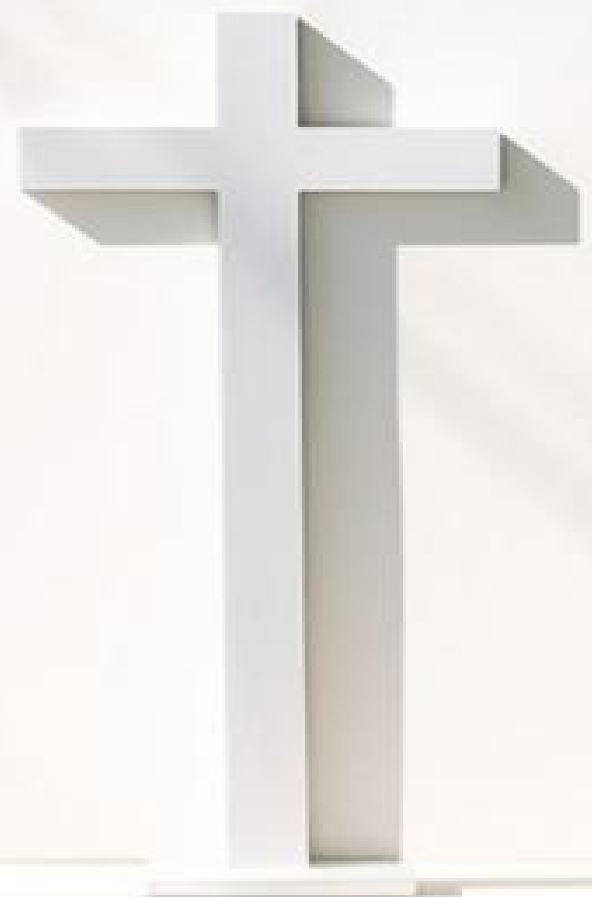


Monergism

**THE  
TRUE  
NATURE  
OF A  
GOSPEL  
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# **The True Nature of a Gospel Church**

Originally published 1689

the late Pious and Learned Minister of the Gospel,

JOHN OWEN, D.D.

LICENSED, June 10. 1688

LONDON, Printed for William Marshall, at the Bible in Newgate street, MDCLXXXIX.

## **PREFATORY NOTE**

ON the ground of some statements in the following treatise, which was published in 1689, it has been gravely argued that the author returned to the Presbyterianism of his early days before he died. In the "Inquiry concerning Evangelical Churches," (see vol. xv.), which forms the first part of this work, Owen states that he would "neither examine nor oppose the opinion" in favour of "a national church-state, arising from an association of the officers of particular

churches, in several degrees, which they call classical and provincial."—P. 262. He declares, in his answer to Stillingfleet, that had the Presbyterian government been established at the Restoration "without a rigorous imposition of every thing supposed by any to belong thereto," Presbyterians and Independents "would have been both to blame" if they had continued in a state of separation from each other. "If it shall be asked, then," he proceeds, "why they did not formerly agree in the Assembly? I answer,—

(1.) I was none of them, and cannot tell;

(2.) They did agree in my judgment well enough, if they could have thought so; and further I am not concerned in the difference."—P. 433. The author of the anonymous memoir prefixed to Marshall's edition of his Sermons remarks, "He was of so healing a temper, that I heard him say before a person of quality and others, that he could readily join with Presbytery as it was exercised in Scotland." In his MSS. *Analecta*, under date 1716, the historian Wodrow records the following statement:—"Mr George Redpath told me two or three years ago, when in Edinburgh, that he visited Dr Owen on his deathbed, and Presbytery and Episcopacy came to be discoursed of; and the Doctor said how he had seen his mistake as to the Independent way, and declared to him a day or two before his death, that, after his utmost search into the Scriptures and antiquity, he was now satisfied that Presbytery was the way Christ had appointed in his new testament church." If we add, that on the subject of the ruling elder (see chapter 7 of the following treatise) the views of Owen are in perfect harmony with Presbyterianism, and that, under certain qualifications, he contends for the lawfulness and authority of synods, we exhaust the evidence that in his last days he was more of a Presbyterian than an Independent.

Mr Orme admits that "he seems to contend for a distinct office of ruling elder, or for elders who are called to rule and not to teach;" but he argues that it was a view which could not be reconciled with his other sentiments, and that it differs from the Presbyterian scheme, according to which pastor and elder "are offices so distinct that the ministers alone are considered as mere pastors, and the elders as mere laymen." But Presbyterians really do not hold that elders are laymen, or that there is any difference in respect of office between the minister and ruling elder, although their functions vary, rule being common to both, while teaching is the duty of the pastor; and on this point Owen was no more chargeable with inconsistency as an Independent than other eminent men of the same denomination,—Thomas Hooker, Cotton Mather, and Timothy Dwight,—who contend for the office of the ruling elder. Some Presbyterians would homologate implicitly the exposition which our author gives of the nature and objects of synodical action; but here his agreement with Presbyterian principles is, on the whole, not so clear and decided as in the case of the ruling elder. He objects to synods determining articles of faith, and issuing orders and decrees on their own authority; but asserts their "authority" to "declare the mind of God from the Scripture in doctrine, or give counsel as unto practice." There is nothing in this view from which Presbyterians would dissent.

That he should differ from both parties on some points is not surprising when we mark how carefully he has thought out his own views from Scripture, giving a freshness and originality of colouring to his treatises on church-government which render them to the present day peculiarly interesting and worthy of consultation. It is only, however, by a process of torture to which no man's language should be subjected that Owen can be claimed as a Presbyterian. We may gladly accept his decision on some points,—not as confirming

Presbyterianism so much as affording room for the hope that, on matters of polity, evangelical churches may yet be united in common action and under the same forms. But the opinions of Owen can only be understood by reading the former part of this treatise in connection with this which follows, and "which," says Chauncey, "he esteemed as his legacy to the church of Christ." In the latter part there is no recantation of the principle so copiously urged in the former, that "the visible church-state, which Christ hath instituted under the new testament consists in an especial society or congregation of professed believers;" and that for two hundred years after Christ there is no mention "of any other organical, visibly professing church, but only that which is parochial or congregational." That Owen might deem it possible to accomplish and secure all the ends of congregational duty under the system of Presbytery may be true; but that, in regard to the spirit and substance of the ecclesiastical system for which he pleaded, he was a Congregationalist, it would be hardihood to question. To the story of Redpath must be opposed the assertion of Chauncey, by whom this treatise was edited, that it was corrected by Owen immediately before his death. Had he undergone a change of view so complete as is represented, he was not the man to quit the world in a spirit of dishonourable reticence, but would have frankly avowed to what extent his previous convictions had been modified or abandoned.

Edmund Elys, son of a clergyman in Devonshire, author of some Latin productions in prose and poetry, replied to this work in 1690, by the publication of "Animadversions upon some passages in a book entitled 'The True Nature of a Gospel Church, etc.'" —ED.

## THE PREFACE TO THE READER

THE church of Christ, according as it is represented unto us, or described by the Holy Spirit of God, in the Old and New Testament, hath but a twofold consideration,—as catholic and mystical, or as visible and organized in particular congregations. The catholic church is the whole mystical body of Christ, consisting of all the elect which are purchased and redeemed by his blood, whether already called or uncalled, militant or triumphant; and this is the church that God gave him to be head unto, which is his body and his fulness, and, by union with him, Christ mystical, Eph. 1:22, 23; and this is that πανήγυρις (the only word most fully expressing the catholic church used in Scripture), "the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven," Heb. 12:23, that is, in the Lamb's book of life; and they shall all appear one day gathered together to their Head, in the perfection and fulness of the New Jerusalem state, where they will make a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. The day of grace which the saints have passed in the respective ages of the church was but the day of its espousals, wherein the bride hath made herself ready; but then will be her full married state unto Christ, then will be the perfection not only of every particular member of Christ, but of the whole body of Christ, called "a perfect man," and "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," to which we are called, edifying and building up by the ministry and ordinances of Christ, whilst we are "in via," in our passage unto this country, a city with a more durable fixed foundation, which we seek.

In order, therefore, unto the completing this great and mystical body, Christ hath his particular visible churches and assemblies in this



world; wherein he hath ordained ordinances and appointed officers for the forementioned glorious ends and purposes.

There is no other sort of visible church of Christ organized, the subject of the aforesaid institutions spoken of, but a particular church or congregation (either in the Old or New Testament), where all the members thereof do ordinarily meet together in one place to hold communion one with another in some one or more great ordinances of Christ. The first churches were economic, when the worship of God was solemnly performed in the large families of the antediluvian and post-diluvian patriarchs, where, no doubt, all frequently assembled to the sacrifices as then offered, and other parts of worship then in use.

After the descent of a numerous progeny from Abraham's loins, God takes them to himself in one visible body, a national but congregational church, into which he forms them four hundred and thirty years after the promise, in the wilderness; and although all Abraham's natural posterity, according to the external part of the promise made to him, were taken into visible church fellowship, so that it became a national church, yet it was such a national church always, in the wilderness and in the Holy Land, as was congregational, for it was but one congregation during the tabernacle or temple state, first or second. They were always bound to assemble at the tabernacle or temple thrice at least every year; hence the tabernacle was still called "The tabernacle of the congregation." They were to have but one altar for burnt-offerings and sacrifices; what others were at any time elsewhere, called "high places," were condemned by God as sin.

Lastly, When Christ had divorced this people, abolished their Mosaical constitution by breaking their staff of beauty and their staff

of bands, he erects his gospel church, calls in disciples by his ministry, forms them into a body, furnisheth them with officers and ordinances, and after he had suffered, rose again, and continued here forty days,—in which time he frequently appeared to them and acquainted them with his will,—ascends unto his Father, sends his Spirit in a plentiful manner at Pentecost, whereby most of them were furnished with all necessary miraculous gifts, to the promoting the glory and interest of Christ among Jews and Gentiles.

Hence the whole evangelical ministry was first placed in the church of Jerusalem (so far as extraordinary, or such a part of it as was [not] to descend to churches of after ages); neither were they placed as abiding or standing officers in any other church, as we find. In this church they acted as the elders thereof; and from this church they were, it is very likely, solemnly sent, by fasting and prayer, to the exercise of their apostolic function in preaching, healing, and working miracles, gathering churches, and settling officers in them, even so as Paul and Barnabas were sent forth by the church of Antioch.

Their distinguishing apostolic office and charge (from which the evangelist differed but little) was to take care of all the churches,—not to sit down as standing pastors to all or any particular congregation, but at the first planting to gather, to direct, and confirm them, in practice of their doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and in prayer. Wherefore this apostolic care committed to them proves nothing either of the catholic authority claimed by an œcumenic pastor, or that charge of many congregations claimed by diocesan bishops.

Whence it is most evident that all church-officers, so far as they had any pastoral or episcopal office, were given to a particular

congregation as the πρῶτον δεκτικόν. We read of no pastors of many congregations, nor of any church made up of many congregations, to which officers were annexed, nor of any representative church, as some would have.

That apostolic power did descend to successors we utterly deny, it being not derivable; for none after them could say they had been eye-witnesses of our Lord before or after his resurrection, none since so qualified by an extraordinary measure of the Spirit for preaching and working miracles, and none but the pope challenges such an extensive care for and power over all churches. That which descends from them to the ordinary ministry is a commission to preach and baptize: and why not to head, it being always, in the commission that Christ gave, a pastoral relation or presbytership which was included in their apostleship, and exercised toward the church of Jerusalem? Such presbytership John and Peter both had. Hence there remains no other successors "jure" to the apostles but ordinary pastors and teachers.

These are relative officers, and are always in and to some particular congregations; we know of no catholic visible church that any pastors are ordained to. 1. The Scripture speaks of no church as catholic visible. 2. The thing itself is but a chimera of some men's brains, it is not "in rerum natura;" for if a catholic visible church be all the churches that I see at a time, I am not capable of seeing many more than what can assemble in one place. And if it be meant of all the churches actually in being, how are they visible to me? where can they be seen in one place? I may as well call all the cities and corporations in the world the catholic visible city or corporation, which all rational men would call nonsense. Besides, if all organized churches could be got together, it is not catholic in respect of saints militant, much less of triumphant; for many are no church members

that are Christ's members, and many visible members are no true members of Christ Jesus. Where is any such church capable of communion in all ordinances in one place? and the Scripture speaks of no other organized visible church.

Again: to a catholic visible church constituted should be a catholic visible pastor or pastors; for as the church is, such is the pastor and officers. To the mystical church Christ is the mystical head and pastor; he is called "The chief Pastor," 1 Pet. 5:4; and "The Shepherd of our souls," chap. 2:25. Hence the uncalled are his sheep, as John 10:16. But to all visible churches Christ hath appointed a visible pastor or pastors; and where is the pastor of the catholic visible church? he is not to be found, unless it suffice us to take him from Rome. To say that all individual pastors are pastors to the catholic church is either to say that they are invested with as much pastoral power and charge in one church as in another, and then they are indefinite pastors, and therefore all pastors have mutual power in each other's churches; and so John may come into Thomas' church and exercise all parts of jurisdiction there, and Thomas into John's; or a minister to the catholic church hath an universal catholic power over the catholic church,—if so, the power and charge which every ordinary pastor hath is apostolic; or, lastly, he is invested with an arbitrary power, at least as to the taking up a particular charge where he pleaseth, with a "non obstante" to the suffrages of the people, for if he hath an office whereby he is equally related to all churches, it is at his liberty, by virtue of this office, to take [himself] where he pleaseth.

But every church-officer under Christ is a visible relate, and the correlate must be such, whence the church must be visible to which he is an officer. It is absurd to say a man is a visible husband to an invisible wife; the relate and correlate must be "ejusdem naturæ." It

is true, Christ is related to the church as mystical head, but it is in respect of the church in its mystical nature, for Christ hath substituted no mystical officers in his church.

There is a great deal of difference between the mystical and external visible church, though the latter is founded upon it and for the sake of it. It is founded upon it as taking its true spiritual original from it, deriving vital spirits from it by a mystical union to and communion with Christ and his members;—and it is for the sake of it; all external visible assemblies, ministers, ordinances, are for the sake of the mystical body of Christ, for calling in the elect, and the edifying of them to that full measure of stature they are designed unto.

But the different consideration lies in these things,—

That the mystical church doth never fail, neither is diminished by any shocks of temptation or suffering that, in their visible profession, any of them undergo; whereas visible churches are often broken, scattered, yea, unchurched, and many members fail of the grace of God by final apostasy. Likewise Christ's mystical church is many times preserved in that state only, or mostly, when Christ hath not a visible organized church, according to institution, to be found on the face of the earth. So it was with his church often under the old testament dispensation: as in Egypt; in the days of the judges, when the ark was carried away by the Philistines; in the days of Manasseh and other wicked kings; and especially in Babylon. In such times the faithful ones were preserved without the true sacrifices, the teaching priest, and the law. So hath it been in the days of the new testament, in divers places, under the draconic heathen persecutions, and afterward in the wilderness state of the church, under the antichristian usurpations and false worship. Which mystical state is the place prepared of God to hide the seed of the woman in from the

dragon's rage for the space of one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Again: unto this mystical church is only essentially necessary a mystical union unto the Lord Jesus Christ, by the gift of the Father, acceptation and covenant-undertaking of the Son: the powerful and efficacious work of the Spirit of the Father and the Son working true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and sincere love to him and all his true members; whereby, as they have a firm and unshaken union, so they have a spiritual communion, though without those desirable enjoyments of external church privileges and means of grace which they are providentially often hindered from, visible churches being but Christ's tents and tabernacles, which he sometimes setteth up and sometimes takes down and removes at his pleasure, as he sees best for his glory in the world.

But of these he hath a special regard, as to their foundation, matter, constitution, and order. He gives forth an exact pattern from mount Zion, as of that typical tabernacle from mount Sinai of old.

1. The foundation part of a visible church is the credible profession of faith and holiness, wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is the corner-stone, Eph. 2:20; Matt. 16:18. This profession is the foundation, but not the church itself. It is not articles of faith, or profession of them in particular individual persons, that make an organized visible church. We are the "household of faith, built upon the foundation," etc. 2. It is men and women, not doctrine, that are the matter of a church, and these professing the faith and practising holiness. The members of churches are always called in the New Testament, "saints, faithful, believers." They were such that were added to the churches. Neither is every believer so, as such, but as a professing believer; for a man must appear to be fit matter of a visible church before he can

challenge church privileges or they can be allowed him. 3. It is not many professing believers that make a particular church; for though they are fit matter for a church, yet they have not the form of a church without a mutual agreement and combination (explicit, or at least implicit), whereby they become, by virtue of Christ's charter, a spiritual corporation, and are called a "city, house hold, house," being united together by joints and bands, not only by internal bonds of the Spirit, but external. The bonds of union must be visible, as the house is by profession.

This is a society that Christ hath given power to, to choose a pastor and other officers of Christ's institution, and enjoy all ordinances, the word, sacraments, and prayer, as Christ hath appointed.

Hence a visible church must needs be a separate congregation; separation is a proper and inseparable adjunct thereof. The apostle speaks of church-membership, 2 Cor. 6:14, "Be not unequally yoked together," ἑτεροζυγοῦντες, yoked with those of another kind (the ploughing with an ox and ass together being forbidden under the law), "with unbelievers," ἀπίστοις,—that is, visible unbelievers of any sort or kind: "for what participation, μετοχή, hath righteousness with unrighteousness? what κοινωνία, communion or fellowship, hath light with darkness?" Verse 15, "Τίς δὲ συμφώνησις, What harmony hath Christ with Belial?" men of corrupt lives and conversation; "or what part μερὶς πιστῶ μετὰ ἀπίστου, hath a believer," that is, a visible believer, "with an unbeliever?" It ought not to be rendered "infidel," but it was done by our translators to put a blind upon this place as to its true intention, and to countenance parish communion; for why did they not here, verse 14, and everywhere else, render ἄπιστος, "an infidel?" Verse 16, "Τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῶ Θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων, What consistency hath the temple of God," that is, the gospel church, "with idols?" etc. I take this place to be a full proof of

what is before spoken,—that a gospel church is a company of faithful professing people, walking together by mutual consent or confederation to the Lord Jesus Christ and one to another, in subjection to and practice of all his gospel precepts and commands, whereby they are separate from all persons and things manifestly contrary or disagreeing thereunto.

Hence, as it is separate from all such impurities as are without, so Christ hath furnished it with sufficient power and means to keep itself pure, and therefore hath provided ordinances and ministers for that end and purpose; for the great end of church-edification cannot be obtained without purity be also maintained in doctrine and fellowship.

Purity cannot be maintained without order. A disorderly society will corrupt within itself; for by disorder it is divided. By divisions the joints and bands are broken, not only of love and affection, but of visible conjunction; so that, roots of bitterness and sensual separation arising, many are defiled.

It is true, there may be a kind of peace and agreement in a society that is a stranger to gospel order; when men agree together to walk according to a false rule, or in a supine and negligent observation of the true rule. There may be a common connivance at each one to walk as he listeth; but this is not order, but disorder by consent. Besides, a church may, for the most part, walk in order when there are breaches and divisions. Some do agree to walk according to the rule, when others will deviate from it. It is orderly to endeavour to reduce those that walk not orderly, though such just undertakings seem sometimes grounds of disturbance and causes of convulsion in the whole body, threatening even its breaking in pieces; but yet this must be done to preserve the whole.



The word translated "order," Col. 2:5, τάξις, is a military word; it is the order of soldiers in a band, keeping rank and file, where every one keeps his place, follows his leader, observes the word of command, and his right-hand man. Hence the apostle joys to see their close order and steadfastness in the faith, their firmness, valour, and resolution, in fighting the good fight of faith; and the order in so doing, not only in watching as single professors, but in marching orderly together, as an army with banners. There is nothing more comely than a church walking in order; when every one keeps his place, knows and practiseth his duty according to the rule, each submitting to the other in the performance of duty; when the elders know their places, and the people theirs. Christ hath been more faithful than Moses, and therefore hath not left his churches without sufficient rules to walk by.

That order may be in a church of Christ, the rules of the gospel must be known, and that by officers and people. They that are altogether ignorant of the rule, or negligent in attending it, or doubtful, and therefore always contending about it, will never walk according to it. Hence it is the great duty of ministers to study order well, and acquaint the people with it. It is greatly to be bewailed that so few divines bend their studies that way. They content themselves only with studying and preaching the truths that concern faith in the Lord Jesus, and the mere moral part of holiness; but as to gospel churches or instituted worship, they generally in their doctrine and practice let it alone, and administer sacraments as indefinitely as they preach, and care not to stand related to one people more than another, any further than maintained by them. Likewise many good people are as great strangers to gospel churches and order, and, as their ministers, have a great averseness to both, and look upon it as schism and faction. And this is the great reason of the readiness of both to comply with rules of men for making churches (canons established

by human laws), being carried away (if they would speak the truth) by corrupt, Erastian principles, that Christ hath left the church to be altogether guided and governed by laws of magistratic sanction. Reformation from the gross, idolatrous part of antichristianism was engaged in with some heroic courage and resolution; but the coldness and indifference of Protestants to any farther progress almost ever since is not a little to be lamented. Many think it enough that the foundation of the house is laid in purity of doctrine (and it is well if that were not rather written in the books than preached in pulpits at this day), but how little do they care to set their hands to building the house! Sure a great matter it is, from that spiritual slothfulness that many are fallen under, as likewise from being ready to sink under the great discouragements laid before them by the adversaries of Judah, when they find the children of the spiritual captivity are about to build a gospel church unto the Lord. And how long hath this great work ceased? And will the Lord's ministers and people yet say, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built?" Is it time to build our own houses, and not the house of the Lord? Surely it is time to build; for we understand by books the number of years whereof the word of the Lord came to Daniel the prophet, and to John the beloved disciple and new testament prophet, that he would accomplish twelve hundred and sixty years in the desolation of our Jerusalem and the court which is without the temple, namely, the generality of visible professors, and the external part of worship, which hath been so long trod down by Gentilism. Wherefore, "Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD," Hag. 1:8. Men, it may be, have thought they have got, or at least saved, by not troubling themselves with the care, charge, and trouble of gathering churches and walking in gospel order; but God saith, "Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow

upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house," verse 9. I doubt not but the time is nigh at hand that the gospel temple must be built with greater splendour and glory than ever Solomon's or Zerubbabel's was; and though it seems to be a great mountain of difficulties, yet it shall become a plain before Him that is exalted far above all principalities and powers; and as he hath laid the foundation thereof in the oppressed state of his people, so his hands shall finish it, and bring forth the headstone thereof with shouting in the New Jerusalem state, crying now, "Grace, grace," but then, "Glory, glory to it."

This hastening glory we should endeavour to meet and fetch in by earnest prayers and faithful endeavours to promote the great work of our day. The pattern is of late years given forth with much clearness by models such as God hath set up in this latter age in the wilderness, and sheltered by "cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for upon all the glory hath been a defence," yea, and it hath been "a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from the storm and from the rain." Neither have we been left to act by the examples or traditions of men. We have had a full manifestation of the revealed mind and will of Christ, with the greatest evidence and conviction, God having in these latter times raised up many most eminent instruments for direction and encouragement unto his people, which he furnished accordingly with great qualifications to this end and purpose, that the true original, nature, institution, and order, of evangelical churches might be known, distinguished, prized, and adhered to, by all that know the name of Christ, and would be followers of him as his disciples, in obedience to all his revealed mind and will; amongst which faithful and renowned servants of Christ the late author of this most useful

and practical treatise hath approved himself to be one of the chief. I need say nothing of his steadfast piety, universal learning, indefatigable labours, in incessant vindication of the doctrines of the gospel (of greatest weight) against all oppositions made thereto by men of corrupt minds. His surviving works will always be bespeaking his honourable remembrance amongst all impartial lovers of the truth. They that were acquainted with him, knew how much the state and standing of the churches of Christ under the late sufferings and strugglings for reformation were laid to heart by him, and therefore how he put forth his utmost strength to assist, aid, comfort, and support the sinking spirits of the poor saints and people of God, even wearied out with long and repeated persecutions. It is to be observed that this ensuing treatise was occasioned by one of the last and most vigorous assaults made upon separate and congregational churches by a pen dipped in the gall of that persecuting spirit under which God's people groaned throughout this land. He then wrote an elaborate account of evangelical churches, their original, institution, etc., with a vindication of them from the charges laid in against them by the author of "The Unreasonableness of Separation." This he lived to print, and promised to handle the subject more particularly; which is here performed. He lived to finish it under his great bodily infirmities, whereby he saw himself hastening to the end of his race; yet so great was his love to Christ, that whilst he had life and breath he drew not back his hand from his service. This work he finished, with others, through the gracious support and assistance of divine power, and corrected the copy before his departure. So that, reader, thou mayst be assured that what thou hast here was his (errata of the press only excepted), and likewise that it ought to be esteemed as his legacy to the church of Christ, being a great part of his dying labours; and therefore it is most uncharitable to suppose that the things here wrote were penned with any other design than to advance the glory and interest of Christ in the world, and that they were not matters of

great weight on his own spirit. And upon the perusal that I have had of these papers, I cannot but recommend them to all diligent inquirers after the true nature, way, order, and practice, of evangelical churches, as a true and faithful account, according to what understanding the professors thereof, for the most part, have had and practised. Whoever is otherwise minded, he hath the liberty of his own light and conscience. Lastly, whereas many serious professors of the faith of the Lord Jesus, it may be well grounded in the main saving truths of the gospel, are yet much to seek of these necessary truths for want of good information therein, and therefore walk not up to all the revealed mind of Christ, as they sincerely desire, let such, with unprejudiced minds, read and consider what is here offered to them, and receive nothing upon human authority, follow no man in judgment or practice any farther than he is a follower of Christ. And this is all the request of him that is a lover of all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ. J. C.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **The subject-matter of the church**

THE church may be considered either as unto its essence, constitution, and being, or as unto its power and order, when it is organized. As unto its essence and being, its constituent parts are its matter and form. These we must inquire into.

By the matter of the church, we understand the persons whereof the church doth consist, with their qualifications; and by its form, the

reason, cause, and way of that kind of relation among them which gives them the being of a church, and therewithal an interest in all that belongs unto a church, either privilege or power, as such.

