufficient intelligence and virtue to conduct so good a system. But it is admitted, as before shown, that this was the kind of government instituted by the apostles, and in the infancy of the church. To speak of episcopacy as a *development* of this, is very like saying that a child, when he is a child, may govern himself, but when he becomes a man he must be governed by guardians and masters. “It does me good,” says the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, in his way “to hear people talk of church government being so necessary to men; and nowhere in the world does it do me so much good to hear them thus talk as in America, where the fundamental theory of the civil government is that every man is competent to govern himself. Men insist that in matters relating to the village or town, it is competent to govern itself, that the county is competent to govern itself, that the State is competent to govern itself, and that the Nation is competent to govern itself; but when they come down to the church, which is composed usually of

picked men—of the best men in the community in which it is located—they say that the church is not able to govern itself; that it needs a presbytery over it, and a synod over that, and a general assembly over that—as if you wanted four hens sitting on one set of eggs.”

Again: it may be said, “The apostles were known to be infallible guides; and those who immediately succeeded them, and all subsequent ages, are quite sure, that they must have pursued that which was, under the existing circumstances, the most direct line to their object; that, circumstance as Christianity was in their hands, all their regulations were the best. The uninspired church was therefore bound to follow them, until any apostolical practice should be found inadequate to accomplish its original purpose. Here commence the discretion and the responsibility; the first obligation being to maintain the principle according to the best of their judgment, as the prudent steersman alters his track and deviates from the course marked out in his chart when wind and tide compel him to deviate. . . . In matters which admit of appeal to the usage of the apostolic church, we are sure, not only that the measure was wise, but the very wisest; and accordingly the only question is, whether its suitableness has been affected by any change of circumstances” (Bishop Hinds’ “Early Christianity,” p. 210).

This is plausible, but it is plausibility only. The apostles instituted a certain form of church government. They “were known to be infallible guides.” “Circumstanced as Christianity was in their hands” the form they instituted, “we are sure,” was not only wise, “but the very wisest.” “Accordingly, the only question is,” indeed, “whether its suitableness has been affected by any change of circumstances.” But they have nowhere intimated even that any change of circumstances would affect its suitableness. If it be alleged that any change of circumstances *does* render it unsuitable, so as to justify us in changing it according to our discretion, we have a right to demand that its unsuitableness be shown *clearly* and *unmistakably*. It was the “very wisest,” confessedly, under their circumstances, because they were infallible guides. If it is alleged not to be the “very wisest” under other circumstances, we have a right to demand, in the absence of any apostolic intimation to that effect, that its unwise-ness be as certainly shown in changing circumstances, as apostolic infallibility shows that it was the wisest under their circumstances. The admission justifies this demand, and the nature of the case requires it. But this never has been, and of course, never can be done. That changing circumstances render it unsuitable is only our judgment, our inference. But how liable our judgement and our inferences are to be wrong in this matter of church government, all history proves. Besides, there is an obvious fallacy that lies under this plea of changing circumstances. To support it, we are referred to the analogy of civil government, and told that a form of civil government that may be the best for a people under some circumstances may not be the best under others. We admit the fact, but deny the analogy. In spiritual matters there are *no chang-*

ing circumstances rendering a form of religious government which was “the very wisest” at one time, not the wisest at another. The churches of Jesus Christ, according to the apostolic idea and appointment, are everywhere and always associations of spiritual persons, united on spiritual principles that *never change*, for spiritual ends that *never change*, and in the use of spiritual means that *never change*; and the same constitution therefore, that suited them at first, must suit them *always* and *everywhere*. The nature upon which the gospel operates, and whose edification and sanctification is one of the ends of church organization, is ever the same. In whatever other respects men may change their state or circumstances, there can be none here; depraved human nature is the same now that it was in the days of Peter and of Paul, and will remain the same amid all the mutations of earthly things. The gospel too, is ever the same. The onward march of civilization and of science can add no new brightness to its glory, nor strength to its potency, nor lustre to its purity. That form of polity therefore, which was instituted by the apostles, and which is admitted to have been “the very wisest” means to accomplish its ends then, must be “the very wisest” for all times, human nature, the gospel, and the ends ever being the same. If, “circumstanced as Christianity was in their hands,” when the church was in its infancy and its members recently converted from Paganism, the independent and congregational form was “the very wisest” for promoting individual edification and growth in grace, what possible reason can be given why it should not be “the very wisest” now, and under all circumstances? If, when the church was in its infancy and surrounded on all sides by heathenism, this form was the best for promoting the world’s evangelization, what possible reason can be given why it should not be the best now and for all circumstances? This plea of changing circumstances is dangerous as well as fallacious. It leaves everybody at liberty to say what change of circumstances renders apostolic regulations unsuitable, and thus, as some one has well said, what is claimed to be left to our discretion is left to everybody’s *indiscretion*.

Finally, it may be said that this form of polity is too good a government for professing Christians as we ordinarily find them,—very fine in theory, but in theory only,—and therefore could not have been the one intended, “upon the principle that the most ingenious tool is useless without a competent workman to handle it.” It is very freely admitted that this form is the most worthless and inefficient if the churches are not imbued with the spirit of Christ, and is efficient only in proportion as they are. But “it is no discredit to a Christian organization that it cannot succeed without Christianity,” whilst it is an unanswerable argument in its favor that it requires for its complete success the highest attainments in Christian virtue and the most thorough consecration to the cause of Christ. If our Saviour intended that his disciples should form themselves into churches at all, we should naturally expect beforehand that this would be the kind of organization he

would intend,—an organization that would derive all its energy and efficiency from the spirituality of its members and their love for his cause. “Too good for Christians as we ordinarily find them,” it is said. This is an objection that must not be urged against the suitableness of the form of government, but against the piety of Christians as we ordinarily find them. The form which the apostles, our “infallible guides,” instituted, must not be brought down to the low attainments of Christians ordinarily, but Christians must bring up their attainments to it. “Too good for Christians as we ordinarily find them.” Only the more reason why all should adopt this good government, and strive after a more than ordinary degree of devotedness to his cause. Other forms of government have a machinery to work them, and can work by the mere force of their machinery. It is more than cheerfully admitted that this has nothing to work it but love to Jesus and consecration to his cause.

There are obvious excellences belonging to this form of polity which would lead us to believe that our Saviour *did* intend it. Among others, its ministerial parity offers less temptation than any other to ministerial rivalries and jealousies, and a carnal ambition. Its elective franchise offers less opportunity than any other to a priestly lording over God’s heritage. Its congregational form begets, more than any other, a sense of individual responsibility, an active interest in church matters, and the exercise of private judgment. Its cardinal principle of a converted church membership tends more than any other to maintain the purity of the church. Its independent form guards better than any other against schism. Indeed, when this independence is faithfully observed, there cannot be any schism to which a great confederated church is liable.

But enough; let us hope that the day may not be so distant as the present divisions among Christians would indicate, when the word of God shall be accepted by the people of God as the only authority in all matters of religious belief and practice, and when our Saviour’s prayer that his people “may be one” will be completely answered.

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