Our first inquiry being concerning what sort of persons our Lord Jesus Christ requireth and admitteth to be the visible subjects of his kingdom, we are to be regulated in our determination by respect unto his honour, glory, and the holiness of his rule. To reckon such persons to be subjects of Christ, members of his body, such as he requires and owns (for others are not so), who would not be tolerated, at least not approved, in a well-governed kingdom or commonwealth of the world, is highly dishonourable unto him, Ps. 15:1–5, 24:3, 4, 93:5; 2 Cor. 8:23; Eph. 5:27. But it is so come to pass, that let men be never so notoriously and flagitiously wicked, until they become pests of the earth, yet are they esteemed to belong to the church of Christ; and not only so, but it is thought little less than schism to forbid them the communion of the church in all its sacred privileges. Howbeit, the Scripture doth in general represent the kingdom or church of Christ to consist of persons called saints, separated from the world, with many other things of an alike nature, as we shall see immediately. And if the honour of Christ were of such weight with us as it ought to be,—if we understood aright the nature and ends of his kingdom, and that the peculiar glory of it above all the kingdoms in the world consists in the holiness of its subjects, such a holiness as the world in its wisdom knoweth not,—we would duly consider whom we avow to belong thereunto. Those who know aught of these things will not profess that persons openly profane, vicious, sensual, wicked, and ignorant, are approved and owned of Christ as the subjects of his kingdom, or that it is his will that we should receive them into the communion of the church, 2 Tim. 3:1–5. But an old opinion of the unlawfulness of separation from a church on the account of the mixture of wicked men in it is made a scare-

crow to frighten men from attempting the reformation of the greatest evils, and a covert for the composing churches of such members only.

Some things, therefore, are to be premised unto what shall be offered unto the right stating of this inquiry; as,—

1. That if there be no more required of any, as unto personal qualifications, in a visible, uncontrollable profession, to constitute them subjects of Christ's kingdom and members of his church, Ezek. 22:26, but what is required by the most righteous and severe laws of men to constitute a good subject or citizen, the distinction between his visible kingdom and the kingdoms of the world, as unto the principal causes of it, is utterly lost. Now, all negative qualifications, as, that men are not oppressors, drunkards, revilers, swearers, adulterers, etc., are required hereunto; but yet it is so fallen out that generally more is required to constitute such a citizen as shall represent the righteous laws he liveth under than to constitute a member of the church of Christ.

2. That whereas regeneration is expressly required in the gospel to give a right and privilege unto an entrance into the church or kingdom of Christ, John 3:3, Tit. 3:3–5, whereby that kingdom of his is distinguished from all other kingdoms in and of the world, unto an interest wherein never any such thing was required, it must of necessity be something better, more excellent and sublime, than any thing the laws and polities of men pretend unto or prescribe. Wherefore it cannot consist in any outward rite, easy to be observed by the worst and vilest of men. Besides, the Scripture gives us a description of it in opposition unto its consisting in any such rite, 1 Pet. 3:21; and many things required unto good citizens are far better than the mere observation of such a rite.

3. Of this regeneration baptism is the symbol, the sign, the expression, and representation, John 3:5; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21. Wherefore, unto those who are in a due manner partakers of it, it giveth all the external rights and privileges which belong unto them that are regenerate, until they come unto such seasons wherein the personal performance of those duties whereon the continuation of the estate of visible regeneration doth depend is required of them. Herein if they fail, they lose all privilege and benefit by their baptism.

So speaks the apostle in the case of circumcision under the law: Rom. 2:25, "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." It is so in the case of baptism. Verily it profiteth, if a man stand unto the terms of the covenant which is tendered therein between God and his soul, for it will give him a right unto all the outward privileges of a regenerate state; but if he do not, as in the sight of God, his baptism is no baptism, as unto the real communication of grace and acceptance with him, Phil. 3:18, 19; Tit. 1:15, 16. So, in the sight of the church, it is no baptism, as unto a participation of the external rights and privileges of a regenerate state.

4. God alone is judge concerning this regeneration, as unto its internal, real principle and state in the souls of men, Acts 15:8, Rev. 2:23, whereon the participation of all the spiritual advantages of the covenant of grace doth depend. The church is judge of its evidences and fruits in their external demonstration, as unto a participation of the outward privileges of a regenerate state, and no farther, Acts 8:13. And we shall hereon briefly declare what belongs unto the forming of a right judgment herein, and who are to be esteemed fit members of any gospel church-state, or have a right so to be:—



1. Such as from whom we are obliged to withdraw or withhold communion can be no part of the matter constituent of a church, or are not meet members for the first constitution of it, 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Phil. 3:18, 19; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 3:5; Rom. 9:6, 7; Tit. 1:16. But such are all habitual sinners, those who, having prevalent habits and inclinations unto sins of any kind unmortified, do walk according unto them. Such are profane swearers, drunkards, fornicators, covetous, oppressors, and the like, "who shall not inherit the kingdom of God," 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Phil. 3:18, 19; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 3:5. As a man living and dying in any known sin, that is, habitually, without repentance, cannot be saved, so a man known to live in sin cannot regularly be received into any church. To compose churches of habitual sinners, and that either as unto sins of commission or sins of omission, is not to erect temples to Christ, but chapels unto the devil.

2. Such as, being in the fellowship of the church, are to be admonished of any scandalous sin, which if they repent not of they are to be cast out of the church, are not meet members for the original constitution of a church, Matt. 18:15–18; 1 Cor. 5:11. This is the state of them who abide obstinate in any known sin, whereby they have given offence unto others, without a professed repentance thereof, although they have not lived in it habitually.

3. They are to be such as visibly answer the description given of gospel churches in the Scripture, so as the titles assigned therein unto the members of such churches may on good grounds be appropriated unto them. To compose churches of such persons as do not visibly answer the character given of what they were of old, and what they were always to be by virtue of the law of Christ or gospel constitution, is not church edification but destruction. And those who look on the things spoken of all church-members of old, as that

they were saints by calling, lively stones in the house of God, justified and sanctified, separated from the world, etc., as those which were in them, and did indeed belong unto them, but even deride the necessity of the same things in present church-members, or the application of them unto those who are so, are themselves no small part of that woful degeneracy which Christian religion is fallen under. Let it then be considered what is spoken of the church of the Jews in their dedication unto God, as unto their typical holiness, with the application of it unto Christian churches in real holiness, 1 Pet. 2:5, 9, with the description given of them constantly in the Scripture, as faithful, holy, believing, as the house of God, as his temple wherein he dwells by his Spirit, as the body of Christ united and compacted by the communication of the Spirit unto them, as also what is said concerning their ways, walkings, and duties, and it will be uncontrollably evident of what sort our church-members ought to be. Nor are those of any other sort able to discharge the duties which are incumbent on all church-members, nor to use the privileges they are intrusted withal. Wherefore, I say, to suppose churches regularly to consist of such persons, for the greater part of them, as no way answer the description given of church-members in their original institution, nor capable to discharge the duties prescribed unto them, but giving evidence of habits and actions inconsistent therewithal, is not only to disturb all church-order, but utterly to overthrow the ends and being of churches. Nor is there any thing more scandalous unto Christian religion than what Bellarmine affirms to be the judgment of the Papists, in opposition unto all others, namely, "That no internal virtue or grace is required unto the constitution of a church in its members," De Eccles. lib. iii. cap. ii.

4. They must be such as do make an open profession of the subjection of their souls and consciences unto the authority of Christ in the gospel, and their readiness to yield obedience unto all his

commands, Rom. 10:10; 2 Cor. 8:5, 9:13; Matt. 10:32, 33; Luke 9:26; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 15:9; John 12:42; 1 John 4:2, 3, 15 This, I suppose, will not be denied; for not only doth the Scripture make this profession necessary unto the participation of any benefit or privilege of the gospel, but the nature of the things themselves requires indispensably that so it should be: for nothing can be more unreasonable than that men should be taken into the privileges attending obedience unto the laws and commands of Christ, without avowing or professing that obedience. Wherefore our inquiry is only [about] what is required unto such a profession as may render men meet to be members of a church, and give them a right thereunto; for to suppose such a confession of Christian religion to be compliant with the gospel which is made by many who openly live in sin, "being disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate," is to renounce the gospel itself. Christ is not the high priest of such a profession. I shall therefore declare briefly what is necessary unto this profession, that all may know what it is which is required unto the entrance of any into our churches, wherein our practice hath been sufficiently traduced:—

(1.) There is required unto it a competent knowledge of the doctrines and mystery of the gospel, especially concerning the person and offices of Christ. The confession hereof was the ground whereon he granted the keys of the kingdom of heaven, or all church-power, unto believers, Matt. 16:15–19. The first instruction which he gave unto his apostles was that they should teach men, by the preaching of the gospel, in the knowledge of the truth revealed by him. The knowledge required in the members of the Judaical church, that they might be translated into the Christian, was principally, if not solely, that of his person, and the acknowledgment of him to be the true Messiah, the Son of God; for as on their unbelief thereof their eternal ruin did depend, as he told them, "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die

in your sins," so the confession of him was sufficient on their part unto their admission into the gospel church-state. And the reasons of it are apparent. With others, an instruction in all the mysteries of religion, especially in those that are fundamental, is necessary unto the profession we inquire after. So Justin Martyr tells us what pains they took in those primitive times to instruct those in the mysteries of religion who, upon a general conviction of its truth, were willing to adhere unto the profession of it. And what was their judgment herein is sufficiently known from the keeping a multitude in the state of catechumens before they would admit them into the fellowship of the church. They are not therefore to be blamed, they do but discharge their duty, who refuse to receive into church-communion such as are ignorant of the fundamental doctrines and mysteries of the gospel, or if they have learned any thing of them from a form of words, yet really understand nothing of them. The promiscuous driving of all sorts of persons who have been baptized in their infancy unto a participation of all church-privileges is a profanation of the holy institutions of Christ. This knowledge, therefore, belonging unto profession is itself to be professed.

(2.) There is required unto it a professed subjection of soul and conscience unto the authority of Christ in the church, Matt. 28:18–20; 2 Cor. 8:5. This in general is performed by all that are baptized when they are adult, as being by their own actual consent baptized in the name of Christ; and it is required of all them who are baptized in their infancy, when they are able with faith and understanding to profess their consent unto and abiding in that covenant whereinto they were initiated.

(3.) An instruction in and consent unto the doctrine of self-denial and bearing of the cross, in a particular manner; for this is made indispensably necessary by our Saviour himself unto all that will be

his disciples, Matt. 10:37–39; Mark 8:34, 38; Luke 9:23; Phil. 3:18; Acts 4:10, 11, 20, 24:14. And it hath been a great disadvantage unto the glory of Christian religion that men have not been more and better instructed therein. It is commonly thought that whoever will may be a Christian at an easy rate,—it will cost him nothing. But the gospel gives us another account of 'these things; for it not only warns us that reproaches, hatred, sufferings of all sorts, oftentimes to death itself, are the common lot of all its professors who will live godly in Christ Jesus, but also requires that at our initiation into the profession of it, we consider aright the dread of them all, and engage cheerfully to undergo them. Hence, in the primitive times, whilst all sorts of miseries were continually presented unto them who embraced the Christian religion, their willing engagement to undergo them who were converted was a firm evidence of the sincerity of their faith, as it ought to be unto us also in times of difficulty and persecution. Some may suppose that the faith and confession of this doctrine of self-denial and readiness for the cross is of use only in time of persecution, and so doth not belong unto them who have continually the countenance and favour of public authority. I say, it is, at least as they judge, well for them; with others it is not so, whose outward state makes the public avowing of this duty indispensably necessary unto them. And I may add it as my own thoughts (though they are not my own alone), that notwithstanding all the countenance that is given unto any church by the public magistracy, yet whilst we are in this world, those who will faithfully discharge their duty, as ministers of the gospel especially, shall have need to be prepared for sufferings. To escape sufferings, and enjoy worldly advantages by sinful compliances, or bearing with men in their sins, is no gospel direction.

(4.) Conviction and confession of sin, with the way of deliverance by Jesus Christ, is that "answer of a good conscience" that is required in

the baptism of them that are adult, 1 Pet. 3:21.

(5.) Unto this profession is required the constant performance of all known duties of religion, both of piety in the public and private worship of God, as also of charity with respect unto others, Matt. 28:19, 20. "Show me thy faith by thy works," James 2:18.

(6.) A careful abstinence from all known sins, giving scandal or offence either unto the world or unto the church of God, 1 Cor. 10:32; Phil. 1:10.

And the gospel requires that this confession be made ("with the mouth confession is made unto salvation") against,—

(1.) Fear;

(2.) Shame;

(3.) The course of the world;

(4.) The opposition of all enemies whatever.

Hence it appears that there are none excluded from an entrance into the church-state but such as are either,—

(1.) Grossly ignorant; or,

(2.) Persecutors or reproachers of those that are good, or of the ways of God wherein they walk; or,

(3.) Idolaters; or,

(4.) Men scandalous in their lives, in the commission of sins or omission of duties, through vicious habits or inclinations; or,

(5.) Such as would partake of gospel privileges and ordinances, yet openly avow that they will not submit unto the law and commands of Christ in the gospel; concerning whom and the like the Scripture rule is peremptory, "From such turn away."

And herein we are remote from exceeding the example and care of the primitive churches; yea, there are but few, if any, that arrive unto it. Their endeavour was to preach unto all they could, and they rejoiced in the multitudes that came to hear the word; but if any did essay to join themselves unto the church, their diligence in their examination and instruction, their severe inquiries into their conversation, their disposing of them for a long time into a state of expectation for their trial, before their admittance, were remarkable; and some of the ancients complain that the promiscuous admittance of all sorts of persons that would profess the Christian religion into church-membership, which took place afterward, ruined all the beauty, order, and discipline of the church.

The things ascribed unto those who are to be esteemed the proper subject-matter of a visible church are such as, in the judgment of charity, entitle them unto all the appellations of "saints, called, sanctified,"—that is, visibly and by profession,—which are given unto the members of all the churches in the New Testament, and which must be answered in those who are admitted into that privilege, if we do not wholly neglect our only patterns. By these things, although they should any of them not be real living members of the mystical body of Christ, unto whom he is a head of spiritual and vital influence, yet are they meet members of that body of Christ unto which he is a head of rule and government, as also meet to be esteemed subjects of his kingdom; and none are excluded but such as concerning whom rules are given either to withdraw from them or to cast them out of church-society, or are expressly excluded by God

himself from any share in the privileges of his covenant, Ps. 50:16, 17.

Divines of all sorts do dispute, from the Scripture and the testimonies of the ancients, that hypocrites and persons unregenerate may be true members of visible churches; and it is a matter very easy to be proved, nor do I know any by whom it is denied: but the only question is, that whereas, undoubtedly, profession is necessary unto all church-communion, whether, if men do profess themselves hypocrites in state and unregenerate in mind, that profession do sufficiently qualify them for church-communion; and whereas there is a double profession, one by words, the other by works, as the apostle declares, Tit. 1:16, whether the latter be not as interpretative of the mind and state of men as the former. Other contest we have with none in this matter.

Bellarmino, De Eccles. lib. iii. cap. ii., gives an account out of Augustine, and that truly, from Brevis. Collat. Col. 3, of the state of the church. "It doth," saith he, "consist of a soul and body. The soul is the internal graces of the Spirit; the body is the profession of them, with the sacraments. All true believers making profession belong to the soul and body of the church. Some (as believing catechumens) belong to the soul, but not to the body; others are of the body, but not of the soul,—namely, such as have no internal grace or true faith,—and they are like the hair, or the nails, or evil humours in the body." And thereunto adds, that his definition of the church compriseth this last sort only; which is all one as if we should define a man to be a thing constituted and made up of hair, nails, and ill humours: and let others take heed that they have no such churches.

There is nothing more certain in matter of fact than that evangelical churches, at their first constitution, were made up and did consist of



such members as we have described, and no others; nor is there one word in the whole Scripture intimating any concession or permission of Christ to receive into his church those who are not so qualified. Others have nothing to plead for themselves but possession; which, being "malæ fidei," ill obtained and ill continued, will afford them no real advantage when the time of trial shall come. Wherefore it is certain that such they ought to be. No man, as I suppose, is come unto that profligate sense of spiritual things as to deny that the members of the church ought to be visibly holy: for if so, they may affirm that all the promises and privileges made and granted to the church do belong unto them who visibly live and die in their sins; which is to overthrow the gospel. And if they ought so to be, and were so at first, when they are not so openly and visibly, there is a declension from the original constitution of churches, and a sinful deviation in them from the rule of Christ.

This original constitution of churches, with respect unto their members, was, for the substance of it, as we observed, preferred in the primitive times, whilst persecution from without was continued and discipline preserved within. I have in part declared before what great care and circumspection the church then used in the admission of any into their fellowship and order, and what trial they were to undergo before they were received; and it is known also with what severe discipline they watched over the faith, walking, conversation, and manners of all their members. Indeed, such was their care and diligence herein that there is scarce left, in some churches at present, the least resemblance or appearance of what was their state and manner of rule. Wherefore some think it meet to ascend no higher in the imitation of the primitive churches than the times of the Christian emperors, when all things began to rush into the fatal apostasy, which I shall here speak a little farther unto; for,—

Upon the Roman emperors, embracing Christian religion, whereby not only outward peace and tranquillity was secured unto the church, but the profession of Christian religion was countenanced, encouraged, honoured, and rewarded, the rule, care, and diligence of the churches, about the admission of members, were in a great measure relinquished and forsaken. The rulers of the church began to think that the glory of it consisted in its numbers, finding both their own power, veneration, and revenue increased thereby. In a short time, the inhabitants of whole cities and provinces, upon a bare, outward profession, were admitted into churches. And then began the outward court,—that is, all that which belongs unto the outward worship and order of the church,—to be trampled on by the Gentiles, not kept any more to the measure of Scripture rule, which thenceforth was applied only to the temple of God and them that worshipped therein: for this corruption of the church, as to the matter of it, was the occasion and means of introducing all that corruption in doctrine, worship, order, and rule, which ensued, and ended in the great apostasy; for whatever belonged unto any of these things, especially those that consist in practice, were accommodated unto the state of the members of the churches. And such they were as stood in need of superstitious rites to be mixed with their worship, as not understanding the power and glory of that which is spiritual; such as no interest in church-order could be committed unto, seeing they were not qualified to bear any share in it; such as stood in need of a rule over them with grandeur and power, like unto that among the Gentiles. Wherefore, the accommodation of all church concerns unto the state and condition of such corrupt members as churches were filled with, and at length made up of, proved the ruin of the church in all its order and beauty.

But so it fell out, that in the protestant reformation of the church very little regard was had thereunto. Those great and worthy persons

who were called unto that work did set themselves principally, yea, solely, for the most part, against the false doctrine and idolatrous worship of the church of Rome, as judging that if they were removed and taken away, the people, by the efficacy of truth and order of worship, would be retrieved from the evil of their ways, and primitive holiness be again reduced among them; for they thought it was the doctrine and worship of that church which had filled the people with darkness and corrupted their conversations. Nor did they absolutely judge amiss therein: for although they were themselves at first introduced in compliance with the ignorance and wickedness of the people, yet they were suited to promote them as well as to countenance them; which they did effectually. Hence it came to pass that the reformation of the church, as unto the matter of it, or the purity and holiness of its members, was not in the least attempted, until Calvin set up his discipline at Geneva; which hath filled the world with clamours against him from that day to this. In most other places, churches, in the matter of them, continued the same as they were in the Papacy, and in many places as bad in their lives as when they were Papists.

But this method was designed, in the holy, wise providence of God for the good and advantage of the church, in a progressive reformation, as it had made a gradual progress into its decay; for had the reformers, in the first place, set themselves to remove out of the church such as were unmeet for its communion, or to have gathered out of them such as were meet members of the church, according to its original institution, it would, through the paucity of the number of those who could have complied with the design, have greatly obstructed, if not utterly defeated, their endeavour for the reformation of doctrine and worship. This was that which, in the preaching of the gospel and the profession of it, God hath since made effectual, in these nations especially, and in other places, to turn

multitudes "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto himself, translating them into the kingdom of his dear Son." Hereby way is made for a necessary addition unto the work of reformation, if not to the closing of it, which could not at first be attained unto nor well attempted,—namely, the reduction of churches, as unto their matter, or the members of them, unto the primitive institution.

The sum of what is designed in this discourse is this only:—We desire no more to constitute church-members, and we can desire no less, than what, in the judgment of charity, may comply with the union that is between Christ the head and the church, 1 Cor. 12:27, Eph. 2:22, 1 Cor. 3:16, 17, 2 Cor. 8:5, 1 Thess. 1:1, 2, etc.; than may, in the same judgment, answer the way of the beginning and increase of the church, according unto the will of God, who adds unto the church such as shall be saved, Acts 2:47, the rule of our receiving of them being because he hath received them, Rom. 14:1–3; than may answer that profession of faith which was the foundation of the church, which was not what flesh and blood, but what God himself revealed, Matt. 16:16, 17, and not such as have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, 2 Tim. 3:5. We acknowledge that many church-members are not what they ought to be, but that many hypocrites may be among them; that the judgment which is passed on the confession and profession of them that are to be admitted into churches is charitable, proceeding on evidence of moral probability, not determining the reality of the things themselves; that there are sundry measures of light, knowledge, experience, and abilities and readiness of mind, in those that are to be admitted, all whose circumstances are duly to be considered, with indulgence unto their weakness; and if the Scripture will allow us any further latitude, we are ready to embrace it.

Our present inquiry yet remaining on these considerations is, What is our duty in point of communion with such churches as are made up or composed of members visibly unholy, or such as comply not with the qualifications that are, by the rules of the gospel, indispensably required to give unto any a regular entrance into the church, with a participation of its privileges; for it is in vain to expect that such churches will reform themselves by any act, duty, or power of their own, seeing the generality of them are justly supposed averse from and enemies unto any such work. I answer, therefore,—

1. It must be remembered that communion with particular churches is to be regulated absolutely by edification. No man is or can be obliged to abide in or confine himself unto the communion of any particular church any longer than it is for his edification. And this liberty is allowed unto all persons by the church of England; for allow a man to be born in such a parish, to be baptized in it, and there educated, yet if at any time he judge that the ministry of the parish is not useful unto his edification, he may withdraw from the communion in that parish by the removal of his habitation, it may be to the next door. Wherefore,—

2. If the corruption of a church, as to the matter of it, be such as that,  
—

(1.) It is inconsistent with and overthroweth all that communion that ought to be among the members of the same church, in love without dissimulation (whereof we shall treat afterward);

(2.) If the scandals and offences which must of necessity abound in such churches be really obstructive of edification;

(3.) If the ways and walking of the generality of their members be dishonourable unto the gospel and the profession of it, giving no

representation of the holiness of Christ or his doctrine;

(4) If such churches do not, can not, will not reform themselves: then,—

It is the duty of every man who takes care of his own present edification and the future salvation of his soul peaceably to withdraw from the communion of such churches, and to join in such others where all the ends of church-societies may in some measure be obtained. Men may not only do so, because all obligation unto the use of means for the attaining of such an end doth cease when the means are not suited thereunto, but obstructive of its attainment, but also because the giving of a testimony hereby against the declension from the rule of Christ in the institution of churches, and the dishonour that by this means is inflicted on the gospel, is necessary unto all that desire to acquit themselves as loyal subjects unto their Lord and King. And it cannot be questioned, by any who understand the nature, use, and end of evangelical churches, but that a relinquishment of the rule of the gospel in any of them, as unto the practice of holiness, is as just a cause of withdrawing communion from them as their forsaking the same rule in doctrine and worship.

It may be some will judge that sundry inconveniencies will ensue on this assertion, when any have a mind to practise according unto it; but when the matter of fact supposed is such as is capable of an uncontrollable evidence, no inconvenience can ensue on the practice directed unto, any way to be compared unto the mischief of obliging believers to abide always in such societies, to the ruin of their souls.

Two things may be yet inquired into, that relate unto this part of the state of evangelical churches; as,—

1. Whether a church may not, ought not, to take under its conduct, inspection, and rule, such as are not yet meet to be received into full communion, such as are the children and servants of those who are complete members of the church? Ans. No doubt the church, in its officers, may and ought so to do, and it is a great evil when it is neglected. For,—

(1.) They are to take care of parents and masters as such, and as unto the discharge of their duty in their families; which without an inspection into the condition of their children and servants, they cannot do.

(2.) Households were constantly reckoned unto the church when the heads of the families were entered into covenant, Luke 19:9; Acts 16:15; Rom. 16:10, 11; 1 Cor. 1:16; 2 Tim. 4:19.

(3.) Children do belong unto and have an interest in their parents' covenant; not only in the promise of it, which gives them right unto baptism, but in the profession of it in the church covenant, which gives them a right unto all the privileges of the church whereof they are capable, until they voluntarily relinquish their claim unto them.

(4.) Baptizing the children of church members, giving them thereby an admission into the visible catholic church, puts an obligation on the officers of the church to take care, what in them lieth, that they may be kept and preserved meet members of it, by a due watch over them and instruction of them.

(5.) Though neither the church nor its privileges be continued and preserved, as of old, by carnal generation, yet, because of the nature of the dispensation of God's covenant, wherein he hath promised to be a God unto believers and their seed, the advantage of the means of a gracious education in such families, and of conversion and

edification in the ministry of the church, ordinarily the continuation of the church is to depend on the addition of members out of the families already incorporated in it. The church is not to be like the kingdom of the Mamalukes, wherein there was no regard unto natural successors, but it was continually made up of strangers and foreigners incorporated into it; nor like the beginning of the Roman commonwealth, which, consisting of men only, was like to have been the matter of one age alone.

The duty of the church towards this sort of persons consists,—

- (1.) In prayer for them;
- (2.) Catechetical instruction of them, according unto their capacities;
- (3.) Advice to their parents concerning them;
- (4.) Visiting of them in the families whereunto they do belong;
- (5.) Encouragement of them, or admonition, according as there is occasion;
- (6.) Direction [of them] for a due preparation unto the joining themselves unto the church in full communion;
- (7.) Exclusion of them from a claim unto the participation of the especial privileges of the church, where they render themselves visibly unmeet for them and unworthy of them.

The neglect of this duty brings inconceivable prejudice unto churches, and if continued in will prove their ruin; for they are not to be preserved, propagated, and continued, at the easy rate of a constant supply by the carnal baptized posterity of those who do at any time, justly or unjustly, belong unto them, but they are to



prepare a meet supply of members by all the spiritual means whose administration they are intrusted withal. And, besides, one end of churches is to preserve the covenant of God in the families once graciously taken thereinto. The neglect, therefore, herein is carefully to be watched against. And it doth arise,—

(1.) From an ignorance of the duty in most that are concerned in it.

(2.) From the paucity of officers in most churches, both teaching and ruling, who are to attend unto it.

(3.) The want of a teacher or catechist in every church, who should attend only unto the instruction of this sort of persons.

(4.) Want of a sense of their duty in parents and masters,—

[1.] In not valuing aright the great privilege of having their children and servants under the inspection, care, and blessing of the church;

[2.] In not instilling into them a sense of it, with the duties that are expected from them on the account of their relation unto the church;

[3.] In not bringing them duly into the church assemblies;

[4.] In not preparing and disposing them unto an actual entrance into full communion with the church;

[5.] In not advising with the elders of the church about them; and,

[6.] Especially by an indulgence unto that loose and careless kind of education, in conformity unto the world, which generally prevails. Hence it is that most of them, on various accounts and occasions, drop off here and there from the communion of the church and all relation thereunto, without the least respect unto them or inquiry

after them, churches being supplied by such as are occasionally converted in them.

Where churches are complete in the kind and number of their officers, sufficient to attend unto all the duties and occasions of them; where whole families, in the conjunction of the heads of them unto the church, are dedicated unto God, according unto the several capacities of those whereof they do consist; where the design of the church is to provide for its own successive continuation, in the preservation of the interest of God's covenant in the families taken thereinto; where parents esteem themselves accountable unto God and the church as unto the relation of their children thereunto,—there is provision for church-order, usefulness, and beauty, beyond what is usually to be observed.

2. The especial duty of the church in admission of members in the time of great persecution may be a little inquired into. And,—

(1.) It is evident that, in the apostolical and primitive times, the churches were exceeding careful not to admit into their society such as by whom they might be betrayed unto the rage of their persecuting adversaries; yet, notwithstanding all their care, they could seldom avoid it, but that when persecution grew severe some or other would fall from them, either out of fear, with the power of temptation, or by a discovery of their latent hypocrisy and unbelief, unto their great trial and distress. However, they were not so scrupulous herein, with respect unto their own safety, as to exclude such as gave a tolerable account of their sincerity, but, in the discharge of their duty, committed themselves unto the care of Jesus Christ. And this is the rule whereby we ought to walk on such occasions. Wherefore,

(2.) On supposition of the establishment of idolatry and persecution here, or in any place, as it was of old, under first the pagan, and

afterward the antichristian tyranny, the church is obliged to receive into its care and communion all such as,—

[1.] Flee from idols, and are ready to confirm their testimony against them with suffering;

[2.] Make profession of the truth of the gospel of the doctrine of Christ, especially as unto his person and offices; are,

[3.] Free from scandalous sins; and,

[4.] Are willing to give up themselves unto the rule of Christ in the church, and a subjection unto all his ordinances and institutions therein: for in such a season, these things are so full an indication of sincerity as that, in the judgment of charity, they render men meet to be members of the visible church. And if any of this sort of persons, through the severity of the church in their non-admission of them, should be cast on a conjunction in superstitious and idolatrous worship, or be otherwise exposed unto temptations and discouragements prejudicial unto their souls, I know not how such a church can answer the refusal of them unto the great and universal Pastor of the whole flock.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Of the formal cause of a particular church**

THE way or means whereby such persons as are described in the foregoing chapter may become a church, or enter into a church-state, is by mutual confederation or solemn agreement for the performance

of all the duties which the Lord Christ hath prescribed unto his disciples in such churches, and in order to the exercise of the power wherewith they are intrusted according unto the rule of the word.

For the most part, the churches that are in the world at present know not how they came so to be, continuing only in that state which they have received by tradition from their fathers. Few there are who think that any act or duty of their own is required to instate them in church order and relation. And it is acknowledged that there is a difference between the continuation of a church and its first erection; yet that that continuation may be regular, it is required that its first congregating (for the church is a congregation) was so, as also that the force and efficacy of it be still continued. Wherefore the causes of that first gathering must be inquired into.

The churches mentioned in the New Testament, planted or gathered by the apostles, were particular churches, as hath been proved. These churches did consist each of them of many members; who were so members of one of them as that they were not members of another. The saints of the church of Corinth were not members of the church at Philippi. And the inquiry is, how those believers in one place and the other became to be a church, and that distinct from all others? The Scripture affirms in general that they gave up themselves unto the Lord and unto the apostles, who guided them in these affairs, by the will of God, 2 Cor. 8:5; and that other believers were added unto the church, Acts 2:47.

That it is the will and command of our Lord Jesus Christ that all his disciples should be joined in such societies, for the duties and ends of them prescribed and limited by himself, hath been proved sufficiently before. All that are disciplined by the word are to be taught to do and observe all his commands, Matt. 28:19, 20.

This could originally be no otherwise done but by their own actual, express, voluntary consent. There are sundry things which concur as remote causes, or pre-requisite conditions, unto this conjunction of believers in a particular church, and without which it cannot be; such are baptism, profession of the Christian faith, convenient cohabitation, resorting to the preaching of the word in the same place: but neither any of these distinctly or separately, nor all of them in conjunction, are or can be the constitutive form of a particular church; for it is evident that they may all be, and yet no such church-state ensue. They cannot all together engage unto those duties nor communicate those powers which appertain unto this state.

Were there no other order in particular churches, no other discipline to be exercised in them, nor rule over them, no other duties, no other ends assigned unto them, but what are generally owned and practised in parochial assemblies, the preaching of the word within such a precinct of cohabitation, determined by civil authority, might constitute a church. But if a church be such a society as is intrusted in itself with sundry powers and privileges depending on sundry duties prescribed unto it; if it constitute new relations between persons that neither naturally nor morally were before so related, as marriage doth between husband and wife; if it require new mutual duties and give new mutual rights among themselves, not required of them either as unto their matter or as unto their manner before,—it is vain to imagine that this state can arise from or have any other formal cause but the joint consent and virtual confederation of those concerned unto these ends: for there is none of them can have any other foundation; they are all of them resolved into the wills of men, bringing themselves under an obligation unto them by their voluntary consent. I say, unto the wills of men, as their formal cause;

the supreme efficient cause of them all being the will, law, and constitution of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus it is in all societies, in all relations that are not merely natural (such as between parents and children, wherein the necessity of powers and mutual duties is predetermined by a superior law, even that of nature), wherein powers, privileges, and mutual duties, are established, as belonging unto that society. Nor, after its first institution, can any one be incorporated into it, but by his own consent and engagement to observe the laws of it: nor, if the nature and duties of churches were acknowledged, could there be any contest in this matter; for the things ensuing are clear and evident:—

1. The Lord Christ, by his authority, hath appointed and instituted this church-state, as that there should be such churches; as we have proved before.
2. That, by his word or law, he hath granted powers and privileges unto this church, and prescribed duties unto all belonging unto it; wherein they can have no concernment who are not incorporated into such a church.
3. That therefore he doth require and command all his disciples to join themselves in such church-relations as we have proved, warranting them so to do by his word and command. Wherefore,—
4. This joining of themselves, whereon depend all their interest in church powers and privileges, all their obligation unto church duties, is a voluntary act of the obedience of faith unto the authority of Christ; nor can it be any thing else.
5. Herein do they give themselves unto the Lord and to one another, by their officers, in a peculiar manner, according to the will of God, 2

Cor. 8:5.

6. To "give ourselves unto the Lord,"—that is, unto the Lord Jesus Christ,—is expressly to engage to do and observe all that he hath appointed and commanded in the church, as that phrase everywhere signifieth in the Scripture; as also "joining ourselves unto God," which is the same.

7. This resignation of ourselves unto the will, power, and authority of Christ, with an express engagement made unto him of doing and observing all his commands, hath the nature of a covenant on our part; and it hath so on his, by virtue of the promise of his especial presence annexed unto this engagement on our part, Matt. 28:18–20.

8. For whereas there are three things required unto a covenant between God and man,—

(1.) That it be of God's appointment and institution;

(2.) That upon a prescription of duties there be a solemn engagement unto their performance on the part of men;

(3.) That there be especial promises of God annexed thereunto, in which consists the matter of confederation, whereof mutual express restipulation is the form,—they all concur herein.

9. This covenant which we intend is not the covenant of grace absolutely considered; nor are all the duties belonging unto that covenant prescribed in it, but the principal of them, as faith, repentance, and the like, are presupposed unto it; nor hath it annexed unto it all the promises and privileges of the new covenant absolutely considered: but it is that which is prescribed as a gospel

duty in the covenant of grace, whereunto do belong all the duties of evangelical worship, all the powers and privileges of the church, by virtue of the especial promise of the peculiar presence of Christ in such a church.

10. Whereas, therefore, in the constitution of a church, believers do give up themselves unto the Lord, and are bound solemnly to engage themselves to do and observe all the things which Christ hath commanded to be done and observed in that state, whereon he hath promised to be present with them and among them in an especial manner,—which presence of his doth interest them in all the rights, powers, and privileges of the church,—their so doing hath the nature of a divine covenant included in it; which is the formal cause of their church-state and being.

11. Besides, as we have proved before, there are many mutual duties required of all which join in church-societies, and powers to be exercised and submitted unto, whereunto none can be obliged without their own consent. They must give up themselves unto one another, by the will of God; that is, they must agree, consent, and engage among themselves, to observe all those mutual duties, to use all those privileges, and to exercise all those powers, which the Lord Christ hath prescribed and granted unto his church. See Jer. 50:4, 5.

12. This completes the confederation intended, which is the formal cause of the church, and without which, either expressly or virtually performed, there can be no church-state.

13. Indeed, herein most men deceive themselves, and think they do not that, and that it ought to be done, and dispute against it as unlawful or unnecessary, which for the substance of it they do themselves, and would condemn themselves in their own consciences if they did it not. For unto what end do they join



themselves unto parochial churches and assemblies? to what end do they require all professors of the protestant religion so to do, declaring it to be their duty by penalties annexed unto its neglect? Is it not that they might yield obedience unto Christ in their so doing? is it not to profess that they will do and observe all whatsoever he commands them? is it not to do it in that society, in those assemblies, whereunto they do belong? is there not therein virtually a mutual agreement and engagement among them unto all those ends? It must be so with them who do not in all things in religion fight uncertainly, as men beating the air.

14. Now, whereas these things are, in themselves and for the substance of them, known gospel duties, which all believers are indispensably obliged unto, the more express our engagement is concerning them, the more do we glorify Christ in our profession, and the greater sense of our duty will abide on our consciences, and the greater encouragement be given unto the performance of mutual duties, as also the more evident will the warranty be for the exercise of church-power. Yet do I not deny the being of churches unto those societies wherein these things are virtually only observed, especially in churches of some continuance, wherein there is at least an implicit consent unto the first covenant constitution.

15. The Lord Christ having instituted and appointed officers, rulers, or leaders, in his church (as we shall see in the next place), to look unto the discharge of all church-duties among the members of it, to administer and dispense all its privileges, and to exercise all its authority, the consent and engagement insisted on is expressly required unto the constitution of this order and the preservation of it; for without this no believer can be brought into that relation unto another as his pastor, guide, overseer, ruler, unto the ends mentioned, wherein he must be subject unto him, [and] partake of

all ordinances of divine worship administered by him with authority, in obedience unto the will of Christ. "They gave their own selves to us," saith the apostle, "by the will of God."

16. Wherefore the formal cause of a church consisteth in an obediencial act of believers, in such numbers as may be useful unto the ends of church-edification, jointly giving up themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, to do and observe all his commands, resting on the promise of his especial presence thereon, giving and communicating, by his law, all the rights, powers, and privileges of his church unto them; and in a mutual agreement among themselves jointly to perform all the duties required of them in that state, with an especial subjection unto the spiritual authority of rules and rulers appointed by Christ in that state.

17. There is nothing herein which any man who hath a conscientious sense of his duty, in a professed subjection unto the gospel, can question, for the substance of it, whether it be according to the mind of Christ or no; and whereas the nature and essential properties of a divine covenant are contained in it, as such it is a foundation of any church-state.

18. Thus under the old testament, when God would take the posterity of Abraham into a new, peculiar church-state, he did it by a solemn covenant. Herein, as he prescribed all the duties of his worship to them, and made them many blessed promises of his presence, with powers and privileges innumerable, so the people solemnly covenanted and engaged with him that they would do and observe all that he had commanded them; whereby they coalesced into that church-state which abode unto the time of reformation. This covenant is at large declared, Exod. 24: for the covenant which God made there with the people, and they with him, was not the covenant

of grace under a legal dispensation, for that was established unto the seed of Abraham four hundred years before, in the promise with the seal of circumcision; nor was it the covenant of works under a gospel dispensation, for God never renewed that covenant under any consideration whatever; but it was a peculiar covenant which God then made with them, and had not made with their fathers, Deut. 5:2, 3, whereby they were raised and erected into a church-state, wherein they were intrusted with all the privileges and enjoined all the duties which God had annexed thereunto. This covenant was the sole formal cause of their church-state, which they are charged so often to have broken, and which they so often solemnly renewed unto God.

19. This was that covenant which was to be abolished, whereon the church-state that was built thereon was utterly taken away; for hereon the Hebrews ceased to be the peculiar church of God, because the covenant whereby they were made so was abolished and taken away, as the apostle disputes at large, Heb. 7–9. The covenant of grace in the promise will still continue unto the true seed of Abraham, Acts 2:38, 39; but the church-covenant was utterly taken away.

20. Upon the removal, therefore, of this covenant, and the church-state founded thereon, all duties of worship and church-privileges were also taken away (the things substituted in their room being totally of another kind). But the covenant of grace, as made with Abraham, being continued and transferred unto the gospel worshippers, the sign or token of it given unto him is changed, and another substituted in the room thereof. But whereas the privileges of this church-covenant were in themselves carnal only, and no way spiritual but as they were typical, and the duties prescribed in it were burdensome, yea, a yoke intolerable, the apostle declares in the same

place that the new church-state, whereinto we are called by the gospel, hath no duties belonging unto it but such as are spiritual and easy, but withal hath such holy and eminent privileges as the church could no way enjoy by virtue of the first church-covenant, nor could believers be made partakers of them before that covenant was abolished. Wherefore,—

21. The same way for the erection of a church-state for the participation of the more excellent privileges of the gospel, and performance of the duties of it, for the substance of it, must still be continued; for the constitution of such a society as a church is, intrusted with powers and privileges by a covenant or mutual consent, with an engagement unto the performance of the duties belonging unto it, hath its foundation in the light of nature, so far as it hath any thing in common with other voluntary relations and societies, was instituted by God himself as the way and means of erecting the church-state of the old testament, and consisteth in the performance of such duties as are expressly required of all believers.

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## **CHAPTER III**

### **Of the polity, rule, or discipline of the church in general**

I. THE things last treated of concern the essence of the church, or the essential constituent parts of it, according unto the appointment of Christ. It remains, in the next place, that we should treat of it as it is organical, or a body corporate, a spiritually political society, for the exercise of the powers wherewith it is intrusted by Christ, and the

due performance of the duties which he requires. Now, whereas it is brought into this estate by the setting, fixing, or placing officers in it, method would require that we should first treat of them, their nature, names, power, and the ways of coming unto their offices; but whereas all things concerning them are founded in the grant of power unto the church itself, and the institution of polity and rule therein by Jesus Christ, I shall first treat somewhat thereof in general.

That which we intend, on various considerations and in divers respects, is called the power or authority, the polity, the rule, the government, and the discipline of the church. The formal nature of it is its authority or power; its polity is skill and wisdom to act that power unto its proper ends; its rule is the actual exercise of that power, according unto that skill and wisdom; its government as the exercise and application of that authority, according unto that skill, towards those that are its proper objects; and it is called its discipline principally with respect unto its end. Yet is it not material whether these things are thus accurately distinguished; the same thing is intended in them all, which I shall call the rule of the church.

II. The rule of the church is, in general, the exercise of the power or authority of Jesus Christ, given unto it, according unto the laws and directions prescribed by himself, unto its edification. This power in actu primo, or fundamentally, is in the church itself; in actu secundo, or its exercise, in them that are especially called thereunto. Whether that which is now called the rule of the church by some, being a plain secular dominion, have any affinity hereunto, is justly doubted. That it is in itself the acting of the authority of Christ, wherein the power of men is ministerial only, is evident: for,—1. All this authority in and over the church is vested in him alone; 2. It is over the souls and

consciences of men only, which no authority can reach but his, and that as it is his; whereof we shall treat more afterward.

The sole end of the ministerial exercise of this power and rule, by virtue thereof, unto the church, is the edification of itself, Rom. 15:1–3; 2 Cor. 10:8, 13:10; Eph. 4:14, 15.

III. This is the especial nature and especial end of all power granted by Jesus Christ unto the church, namely, a ministry unto edification, in opposition unto all the ends whereunto it hath been abused; for it hath been so unto the usurpation of a dominion over the persons and consciences of the disciples of Christ, accompanied with secular grandeur, wealth, and power. The Lord Christ never made a grant of any authority for any such ends, yea, they are expressly forbidden by him, Luke 22:25, 26; Matt. 20:25–28, "Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon 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."

All the pleas of the Romanists are utterly insufficient to secure their papal domination from this sword of the mouth of the Lord Jesus; for whereas their utmost pretence and defence consists in this, that it is not dominion and power absolutely that is forbidden, but the unlawful, tyrannical, oppressive exercise of power, such as was in use among the princes of the Gentiles, never was there any dominion in the world, no, not among the Gentiles, more cruel, oppressive, and bloody than that of the pope's hath been. But it is evident that our Lord Jesus Christ doth not in the least reflect on the rule or government of the kings and princes of the Gentiles, which was good

and gracious; yea, he speaks of them in an especial manner whom their subjects, for their moderate and equal rule, with their usefulness unto their countries, called εὐεργέται, or "benefactors." Their rule, as unto the kind and administration of it in the kingdoms of the world, he approves of. And such a power or preeminence it was,—namely, good and just in itself, not tyrannical and oppressive,—that the two disciples desired in his kingdom; which gave occasion unto this declaration of the nature of his kingdom and the rule thereof. For in this power or dominion two things may be considered:—1. The exercise of it over the persons, goods, and lives of men, by courts, coercive jurisdictions, processes of law, and external force in punishments; 2. The state, grandeur, pre-eminence, wealth, exaltation above others, which are necessary unto the maintenance of their authority and power. Both these, in the least participation of them, in the least degree whatever, are forbidden by our Saviour to be admitted in his kingdom, or to have any place therein, on what pretence soever. He will have nothing of lordship, domination, pre-eminence in lordly power, in his church. No courts, no coercive jurisdictions, no exercise of any human authority, doth he allow therein; for by these means do the princes of the Gentiles, those that are the benefactors of their countries, rule among them. And this is most evident from what, in opposition hereunto, he prescribes unto his own disciples, the greatest, the best in office, grace, and gifts, namely, a ministry only to be discharged in the way of service. How well this great command and direction of our Lord Jesus Christ hath been, and is, complied withal by those who have taken on them to be rulers in the church is sufficiently known.

Wherefore there is no rule of the church but what is ministerial, consisting in an authoritative declaration and application of the commands and will of Christ unto the souls of men; wherein those

who exercise it are servants unto the church for its edification, for Jesus, sake, 2 Cor. 4:5.

It hence follows that the introduction of human authority into the rule of the church of Christ, in any kind, destroyeth the nature of it, and makes his kingdom to be of this world, and some of his disciples to be, in their measure, like the princes of the Gentiles; nor is it, oftentimes, from themselves that they are not more like them than they are. The church is the house of Christ, his family, his kingdom. To act any power, in its rule, which is not his, which derives not from him, which is not communicated by his legal grant; or to act any power by ways, processes, rules, and laws, not of his appointment,—is an invasion of his right and dominion. It can no otherwise be, if the church be his family, his house, his kingdom; for what father would endure that any power should be exercised in his family, as to the disposal of his children and estate, but his own? what earthly prince will bear with such an intrusion into his rights and dominion? Foreign papal power is severely excluded here in England, because it intrenches on the rights of the crown, by the exercise of an authority and jurisdiction not derived from the king, according unto the law of the land; and we should do well to take care that at the same time we do not encroach upon the dominion of Christ by the exercise of an authority not derived from him, or by laws and rules not enacted by him, but more foreign unto his kingdom than the canon law or the pope's rule is unto the laws of this nation, lest we fall under the statute of *præmunire*, Matt. 20:25–28. The power of rule in the church, then, is nothing, but a right to yield obedience unto the commands of Christ, in such a way, by such rules, and for such ends, as wherein and whereby his authority is to be acted.

The persons concerned in this rule of the church, both those that rule and those that are to be ruled, as unto all their civil and political



concerns in this world, are subject unto the civil government of the kingdoms and places wherein they inhabit, and there are sundry things which concern the outward state and condition of the church that are at the disposal of the governors of this world; but whereas the power to be exercised in the church is merely spiritual as unto its objects, which are the consciences of men, and as unto its ends, which are the tendency of their souls unto God, their spiritual obedience in Christ, and eternal life, it is a frenzy to dream of any other power or authority in this rule but that of Christ alone.

To sum up this discourse: If the rulers of the church, the greatest of them, have only a ministerial power committed unto them, and are precisely limited thereunto; if in the exercise thereof they are servants of the church unto its edification; if all lordly domination, in an exaltation above the church or the members of it in dignity and authority of this world, and the exercise of power by external, coercive jurisdiction, be forbidden unto them; if the whole power and rule of the church be spiritual and not carnal, mighty through God and not through the laws of men, and be to be exercised by spiritual means for spiritual ends only,—it is apparent how it hath been lost in or cast out of the world, for the introduction of a lordly domination, a secular, coercive jurisdiction, with laws and powers no way derived from Christ, in the room thereof. Neither is it possible for any man alive to reconcile the present government of some churches, either as unto the officers who have the administration of that rule, or the rules and laws whereby they act and proceed, or the powers which they exercise, or the jurisdiction which they claim, or the manner of their proceeding in its administration, unto any tolerable consistency with the principles, rules, and laws of the government of the church given by Christ himself. And this alone is a sufficient reason why those who endeavour to preserve their loyalty entire unto Jesus Christ should, in their own practice, seek after the reduction of the

rule of the church unto his commands and appointments. In the public disposals of nations we have no concernment.

IV. Whereas, therefore, there is a power and authority for its rule unto edification given and committed by the Lord Christ unto his church, I shall proceed to inquire how this power is communicated, what it is, and to whom it is granted; which shall be declared in the ensuing observations:—

1. There was an extraordinary church-power committed by the Lord Jesus Christ unto his apostles, who in their own persons were the first and only subject of it. It was not granted unto the church, by it to be communicated unto them, according unto any rules prescribed thereunto; for their office, as it was apostolical, was antecedent unto the existence of any gospel church-state, properly so called, neither had any church the least concurrence or influence into their call or mission. Howbeit, when there was a church-state, the churches being called and gathered by their ministry, they were given unto the church, and placed in the church for the exercise of all office with power, unto their edification, according to the rules and laws of their constitution, Acts 1:14, 15, etc., 6:1–4; 1 Cor. 3:22, 12:28; Eph. 4:11–15.

2. This power is ceased in the church. It is so, not by virtue of any law or constitution of Christ, but by a cessation of those actings whence it did flow and whereon it did depend. For unto this apostolical office and power there were required,—

(1.) An immediate personal call from Christ himself;

(2.) A commission equally extensive unto all nations, for their conversion, and unto all churches equally, for their edification;

(3.) An authority in all churches, comprehensive of all that power which is, in the ordinary constitution of them, distributed among many;

(4.) A collation of extraordinary gifts, as of infallibility in teaching, of working miracles, speaking with tongues, and the like. Whereas, therefore, all these things do cease, and the Lord Christ doth not act in the same manner towards any, this office and power doth absolutely cease. For any to pretend themselves to be successors unto these apostles, as some with a strange confidence and impertinency have done, is to plead that they are personally and immediately called by Christ unto their office, that they have authority with respect unto all nations and all churches, and are endued with a spirit of infallibility and a power of working miracles; whereof outward pomp and ostentation are no sufficient evidences: and certainly when some of them consider one another, and talk of being the apostles successors, it is but "Aruspex aruspicem."

3. Least of all, in the ordinary state of the church, and the continuation thereof, hath the Lord Christ appointed a vicar, or rather, as is pretended, a successor, with a plenitude of all church-power, to be by him parcelled out unto others. This is that which hath overthrown all church rule and order, introducing Luciferian pride and antichristian tyranny in their room. And whereas the only way of Christ's acting his authority over the churches, and of communicating authority unto them, to be acted by them in his name, is by his word and Spirit, which he hath given to continue in his church unto that end unto the consummation of all things, the pope of Rome placing himself in his stead for these ends, doth thereby "sit in the temple of God, and show himself to be God." But this is sufficiently confuted among all sober Christians; and those who embrace it may be left to contend with the Mohammedans, who

affirm that Jesus left John the Baptist to be his successor, as Ali, succeeded unto Mohammed.

4. All those by whom the ordinary rule of the church is to be exercised unto its edification are, as unto their office and power, given unto the church, set or placed in it, not as "lords of their faith, but as helpers of their joy," 1 Cor. 2:3, 3:21–23; 2 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 4:11–15; 1 Pet. 5:1, 2: for the church is the spouse of Christ, the Lamb's wife, and, by virtue of that relation, the enfeoffment into this power is her due and dowry. All particular persons are but her servants for Christ's sake; for though some of them be stewards, and set over all their fellow-servants, yet he hath not given them the trust of power to rule his spouse at their own will, and to grant what they please unto her.

5. But as this whole church-power is committed unto the whole church by Christ, so all that are called unto the peculiar exercise of any part of it, by virtue of office-authority, do receive that authority from him by the only way of the communication of it,—namely, by his word and Spirit, through the ministry of the church; whereof we shall treat afterward.

V. These things being thus premised in general concerning church-power, we must treat yet particularly of the communication of it from Christ, and of its distribution as unto its residence in the church:—

1. Every individual believer hath power or right given unto him, upon his believing, to become a son of God, John 1:12. Hereby, as such, he hath a right and title radically and originally unto, with an interest in, all church-privileges, to be actually possessed and used according to the rules by him prescribed; for he that is a son of God hath a right unto all the privileges and advantages of the family of God, as well as he is obliged unto all the duties of it. Herein lies the foundation of all

right unto church-power; for both it and all that belongs unto it are a part of the purchased inheritance, whereunto right is granted by adoption. Wherefore the first, original grant of all church power and privileges is made unto believers as such. Theirs it is, with these two limitations:—

(1.) That as such only they cannot exercise any church-power but upon their due observation of all rules and duties given unto this end; such are joint confession and confederation.

(2.) That each individual do actually participate therein, according to the especial rules of the church, which peculiarly respects women that do believe.

2. Wherever there are "two or three" of these believers (the smallest number), right or power is granted unto them actually to meet together in the name of Christ for their mutual edification; where unto he hath promised his presence among them, Matt. 18:19, 20. To meet and to do any thing in the name of Christ, as to exhort, instruct, and admonish one another, or to pray together, as verse 19, there is an especial right or power required thereunto. This is granted by Jesus Christ unto the least number of consenting believers. And this is a second preparation unto the communication of church-power. Unto the former faith only is required; unto this, profession, with mutual consent unto and agreement in the evangelical duties mentioned, are to be added.

3. Where the number of believers is increased so as that they are sufficient, as unto their number, to observe and perform all church-duties in the way and manner prescribed for their performance, they have right and power granted unto them to make a joint solemn confession of their faith, especially as unto the person of Christ and his mediation, Matt. 16:16–18; as also to give up themselves unto

him and to one another, in a holy agreement or confederation to do and observe all things whatever that he hath commanded. Hereon, by virtue of his laws in his institutions and commands, he gives them power to do all things in their order which he grants unto his church, and instates them in all the rights and privileges thereof. These believers, I say, thus congregated into a church-state, have immediately, by virtue thereof, power to take care that all things be done among them as by the Lord Christ they are commanded to be done in and by his church.

This, therefore, is the church essential and homogeneal, unto which the Lord Christ hath granted all that church-power which we inquire after, made it the seat of all ordinances of his worship, and the tabernacle wherein he will dwell; nor, since the ceasing of extraordinary officers, is there any other way possible for the congregating of any church than what doth virtually include the things we have mentioned.

4. But yet this church-state is not complete, nor are the ends of its institution attainable in this state, for the Lord Christ hath appointed such things in and unto it which in this state it cannot observe; for he hath given authority unto his church, to be exercised both in its rule and in the administration of his solemn ordinances of worship. The things before mentioned are all of them acts of right and power, but not of authority.

5. Wherefore the Lord Christ hath ordained offices, and appointed officers to be established in the church, Eph. 4:11–15. Unto these is all church authority granted; for all authority is an act of office-power, which is that which gives unto what is performed by the officers of the church the formal nature of authority.

6. Therefore unto the church, in the state before described, right and power is granted by Christ to call, choose, appoint, and set apart, persons made meet for the work of the offices appointed by him, in the ways and by the means appointed by him. Nor is there any other way whereby ordinary officers may be fixed in the church, as we have proved before, and shall farther confirm afterward.

That which hereon we must inquire into is, How, or by what means, or by what acts of his sovereign power, the Lord Christ doth communicate office-power, and therewith the office itself, unto any persons, whereon their authority is directly from him; and what are the acts or duties of the church in the collation of this authority.

The acts of Christ herein may be reduced unto these heads:—

1. He hath instituted and appointed the offices themselves, and made a grant of them unto the church, for its edification; as also, he hath determined and limited the powers and duties of the officers. It is not in the power of any, or of all the churches in the world, to appoint any office or officer in the church that Christ hath not appointed; and where there are any such, they can have no church-authority, properly so called, for that entirely ariseth from, and is resolved into, the institution of the office by Christ himself. And hence, in the first place, all the authority of officers in the church proceeds from the authority of Christ in the institution of the office itself; for that which gives being unto any thing gives it also its essential properties.

2. By virtue of his relation unto the church as its head, of his kingly power over it and care of it, whereon the continuation and edification of the church in this world do depend, wherever he hath a church called, he furnisheth some persons with such gifts, abilities, and endowments as are necessary to the discharge of such offices, in the powers, works, and duties of them; for it is most unquestionably

evident, both in the nature of the thing itself and in his institution, that there are some especial abilities and qualifications required to the discharge of every church-office. Wherefore, where the Lord Christ doth not communicate of these abilities in such a measure as by virtue of them church-order may be observed, church-power exercised, and all church-ordinances administered according to his mind, unto the edification of the church, it is no more in the power of men to constitute officers than to erect and create an office in the church, Eph. 4:11–15; 1 Cor. 12:4–10, etc.; Rom. 12:6–8.

This collation of spiritual gifts and abilities for office by Jesus Christ unto any doth not immediately constitute all those, or any of them, officers in the church, on whom they are collated, without the observation of that method and order which he hath appointed in the church for the communication of office-power; yet is it so prerequisite thereunto, that no person not made partaker of them in the measure before mentioned can, by virtue of any outward rite, order, or power, be really vested in the ministry.

3. This communication of office-power on the part of Christ consists in his institution and appointment of the way and means whereby persons gifted and qualified by himself ought to be actually admitted into their offices, so as to administer the powers and perform the duties of them; for the way of their call and ordination, whereof we shall speak afterward, is efficacious unto this end of communicating office-power merely from his institution and appointment of it, and what is not so can have no causal influence into the communication of this power. For although sundry things belonging hereunto are directed by the light of nature, as it is that where one man is set over others in power and authority, which before he had no natural right unto, it should be by their own consent and choice; and some things are of a moral nature, as that especial prayer be used in and about



affairs that need especial divine assistance and favour; and there may be some circumstances of outward actions herein not to be determined but by the rule of reason on the present posture of occasions,—yet nothing hath any causal influence into the communication of office-power but what is of the institution and appointment of Christ. By virtue hereof, all that are called unto this office do derive all their power and authority from him alone.

4. He hath hereon given commands unto the whole church to submit themselves unto the authority of these officers in the discharge of their office, who are so appointed, so prepared or qualified, so called by himself, and to obey them in all things, according unto the limitations which himself also hath given unto the power and authority of such officers; for they who are called unto rule and authority in the church by virtue of their office are not thereon admitted unto an unlimited power, to be exercised at their pleasure in a lordly or despotical manner, but their power is stated, bounded, limited, and confined, as to the objects of it, its acts, its manner of administration, its ends, and as unto all things wherein it is concerned. The swelling over these banks by ambition, the breaking up of these bounds by pride and love of domination, by the introduction of a power over the persons of men in their outward concerns, exercised in a legal, coercive, lordly manner, are sufficient to make a forfeiture of all church-power in them who are guilty of them. But after that some men saw it fit to transgress the bounds of power and authority prescribed and limited unto them by the Lord Christ,—which was really exclusive of lordship, dominion, and all elation above their brethren, leaving them servants to the church for Christ's sake,—they began to prescribe bounds unto themselves, such as were suited unto their interest, which they called rules or canons, and never left enlarging them at their pleasure until they instated the

most absolute tyranny in and over the church that ever was in the world.

By these ways and means doth the Lord Christ communicate office-power unto them that are called thereunto; whereon they become not the officers or ministers of men, no, not of the church, as unto the actings and exercise of their authority, but only as the good and edification of the church is the end of it, but the officers and ministers of Christ himself.

It is hence evident, that, in the communication of church-power in office unto any persons called thereunto, the work and duty of the church consists formally in acts of obedience unto the commands of Christ. Hence it doth not give unto such officers a power or authority that was formally and actually in the body of the community by virtue of any grant or law of Christ, so as that they should receive and act the power of the church by virtue of a delegation from them; but only they design, choose, and set apart the individual persons, who thereon are intrusted with office-power by Christ himself, according as was before declared. This is the power and right given unto the church, essentially considered, with respect unto their officers,—namely, to design, call, choose, and set apart, the persons, by the ways of Christ's appointment, unto those offices whereunto, by his laws, he hath annexed church power and authority.

We need not, therefore, trouble ourselves with the disputes about the first subject of church-power, or any part of it; for it is a certain rule, that, in the performance of all duties which the Lord Christ requires, either of the whole church or of any in the church, especially of the officers, they are the first subject of the power needful unto such duties who are immediately called unto them. Hereby all things come to be done in the name and authority of Christ; for the power of the

church is nothing but a right to perform church-duties in obedience unto the commands of Christ and according unto his mind. Wherefore all church-power is originally given unto the church essentially considered, which hath a double exercise;—first, in the call or choosing of officers; secondly, in their voluntary acting with them and under them in all duties of rule. 1. All authority in the church is committed by Christ unto the officers or rulers of it, as unto all acts and duties whereunto office-power is required; and, 2. Every individual person hath the liberty of his own judgment as unto his own consent or dissent in what he is himself concerned.

That this power, under the name of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," was originally granted unto the whole professing church of believers, and that it is utterly impossible it should reside in any other, who is subject unto death, or if so, be renewed upon any occasional intermission, is so fully proved by all Protestant writers against the Papists that it needs not on this occasion be again insisted on.

VI. These things have been spoken concerning the polity of the church in general, as it is taken objectively for the constitution of its state and the laws of its rule. We are in the next place to consider it subjectively, as it is a power or faculty of the minds of men unto whom the rule of the church is committed; and in this sense it is the wisdom or understanding of the officers of the church to exercise the government in it appointed by Jesus Christ, or to rule it according to his laws and constitutions. Or,

This wisdom is a spiritual gift, 1 Cor. 12:8, whereby the officers of the church are enabled to make a due application of all the rules and laws of Christ, unto the edification of the church and all the members of it.

Unto the attaining of this wisdom are required,—1. Fervent prayer for it, James 1:5. 2. Diligent study of the Scripture, to find out and understand the rules given by Christ unto this purpose, Ezra 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:1, 15. 3. Humble waiting on God for the revelation of all that it is to be exercised about, Ezek. 43:11. 4. A conscientious exercise of the skill which they have received; talents traded with duly will increase. 5. A continual sense of the account which is to be given of the discharge of this great trust, being called to rule in the house of God, Heb. 13:17.

How much this wisdom hath been neglected in church-government, yea, how much it is despised in the world, is evident unto all, It is skill in the canon law, in the proceedings of vexatious courts, with the learning, subtilty, and arts, which are required thereunto, that is looked on as the only skill to be exercised in the government of the church. Without this a man is esteemed no way meet to be employed in any part of the church-government; and according as any do arrive unto a dexterity in this polity, they are esteemed eminently useful. But these things belong not at all unto the government of the church appointed by Christ; nor can any sober man think in his conscience that so they do. What is the use of this art and trade as unto political ends we inquire not. Nor is the true wisdom required unto this end, with the means of attaining of it, more despised, more neglected, by any sort of men in the world, than by those whose pretences unto ecclesiastical rule and authority would make it most necessary unto them.

Two things follow on the supposition laid down:—

1. That the wisdom intended is not promised unto all the members of the church in general, nor are they required to seek for it by the ways and means of attaining it before laid down, but respect is had herein

only unto the officers of the church. Hereon dependeth the equity of the obedience of the people unto their rulers; for wisdom for rule is peculiarly granted unto them, and their duty it is to seek after it in a peculiar manner. Wherefore those who, on every occasion, are ready to advance their own wisdom and understanding in the affairs and proceedings of the church against the wisdom of the officers of it are proud and disorderly.

I speak not this to give any countenance unto the outcries of some, that all sorts of men will suppose themselves wiser than their rulers, and to know what belongs unto the government of the church better than they; whereas the government which they exercise belongs not at all unto the rule of the church, determined and limited in the Scripture, as the meanest Christian can easily discern; nor is it pretended by themselves so to do: for they say that the Lord Christ hath prescribed nothing herein, but left it unto the will and wisdom of the church to order all things as they see necessary, which church they are. Wherefore, if that will please them, it shall be granted, that in skill for the management of ecclesiastical affairs according to the canon law, with such other rules of the same kind as they have framed, and in the legal proceedings of ecclesiastical courts, as they are called, there are none of the people that are equal unto them or will contend with them.

2. It hence also follows that those who are called unto rule in the church of Christ should diligently endeavour the attaining of and increasing in this wisdom, giving evidence thereof on all occasions, that the church may safely acquiesce in their rule. But hereunto so many things do belong as cannot in this place be meetly treated of; somewhat that appertains to them shall afterward be considered.

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## CHAPTER IV

### The officers of the church

THE church is considered either as it is essential, with respect unto its nature and being, or as it is organical, with respect unto its order.

The constituent causes and parts of the church, as unto its essence and being, are its institution, matter, and form, whereof we have treated.

Its order as it is organical is founded in that communication of power unto it from Christ which was insisted on in the foregoing chapter.

The organizing of a church is the placing or implanting in it those officers which the Lord Jesus Christ hath appointed to act and exercise his authority therein. For the rule and government of the church are the exertion of the authority of Christ in the hands of them unto whom it is committed, that is, the officers of it; not that all officers are called to rule, but that none are called to rule that are not so.

The officers of the church in general are of two sorts, "bishops and deacons," Phil. 1:1; and their work is distributed into "prophecy and ministry," Rom. 12:6, 7.

The bishops or elders are of two sorts:—1. Such as have authority to teach and administer the sacraments, which is commonly called the power of order; and also of ruling, which is called a power of jurisdiction, corruptly: and, 2. Some have only power for rule; of which sort there are some in all the churches in the world.

Those of the first sort are distinguished into pastors and teachers.

The distinction between the elders themselves is not like that between elders and deacons, which is as unto the whole kind or nature of the office, but only with respect unto work and order, whereof we shall treat distinctly.

The first sort of officers in the church are bishops or elders, concerning whom there have been mighty contentions in the late ages of the church. The principles we have hitherto proceeded on discharge us from any especial interest or concernment in this controversy; for if there be no church of divine or apostolical constitution, none in being in the second or third century, but only a particular congregation, the foundation of that contest, which is about pre-eminence and power in the same person over many churches, falls to the ground.

Indeed, strife about power, superiority, and jurisdiction over one another, amongst those who pretend to be ministers of the gospel, is full of scandal. It started early in the church, was extinguished by the Lord Christ in his apostles, rebuked by the apostles in all others, Matt. 18:1–4, 23:8–11; Luke 22:24–26; 1 Pet. 5:1–5; 2 John 9, 10; yet, through the pride, ambition, and avarice of men, it hath grown to be the stain and shame of the church in most ages: for neither the sense of the authority of Christ forbidding such ambitious designings, nor the proposal of his own example in this particular case, nor the experience of their own insufficiency for the least part of the work of the gospel ministry, have been able to restrain the minds of men from coveting after and contending for a prerogative in church-power over others; for though this ambition, and all the fruits or rewards of it, are laid under a severe interdict by our Lord Jesus Christ, yet when men (like Achan) saw "the wedge of gold and the

goodly Babylonish garment" that they thought to be in power, domination, and wealth, they coveted them and took them, to the great disturbance of the church of God.

If men would but a little seriously consider what there is in that care of souls, even of all them over whom they pretend church power, rule, or jurisdiction, and what it is to give an account concerning them before the judgment-seat of Christ, it may be it would abate of their earnestness in contending for the enlargement of their cures.

The claim of episcopacy, as consisting in a rank of persons distinct from the office of presbyters, is managed with great variety. It is not agreed whether they are distinct in order above them, or only as unto a certain degree among them of the same order. It is not determined what doth constitute that pretended distinct order, nor wherein that degree of pre-eminence in the same order doth consist, nor what basis it stands upon. It is not agreed whether this order of bishops hath any church-power appropriated unto it, so as to be acted singly by themselves alone, without the concurrence of the presbyters, or how far that concurrence is necessary in all acts of church order or power. There are no bounds or limits of the dioceses which they claim the rule in and over, as churches whereunto they are peculiarly related, derived either from divine institution or tradition, or general rules of reason respecting both or either of them, or from the consideration of gifts and abilities, or any thing else wherein church-order or edification is concerned. Those who plead for diocesan episcopacy will not proceed any farther but only that there is, and ought to be, a superiority in bishops over presbyters in order or degree; but whether this must be over presbyters in one church only, or in many distinct churches,—whether it must be such as not only hinders them utterly from the discharge of any of the duties of the pastoral office towards the most of them whom they esteem their



flocks, and necessitates them unto a rule by unscriptural church officers, laws, and power,—they suppose doth not belong unto their cause, whereas, indeed, the weight and moment of it doth lie in and depend on these things. Innumerable other uncertainties, differences, and variances there are about this singular episcopacy, which we are not at present concerned to inquire into, nor shall I insist on any of those which have been already mentioned.

But yet, because it is necessary unto the clearing of the evangelical pastoral office, which is now under consideration, unto what hath been pleaded before about the non-institution of any churches beyond particular congregations, which is utterly exclusive of all pretences of the present episcopacy, I shall briefly, as in a diversion, add the arguments which undeniably prove that in the whole New Testament bishops and presbyters, or elders, are every way the same persons, in the same office, have the same function, without distinction in order or degree; which also, as unto the Scripture, the most learned advocates of prelacy begin to grant:—

1. The apostle describing what ought to be the qualifications of presbyters or elders, gives this reason of it, Because a bishop must be so: Tit. 1:5–9, "Ordain elders in every city, if any be blameless," etc., "for a bishop must be blameless." He that would prove of what sort a presbyter, that is to be ordained so, ought to be, [and] gives this reason for it, that "such a bishop ought to be," intends the same person and office by presbyter and bishop, or there is no congruity of speech or consequence of reason in what he asserts. To suppose that the apostle doth not intend the same persons and the same office by "presbyters" and "bishops," in the same place, is to destroy his argument and render the context of his discourse unintelligible. He that will say, "If you make a justice of peace or a constable, he must be magnanimous, liberal, full of clemency and courage, for so a king

ought to be," will not be thought to argue very wisely; yet such is the argument here, if by "elders" and "bishops" distinct orders and offices are intended.

2. There were many bishops in one city, in one particular church: Phil. 1:1, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." That the church then at Philippi was one particular church or congregation was proved before. But to have many bishops in the same church, whereas the nature of the episcopacy pleaded for consists in the superiority of one over the presbyters of many churches, is absolutely inconsistent. Such bishops whereof there may be many in the same church, of the same order, equal in power and dignity with respect unto office, will easily be granted; but then they are presbyters as well as bishops. There will, I fear, be no end of this contest, because of the prejudices and interests of some; but that the identity of bishops and presbyters should be more plainly expressed can neither be expected nor desired.

3. The apostle, being at Miletus, sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church to come unto him; that is, the elders of the church at Ephesus, as hath been elsewhere undeniably demonstrated, Acts 20:17, 18: unto these elders he says, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the church of God," verse 28. If "elders" and "bishops" be not the same persons, having the same office, the same function, and the same duties, and the same names, it is impossible, so far as I understand, how it should be expressed: for these elders are they whom the Holy Ghost made bishops, they were many of them in the same church, their duty it was to attend unto the flock and to feed the church, which comprise all the duties, the whole function of elders and bishops; which must therefore be the same.

This plain testimony can no way be evaded by pretences and conjectures, unwritten and uncertain; the only answer unto it is, "It was indeed so then, but it was otherwise afterward;" which some now betake themselves unto. But these elders were either elders only, and not bishops; or bishops only, and not elders; or the same persons were elders and bishops, as is plainly affirmed in the words. The last is that which we plead. If the first be asserted, then was there no bishop then at Ephesus, for these elders had the whole oversight of the flock; if the second, then were there no elders at all, which is no good exposition of those words, that "Paul called unto him the elders of the church."

4. The apostle Peter writes unto the "elders" of the churches that they should "feed the flock," ἐπισκοποῦντες, "taking the oversight," or exercising the office and function of bishops over it; and that not as "lords," but as "ensamples" of humility, obedience, and holiness, to the whole flock, 1 Pet. 5:1–3. Those on whom it is incumbent to feed the flock and to superintend it, as those who in the first place are accountable unto Jesus Christ, are bishops, and such as have no other bishop over them, unto whom this charge should be principally committed; but such, according unto this apostle, are the elders of the church: therefore these elders and bishops are the same. And such were the ἡγούμενοι, the guides of the church at Jerusalem, whom the members of it were bound to obey, as those that did watch for and were to give an account of their souls, Heb. 13:17.

5. The substance of these and all other instances or testimonies of the same kind is this: Those whose names are the same, equally common and applicable unto them all, whose function is the same, whose qualifications and characters are the same, whose duties, account, and reward are the same, concerning whom there is in no one place of Scripture the least mention of inequality, disparity, or preference

in office among them, they are essentially and every way the same. That thus it is with the elders and bishops in the Scripture cannot modestly be denied.

I do acknowledge, that where a church is greatly increased, so as that there is a necessity of many elders in it for its instruction and rule, decency and order do require that one of them do, in the management of all church-affairs, preside, to guide and direct the way and manner thereof: so the presbyters at Alexandria did choose one from among themselves that should have the pre-eminence of a president among them. Whether the person that is so to preside be directed unto by being first converted, or first ordained, or on the account of age, or of gifts and abilities, whether he continue for a season only, and then another be deputed unto the same work, or for his life, are things in themselves indifferent, to be determined according unto the general rules of reason and order, with respect unto the edification of the church.

I shall never oppose this order, but rather desire to see it in practice, —namely, that particular churches were of such an extent as necessarily to require many elders, both teaching and ruling, for their instruction and government; for the better observation of order and decency in the public assemblies; for the fuller representation of the authority committed by Jesus Christ unto the officers of his church; for the occasional instruction of the members in lesser assemblies, which, as unto some ends, may be stated also; with the due attendance unto all other means of edification, as watching, inspecting, warning, admonishing, exhorting, and the like: and that among these elders one should be chosen by themselves, with the consent of the church, not into a new order, not into a degree of authority above his brethren, but only unto his part of the common work in a peculiar manner, which requires some kind of precedency.

Hereby no new officer, no new order of officers, no new degree of power or authority, is constituted in the church; only the work and duty of it is cast into such an order as the very light of nature doth require.

But there is not any intimation in the Scripture of the least imparity or inequality, in order, degree, or authority, among officers of the same sort, whether extraordinary or ordinary. The apostles were all equal; so were the evangelists, so were elders or bishops, and so were deacons also. The Scripture knows no more of an archbishop, such as all diocesan bishops are, nor of an archdeacon, than of an archapostle, or of an archevangelist, or an archprophet. Howbeit it is evident that in all their assemblies they had one who did preside in the manner before described; which seems, among the apostles, to have been the prerogative of Peter.

The brethren also of the church may be so multiplied as that the constant meeting of them all in one place may not be absolutely best for their edification; howbeit, that on all the solemn occasions of the church whereunto their consent was necessary, they did of old, and ought still, to meet in the same place, for advice, consultation, and consent, was proved before. This is so fully expressed and exemplified in the two great churches of Jerusalem and Antioch, Acts 15, that it cannot be gainsaid. When Paul and Barnabas, sent by the "brethren" or church at Antioch, verses 1–3, were come to Jerusalem, they were received by "the church," as the brethren are called, in distinction from the "apostles and elders," verse 4. So when the apostles and elders assembled to consider of the case proposed unto them, the whole "multitude" of the church, that is, the brethren, assembled with them, verses 6, 12; neither were they mute persons, mere auditors and spectators in the assembly, but they concurred both in the debate and determination of the question, insomuch that

they are expressly joined with the apostles and elders in the advice given, verses 22, 23. And when Paul and Barnabas returned unto Antioch, the "multitude," unto whom the letter of the church at Jerusalem was directed, came together about it, verses 23, 30. Unless this be observed, the primitive church-state is overthrown. But I shall return from this digression.

The first officer or elder of the church is the pastor. A pastor is the elder that feeds and rules the flock, 1 Pet. 5:2; that is, who is its teacher and its bishop: Ποιμάνετε, ἐπισκοποῦντες, "Feed, taking the oversight."

It is not my present design or work to give a full account of the qualifications required in persons to be called unto this office, nor of their duty and work, with the qualities or virtues to be exercised therein; it would require a large discourse to handle them practically, and it hath been done by others. It were to be wished that what is of this kind expressed in the rule, and which the nature of the office doth indispensably require, were more exemplified in practice than it is. But some things relating unto this officer and his office, that are needful to be well stated, I shall treat concerning.

The name of a pastor or shepherd is metaphorical. It is a denomination suited unto his work, denoting the same office and person with a bishop or elder, spoken of absolutely, without limitation unto either teaching or ruling; and it seems to be used or applied unto this office because it is more comprehensive of and instructive in all the duties that belong unto it than any other name whatever, nay, than all of them put together. The grounds and reasons of this metaphor, or whence the church is called a flock, and whence God termeth himself the shepherd of the flock; whence the sheep of this flock are committed unto Christ, whereon he becomes

"the good shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep," and the prince of shepherds; what is the interest of men in a participation of this office, and what their duty thereon,—are things well worth the consideration of them who are called unto it. "Hirelings," yea, "wolves" and "dumb dogs," do in many places take on themselves to be shepherds of the flock, by whom it is devoured and destroyed, Acts 20:18, 19, etc.; 1 Pet. 5:2–4; Cant. 1:7; Jer. 13:17, 23:2; Ezek. 34:3; Gen. 49:24; Ps. 23:1, 80:1; John 10:11, 14–16; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25, 5:4.

Whereas, therefore, this name or appellation is taken from and includes in it love, care, tenderness, watchfulness, in all the duties of going before, preserving, feeding, defending the flock, the sheep and the lambs, the strong, the weak, and the diseased, with accountableness, as servants, unto the chief Shepherd, it was generally disused in the church, and those of bishops or overseers, guides, presidents, elders, which seem to include more of honour and authority, were retained in common use; though one of them at last, namely, that of bishops, with some elating compositions and adjuncts of power, obtained the pre-eminence. Out of the corruption of these compositions and additions, in archbishops, metropolitans, patriarchs, and the like, brake forth the cockatrice of the church,—that is, the pope.

But this name is by the Holy Ghost appropriated unto the principal ministers of Christ in his church, Eph. 4:11; and under that name they were promised unto the church of old, Jer. 3:15. And the work of these pastors is to feed the flock committed to their charge, as it is constantly required of them, Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2.

Of pastoral feeding there are two parts:—1. Teaching or instruction; 2. Rule or discipline. Unto these two heads may all the acts and

duties of a shepherd toward his flock be reduced; and both are intended in the term of "feeding," 1 Chron. 11:2, 17:6; Jer. 23:2; Mic. 5:4, 7:14; Zech. 11:7; Acts 20:28; John 21:15–17; 1 Pet. 5:2, etc. Wherefore he who is the pastor is the bishop, the elder, the teacher of the church.

These works of teaching and ruling may be distinct in several officers, namely, teachers and rulers; but to divide them in the same office of pastors, that some pastors should feed by teaching only, but have no right to rule by virtue of their office, and some should attend in exercise unto rule only, not esteeming themselves obliged to labour continually in feeding the flock, is almost to overthrow this office of Christ's designation, and to set up two in the room of it, of men's own projection.

Of the call of men unto this office so many things have been spoken and written by others at large that I shall only insist, and that very briefly, on some things which are either of the most important consideration or have been omitted by others; as,—

1. Unto the call of any person unto this office of a pastor in the church there are certain qualifications previously required in him, disposing and making him fit for that office. The outward call is an act of the church, as we shall show immediately; but therein is required an obediencial acting of him also who is called. Neither of these can be regular, neither can the church act according to rule and order, nor the person called act in such a due obedience, unless there are in him some previous indications of the mind of God, designing the person to be called by such qualifications as may render him meet and able for the discharge of his office and work; for ordinary vocation is not a collation of gracious spiritual abilities, suiting and making men meet for the pastoral office, but it is the communication



of right and power for the regular use and exercise of gifts and abilities received antecedently unto that call, unto the edification of the church, wherein the office itself doth consist. And if we would know what these qualifications and endowments are, for the substance of them, we may learn them in their great example and pattern, our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Our Lord Jesus Christ, being the good Shepherd, whose the sheep are, the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, the chief Shepherd, did design, in the undertaking and exercise of his pastoral office, to give a type and example unto all those who are to be called unto the same office under him; and if there be not a conformity unto him herein, no man can assure his own conscience or the church of God that he is or can be lawfully called unto this office.

The qualifications of Christ unto, and the gracious qualities of his mind and soul in, the discharge of his pastoral office, may be referred unto five heads:—

(1.) That furniture with spiritual gifts and abilities by the communication of the Holy Ghost unto him in an unmeasurable fulness, whereby he was fitted for the discharge of his office. This is expressed with respect unto his undertaking of it, Isa. 11:2, 3, 61:1–3; Luke 4:14. Herein was he "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows," Heb. 1:9. But this unction of the Spirit is, in a certain measure, required in all who are called, or to be called, unto the pastoral office, Eph. 4:7. That there are spiritual powers, gifts, and abilities, required unto the gospel ministry, I have at large declared in another treatise, as also what they are; and where there are none of those spiritual abilities which are necessary unto the edification of the church in the administration of gospel ordinances, as in prayer, preaching, and the like, no outward call or order can constitute any man an evangelical pastor. As unto particular persons, I will not

contend as unto an absolute nullity in the office by reason of their deficiency in spiritual gifts, unless it be gross, and such as renders them utterly useless unto the edification of the church. I only say, that no man can in an orderly way and manner be called or set apart unto this office in whom there are not some indications of God's designation of him thereunto by his furniture with spiritual gifts, of knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and utterance for prayer and preaching, with other ministerial duties, in some competent measure.

(2.) Compassion and love to the flock were gloriously eminent in this "great Shepherd of the sheep." After other evidences hereof, he gave them that signal confirmation in laying down his life for them. This testimony of his love he insists upon himself, John 10. And herein also his example ought to lie continually before the eyes of them who are called unto the pastoral office. Their entrance should be accompanied with love to the souls of men; and if the discharge of their office be not animated with love unto their flocks, wolves, or hirelings, or thieves, they may be, but shepherds they are not. Neither is the glory of the gospel ministry more lost or defaced in any thing, or by any means, than by the evidence that is given among the most of an inconformity unto Jesus Christ in their love unto the flock. Alas! it is scarce once thought of amongst the most of them who, in various degrees, take upon them the pastoral office. Where are the fruits of it? what evidence is given of it in any kind? It is well if some, instead of laying down their lives for them, do not by innumerable ways destroy their souls.

(3.) There is and was in this great Shepherd a continual watchfulness over the whole flock, to keep it, to preserve it, to feed, to lead, and cherish it, to purify and cleanse it, until it be presented unspotted unto God. He doth never slumber nor sleep; he watereth his vineyard

every moment; he keeps it night and day, that none may hurt it; he loseth nothing of what is committed to him. See Isa. 40:11. I speak not distinctly of previous qualifications unto an outward call only, but with a mixture of those qualities and duties which are required in the discharge of this office; and herein also is the Lord Christ to be our example. And hereunto do belong,—

[1.] Constant prayer for the flock;

[2.] Diligence in the dispensation of the word with wisdom, as unto times, seasons, the state of the flock in general, their light, knowledge, ways, walking, ignorance, temptations, trials, defections, weaknesses of all sorts, growth, and decays, etc.;

[3.] Personal admonition, exhortation, consolation, instruction, as their particular cases do require;

[4.] All with a design to keep them from evil, and to present them without blame before Christ Jesus at the great day. But these and things of the like nature presenting themselves with some earnestness unto my mind, I shall at present discharge myself of the thoughts of them, hoping for a more convenient place and season to give them a larger treatment; and somewhat yet further shall be spoken of them in the next chapter.

(4.) Zeal for the glory of God, in his whole ministry and in all the ends of it, had its continual residence in the holy soul of the great Shepherd. Hence it is declared in an expression intimating that it was inexpressible: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," John 2:17. This also must accompany the discharge of the pastoral office, or it will find no acceptance with him; and the want of it is one of those things which hath filled the world with a dead, faithless, fruitless ministry.

(5.) As he was absolutely in himself "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," so a conformity unto him in these things, and that in some degree of eminency above others, is required in them who are called unto this office.

2. Again; none can or may take this office upon him, or discharge the duties of it, which are peculiarly its own, with authority, but he who is called and set apart thereunto according to the mind of Jesus Christ. The continuation of all church order and power, of the regular administration of all sacred ordinances, yea, of the very being of the church as it is organical, depends on this assertion. Some deny the continuation of the office itself, and of those duties which are peculiar unto it, as the administration of the sacraments; some judge that persons neither called nor set apart unto this office may discharge all the duties and the whole work of it; some, that a temporary delegation of power unto any by the church is all the warranty necessary for the undertaking and discharge of this office. Many have been the contests about these things, occasioned by the ignorance and disorderly affections of some persons. I shall briefly represent the truth herein, with the grounds of it, and proceed to the consideration of the call itself, which is so necessary:—

(1.) Christ himself, in his own person and by his own authority, was the author of this office. He gave it, appointed it, erected it in the church, by virtue of his sovereign power and authority, Eph. 4:11, 12; 1 Cor. 12:28. As he gave, appointed, ordained, an extraordinary office of apostleship, so he ordained, appointed, and gave, the ordinary office of pastorship or teaching. They have both the same divine original.

(2.) He appointed this office for continuance, or to abide in the church unto the consummation of all things, Eph. 4:13, Matt. 28:19,

20; and therefore he took order by his apostles that, for the continuation of this office, pastors, elders, or bishops, should be called and ordained unto the care and discharge of it in all churches; which was done by them accordingly, Acts 14:22, 23, 20:28, 1 Tim. 3:1–7, Tit. 1:5–9: wherein he gave rule unto all churches unto the end of the world, and prescribed them their duty.

(3.) On this office and the discharge of it he hath laid the whole weight of the order, rule, and edification of his church, in his name and by virtue of his authority, Acts 20:28; Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 5:1–4; Rev. 2:1–5, etc. Hereon a double necessity of the continuation of this office doth depend,—first, That which ariseth from the precept or command of it, which made it necessary to the church on the account of the obedience which it owes to Christ; and, secondly, From its being the principal ordinary means of all the ends of Christ in and towards his church. Wherefore, although he can himself feed his church in the wilderness, when it is deprived of all outward instituted means of edification, yet where this office fails through its neglect, there is nothing but disorder, confusion, and destruction, will ensue thereon; no promise of feeding or edification.

(4.) The Lord Christ hath given commands unto the church for obedience unto those who enjoy and exercise this office among them. Now, all these commands are needless and superfluous, nor can any obedience be yielded unto the Lord Christ in their observance, unless there be a continuation of this office. And the church loseth as much in grace and privilege as it loseth in commands; for in obedience unto the commands of Christ doth grace in its exercise consist, 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17.

(5.) This office is accompanied with power and authority, which none can take or assume to themselves. All power and authority, whether

in things spiritual or temporal, which is not either founded in the law of nature or collated by divine ordination, is usurpation and tyranny; no man can of himself take either sword. To invade an office which includes power and authority over others is to disturb all right, natural, divine, and civil. That such an authority is included in this office is evident,—

[1.] From the names ascribed unto them in whom it is vested; as pastors, bishops, elders, rulers, all of them requiring it.

[2.] From the work prescribed unto them, which is feeding by rule and teaching.

[3.] From the execution of church-power in discipline, or the exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven committed unto them.

[4.] From the commands given for obedience unto them, which respect authority.

[5.] From their appointment to be the means and instruments of exerting the authority of Christ in the church, which can be done no other way.

(6.) Christ hath appointed a standing rule of the calling of men unto this office, as we shall see immediately; but if men may enter upon it and discharge it without any such call, that rule, with the way of the call prescribed, is altogether in vain; and there can be no greater affront unto the authority of Christ in his church than to act in it in neglect of or in opposition unto the rule that he hath appointed for the exercise of power in it.

(7.) There is an accountable trust committed unto those who undertake this office. The whole flock, the ministry itself, the truths

of the gospel, as to the preservation of them, all are committed to them, Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:2, 16, 23; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Heb. 13:17, "They that must give account." Nothing can be more wicked or foolish than for a man to intrude himself into a trust which is not committed unto him. They are branded as profligately wicked who attempt any such thing among men, which cannot be done without falsification; and what shall he be esteemed who intrudes himself into the highest trust that any creature is capable of in the name of Christ, and takes upon him to give an account of its discharge at the last day, without any divine call or warranty?

(8.) There are, unto the discharge of this office, especial promises granted and annexed of present assistances and future eternal rewards, Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Pet. 5:4. Either these promises belong unto them who take this office on themselves without any call, or they do not. If they do not, then have they neither any especial assistance in their work nor can expect any reward of their labours. If it be said they have an interest in them, then the worst of men may obtain the benefit of divine promises without any divine designation.

(9.) The general force of the rule, Heb. 5:4, includes a prohibition of undertaking any sacred office without a divine call; and so the instances of such prohibitions under the old testament, as unto the duties annexed unto an office, as in the case of Uzziah invading the priesthood, 2 Chron. 26:16-21; or of taking a ministerial office without call or mission, as Jer. 27:9, 10, 14, 15, having respect unto the order of God's institutions, may be pleaded in this case.

(10.) Whoever, therefore, takes upon him the pastoral office without a lawful outward call, doth take unto himself power and authority without any divine warranty, which is a foundation of all disorder and confusion; interests himself in an accountable trust no way

committed unto him; hath no promise of assistance in or reward for his work, but engageth in that which is destructive of all church-order, and consequently of the very being of the church itself.

(11.) Yet there are three things that are to be annexed unto this assertion, by way of limitation; as,—

[1.] Many things performed by virtue of office, in a way of authority, may be performed by others, not called to office, in a way of charity. Such are the moral duties of exhorting, admonishing, comforting, instructing, and praying with and for one another.

[2.] Spiritual gifts may be exercised unto the edification of others without office-power, where order and opportunity do require it. But the constant exercise of spiritual gifts in preaching, with a refusal of undertaking a ministerial office, or without design so to do upon a lawful call, cannot be approved.

[3.] The rules proposed concern only ordinary cases, and the ordinary state of the church; extraordinary cases are accompanied with a warranty in themselves for extraordinary actings and duties.

(12.) The call of persons unto the pastoral office is an act and duty of the church. It is not an act of the political magistrate, not of the pope, not of any single prelate, but of the whole church, unto whom the Lord Christ hath committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And, indeed, although there be great differences about the nature and manner of the call of men unto this office, yet none who understands aught of these things can deny but that it is an act and duty of the church, which the church alone is empowered by Christ to put forth and exert. But this will more fully appear in the consideration of the nature and manner of this call of men unto the pastoral office, and the actings of the church therein.



The call of persons unto the pastoral office in the church consists of two parts,—first, Election; secondly, Ordination, as it is commonly called, or sacred separation by fasting and prayer. As unto the former, four things must be inquired into:—I. What is previous unto it, or preparatory for it; II. Wherein it doth consist; III. Its necessity, or the demonstration of its truth and institution; IV. What influence it hath into the communication of pastoral office-power unto a pastor so chosen.

I. That which is previous unto it is the meetness of the person for his office and work that is to be chosen. It can never be the duty of the church to call or choose an unmeet, an unqualified, an unprepared person unto this office. No pretended necessity, no outward motives, can enable or warrant it so to do; nor can it by any outward act, whatever the rule or solemnity of it be, communicate ministerial authority unto persons utterly unqualified for and incapable of the discharge of the pastoral office according to the rule of the Scripture. And this has been one great means of debasing the ministry and of almost ruining the church itself, either by the neglect of those who suppose themselves intrusted with the whole power of ordination, or by impositions on them by secular power and patrons of livings, as they are called, with the stated regulation of their proceedings herein by a defective law, whence there hath not been a due regard unto the antecedent preparatory qualifications of those who are called unto the ministry.

Two ways is the meetness of any one made known and to be judged of:—1. By an evidence given of the qualifications in him before mentioned. The church is not to call or choose any one to office who is not known unto them, of whose frame of spirit and walking they have not had some experience; not a novice, or one lately come unto them. He must be one who by his ways and walking hath obtained a

good report, even among them that are without, so far as he is known, unless they be enemies or scoffers; and one that hath in some good measure evidenced his faith, love, and obedience unto Jesus Christ in the church. This is the chief trust that the Lord Christ hath committed unto his churches; and if they are negligent herein, or if at all adventures they will impose an officer in his house upon him without satisfaction of his meetness upon due inquiry, it is a great dishonour unto him and provocation of him. Herein principally are churches made the overseers of their own purity and edification. To deny them an ability of a right judgment herein, or a liberty for the use and exercise of it, is error and tyranny. But that flock which Christ purchased and purified with his own blood is thought by some to be little better than a herd of brute beasts. Where there is a defect of this personal knowledge, from want of opportunity, it may be supplied by testimonies of unquestionable authority. 2. By a trial of his gifts for edification. These are those spiritual endowments which the Lord Christ grants and the Holy Spirit works in the minds of men, for this very end that the church may be profited by them, 1 Cor. 12:7–11. And we must at present take it for granted that every true church of Christ, that is so in the matter and form of it, is able to judge in some competent measure what gifts of men are suited unto their own edification. But yet, in making a judgment hereof, one directive means is the advice of other elders and churches; which they are obliged to make use of by virtue of the communion of churches, and for the avoidance of offence in their walk in that communion.

II. As to the nature of this election, call, or choice of a person known, tried, and judged meetly qualified for the pastoral office, it is an act of the whole church; that is, of the fraternity with their elders, if they have any; for a pastor may be chosen unto a church which hath other teachers, elders, or officers, already instated in it. In this case their

concurrence in the choice intended is necessary, by way of common suffrage, not of authority or office-power; for election is not an act of authority, but of liberty and power, wherein the whole church in the fraternity is equal. If there be no officers stated in the church before, as it was with the churches in the primitive times, on the first ordination of elders among them, this election belongs unto the fraternity.

III. That, therefore, which we have now to prove is this, that it is the mind and will of Jesus Christ that meet persons should be called unto the pastoral office (or any other office in the church) by the election and choice of the church itself whereunto they are called, antecedently unto a sacred, solemn separation unto their respective offices; for under the old testament there were three ways whereby men were called unto office in the church:—1. They were so extraordinarily and immediately, by the nomination and designation of God himself: so Aaron was called unto the priesthood; and others afterward, as Samuel, to be prophets. 2. By a law of carnal generation: so all the priests of the posterity of Aaron succeeded into the office of the priesthood without any other call. 3. By the choice of the people, which was the call of all the ordinary elders and rulers of the church: Deut. 1:13, הָבֹּי לָכֶם, "Give to yourselves." It was required of the people that they should in the first place make a judgment on their qualifications for the office whereunto they were called. Men known unto them for wise, understanding, righteous, walking in the fear of God, they were to look out, and then to present them unto Moses, for their separation unto office; which is election. It is true that, Exod. 18:25, it is said that Moses chose the elders; but it is frequent in the Scripture that where any thing is done by many, where one is chief, that is ascribed in differently either to the many or to the chief director. So is it said, "Israel sent messengers," Num. 21:21. Moses, speaking of the same thing, says, "I sent messengers,"

Deut. 2:26. So, 1 Chron. 19:19, "They made peace with David and became his servants;" which is, 2 Sam. 10:19, "They made peace with Israel and served them." See also 2 Kings 11:12, with 2 Chron. 23:11; as also 1 Chron. 16:1, with 2 Sam. 6:17; and the same may be observed in other places. Wherefore the people chose these elders under the conduct and guidance of Moses: which directs us unto the right interpretation of Acts 14:23, whereof we shall speak immediately.

The first of these ways was repeated in the foundation of the evangelical church. Christ himself was called unto his office by the Father, through the unction of the Spirit, Isa. 61:1–3, Heb. 5:5; and he himself called the apostles and evangelists, in whom that call ceased. The second, ordinary way, by the privilege of natural generation of the stock of the priests, was utterly abolished. The third way only remained for the ordinary continuation of the church,—namely, by the choice and election of the church itself, with solemn separation and dedication by officers extraordinary or ordinary.

The first instance of the choice of a church-officer had a mixture in it of the first and last ways, in the case of Matthias. As he was able to be a church-officer, he had the choice and consent of the church; as he was to be an apostle or an extraordinary officer, there was an immediate divine disposition of him into his office;—the latter, to give him apostolical authority; the former, to make him a precedent of the future actings of the church in the call of their officers.

I say, this being the first example and pattern of the calling of any person unto office in the Christian church-state, wherein there was an interposition of the ordinary actings of men, is established as a rule and precedent, not to be changed, altered, or departed from, in any age of the church whatever. It is so as unto what was of common

right and equity, which belonged unto the whole church. And I cannot but wonder how men durst ever reject and disannul this divine example and rule. It will not avail them to say that it is only a matter of fact, and not a precept or institution, that is recorded; for,—1. It is a fact left on record in the holy Scripture for our instruction and direction. 2. It is an example of the apostles and the whole church proposed unto us; which, in all things not otherwise determined, hath the force of an institution. 3. If there were no more in it but this, that we have a matter of common right determined and applied by the wisdom of the apostles and the entire church of believers at that time in the world, it were an impiety to depart from it, unless in case of the utmost necessity.

Whereas what is here recorded was in the call of an apostle, it strengthens the argument which hence we plead; for if in the extraordinary call of an apostle it was the mind of Christ that the fraternity or multitude should have the liberty of their suffrage, how much more is it certainly his mind, that in the ordinary call of their own peculiar officers, in whom, under him, the concernment is their own only, this right should be continued unto them!

The order of the proceeding of the church herein is distinctly declared; for,—

1. The number of the church at that time,—that is, of the men,—was about an hundred and twenty, Acts 1:15.
2. They were assembled all together in one place, so as that Peter stood up in the midst of them, verse 15.
3. Peter, in the name of the rest of the apostles, declares unto them the necessity of choosing one to be substituted in the room of Judas, verses 16–22.

4. He limits the choice of him unto the especial qualification of being a meet witness of the resurrection of Christ, or unto those who constantly accompanied him with themselves from the baptism of John; that is, from his being baptized by him, whereon he began his public ministry.

5. Among these they were left at their liberty to nominate any two, who were to be left unto the lot for a determination whether of them God designed unto the office.

6. Hereon the whole multitude ἔστησαν δύο, "appointed two;" that is, the ἄνδρες ἀδελφοί, the "men and brethren," unto whom Peter spoke, verse 16, did so.

7. The same persons, to promote the work, "prayed and gave forth their lots," verses 24–26. 8. Συγκατεψηφίσθη Μαθθίας,—Matthias was, by the common suffrage of the whole church, reckoned unto the number of the apostles.

I say not that these things were done by the disciples in distinction from Peter and the rest of the apostles, but in conjunction with them. Peter did nothing without them, nor did they any thing without him.

The exceptions of Bellarmine and others against this testimony, that it was a grant and a condescension in Peter, and not a declaration of the right of the church, that it was an extraordinary case, that the determination of the whole was by lot, are of no validity. The pretended concession of Peter is a figment; the case was so extraordinary as to include in it all ordinary cases, for the substance of them; and although the ultimate determination of the individual person (which was necessary unto his apostleship) was immediately divine, by lot, yet here is all granted unto the people, in their

choosing and appointing two, in their praying, in their casting lots, in their voluntary approbatory suffrage, that is desired.

This blessed example, given us by the wisdom of the apostles, yea, of the Spirit of God in them, being eminently suited unto the nature of the thing itself, as we shall see immediately, and compliant with all other directions and apostolical examples in the like case, is rather to be followed than the practice of some degenerate churches, who, to cover the turpitude of their acting in deserting this example and rule, do make use of a mock show and pretence of that which really they deny, reject, and oppose.

The second example we have of the practice of the apostles in this case, whereby the preceding rule is confirmed, is given us Acts. 6, in the election of the deacons. Had there ensued, after the choice of Matthias, an instance of a diverse practice, by an exclusion of the consent of the people, the former might have been evaded as that which was absolutely extraordinary, and not obliging unto the church: but this was the very next instance of the call of any church-officer, and it was the first appointment of any ordinary officers in the Christian church; for, it falling out in the very year of Christ's ascension, there is no mention of any ordinary elders, distinct from the apostles, ordained in that church; for all the apostles themselves yet abiding there for the most part of this time, making only some occasional excursions unto other places, were able to take care of the rule of the church and the preaching of the word. They are, indeed, mentioned as those who were well known in the church not long afterward, chap. 11:30; but the first instance of the call of ordinary teaching elders or pastors is not recorded. That of deacons is so by reason of the occasion of it; and we may observe concerning it unto our purpose,—

1. That the institution of the office itself was of apostolical authority, and that fulness of church-power wherewith they were furnished by Jesus Christ.

2. That they did not exert that authority but upon such reasons of it as were satisfactory to the church; which they declare, chap. 6:2.

3. That the action is ascribed to the twelve in general, without naming any person who spake for the rest; which renders the pretence of the Romanists from the former place, where Peter is said to have spoken unto the disciples,—whereon they would have the actings of the church which ensued thereon to have been by his concession and grant, not of their own right,—altogether vain; for the rest of the apostles were as much interested and concerned in what was then spoken by Peter as they were at this time, when the whole is ascribed unto the twelve.

4. That the church was greatly multiplied [at] that time, on the account of the conversion unto the faith recorded in the foregoing chapter. It is probable, indeed, that many, yea, the most of them, were returned unto their own habitations; for the next year there were churches in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, chap. 9:31. And Peter went about "throughout all quarters," to visit the saints that dwelt in them, verse 32, of whose conversion we read nothing but that which fell out at Jerusalem at Pentecost; but a great multitude they were, chap. 6:1, 2.

5. This whole multitude of the church,—that is, the "brethren," verse 3,—assembled in one place, being congregated by the apostles, verse 2; who would not ordain any thing, wherein they were concerned, without their own consent.



6. They judged on the whole matter proposed unto them, and gave their approbation thereof, before they entered upon the practice of it: Verse 5, "The saying pleased the whole multitude."

7. The qualifications of the persons to be chosen unto the office intended are declared by the apostles: Verse 3, "Of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom."

8. These qualities the multitude were to judge upon; and so, absolutely, of the meetness of any for this office.

9. The choice is wholly committed and left unto them by the apostles, as that which of right did belong unto them, "Look ye out among you;" which they made use of, choosing them unto the office by their common suffrage, verse 5.

10. Having thus chosen them, they presented them as their chosen officers unto the apostles, to be by them set apart unto the exercise of their office by prayer and imposition of hands, verse 6.

It is impossible there should be a more evident, convincing instance and example of the free choice of ecclesiastical officers by the multitude or fraternity of the church than is given us herein. Nor was there any ground or reason why this order and process should be observed, why the apostles would not themselves nominate and appoint persons whom they saw and knew meet for this office to receive it, but that it was the right and liberty of the people, according to the mind of Christ, to choose their own officers, which they would not abridge nor infringe.

So was it then, οὕτω καὶ νῦν γίνεσθαι ἔδει, saith Chrysostom on the place, "and so it ought now to be;" but the usage began then to decline. It were well if some would consider how the apostles at that

time treated that multitude of the people, which is so much now despised, and utterly excluded from all concern in church affairs but what consists in servile subjection; but they have, in this pattern and precedent for the future ordering of the calling of meet persons to office in the church, their interest, power, and privilege secured unto them, so as that they can never justly be deprived of it. And if there were nothing herein but only a record of the wisdom of the apostles in managing church affairs, it is marvellous to me that any who would be thought to succeed them in any part of their trust and office should dare to depart from the example set before them by the Holy Ghost in them, preferring their own ways and inventions above it. I shall ever judge that there is more safety in a strict adherence unto this apostolical practice and example than in a compliance with all the canons of councils or churches afterward.

The only objection usually insisted on,—that is, by Bellarmine and those that follow him,—is, "That this being the election of deacons to manage the alms of the church, that is, somewhat of their temporals, nothing can thence be concluded unto the right or way of calling bishops, pastors, or elders, who are to take care of the souls of the people. They may, indeed, be able to judge of the fitness of them who are to be intrusted with their purses, or what they are willing to give out of them; but it doth not thence follow that they are able to judge of the fitness of those who are to be their spiritual pastors, nor to have the choice of them."

Nothing can be weaker than this pretence or evasion; for,—

(1.) The question is concerning the calling of persons unto office in the church in general, whereof we have here a rule whereunto no exception is any way entered.

(2.) This cannot be fairly pleaded by them who appoint deacons to preach, baptize, and officiate publicly in all holy things, excepting only the administration of the eucharist.

(3.) If the people are meet and able to judge of them who are of "honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom," which is here required of them, they are able to judge who are meet to be their pastors.

(4.) The argument holds strongly on the other side, namely, that if it be right and equal, if it be of divine appointment and apostolical practice, that the people should choose those who were to collect and distribute their charitable benevolence because of their concernment therein, much more are they to enjoy the same liberty, right, and privilege, in the choice of their pastors, unto whom they commit the care of their souls, and submit themselves unto their authority in the Lord.

Thirdly. Accordingly they did use the same liberty in the choice of their elders: Acts 14:23, *Χειροτονήσαντες αὐτοῖς πρεσβυτέρους κατ' ἐκκλησίαν, προσευξάμενοι μετὰ νηστειῶν*,—that is, say Erasmus, Vatablus, Beza, all our old English translations, appointing, ordaining, creating elders by election, or the suffrage of the disciples, having prayed with fasting. The whole order of the sacred separation of persons qualified unto the office of the ministry,—that is, to be bishops, elders, or pastors,—is here clearly represented; for,—

1. They were chosen by the people, the apostles who were present, namely, Paul and Barnabas, presiding in the action, directing of it and confirming that by their consent with them.

2. A time of prayer and fasting was appointed for the action or discharge of the duty of the church herein.

3. When they were so chosen, the apostles present solemnly prayed, whereby their ordination was completed. And those who would have χειροτονία here mentioned to be χειροθεσία, or an authoritative imposition of hands, wherein this ordination did consist, do say there is an ὑστερολογία in the words,—that is, they feign a disorder in them to serve their own hypothesis; for they suppose that their complete ordination was effected before there was any prayer with fasting, for by imposition of hands in their judgment ordination is completed: so Bellarmine and à Lapeyre on the place, with those that follow them. But first to pervert the true signification of the word, and then to give countenance unto that wresting of it by assigning a disorder unto the words of the whole sentence, and that such a disorder as makes, in their judgment, a false representation of the matter of fact related, is a way of the interpretation of Scripture which will serve any turn.

4. This was done in every church, or in every congregation, as Tindal renders the word, namely, in all the particular congregations that were gathered in those parts; for that collection and constitution did always precede the election and ordination of their officers, as is plain in this place, as also Tit. 1:5. So far is it from truth that the being of churches dependeth on the successive ordination of their officers, that the church, essentially considered, is always antecedent unto their being and call.

But because it is some men's interest to entangle things plain and clear enough in themselves, I shall consider the objection unto this reddition of the words. The whole of it lies against the signification, use, and application of χειροτονήσαντες. Now, although we do not here argue merely from the signification of the word, but from the representation of the matter of fact made in the context, yet I shall observe some things sufficient for the removal of that objection; as,—

1. The native signification of χειροτονέω, by virtue of its composition, is to "lift up" or "stretch forth the hands," or a hand. And hereunto the LXX. have respect, Isa. 58:9, where they render  $\eta\lambda\psi\ \nu\beta\chi\kappa$ , "the putting forth of the finger," which is used in an ill sense, by χειροτονία. Χειροτονεῖν is the same with τὰς χεῖρας αἴρειν, nor is it ever used in any other signification.

2. The first constant use of it in things political or civil, and so consequently ecclesiastical, is to choose, elect, design, or create any person an officer, magistrate, or ruler, by suffrage or common consent of those concerned. And this was usually done with making bare the hand and arm with lifting up, as Aristophanes witnesseth:—

—Ὅμως δὲ χειροτονητέον

Ἐξωμισάσαις τὸν ἕτερον βραχίονκ.—Eccles. 266.

He is a great stranger unto these things who knoweth not that among the Greeks, especially the Athenians, from whom the use of this word is borrowed or taken, χειροτονία was an act ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας, "of the whole assembly" of the people in the choice of their officers and magistrates. Χειροτονέω is "by common suffrage to decree and determine of any thing, law, or order;" and when applied unto persons, it signifies their choice and designation to office. So is it used in the first sense by Demosthenes, Orat. De Corona, οδ'. Ὁ δῆμος τὰς ἐμὰς γνώμας περὶ σωτηρίας τῆς πόλεως ἐχειρότονει,—"The people confirmed my sayings by their suffrage;" and in the other, Philip. 1, Οὔτε βουλῆς, οὔτε δήμου χειροτονήσαντος αὐτόν,—"Neither the senate nor the people choosing him to his office." So is the passive verb used, "to be created by suffrages." Χειροτονία was the act of choosing; whose effect was ψήφισμα, the determining vote or suffrage. "Porrexerunt manus: psephisma natum est," saith Cicero, speaking of the manner of the Greeks, Pro Flacco, 7. And

when there was a division in choice, it was determined by the greater suffrage: Thucyd. lib. iii. cap. xlix., Καὶ ἐγένοντο ἐν τῇ χειροτονίᾳ ἀγχώμαλοι ἐκράτησε δὲ ἡ τοῦ Διοδότου. As many instances of this nature may be produced as there are reports of calling men unto magistracy by election in the Greek historians; and all the further compositions of the word do signify to choose, confirm, or to abrogate, by common suffrage.

3. The word is but once more used in the New Testament, 2 Cor. 8:19, where it plainly signifies election and choice of a person to an employment: Χειροτονηθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν συνέκδημος ἡμῶν.—"He was chosen of the churches to travel with us."

4. It is acknowledged that after this was the common use of the word, it was applied to signify the thing itself, and not the manner of doing it. Hence it is used sometimes for the obtaining or collation of authority, or dignity, or magistracy, any manner of way, though not by election: "to appoint," "to create." But this was, by an abusive application of the word, to express the thing itself intended without regard unto its signification and proper use. Why such a use of it should be here admitted no reason can be given; for in all other places on such occasions, the apostles did admit and direct the churches to use their liberty in their choice. So Acts 15:22, "The apostles and elders, with the whole church, sent chosen men of their own company to Antioch," such as they chose by common suffrage for that end; so again, verse 25. "Whomsoever ye shall approve, them will I send," 1 Cor. 16:3: the church chose them, the apostle sent them. "Who was chosen of the churches to travel with us," 2 Cor. 8:19. "Look ye out among you," Acts 6:3. If on all these and the like occasions, the apostles did guide and direct the people in their right and use of their liberty, as unto the election of persons unto offices and employments when the churches themselves were concerned,

what reason is there to depart from the proper and usual signification of the word in this place, denoting nothing but what was the common practice of the apostles on the like occasions?

5. That which alone is objected hereunto, by Bellarmine and others who follow him and borrow their whole [argument] in this case from him, namely, that *Χειροτονήσαντες*, grammatically agreeing with and regulated by Paul and Barnabas, denotes their act, and not any act of the people, is of no force; for,—

(1.) Paul and Barnabas did preside in the whole action, helping, ordering, and disposing of the people in the discharge of their duty, as is meet to be done by some on all the like occasions; and therefore it is truly said of them that "they appointed elders by the suffrage of the people."

(2.) I have showed instances before out of the Scripture, that when a thing is done by the people, it is usual to ascribe it unto him or them who were chief therein, as elsewhere the same thing is ascribed unto the whole people.

The same authors contend that the liberty of choosing their own officers or elders, such as it was, was granted unto them or permitted by way of condescension for a season, and not made use of by virtue of any right in them thereunto. But this permission is a mere imagination. It was according to the mind of Christ that the churches should choose their own elders, or it was not. If it were not, the apostles would not have permitted it; and if it were, they ought to ordain it and practise according to it, as they did. Nor is such a constant apostolical practice, proposed for the direction of the church in all ages, to be ascribed unto such an original as condescension and permission: yea, it is evident that it arose from the most fundamental principles of the constitution and nature of the

gospel churches, and was only a regular pursuit and practice of them; for,—

First, The calling of bishops, pastors, or elders, is an act of the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. But these keys are originally and properly given unto the whole church, unto the elders of it only ministerially, and as unto exercise. Pastors are eyes to the church. But God and nature design, in the first place, light to the whole body, to the whole person; thereunto it is granted both subjectively and finally, but actually it is peculiarly seated in the eye. So is it in the grant of church-power; it is given to the whole church, though to be exercised only by its elders.

That the grant of the keys unto Peter was in the person and as the representative of the whole confessing church is the known judgment of Austin and a multitude of divines that follow him: so he fully expresseth himself, Tractat. 124. in Johan.: "Peter the apostle bare, in a general figure, the person of the church; for as unto what belonged unto himself, he was by nature one man, by grace one Christian, and of special, more abounding grace one and the chief apostle. But when it was said unto him, 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' etc., He signified the whole church," etc. Again: "The church, which is founded in Christ, received from him, in (the person of) Peter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which is the power of binding and loosing."

Unto whom these keys are granted, they, according to their distinct interests in that grant, have the right and power of calling their bishops, pastors, or elders; for in the exercise of that trust and power it doth consist. But this is made unto the whole church; and as there are in a church already constituted several sorts of persons, as some are elders, others are of the people only, this right resideth in them



and is acted by them according to their respective capacities, as limited by the light of nature and divine institution; which is, that the election of them should belong unto the body of the people, and their authoritative designation or ordination unto the elders. And when in any place the supreme magistrate is a member or part of the church, he hath also his peculiar right herein.

That the power of the keys is thus granted originally and fundamentally unto the whole church is undeniably confirmed by two arguments:—

1. The church itself is the wife, the spouse, the bride, the queen of the husband and king of the church, Christ Jesus, Ps. 45:9; John 3:29; Rev. 21:9, 22:17; Matt. 25:1, 5, 6. Other wife Christ hath none; nor hath the church any other husband. Now, to whom should the keys of the house be committed but unto the bride? There is, I confess, another who claims the keys to be his own; but withal he makes himself the head and husband of the church, proclaiming himself not only to be an adulterer with that harlot which he calleth the church, but a tyrant also, in that, pretending to be her husband, he will not trust her with the keys of his house, which Christ hath done with his spouse. And whereas, by the canon law, every bishop is the husband or spouse of his diocesan church, for the most part they commit an open rape upon the people, taking them without their consent; at least they are not chosen by them, which yet is essential unto a lawful marriage. And the bride of Christ comes no otherwise so to be but by the voluntary choice of him to be her husband. For the officers or rulers of the church, they do belong unto it as hers, 1 Cor. 3:21, 22, and as stewards in the house, chap. 4:1; the servants of the church for Jesus sake, 2 Cor. 4:5.

If the Lord Christ have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, that is, of "his own house," Heb. 3:6; if the church itself be the spouse of Christ, the mother of the family, the bride, the Lamb's wife, Rev. 21:9; and if all the officers of the church be but stewards and servants in the house and unto the family; if the Lord Christ do make a grant of these keys unto any, whereon the disposal of all things in this house and family doth depend, the question is, whether he bath originally granted them unto his holy spouse, to dispose of according unto her judgment and duty, or unto any servants in the house, to dispose of her and all her concernments at their pleasure?

2. The power of the keys as unto binding and loosing, and consequently as unto all other acts thence proceeding, is expressly granted unto the whole church: Matt. 18:17, 18, "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. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." What church it is that is here intended we have proved before, and that the church is intrusted with the power of binding and loosing; and what is the part of the body of the people herein the apostle declares, 1 Cor. 5:4, 5; 2 Cor. 2:6.

Secondly, This right, exemplified in apostolical practice, is comprehended in the commands given unto the church or body of the people with respect unto teachers and rulers of all sorts: for unto them it is in a multitude of places given, in charge that they should discern and try false prophets, flee from them, try spirits, or such as pretend spiritual gifts or offices, reject them who preach false doctrine, to give testimony unto them that are to be in office, with sundry other things of the like nature; which all of them do suppose, or cannot be discharged without, a right in them to choose the

worthy and reject the unworthy, as Cyprian speaks. See Matt. 7:15–20; John 5:39; Gal. 2:9; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 10, 11.

What is objected hereunto from the unfitness and disability of the people to make a right judgment concerning them who are to be their pastors and rulers labours with a threefold weakness: for,—1. It reflects dishonour upon the wisdom of Christ, in commanding them the observance and discharge of such duties as they are no way meet for. 2. It proceeds upon a supposition of that degenerate state of churches in their members, as to light, knowledge, wisdom, and holiness, which they are for the most part fallen into; which must not be allowed to have the force of argument in it, when it is to be lamented and ought to be reformed. 3. It supposeth that there is no supply of assistance provided for the people in the discharge of their duty, to guide and direct them therein; which is otherwise, seeing the elders of the church wherein any such election is made, and those of other churches in communion with that church, are, by the common advice and declaration of their judgment, to be assistant unto them.

Thirdly, The church is a voluntary society. Persons otherwise absolutely free, as unto all the rules, laws, and ends of such a society, do of their own wills and free choice coalesce into it. This is the original of all churches, as hath been declared. "They first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God," 2 Cor. 8:5. Herein neither by prescription, nor tradition, nor succession, hath any one more power or authority than another, but they are all equal. It is gathered into this society merely by the authority of Christ; and where it is so collected, it hath neither right, power, privilege, rules, nor bonds, as such, but what are given, prescribed, and limited, by the institution and laws of Christ. Moreover, it abides and continues on the same grounds and principles as whereon it was collected, namely, the wills of the members of it, subjected unto the commands

of Christ. This is as necessary unto its present continuance in all its members as it was in its first plantation. It is not like the political societies of the world, which, being first established by force or consent, bring a necessity on all that are born in them and under them to comply with their rule and laws. For men may, and in many cases ought to submit unto the disposal of temporal things in a way, it may be, not convenient for them, which they judge not well of, and which in many things is not unto their advantage; and this may be just and equal, because the special good which everyone would aim at, being not absolutely so, may be outbalanced by a general good, nor alterable but by the prejudice of that which is good in particular. But with reference unto things spiritual and eternal it is not so. No man can by any previous law be concluded as unto his interest in such things; nor is there any general good to be attained by the loss of any of them. None, therefore, can coalesce in such a society, or adhere unto it, or be any way belonging unto it, but by his own free choice and consent. And it is inquired, how it is possible that any rule, authority, power, or office, should arise or be erected in such a society? We speak of that which is ordinary; for He by whom this church-state is erected and appointed may and did appoint in it and over it extraordinary officers for a season. And we do suppose that as he hath, by his divine authority, instituted and appointed that such societies shall be, he hath made grant of privileges and powers to them proper and sufficient for this end; as also, that he hath given laws and rules, by the observance whereof they may be made partakers of those privileges and powers, with aright unto their exercise.

On these suppositions, in a society absolutely voluntary, among those who in their conjunction into it by their own consent are every way equal, there can but three things be required unto the actual constitution of rule and office among them:—

And the first is, That there be some among them that are fitted and qualified for the discharge of such an office in a peculiar manner above others. This is previous unto all government, beyond that which is purely natural and necessary: "Principio rerum, gentium nationumque imperium penes reges erat; quos ad fastigium hujus majestatis, non ambitio popularis, sed spectata inter bonos moderatio provehebat," Just., lib. i. cap. i. So it was in the world, so it was in the church: "Præsident probati quique seniores, honorem istum non pretio, sed testimonio adepti," Tertul. This preparation and furniture of some persons with abilities and meet qualifications for office and work in the church the Lord Christ hath taken on himself, and doth and will effect it in all generations. Without this there can be neither office, nor rule, nor order in the church.

Secondly, Whereas there is a new relation to be made or created between a pastor, bishop, or elder, and the church, which was not before between them (a bishop and a church, a pastor and a flock, are relata), it must be introduced at the same time by the mutual voluntary acts of one another, or of each party; for one of the relata can, as such, have no being or existence without the other. Now, this can no otherwise be but by the consent and voluntary subjection of the church unto persons so antecedently qualified for office, according to the law and will of Christ; for it cannot be done by the delegation of power and authority from any other superior or equal unto them that do receive it. Neither the nature of this power, which is incapable of such a delegation, nor the relation unto Christ of all those who are pastors of the church, will admit of an interposition of authority by way of delegation of power from themselves in other men; which would make them their ministers and not Christ's. Nor is it consistent with the nature of such a voluntary society. This, therefore, can no way be done but by free choice, election, consent, or approbation. It cannot, I say, be so regularly. How far an

irregularity herein may vitiate the whole call of a minister we do not now inquire.

Now, this choice or election doth not communicate a power from them that choose unto them that are chosen, as though such a power as that whereunto they are called should be formally inherent in the choosers antecedent unto such choice; for this would make those that are chosen to be their ministers only, and to act all things in their name and by virtue of authority derived from them. It is only an instrumental, ministerial means to instate them in that power and authority which is given unto such officers by the constitution and laws of Christ, whose ministers thereon they are. These gifts, offices, and officers, being granted by Christ unto the churches, Eph. 4:11, 12, wherever there is a church called according to his mind, they do, in and by their choice of them, "submit themselves unto them in the Lord," according unto all the powers and duties wherewith they are by him intrusted and whereunto they are called.

Thirdly, It is required that persons so chosen, so submitted unto, be [al]so solemnly separated, dedicated unto, and confirmed in their office by fasting and prayer. As this is consonant unto the light of nature, which directs unto a solemnity in the susception of public officers,—whence proceeds the coronation of kings, which gives them not their title, but solemnly proclaims it, which on many accounts is unto the advantage of government,—so it is prescribed unto the church in this case by especial institution. But hereof I shall speak further immediately.

This order of calling men unto the pastoral office, namely, by their previous qualifications for the ministry, whereby a general designation of the persons to be called is made by Christ himself, the orderly choice or election of them in a voluntary subjection unto

them in the Lord, according to the mind of Christ, by the church itself, followed with solemn ordination, or setting apart unto the office and discharge of it by prayer with fasting, all in obedience unto the commands and institution of Christ, whereunto the communication of office-power and privilege is by law-constitution annexed, is suited unto the light of reason in all such cases, the nature of gospel societies in order or churches, the ends of the ministry, the power committed by Christ unto the church, and confirmed by apostolical practice and example.

Herein we rest, without any further dispute, or limiting the formal cause of the communication of office-power unto any one act or duty of the church, or of the bishops or elders of it. All the three things mentioned are essential thereunto; and when any of them are utterly neglected,—where they are neither formally nor virtually,—there is no lawful, regular call unto the ministry according to the mind of Christ.

This order was a long time observed in the ancient church inviolate, and the footsteps of it may be traced through all ages of the church, although it first gradually decayed, then was perverted and corrupted, until it issued (as in the Roman church) in a pageant and show, instead of the reality of the things themselves: for the trial and approbation of spiritual endowments, previously necessary unto the call of any, was left unto the pedantic examination of the bishop's domestics, who knew nothing of them in themselves; the election and approbation of the people was turned into a mock show in the sight of God and men, a deacon calling out that if any had objections against him who was to be ordained, they should come forth and speak, whereunto another cries out of a corner, by compact, "He is learned and worthy;" and ordination was esteemed to consist only in the outward sign of imposition of hands, with some other ceremonies

annexed thereunto, whereby, without any other consideration, there ensued a flux of power from the ordainers unto the ordained!

But from the beginning it was not so. And some few instances of the right of the people, and the exercise of it in the choice of their own pastors, may be touched on in our passage:—

CLEMENS, Epist. ad Corinth., affirms that the apostles themselves appointed approved persons unto the office of the ministry, *συνευδοκησάσης τῆς ἐκκλησίας πάσης*, "by (or with) the consent (or choice) of the whole church." *Συνευδοκεῖν* is "to enact by common consent:" which makes it somewhat strange that a learned man should think that the right of the people in election is excluded in this very place by Clemens, from what is assigned unto the apostles in ordination.

IGNATIUS, Epist. ad Philadelph., cap. x., *Πρέπον ἐστὶν ὑμῖν, ὡς ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεοῦ, χειροτονήσαι ἐπίσκοπον*, writing to the fraternity of the church,—"It becomes you, as a church of God, to choose or (ordain) a bishop."

TERTULLIAN, Apol., "*Præsident probati quique seniores, honorem istum non pretio, sed testimonio adepti*,"—"The elders came unto their honour (or office) by the testimony of the people;" that is, by their suffrage in their election.

ORIGEN, in the close of his last book against Celsus, discoursing expressly of the calling and constitution of churches or cities of God, speaking of the elders and rulers of them, affirms that they are *ἐκλεγόμενοι*, "chosen to their office," by the churches which they do rule.



The testimony given by CYPRIAN in sundry places unto this right of the people, especially in Epist. lxvii., unto the elders and people of some churches in Spain, is so known, so frequently urged, and excepted against to so little purpose, as that it is no way needful to insist again upon it. Some few things I shall only observe concerning and out of that epistle; as,—

1. It was not a simple epistle of his own more ordinary occasions, but a determination upon a weighty question, made by a synod of bishops or elders, in whose name, as well as that of Cyprian, it was written and sent unto the churches who had craved their advice.

2. He doth not only assert the right of the people to choose worthy persons to be their bishops, and reject those that are unworthy, but also industriously proves it so to be their right by divine institution and appointment.

3. He declares it to be the sin of the people, if they neglect the use and exercise of their right and power in rejecting and withdrawing themselves from the communion of unworthy pastors, and choosing others in their room.

4. He affirms that this was the practice not only of the churches of Africa, but of those in most of the other provinces of the empire. Some passages in his discourse, wherein all these things are asserted, I shall transcribe, in the order wherein they lie in the epistle:—

"Nec sibi plebs blandiatur, quasi immunis esse a contagio delicti possit cum sacerdote peccatore communicans, et ad injustum et illicitum præpositi sui episcopatum consensum suum commodans..... Propter quod plebs obsequens præceptis Dominicis et Deum metuens, a peccatore præposito separare se debet, nee se ad sacrilegi sacerdotis sacrificia miscere; quando ipsa maxime habeat potestatem

vel eligendi dignos sacerdotes vel indignos recusandi, quod et ipsum videmus de divina autoritate descendere;"—"For this cause the people, obedient to the commands of our Lord and fearing God, ought to separate themselves from a wicked bishop, nor mix themselves with the worship of a sacrilegious priest; for they principally have the power of choosing the worthy priests and rejecting the unworthy, which comes from divine authority (or appointment)," as he proves from the Old and New Testament. Nothing can be spoken more fully representing the truth which we plead for. He assigns unto the people a right and power of separating from unworthy pastors, of rejecting or deposing them, and that granted to them by divine authority.

And this power of election in the people he proves from the apostolical practice before insisted on: "Quod postea secundum divina magisteria observatur in Actis Apostolorum, quando in ordinando in locum Judæ apostolo, Petrus ad plebem loquitur. 'Surrexit,' inquit, 'Petrus in medio discentium, fuit autem turba hominum forte centum viginti.' Nee hoc in episcoporum tantum et sacerdotum, sed in diaconorum ordinationibus observasse apostolos animadvertimus de quo et ipso in actis eorum scriptum est. 'Et convocarunt,' inquit, 'illi duodecim totam plebem discipulorum, et dixerunt eis,'" etc.;—"According unto the divine commands, the same course was observed in the Acts of the Apostles;" whereof he gives instances in the election of Matthias, Acts 1, and of the deacons, chap. 6.

And afterward, speaking of ordination "de universæ fraternitatis suffragio," "by the suffrage of the whole brotherhood of the church," he says, "Diligenter de traditione divina, et apostolica observatione servandum est et tenendum apud nos quoque et fere per universas provincias tenetur;"—"According to which divine tradition and

apostolical practice, this custom is to be preserved and kept amongst us also, as it is almost through all the provinces."

Those who are not moved with his authority, yet I think have reason to believe him in a matter of fact of what was done everywhere, or almost everywhere, in his own days; and they may take time to answer his reasons when they can, which comprise the substance of all that we plead in this case.

But the testimonies in following ages given unto this right and power of the people in choosing their own church-officers, bishops and others, recorded in the decrees of councils, the writings of the learned men in them, the rescripts of popes, and constitutions of emperors, are so fully and faithfully collected by Blondellus, in the third part of his apology for the judgment of Jerome about episcopacy, as that nothing can be added unto his diligence, nor is there any need of further confirmation of the truth in this behalf.

The pretence also of Bellarmine, and others who follow him and borrow their conceits from him, that this liberty of the people in choosing their own bishops and pastors was granted unto them at first by way of indulgence or connivance, and that, being abused by them and turned into disorder, it was gradually taken from them, until it issued in that shameful mocking of God and man which is in use in the Roman church, when, at the ordination of a bishop or priest, one deacon makes a demand, "Whether the person to be ordained be approved by the people," and another answers out of a corner, "That the people approve him," has been so confuted by protestant writers of all sorts, that it is needless to insist any longer on them.

Indeed, the concessions that are made, that this ancient practice of the church in the people's choosing their own officers (which to deny

is all one as to deny that the sun gives light at noon-day), is, as unto its right, by various degrees transferred unto popes, patrons, and bishops, with a representation in a mere pageantry of the people's liberty to make objections against them that are to be ordained, are as fair a concession of the gradual apostasy of churches from their original order and constitution as need be desired.

This power and right which we assign unto the people is not to act itself only in a subsequent consent unto one that is ordained, in the acceptance of him to be their bishop or pastor. How far that may salve the defect and disorder of the omission of previous election, and so preserve the essence of the ministerial call, I do not now inquire. But that which we plead for is the power and right of election, to be exercised previously unto the solemn ordination or setting apart of any unto the pastoral office, communicative of office-power in its own kind unto the person chosen.

This is part of that contest which for sundry ages filled most countries of Europe with broils and disorders; neither is there yet an end put unto it. But in this present discourse we are not in the least concerned in these things; for our inquiry is, what state and order of church-affairs is declared and represented to us in the Scripture; and therein there is not the least intimation of any of those things from whence this controversy did arise and whereon it doth depend. Secular endowments, jurisdictions, investiture, rights of presentation, and the like, with respect unto the evangelical pastoral office and its exercise in any place, which are the subjects of these contests, are foreign unto all things that are directed in the Scriptures concerning them, nor can be reduced unto any thing that belongs unto them. Wherefore, whether this "jus patronatus" be consistent with gospel institutions; whether it may be continued with respect unto lands, tithes, and benefices; or how it may be reconciled

unto the right of the people in the choice of their own ecclesiastical officers, from the different acts, objects, and ends required unto the one and the other,—are things not of our present consideration.

And this we affirm to be agreeable unto natural reason and equity, to the nature of churches in their institution and ends, to all authority and office-power in the church necessary unto its edification, with the security of the consciences of the officers themselves and the preservation of due respect and obedience unto them, and constituted by the institution of Christ himself in his apostles and the practice of the primitive church. Wherefore, the utter despoiling of the church, of the disciples, of those gathered in church-societies by his authority and command, of this right and liberty, may be esteemed a sacrilege of a higher nature than sundry other things which are reproached as criminal under that name.

And if any shall yet further appear to justify this deprivation of the right laid claim unto, and the exclusion of the people from their ancient possession, with sobriety of argument and reason, the whole cause may be yet further debated, from principles of natural light and equity, from maxims of law and policy, from the necessity of the ends of church-order and power, from the moral impossibility of any other way of the conveyance of ecclesiastical office-power, as well as from evangelical institution and the practice of the first churches.

It will be objected, I know, that the restoration of this liberty unto the people will overthrow that *jus patronatus*, or right of presenting unto livings and preferments which is established by law in this nation, and so, under a pretence of restoring unto the people their right in common, destroy other men's undoubted rights in their own enclosures.

IV. But this election of the church doth not actually and immediately instate the person chosen in the office whereunto he is chosen, nor give actual right unto its exercise. It is required, moreover, that he be solemnly set apart unto his office in and by the church with fasting and prayer. That there should be some kind of peculiar prayer in the dedication of any unto the office of the ministry is a notion that could never be obliterated in the minds of men concerned in these things, nor cast out of their practice. Of what sort they have been amongst many we do not now inquire. But there hath been less regard unto the other duty, namely, that these prayers should be accompanied with fasting; but this also is necessary by virtue of apostolical example, Acts 14:23.

The conduct of this work belongs unto the elders or officers of the church wherein any one is to be so ordained. It did belong unto extraordinary officers whilst they were continued in the church, and upon the cessation of their office it is devolved on the ordinary stated officers of the church. It is so, I say, in case there be any such officer before fixed in the church whereunto any one is to be only ordained; and in case there be none, the assistance of pastors or elders of other churches may and ought to be desired unto the conduct and regulation of the duty.

It is needless to inquire what is the authoritative influence of this ordination into the communication of office or office-power, whilst it is acknowledged to be indispensably necessary, and to belong essentially unto the call unto office; for when sundry duties, as these of election and ordination, are required unto the same end, by virtue of divine institution, it is not for me to determine what is the peculiar efficacy of the one or the other, seeing neither of them without the other hath any at all.

Hereunto is added, as an external adjunct, imposition of hands, significant of the persons so called to office in and unto the church; for although it will be difficultly proved that the use of this ceremony was designed unto continuance, after a cessation of the communication of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, whereof it was the sign and outward means in extraordinary officers, yet we do freely grant it unto the ordinary officers of the church, provided that there be no apprehension of its being the sole authoritative conveyance of a successive flux of office-power, which is destructive of the whole nature of the institution.

And this may at present suffice, as unto the call of meet persons unto the pastoral office; and, consequently, any other office in the church. The things following are essentially necessary unto it, so as that authority and right to feed and rule in the church in the name of Christ, as an officer of his house, may be given unto any one there by, by virtue of his law and the charter granted by him unto the church itself. The first is, That antecedently unto any actings of the church towards such a person with respect unto office, he be furnished by the Lord Christ himself with graces, and gifts, and abilities, for the discharge of the office whereunto he is to be called. This divine designation of the person to be called rests on the kingly office and care of Christ towards his church. Where this is wholly wanting, it is not in the power of any church under heaven, by virtue of any outward order or act, to communicate pastoral or ministerial power unto any person whatever. Secondly, There is to be an exploration or trial of those gifts and abilities as unto their accommodation unto the edification of that church whereunto any person is to be ordained a pastor or minister. But although the right of judging herein doth belong unto and reside in the church itself (for who else is able to judge for them, or is intrusted so to do?), yet is it their wisdom and duty to desire the assistance and guidance of those who are approved

in the discharge of their office in other churches. Thirdly, The first act of power committed unto the church by Jesus Christ, for the constitution of ordinary officers in it, is that election of a person qualified and tried unto his office which we have now vindicated. Fourthly, There is required hereunto the solemn ordination, inauguration, dedication, or setting apart, of the person so chosen, by the presbytery of the church, with fasting and prayer and the outward sign of the imposition of hands.

This is that order which the rule of the Scripture, the example of the first churches, and the nature of the things themselves, direct unto; and although I will not say that a defect in any of these, especially if it be from unavoidable hinderances, doth disannul the call of a person to the pastoral office, yet I must say that where they are not all duly attended unto, the institution of Christ is neglected, and the order of the church infringed. Wherefore,—

The plea of the communication of all authority for office, and of office itself, solely by a flux of power from the first ordainers, through the hands of their pretended successors in all ages, under all the innumerable miscarriages whereunto they are subject, and have actually fallen into, without any respect unto the consent or call of the churches, by rules, laws, and orders foreign to the Scripture, is contrary to the whole nature of evangelical churches and all the ends of their institution, as shall be manifested, if it be needful.

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## **CHAPTER V**



## The especial duty of pastors of churches

WE have declared the way whereby pastors are given unto and instated in the church; that which should ensue is an account of their work and duty in the discharge of their office: but this hath been the subject of many large discourses, both among the ancient writers of the church and of late; I shall therefore only touch on some things that are of most necessary consideration:—

1. The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word. It is a promise relating to the new testament, that God would give unto his church "pastors according to his own heart, which should feed them with knowledge and understanding," Jer. 3:15. This is by teaching or preaching the word, and no otherwise. This feeding is of the essence of the office of a pastor, as unto the exercise of it; so that he who doth not, or can not, or will not feed the flock is no pastor, whatever outward call or work he any have in the church. The care of preaching the gospel was committed to Peter, and in him unto all true pastors of the church, under the name of "feeding," John 21:15–17. According to the example of the apostles, they are to free themselves from all encumbrances, that they may give themselves wholly unto the word and prayer, Acts 6:1–4. Their work is "to labour in the word and doctrine," 1 Tim. 5:17; and thereby to "feed the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers," Acts 20:28: and it is that which is everywhere given them in charge.

This work and duty, therefore, as was said, is essential unto the office of a pastor. A man is a pastor unto them whom he feeds by pastoral teaching, and to no more; and he that doth not so feed is no pastor. Nor is it required only that he preach now and then at his leisure, but

that he lay aside all other employments, though lawful, all other duties in the church, as unto such a constant attendance on them as would divert him from this work, that he give himself unto it,—that he be in these things labouring to the utmost of his ability. Without this no man will be able to give a comfortable account of the pastoral office at the last day.

There is, indeed, no more required of any man than God giveth him ability for. Weakness, sickness, bodily infirmities, may disenable men from the actual discharge of this duty in that assiduity and frequency which are required in ordinary cases; and some may, through age or other incapacitating distempers, be utterly disabled for it,—in which case it is their duty to lay down and take a dismissal from their office, or, if their disability be but partial, provide a suitable supply, that the edification of the church be not prejudiced;—but for men to pretend themselves pastors of the church, and to be unable for, or negligent of, this work and duty, is to live in open defiance of the commands of Christ.

We have lived to see and hear of reproachful scorn and contempt cast upon laborious preaching,—that is, "labouring in the word and doctrine,"—and all manner of discouragements given unto it, with endeavours for its suppression in sundry instances; yea, some have proceeded so far as to declare that the work of preaching is unnecessary in the church, so to reduce all religion to the reading and rule of the liturgy. The next attempt, so far as I know, may be to exclude Christ himself out of their religion; which the denial of a necessity of preaching the gospel makes an entrance into, yea, a good progress towards.

Sundry things are required unto this work and duty of pastoral preaching; as,—

(1.) Spiritual wisdom and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel, that they may declare unto the church "all the counsel of God" and "the unsearchable riches of Christ:" see Acts 20:27; 1 Cor. 2:4-7; Eph. 3:8-11. The generality of the church, especially those who are grown in knowledge and experience, have a spiritual insight into these things, and the apostle prays that all believers may have so, Eph. 1:15-19; and if those that instruct them, or should do so, have not some degree of eminency herein, they cannot be useful to lead them on to perfection. And the little care hereof or concernment herein is that which in our days hath rendered the ministry of many fruitless and useless.

(2.) Experience of the power of the truth which they preach in and upon their own souls. Without this they will themselves be lifeless and heartless in their own work, and their labour for the most part will be unprofitable towards others. It is, to such men, attended unto as a task for their advantage, or as that which carries some satisfaction in it from ostentation and supposed reputation wherewith it is accompanied. But a man preacheth that sermon only well unto others which preacheth itself in his own soul. And he that doth not feed on and thrive in the digestion of the food which he provides for others will scarce make it savoury unto them; yea, he knows not but the food he hath provided may be poison, unless he have really tasted of it himself. If the word do not dwell with power in us, it will not pass with power from us. And no man lives in a more woful condition than those who really believe not themselves what they persuade others to believe continually. The want of this experience of the power of gospel truth on their own souls is that which gives us so many lifeless, sapless orations, quaint in words and dead as to power, instead of preaching the gospel in the demonstration of the Spirit. And let any say what they please, it is

evident that some men's preaching, as well as others not-preaching, hath lost the credit of their ministry.

(3.) Skill to divide the word aright, 2 Tim. 2:15; and this consists in a practical wisdom, upon a diligent attendance unto the word of truth, to find out what is real, substantial, and meet food for the souls of the hearers,—to give unto all sorts of persons in the church that which is their proper portion. And this requires,

(4.) A prudent and diligent consideration of the state of the flock over which any man is set, as unto their strength or weakness, their growth or defect in knowledge (the measure of their attainments requiring either milk or strong meat), their temptations and duties, their spiritual decays or thrivings; and that not only in general, but, as near as may be, with respect unto all the individual members of the church. Without a due regard unto these things, men preach at random, uncertainly fighting, like those that beat the air. Preaching sermons not designed for the advantage of them to whom they are preached; insisting on general doctrines not levelled to the condition of the auditory; speaking what men can, without consideration of what they ought,—are things that will make men weary of preaching, when their minds are not influenced with outward advantages, as much as make others weary in hearing of them. And,

(5.) All these, in the whole discharge of their duty, are to be constantly accompanied with the evidence of zeal for the glory of God and compassion for the souls of men. Where these are not in vigorous exercise in the minds and souls of them that preach the word, giving a demonstration of themselves unto the consciences of them that hear, the quickening form, the life and soul of preaching, is lost.

All these things seem common, obvious, and universally acknowledged; but the ruin of the ministry of the most for the want of them, or from notable defects in them, is or may be no less evidently known. And the very naming of them (which is all at present which I design) is sufficient to evidence how great a necessity there is incumbent on all pastors of churches to give themselves unto the word and prayer, to labour in the word and doctrine, to be continually intent on this work, to engage all the faculties of their souls, to stir up all their graces and gifts, unto constant exercise in the discharge of their duty; for "who is sufficient for these things?" And as the consideration of them is sufficient to stir up all ministers unto fervent prayer for supplies of divine aid and assistance for that work which in their own strength they can no way answer, so is it enough to warn them of the avoidance of all things that would give them a diversion or avocation from the constant attendance unto the discharge of it.

When men undertake the pastoral office, and either judge it not their duty to preach, or are not able so to do, or attempt it only at some solemn seasons, or attend unto it as a task required of them, without that wisdom, skill, diligence, care, prudence, zeal, and compassion, which are required thereunto, the glory and use of the ministry will be utterly destroyed.

2. The second duty of a pastor towards his flock is continual fervent prayer for them, James 5:16; John 17:20; Exod. 32:11; Deut. 9:18; Lev. 16:24; 1 Sam. 12:23; 2 Cor. 13:7, 9; Eph. 1:15–19, 3:14; Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11. "We will give ourselves continually to prayer," Acts 6:4. Without this, no man can or doth preach to them as he ought, nor perform any other duty of his pastoral office. From hence may any man take the best measure of the discharge of his duty towards his flock. He that doth constantly, diligently, fervently, pray

for them, will have a testimony in himself of his own sincerity in the discharge of all other pastoral duties, nor can he voluntarily omit or neglect any of them. And as for those who are negligent herein, be their pains, labour, and travail in other duties never so great, they may be influenced from other reasons, and so give no evidence of sincerity in the discharge of their office. In this constant prayer for the church, which is so incumbent on all pastors as that whatever is done without it is of no esteem in the sight of Jesus Christ, respect is to be had,—

(1.) Unto the success of the word, unto all the blessed ends of it, among them. These are no less than the improvement and strengthening of all their graces, the direction of all their duties, their edification in faith and love, with the entire conduct of their souls in the life of God, unto the enjoyment of him. To preach the word, therefore, and not to follow it with constant and fervent prayer for its success, is to disbelieve its use, neglect its end, and to cast away the seed of the gospel at random.

(2.) Unto the temptations that the church is generally exposed unto. These greatly vary, according unto the outward circumstances of things. The temptations in general that accompany a state of outward peace and tranquillity are of another nature than those that attend a time of trouble, persecution, distress, and poverty; and so it is as unto other occasions and circumstances. These the pastors of churches ought diligently to consider, looking on them as the means and ways whereby churches have been ruined, and the souls of many lost for ever. With respect unto them, therefore, ought their prayers for the church to be fervent.

(3.) Unto the especial state and condition of all the members, so far as it is known unto them. There may be of them who are spiritually

sick and diseased, tempted, afflicted, bemisted, wandering out of the way, surprised in sins and miscarriages, disconsolate and troubled in spirit in a peculiar manner. The remembrance of them all ought to abide with them, and to be continually called over in their daily pastoral supplications.

(4.) Unto the presence of Christ in the assemblies of the church, with all the blessed evidences and testimonies of it. This is that alone which gives life and power unto all church assemblies, without which all outward order and forms of divine worship in them are but a dead carcase. Now, this presence of Christ in the assemblies of his church is by his Spirit, accompanying all ordinances of worship with a gracious, divine efficacy, evidencing itself by blessed operations on the minds and hearts of the congregation. This are pastors of churches continually to pray for; and they will do so who understand that all the success of their labours, and all the acceptance of the church with God in their duties, do depend hereon.

(5.) To their preservation in faith, love, and fruitfulness, with all the duties that belong unto them, etc.

It were much to be desired that all those who take upon them this pastoral office did well consider and understand how great and necessary a part of their work and duty doth consist in their continual fervent prayer for their flocks; for besides that it is the only instituted way whereby they may, by virtue of their office, bless their congregations, so will they find their hearts and minds, in and by the discharge of it, more and more filled with love, and engaged with diligence unto all other duties of their office, and excited unto the exercise of all grace towards the whole church on all occasions. And where any are negligent herein, there is no duty which they perform

towards the church but it is influenced with false considerations, and will not hold weight in the balance of the sanctuary.

3. The administration of the seals of the covenant is committed unto them, as the stewards of the house of Christ; for unto them the authoritative dispensation of the word is committed, whereunto the administration of the seals is annexed; for their principal end is the peculiar confirmation and application of the word preached. And herein there are three things that they are to attend unto:—

(1.) The times and seasons of their administration unto the church's edification, especially that of the Lord's supper, whose frequency is enjoined. It is the duty of pastors to consider all the necessary circumstances of their administration, as unto time, place, frequency, order, and decency.

(2.) To keep severely unto the institution of Christ, as unto the way and manner of their administration. The gradual introduction of uninstituted rites and ceremonies into the church celebration of the ordinance of the Lord's supper ended at length in the idolatry of the mass. Herein, then, alone, and not in bowing, cringing, and vestments, lies the glory and beauty of these administrations, namely, that they are compliant with and expressive of the institution of Christ, nor is any thing done in them but in express obedience unto his authority. "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," saith the apostle in this case, 1 Cor. 11:23.

(3.) To take care that these holy things be administered only unto those who are meet and worthy, according unto the rule of the gospel. Those who impose on pastors the promiscuous administration of these divine ordinances, or the application of the seals unto all without difference, do deprive them of one-half of their ministerial office and duty.



But here it is inquired by some, "Whether, in case a church have no pastor at present, or a teaching elder with pastoral power, it may not delegate and appoint the administration of these especial ordinances unto some member of the church at this or that season, who is meetly qualified for the outward administration of them?" which, for the sake of some, I shall examine.

No church is complete in order without teaching officers, Eph. 4:11, 12; 1 Cor. 12:27, 28.

A church not complete in order cannot be complete in administrations, because the power of administrations depends upon the power of order proportionably; that is, the power of the church depends upon the being of the church. Hence the first duty of a church without officers is to obtain them, according to rule. And to endeavour to complete administrations without an antecedent completing of order is contrary unto the mind of Christ, Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5, "That thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every church." The practice therefore proposed is irregular, and contrary to the mind of Christ.

The order of the church is twofold,—as essential, and as organical. The order of the church as essential, with its power thence arising, is,—first, For its preservation; secondly, For its perfection.

(1.) For its preservation in admission and exclusion of members;

(2.) For its perfection in the election of officers.

No part of this power, which belongs to the church as essentially considered, can be delegated, but must be acted by the whole church. They cannot delegate power to some to admit members, so as it should not be an act of the whole church. They cannot delegate

power to any to elect officers, nor any thing else which belongs to them as a church essentially. The reason is, things that belong unto the essence of any thing belong unto it formally as such, and so cannot be transferred.

The church, therefore, cannot delegate the power and authority inquired after, should it be supposed to belong to the power of order as the church is essentially considered; which yet it doth not.

If the church may delegate or substitute others for the discharge of all ordinances whatsoever without elders or pastors, then it may perfect the saints and complete the work of the ministry without them, which is contrary to Eph. 4:11, 12; and, secondly, it would render the ministry only convenient, and not absolutely necessary to the church, which is contrary to the institution of it.

A particular church, in order as organical, is the adequate subject of all ordinances, and not as essential; because as essential it never doth nor can enjoy all ordinances, namely, the ministry in particular, whereby it is constituted organical. Yet, on this supposition, the church, as essentially considered, is the sole adequate subject of all ordinances.

Though the church be the only subject, it is not the only object of gospel ordinances, but that is various. For instance,—

(1.) The preaching of the word: its first object is the world, for conversion; its next, professors, for edification.

(2.) Baptism: its only object is neither the world nor the members of a particular church, but professors, with those that are reckoned to them by God's appointment,—that is, their infant seed.

(3.) The supper: its object is a particular church only, which is acknowledged, and may be proved by the institution, one special end of it, and the necessity of discipline thereon depending.

Ordinances, whereof the church is the only subject and the only object, cannot be administered authoritatively but by officers only,—

(1.) Because none but Christ's stewards have authority in and towards his house as such, 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 24:45;

(2.) Because it is an act of office-authority to represent Christ to the whole church, and to feed the whole flock thereby, Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2.

There are no footsteps of any such practice among the churches of God who walked in order, neither in the Scripture nor in all antiquity.

But it is objected, by those who allow this practice, "That if the church may appoint or send a person forth to preach, or appoint a brother to preach unto themselves, then they may appoint him to administer the ordinance of the supper."

Ans. Here is a mistake in the supposition. The church,—that is, the body of it,—cannot send out any brother authoritatively to preach. Two things are required thereunto, collation of gifts and communication of office; neither of which the church, under that consideration, can do to one that is sent forth. But where God gives gifts by his Spirit and a call by his providence, the church only complies therewith, not in communicating authority to the person, but in praying for a blessing upon his work.

The same is the case in desiring a brother to teach among them. The duty is moral in its own nature; the gifts and call are from God alone; the occasion of his exercise is only administered by the church.

It is further added, by the same persons, "That if a brother, or one who is a disciple only, may baptize, then he may also administer the Lord's supper, being desired of the church."

Ans. The supposition is not granted nor proved; but there is yet a difference between these ordinances,—the object of the one being professors, as such, at large; the object of the other being professors, as members of a particular church. But to return,—

4. It is incumbent on them to preserve the truth or doctrine of the gospel received and professed in the church, and to defend it against all opposition. This is one principal end of the ministry, one principal means of the preservation of the faith once delivered unto the saints. This is committed in an especial manner unto the pastors of the churches, as the apostle frequently and emphatically repeats the charge of it unto Timothy, and in him unto all to whom the dispensation of the word is committed, 1 Epist. i. 3, 4, iv. 6, 7, 16, vi. 20; 2 Epist. i.14, ii. 25, iii. 14–17. The same he giveth in charge unto the elders of the church of Ephesus, Acts 20:28–31. What he says of himself, that the "glorious gospel of the blessed God was committed unto his trust," 1 Tim. 1:11, is true of all pastors of churches, according to their measure and call; and they should all aim at the account which he gives of his ministry herein: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," 2 Tim. 4:7. The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth;" and it is so principally in its ministry. And the sinful neglect of this duty is that which was the cause of most of the pernicious heresies and errors that have infested and ruined the church. Those whose duty it was to

preserve the doctrine of the gospel entire in the public profession of it have, many of them, "spoken perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Bishops, presbyters, public teachers, have been the ringleaders in heresies. Wherefore this duty, especially at this time, when the fundamental truths of the gospel are on all sides impugned, from all sorts of adversaries, is in an especial manner to be attended unto.

Sundry things are required hereunto; as,—

(1.) A clear, sound, comprehensive knowledge of the entire doctrine of the gospel, attained by all means useful and commonly prescribed unto that end, especially by diligent study of the Scripture, with fervent prayer for illumination and understanding. Men cannot preserve that for others which they are ignorant of themselves. Truth may be lost by weakness as well as by wickedness. And the defect herein, in many, is deplorable.

(2.) Love of the truth which they have so learned and comprehended. Unless we look on truth as a pearl, as that which is valued at any rate, bought with any price, as that which is better than all the world, we shall not endeavour its preservation with that diligence which is required. Some are ready to part with truth at an easy rate, or to grow indifferent about it; whereof we have multitudes of examples in the days wherein we live. It were easy to give instances of sundry important evangelical truths, which our fore fathers in the faith contended for with all earnestness, and were ready to seal with their blood, which are now utterly disregarded and opposed, by some who pretend to succeed them in their profession. If ministers have not a sense of that power of truth in their own souls, and a taste of its goodness, the discharge of this duty is not to be expected from them.

(3.) A conscientious care and fear of giving countenance or encouragement unto novel opinions, especially such as oppose any truth of whose power and efficacy experience hath been had among them that believe. Vain curiosity, boldness in conjectures, and readiness to vent their own conceits, have caused no small trouble and damage unto the church.

(4.) Learning and ability of mind to discern and disprove the oppositions of the adversaries of the truth, and thereby to stop their mouths and convince gainsayers.

(5.) The solid confirmation of the most important truths of the gospel, and whereinto all others are resolved, in their teaching and ministry. Men may and do oftentimes prejudice, yea, betray the truth, by the weakness of their pleas for it.

(6.) A diligent watch over their own flocks against the craft of seducers from without, or the springing up of any bitter root of error among themselves.

(7.) A concurrent assistance with the elders and messengers of other churches with whom they are in communion, in the declaration of the faith which they all profess; whereof we must treat afterward more at large.

It is evident what learning, labour, study, pains, ability, and exercise of the rational faculties, are ordinarily required unto the right discharge of these duties; and where men may be useful to the church in other things, but are defective in these, it becomes them to walk and act both circumspectly and humbly, frequently desiring and adhering unto the advices of them whom God hath intrusted with more talents and greater abilities.

5. It belongs unto their charge, and office diligently to labour for the conversion of souls unto God. The ordinary means of conversion is left unto the church, and its duty it is to attend unto it; yea, one of the principal ends of the institution and preservation of churches is the conversion of souls, and when there are no more to be converted, there shall be no more church on the earth. To enlarge the kingdom of Christ, to diffuse the light and savour of the gospel, to be subservient unto the calling of the elect, or gathering all the sheep of Christ into his fold, are things that God designs by his churches in this world. Now, the principal instrumental cause of all these is the preaching of the word; and this is committed unto the pastors of the churches. It is true, men may be, and often are, converted unto God by their occasional dispensation of the word who are not called unto office; for it is the gospel itself that is the "power of God unto salvation," by whomsoever it is administered, and it hath been effectual unto that end even in the necessary occasional teaching of women: but it is so, frequently, in the exercise of spiritual gifts by them who are not stated officers of the church, 1 Cor. 14:24, 25; Phil. 1:14, 15, 18; 1 Pet. 4:10, 11. But yet this hinders not but that the administration of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, as unto all the ends of it, is committed unto the pastors of the church. And the first object of the preaching of the gospel is the world, or the men of it, for their conversion; and it is so in the preaching of all them unto whom that work is committed by Christ. The work of the apostles and evangelists had this order in it:—First, they were to make disciples of men, by the preaching of the gospel unto conversion; and this was their principal work, as Paul testified, 1 Cor. 1:17: and herein were they gloriously instrumental in laying the foundation of the kingdom of Christ all the world over. The second part of their work was to teach them that were converted, or made disciples, to do and observe all that he did command them. In the pursuit of this part of their commission, they gathered the disciples of Christ into churches,

under ordinary officers of their own. And although the work of these ordinary officers, pastors and teachers, be of the same nature with theirs, yet the method of it is changed in them; for their first ordinary work is to conduct and teach all the disciples of Christ to do and observe all things appointed by him,—that is, to preach unto and watch over the particular flocks unto whom they do relate. But they are not hereby discharged from an interest in the other part of the work,—in preaching the word unto the conversion of souls. They are not, indeed, bound unto the method of the apostles and evangelists; yea, they are, by virtue of their office, ordinarily excluded from it. After a man is called to be a pastor of a particular church, it is not his duty to leave that church, and go up and down to preach for the conversion of strangers. It is not, I say, ordinarily so; for many cases may fall out wherein the edification of any particular church is to give way unto the glory of Christ with respect unto the calling of all the members of the church catholic. But in the discharge of the pastoral office there are many occasions of preaching the word unto the conversion of souls; as,—

(1.) When any that are unconverted do come into the assemblies of the church, and are there wrought upon by the power of the word; whereof we have experience every day. To suppose that a man, at the same time, and in the same place, preaching unto one congregation, should preach to some of them, namely, those that are of the church where unto he relates, as a minister, with ministerial authority, and to others only by virtue of a spiritual gift which he hath received, is that which no man can distinguish in his own conscience; nor is there any colour of rule or reason for it: for though pastors, with respect unto their whole office and all the duties of it, whereof many can have the church only for their object, are ministers in office unto the church, and so ministers of the church, yet are they ministers of Christ also; and by him it is, and not by the church, that the



preaching of the gospel is committed unto them. And it is so committed as that, by virtue of their office, they are to use it unto all its ends, in his way and method; whereof the conversion of sinners is one. And for a man to conceive of himself in a double capacity, whilst he is preaching to the same congregation, is that which no man's experience can reach unto.

(2.) In occasional preaching in other places, whereunto a pastor of a church may be called and directed by divine providence; for although we have no concernment in the figment of an indelible character accompanying sacred orders, yet we do not think that the pastoral office is such a thing as a man must leave behind him every time he goes from home, or that it is in his own power, or in the power of all men in the world, to divest him of it, unless he be dismissed or deposed from it by Christ himself, through the rule of his word. Wherever a true minister preacheth, he preacheth as a minister, for as such the administration of the gospel is committed unto him, as unto all the ends of it, whereof the chief, as was said, is the conversion of souls; yea, of such weight it is that the conveniency and edification of particular churches ought to give place unto it. When, therefore, there are great opportunities and providential calls for the preaching of the gospel unto the conversion of souls, and, the harvest being great, there are not labourers sufficient for it, it is lawful, yea, it is the duty of pastors of particular churches to leave their constant attendance on their pastoral charge in those churches, at least for a season, to apply themselves unto the more public preaching of the word unto the conversion of the souls of men. Nor will any particular church be unwilling hereunto which understands that even the whole end of particular churches is but the edification of the church catholic, and that their good and advantage is to give place unto that of the glory of Christ in the whole. The good shepherd will leave the ninety and nine sheep, to seek after one that wanders; and we may

certainly leave a few for a season, to seek after a great multitude of wanderers, when we are called thereunto by divine providence: and I could heartily wish that we might have a trial of it at this time.

The ministers who have been most celebrated, and that deservedly, in the last ages, in this and the neighbour nations, have been such as whose ministry God made eminently successful unto the conversion of souls. To affirm that they did not do their work as ministers, and by virtue of their ministerial office, is to cast away the crown and destroy the principal glory of the ministry. For my own part, if I did not think myself bound to preach as a minister, and as a minister authorized in all places and on all occasions, when I am called thereunto, I think I should never preach much more in this world. Nor do I know at all what rule they walk by who continue public constant preaching for many years, and yet neither desire nor design to be called unto any pastoral office in the church. But I must not here insist on the debate of these things.

6. It belongs unto them, on the account of their pastoral office, to be ready, willing, and able, to comfort, relieve, and refresh, those that are tempted, tossed, wearied with fears and grounds of disconsolation, in times of trial and desertion. "The tongue of the learned" is required in them, "that they should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." One excellent qualification of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the discharge of his priestly office now in heaven, is, that he is touched with a sense of our infirmities, and knows how to succour them that are tempted. His whole flock in this world are a company of tempted ones; his own life on the earth he calls "the time of his temptation;" and those who have the charge of his flock under him ought to have a sense of their infirmities, and endeavour in an especial manner to succour them that are tempted. But amongst them there are some always that are cast under

darkness and disconsolations in a peculiar manner: some at the entrance of their conversion unto God, whilst they have a deep sense of the terror of the Lord, the sharpness of conviction, and the uncertainty of their condition; some are relapsed into sin or omissions of duties; some under great, sore, and lasting afflictions; some upon pressing, urgent, particular occasions; some on sovereign, divine desertions; some through the buffetings of Satan and the injection of blasphemous thoughts into their minds, with many other occasions of an alike nature. Now, the troubles, disconsolations, dejections, and fears, that arise in the minds of persons in these exercises and temptations are various, oftentimes urged and fortified with subtile arguings and fair pretences, perplexing the souls of men almost to despair and death. It belongs unto the office and duty of pastors,—

(1.) To be able rightly to understand the various cases that will occur of this kind, from such principles and grounds of truth and experience as will bear a just confidence in a prudent application unto the relief of them concerned; [to have] "the tongue of the learned, to know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." It will not be done by a collection and determination of cases, which yet is useful in its place; for hardly shall we meet with two cases of this kind that will exactly be determined by the same rule, all manner of circumstances giving them variety: but a skill, understanding, and experience, in the whole nature of the work of the Spirit of God on the souls of men, of the conflict that is between the flesh and the Spirit, of the methods and wiles of Satan, of the wiles of principalities and powers or wicked spirits in high places, of the nature, and effects, and ends of divine desertions, with wisdom to make application out of such principles, or fit medicines and remedies unto every sore and distemper, are required hereunto. These things are by some despised, by some neglected, by some

looked after only in stated cases of conscience, in which work it is known that some have horribly debauched their own consciences and [those of] others, to the scandal and ruin of religion, so far as they have prevailed. But not to dispute how far such helps as books written on cases of conscience may be useful herein,—which they may be greatly unto those who know how to use them aright,—the proper ways whereby pastors and teachers must obtain this skill and understanding are, by diligent study of the Scriptures, meditation thereon, fervent prayer, experience of spiritual things, and temptations in their own souls, with a prudent observation of the manner of God's dealing with others, and the ways of the opposition made to the work of his grace in them. Without these things, all pretences unto this ability and duty of the pastoral office are vain; whence it is that the whole work of it is much neglected.

(2.) To be ready and willing to attend unto the especial cases that may be brought unto them, and not to look on them as unnecessary diversions, whereas a due application unto them is a principal part of their office and duty. To discountenance, to discourage any from seeking relief in perplexities of this nature, to carry it towards them with a seeming moroseness and unconcernedness, is to turn that which is lame out of the way, to push the diseased, and not at all to express the care of Christ towards his flock, Isa. 40:11. Yea, it is their duty to hearken after them who may be so exercised, to seek them out, and to give them their counsel and direction on all occasions.

(3.) To bear patiently and tenderly with the weakness, ignorance, dulness, slowness to believe and receive satisfaction, yea, it may be, impertinencies, in them that are so tempted. These things will abound amongst them, partly from their natural infirmities, many being weak, and perhaps froward; but especially from the nature of their temptations, which are suited to disorder and disquiet their

minds, to fill them with perplexed thoughts, and to make them jealous of every thing wherein they are spiritually concerned; and if much patience, meekness, and condescension, be not exercised towards them, they are quickly turned out of the way.

In the discharge of the whole pastoral office, there is not any thing or duty that is of more importance, nor wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is more concerned, nor more eminently suited unto the nature of the office itself, than this is. But whereas it is a work or duty which, because of the reasons mentioned, must be accompanied with the exercise of humility, patience, self-denial, and spiritual wisdom, with experience, with wearisome diversions from other occasions, those who had got of old the conduct of the souls of men into their management turned this whole part of their office and duty into an engine they called "auricular confession;" whereby they wrested the consciences of Christians to the promotion of their own ease, wealth, authority, and oftentimes to worse ends.

7. A compassionate suffering with all the members of the church in all their trials and troubles, whether internal or external, belongs unto them in the discharge of their office; nor is there any thing that renders them more like unto Jesus Christ, whom to represent unto the church is their principal duty. The view and consideration, by faith, of the glory of Christ in his compassion with his suffering members, is the principal spring of consolation unto the church in all its distresses. And the same spirit, the same mind herein, ought, according to their measure, to be in all that have the pastoral office committed unto them. So the apostle expresseth it in himself, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" 2 Cor. 11:29. And unless this compassion and goodness do run through the discharge of their whole office, men cannot be said to be evangelical shepherds, nor the sheep said in any sense to be their own. For those

who pretend unto the pastoral office to live, it may be, in wealth and pleasure, regardless of the sufferings and temptations of their flock, or of the poor of it, or related unto such churches as wherein it is impossible that they should so much as be acquainted with the state of the greatest part of them, is not answerable unto the institution of their office, nor to the design of Christ therein.

8. Care of the poor and visitation of the sick are parts of this duty, commonly known, though commonly neglected.

9. The principal care of the rule of the church is incumbent on the pastors of it. This is the second general head of the power and duty of this office, whereunto many things in particular do belong. But because I shall treat afterward of the rule of the church by itself distinctly, I shall not here insist upon it.

10. There is a communion to be observed among all the churches of the same faith and profession in any nation. Wherein it doth consist, and what is required thereunto, shall be afterward declared. The principal care hereof, unto the edification of the churches, is incumbent on the pastors of them. Whether it be exercised by letters of mutual advice, of congratulation or consolation, or in testimony of communion with those who are called to office in them, or whether it be by convening in synods for consultation of their joint concernments (which things made up a great part of the primitive ecclesiastical polity), their duty it is to attend unto it and to take care of it.

11. That wherewith I shall close these few instances of the pastoral charge and duty is that without which all the rest will neither be useful unto men nor be accepted with the great shepherd, Christ Jesus; and that is, a humble, holy, exemplary conversation, in all godliness and honesty. The rules and precepts of the Scripture, the

examples of Christ and his apostles, with that of the bishops or pastors of the primitive churches, and the nature of the thing itself, with the religion which we do profess, do undeniably prove this duty to be necessary and indispensable in a gospel ministry. It were an easy thing to fill up a volume with ancient examples unto this purpose, with testimonies of the Scripture and first writers among Christians, with examples of public and private miscarriages herein, with evident demonstration that the ruin of Christian religion in most nations where it hath been professed, and so of the nations themselves, hath proceeded from the ambition, pride, luxury, uncleanness, profaneness, and otherwise vicious conversations, of those who have been called the "clergy." And in daily observation, it is a thing written with the beams of the sun, that whatever else be done in churches, if the pastors of them, or those who are so esteemed, are not exemplary in gospel obedience and holiness, religion will not be carried on and improved among the people. If persons light or profane in their habits, garbs, and converse, corrupt in their communication, unsavoury and barren as unto spiritual discourse; if such as are covetous, oppressive, and contentious; such as are negligent in holy duties in their own families, and so cannot stir up others unto diligence therein; much more, if such as are openly sensual, vicious, and debauched,—are admitted into this office, we may take our leave of all the glory and power of religion among the people committed unto their charge.

To handle this property or adjunct of the pastoral office, it were necessary distinctly to consider and explain all the qualifications assigned by the apostle as necessary unto bishops or elders, evidenced as previously necessary unto the orderly call of them unto this office, 1 Tim. 3:2–7, Tit. 2:6–9; which is a work not consistent with my present design to engage in.

These are some instances of the things wherein the office-duty of pastors of the church doth consist. They are but some of them, and these only proposed, not pursued and pressed with the consideration of all those particular duties, with the manner of their performance, way of management, motives and enforcements, defects and causes of them; which would require a large discourse. These may suffice unto our present purpose; and we may derive from them the ensuing brief considerations:—

1. A due meditation and view of these things, as proposed in the Scripture, is enough to make the wisest, the best of men, and the most diligent in the discharge of the pastoral office, to cry out with the apostle, "Who is sufficient for these things?" This will make them look well to their call and entrance into this office, as that alone which will bear them out and justify them in the susception of it; for no sense of insufficiency can utterly discourage any in the undertaking of a work which he is assured that the Lord Christ calls him unto, for where he calls to a duty, he gives competent strength for the performance of it. And when we say, under a deep sense of our own weakness, "Who is sufficient for these things?" he doth say, "My grace is sufficient for you."

2. Although all the things mentioned do plainly, evidently, and undeniably, belong unto the discharge of the pastoral office, yet, in point of fact, we find, by the success, that they are very little considered by the most that seek after it. And the present ruin of religion, as unto its power, beauty, and glory, in all places, ariseth principally from this cause, that multitudes of those who undertake this office are neither in any measure fit for it, nor do either conscientiously attend unto or diligently perform the duties that belong unto it. It ever was and ever will be true in general, "Like priest, like people."



3. Whereas the account which is to be given of this office and the discharge of it at the last day unto Jesus Christ, the consideration whereof had a mighty influence upon the apostles themselves and all the primitive pastors of the churches, is frequently proposed unto us, and many warnings given us thereon in the Scripture, yet it is apparent they are but few who take it into due consideration. In the great day of Christ's visitation, he will proceed on such articles as those here laid down, and others expressed in the Scripture, and not at all on those which are now inquired upon in our episcopal visitations. And if they may be minded of their true interest and concern, whilst they possess the places they hold in the church, without offence, I would advise them to conform their inquiries, in their visitations, unto those which they cannot but know the Lord Christ will make in the great day of his visitation, which doth approach. This I think but reasonable, In the meantime, for those who desire to give up their account with joy and confidence, and not with grief and confusion, it is their wisdom and duty continually to bear in mind what it is that the Lord Christ requires of them in the discharge of their office. To take benefices, to perform legal duties, by themselves or others, is not fully compliant with what pastors of churches are called unto.

4. It is manifest also from hence how inconsistent it is with this office, and the due discharge of it, for anyone man to undertake the relation of a pastor unto more churches than one, especially if far distant from one another. An evil this is like that of mathematical prognostications at Rome,—always condemned and always retained. But one view of the duties incumbent on each pastor, and of whose diligent performance he is to give an account at the last day, will discard this practice from all approbation in the minds of them that are sober. However, it is as good to have ten churches at once, as, having but one, never to discharge the duty of a pastor towards it.

5. All churches may do well to consider the weight and burden that lies upon their pastors and teachers in the discharge of their office, that they may be constant in fervent prayers and supplications for them; as also to provide, what lies in them, that they may be without trouble and care about the things of this life.

6. "There being so many duties necessary unto the discharge of this office, and those of such various sorts and kinds as to require various gifts and abilities unto their due performance, it seems very difficult to find a concurrence of them in any one person in any considerable degree, so that it is hard to conceive how the office itself should be duly discharged." I answer,—

(1.) The end both of the office and of the discharge of it is the due edification of the church; this, therefore, gives them their measure. Where that is attained, the office is duly discharged, though the gifts whereby men are enabled thereunto be not eminent.

(2.) Where a man is called unto this office, and applieth himself sincerely unto the due discharge of it, if he be evidently defective with respect to any especial duty or duties of it, that defect is to be supplied by calling any other unto his assistance in office who is qualified to make that supply unto the edification of the church. And the like must be said concerning such pastors as, through age or bodily weakness, are disabled from attendance unto any part of their duty; for still the edification of the church is that which, in all these things, is in the first place to be provided for.

7. It may be inquired what is the state of those churches, and what relation with respect unto communion we ought to have unto them, whose pastors are evidently defective in or neglective of these things, so as that they are not in any competent measure attended unto; and we may, in particular, instance in the first and last of the pastoral

duties before insisted on. Suppose a man be no way able to preach the word unto the edification of them that are pleaded to be his flock, or, having an ability, yet doth not, will not, give himself unto the word and prayer, or will not labour in the word and doctrine, unto the great prejudice of edification; and suppose the same person be openly defective as unto an exemplary conversation, and on the contrary layeth the stumbling-block of his own sins and follies before the eyes of others,—what shall we judge of his ministry, and of the state of that church whereof he is a constituent part as its ruler? I answer:—

(1.) I do not believe it is in the power of any church really to confer the pastoral office, by virtue of any ordination whatever, unto any who are openly and evidently destitute of all those previous qualifications which the Scripture requireth in them who are to be called unto this office. There is, indeed, a latitude to be allowed in judging of them in times of necessity and great penury of able teachers, so that persons in holy ministry design the glory of God and the edification of the church according to their ability; but otherwise there is a nullity in the pretended office.

(2.) Where any such are admitted, through ignorance or mistake, or the usurpation of undue power over churches in imposing ministers on them, there is not an absolute nullity in their administrations until they are discovered and convicted by the rule and law of Christ. But if, on evidence hereof, the people will voluntarily adhere unto them, they are partakers of their sins, and do what in them lies to unchurch themselves.

(3.) Where such persons are, by any means, placed as pastors in or over any churches, and there is no way for their removal or reformation, it is lawful unto, it is the duty of every one who takes

care of his own edification and salvation to withdraw from the communion of such churches, and to join with such as wherein edification is better provided for; for whereas this is the sole end of churches, of all their offices, officers, and administrations, it is the highest folly to imagine that any disciple of Christ can be or is obliged, by his authority, to abide in the communion of such churches, without seeking relief in the ways of his appointment, wherein that end is utterly overthrown.

(4.) Where the generality of churches, in any kind of association, are headed by pastors defective in these things, in the matter declared, there all public church-reformation is morally impossible, and it is the duty of private men to take care of their own souls, let churches and churchmen say what they please.

Some few things may yet be inquired into with reference unto the office of a pastor in the church; as,—

1. Whether a man may be ordained a pastor or a minister without relation unto any particular church, so as to be invested with office-power thereby?

It is usually said that a man may be ordained a minister unto or of the catholic church, or to convert infidels, although he be not related unto any particular flock or congregation.

I shall not at present discuss sundry things about the power and way of ordination which influence this controversy, but only speak briefly unto the thing itself. And,—

(1.) It is granted that a man endowed with spiritual gifts for the preaching of the gospel may be set apart by fasting and prayer unto

that work, when he may be orderly called unto it in the providence of God; for,—

[1.] Such an one hath a call unto it materially in the gifts which he hath received, warranting him unto the exercise of them for the edification of others as he hath occasion, 1 Pet. 4:10, 11; 1 Cor. 14:12. Setting apart unto an important work by prayer is a moral duty, and useful in church-affairs in an especial manner, Acts 13:1–3.

[2.] A public testimony unto the approbation of a person undertaking the work of preaching is necessary,—1st. Unto the communion of churches, that he may be received in any of them as is occasion; of which sort were the letters of recommendation in the primitive church, 1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 3:1; 3 John 9;—2dly. Unto the safety of them amongst whom he may exercise his gifts, that they be not imposed on by false teachers or seducers Nor would the primitive church allow, nor is it allowable in the communion of churches, that any person not so testified unto, not so sent and warranted, should undertake constantly to preach the gospel.

(2.) Such persons, so set apart and sent, may be esteemed ministers in the general notion of the word, and may be useful in the calling and planting of churches, wherein they may be instated in the pastoral office. This was originally the work of evangelists, which office being ceased in the church (as shall be proved elsewhere), the work may be supplied by persons of this sort.

(3.) No church whatever hath power to ordain men ministers for the conversion of infidels. Since the cessation of extraordinary officers and offices, the care of that work is devolved merely on the providence of God, being left without the verge of church-institutions, God alone can send and warrant men for the undertaking of that work; nor can any man know or be satisfied in a

call unto that work without some previous guidance of divine providence leading him thereunto. It is, indeed, the duty of all the ordinary ministers of the church to diffuse the knowledge of Christ and the gospel unto heathen and infidels, among whom, or near unto whom, their habitation is cast, and they have all manner of divine warranty for their so doing, as many worthy persons have done effectually in New England; and it is the duty of every true Christian who may be cast among them by the providence of God to instruct them according unto his ability in the knowledge of the truth: but it is not in the power of any church, or any sort of ordinary officers, to ordain person unto the office of the ministry for the conversion of the heathen antecedently unto any designation by divine providence thereunto.

(4.) No man can be properly or completely ordained unto the ministry, but he is ordained unto a determinate office, as a bishop, an elder, a pastor. But this no man can be but he who is ordained in and unto a particular church; for the contrary practice,—

[1.] Would be contrary to the constant practice of the apostles, who ordained no ordinary officers but in and unto particular churches, which were to be their proper charge and care, Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5. Nor is there mention of any ordinary officers in the whole Scripture but such as were fixed in the particular churches whereunto they did relate, Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1; Rev. 2, 3; nor was any such practice known or heard of in the primitive church: yea,—

[2.] It was absolutely forbidden in the ancient church, and all such ordinations declared null, so as not to communicate office-power or give any ministerial authority. So it is expressly in the first canon of the council of Chalcedon, and the council decrees, "That all imposition of hands in such cases is invalid and of no effect." Yea so

exact and careful were they in this matter, that if any one, for any just cause, as he judged himself, did leave his particular church or charge, they would not allow him the name or title of a bishop, or to officiate occasionally in that church, or anywhere else. This is evident in the case of Eustathius, a bishop of Pamphylia. The good man finding the discharge of his office very troublesome, by reason of secular businesses that it was encumbered withal, and much opposition with reproach that befell him from the church itself, of his own accord laid down and resigned his charge, the church choosing one Theodorus in his room. But afterward he desired that, though he had left his charge, he might retain the name, title, and honour of a bishop. For this end he made a petition unto the council of Ephesus; who, as themselves express it, in mere commiseration unto the old man, condescended unto his desire as unto the name and title, but not as unto any office-power, which, they judged, related absolutely unto a particular charge, Epist. Cone. Ephes. 1 ad Synod, in Pamphyl.

[3.] Such ordination wants an essential constitutive cause, and part of the collation of office-power, which is the election of the people; and is therefore invalid. See what hath been proved before unto that purpose.

[4.] A bishop, an elder, a pastor, being terms of relation, to make any one so without relation unto a church, a people, a flock, is to make him a father who hath no child, or a husband who hath no wife, a relate without a correlate, which is impossible, and implies a contradiction.

[5.] It is inconsistent with the whole nature and end of the pastoral office. Whoever is duly called, set apart, or ordained unto that office, he doth therein and thereby take on himself the discharge of all the duties belonging thereunto, and is obliged to attend diligently unto

them. If, then, we will take a view of what hath been proved before to belong unto this office, we shall find that not the least part, scarce any thing of it, can be undertaken and discharged by such as are ordained absolutely without relation unto particular churches. For any to take upon them to commit an office unto others, and not at the same time charge them with all the duties of that office and their immediate attendance on them, or for any to accept of an office and office-power not knowing when or where to exert the power or perform the duties of it, is irregular. In particular, ruling is an essential part of the pastoral office, which they cannot attend unto who have none to be ruled by them.

## 2. May a pastor remove from one congregation unto another?

This is a thing also which the ancient church made great provision against; for when some churches were increased in members, reputation, privileges, and wealth, above others, it grew an ordinary practice for the bishops to design and endeavour their own removal from a less unto a greater benefice. This is so severely interdicted in the councils of Nice and Chalcedon as that they would not allow that a man might be a bishop or presbyter in any other place but only in the church wherein he was originally ordained; and, therefore, if any did so remove themselves, decreed that they should be sent home again, and there abide, or cease to be church-officers, Cone. Nicæ. can. 15, 16; Chalced., can. 5, 20. Pluralities, as they are called, and open contending for ecclesiastical promotions, benefices, and dignities, were then either unknown or openly condemned.

Yet it cannot be denied but that there may be just causes of the removal of a pastor from one congregation unto another; for whereas the end of all particular churches is to promote the edification of the catholic church in general, where, in any especial instance, such a



removal is useful unto that end, it is equal it should be allowed. Cases of this nature may arise from the consideration of persons, places, times, and many other circumstances that I cannot insist on in particular. But that such removals may be without offence, it is required that they be made,—

(1.) With the free consent of the churches concerned;

(2.) With the advice of other churches, or their elders, with whom they walk in communion. And of examples of this kind, or of the removal of bishops or pastors from one church to another in an orderly manner, by advice and counsel, for the good of the whole church, there are many instances in the primitive times. Such was that of Gregory Nazianzen, removed from Casima to Constantinople; though I acknowledge it had no good success.

3. May a pastor voluntarily, or of his own accord, resign and lay down his office, and remain in a private capacity?

This also was judged inconvenient, if not unlawful, by the first synod of Ephesus, in the case of Eustathius. He was, as it appears, an aged man, one that loved his own peace and quietness, and who could not well bear the oppositions and reproaches which he met withal from the church, or some in it, and thereon solemnly, upon his own judgment, without advice, laid down and renounced his office in the church; who thereupon chose a good man in his room. Yet did the synod condemn this practice, and that not without weighty reasons, whereby they confirmed their judgment.

But yet no general rule can be established in this case; nor was the judgment or practice of the primitive church precise herein. Clemens, in his epistle to the church of Corinth, expressly adviseth those on whose occasion there was disturbance and divisions in the

church to lay down their office and withdraw from it. Gregory Nazianzen did the same at Constantinople; and protested openly that although he were himself innocent and free from blame, as he truly was, and one of the greatest men of his age, yet he would depart or be cast out, rather than they should not have peace among them; which he did accordingly, Orat. 52, et Vit. Greg. Nazian. And afterward a synod at Constantinople, under Photius, concluded that in some cases it is lawful, can. 5. Wherefore,—

(1.) It seems not to be lawful so to do merely on the account of weakness for work and labour, though occasioned by age, sickness, or bodily distemper: for no man is any way obliged to do more than he is able with the regular preservation of his life; and the church is obliged to be satisfied with the conscientious discharge of what abilities a pastor hath, otherwise providing for itself in what is wanting.

(2.) It is not lawful merely on a weariness of and despondency under opposition and reproaches, which a pastor is called and obliged to undergo for the good and edification of the flock, and not to faint in the warfare whereto he is called.

These two were the reasons of Eustathius at Perga, which were disallowed in the council at Ephesus. But,—

(3.) It is lawful in such an incurable decay of intellectual abilities as whereon a man can discharge no duty of the pastoral office unto the edification of the church.

(4.) It is lawful in case of incurable divisions in the church, constantly obstructing its edification, and which cannot be removed whilst such a one continues in his office, though he be no way the

cause of them. This is the case wherein Clemens gives advice, and whereof Gregory gave an example in his own practice.

But this case and its determination will hold only where the divisions are incurable by any other ways and means; for if those who cause such divisions may be cast out of the church, or the church may withdraw communion from them, or if there be divisions in fixed parties and principles, opinions or practices, they may separate into distinct communions. In such cases this remedy, by the pastor's laying down his office, is not to be made use of; otherwise all things are to be done for edification.

(5.) It may be lawful where the church is wholly negligent in its duty, and persists in that negligence, after admonition, in providing, according to their abilities, for the outward necessity of their pastor and his family. But this case cannot be determined without the consideration of many particular circumstances.

(6.) Where all or many of these causes concur, so as that a man cannot cheerfully and comfortably go on in the discharge of his office, especially if he be pressed in point of conscience, through the church's noncompliance with their duty with respect unto any of the institutions of Christ, and if the edification of the church, which is at present obstructed, may be provided for, in their own judgment, after a due manner, there is no such grievous yoke laid by the Lord Christ on the necks of any of his servants but that such a person may peaceably lay down his office in such a church, and either abide in a private station, or take the care of another church, wherein he may discharge his office (being yet of ability) unto his own comfort and their edification.

## **CHAPTER VI**

# **Of the office of teachers in the church, or an inquiry into the state, condition, and work of those called teachers in the Scripture**

THE Lord Christ hath given unto his church "pastors and teachers," Eph. 4:11. He hath "set in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers" 1 Cor. 12:28. In the church that was at Antioch there were "prophets and teachers," Acts 13:1; and their work is both described and assigned unto them, as we shall see afterward.

But the thoughts of learned men about those who in the Scripture are called teachers are very various, nor is the determination of their state and condition easy or obvious, as we shall find in our inquiry.

If there were originally a distinct office of teachers in the church, it was lost for many ages; but yet there was always a shadow or appearance of it retained, first in public catechists, and then in doctors or professors of theology in the schools belonging unto any church. But this, as unto the title of doctor or teacher, is but a late invention; for the occasion of it rose about the year of Christ 1135. Lotharius the emperor having found in Italy a copy of the Roman civil law, and being greatly taken with it, he ordained that it should be publicly read and expounded in the schools. This he began, by the direction of Imerius his chancellor, at Bononia; and to give encouragement unto this employment, they ordained that those who were the public professors of it should be solemnly created doctors; of whom Bulgarus Hugolinus, with others, were the first. Not long after, this rite of creating doctors was borrowed of the lawyers by divines who publicly taught divinity in their schools; and this

imitation first took place in Bononia, Paris, and Oxford. But this name is since grown a title of honour to sundry sorts of persons, whether, unto any good use or purpose or no I know not; but it is in use, and not worth contending about, especially if, as unto some of them, it be fairly reconcilable unto that of our Saviour, Matt. 23:8.

But the custom of having in the church teachers that did publicly explain and vindicate the principles of religion is far more ancient, and of known usage in the primitive churches. Such was the practice of the church of Alexandria in their school, wherein the famous Pantænus, Origen, and Clemens, were teachers; an imitation whereof has been continued in all ages of the church.

And, indeed, the continuation of such a peculiar work and employment, to be discharged in manner of an office, is an evidence that originally there was such a distinct office in the church; for although in the Roman church they had instituted sundry orders of sacred officers, borrowed from the Jews or Gentiles, which have no resemblance unto any thing mentioned in the Scripture, yet sundry things abused and corrupted by them in church-officers took their occasional rise from what is so mentioned.

There are four opinions concerning those who are called by this name in the New Testament:—

1. Some say that no office at all is denoted by it, it being only a general appellation of those that taught others, whether constantly or occasionally. Such were the prophets in the church of Corinth, that spake occasionally and in their turns, 1 Cor. 14; which is that which all might do who had ability for it, verses 5, 24, 25.

2. Some say it is only another name for the same office with that of a pastor, and so not [intended] to denote any distinct office; of which

mind Jerome seems to be, Eph. 4.

3. Others allow that it was a distinct office, whereunto some were called and set apart in the church, but it was only to teach (and that in a peculiar manner) the principles of religion, but had no interest in the rule of the church or the administration of the sacred mysteries. So the pastor in the church was to rule, and teach, and administer the sacred mysteries; the teacher to teach or instruct only, but not to rule nor dispense the sacraments; and the ruling elder to rule only, and neither to teach nor administer sacraments;— which hath the appearance of order, both useful and beautiful.

4. Some judge that it was a distinct office, but of the same nature and kind with that of the pastor, endowed with all the same powers, but differenced from it with respect unto gifts and a peculiar kind of work allotted unto it. But this opinion hath this seeming disadvantage, that the difference between them is so small as not to be sufficient to give a distinct denomination of officers or to constitute a distinct office; and, it may be, such a distinction in gifts will seldom appear, so that the church may be guided thereby in the choice of meet persons unto distinct offices.

But Scripture testimony and rule must take place, and I shall briefly examine all these opinions.

The FIRST is, That this is not the name of any officer, nor is a teacher, as such, any officer in the church, but it is used only as a general name for any that teach, on any account, the doctrine of the gospel. I do not, indeed, know of any who have in particular contended for this opinion, but I observe that very many expositors take no further notice of them but as such. This seems to me to be most remote from the truth.

It is true, that in the first churches not only some, but all who had received spiritual light in the gifts of knowledge and utterance, did teach and instruct others as they had opportunity, 1 Pet. 4:8–11. Hence the heathen philosophers, as Celsus in particular, objected to the Christians of old that they suffered sutlers, and weavers, and cobblers, to teach among them; which they who knew that Paul himself, their great apostle, wrought at a trade not much better, were not offended at. Of this sort were the disciples mentioned Acts 8:4; so was Aquila, chap. 18:26, and the many prophets in the church of Corinth, 1 Cor. 14:29. But,—

1. The name διδάσκαλος is not used in the New Testament but for a teacher with authority. The apostle John tells us that διδάσκαλος is the same with ῥαζζουνί chap. 20:16, or as it is written, ῥαζζονί, Mark 10:51; which, in their mixed dialect, was the same with rabbi. And רַבִּי, רַבִּי, and אֲבִי, were then in use for the Hebrew מוֹרֶה: of which see Job 36:22; Isa. 30:20. Now, the constant signification of these words is "a master in teaching," "a teacher with authority;" nor is διδάσκαλος used in the New Testament but for such a one. And therefore those who are called teachers were such as were set apart unto the office of teaching, and not such as were so called from an occasional work or duty.

2. Teachers are numbered among the officers which Christ hath given unto and set in the church, Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28: so that originally church-officers were intended by them is beyond contradiction.

3. They are mentioned as those who, with others, did preside in the church, and join in the public ministrations of it, Acts 13:1, 2.

4. They are charged to attend unto the work of teaching; which none can be but they whose office it is to teach, Rom. 12:7.

It is therefore undeniable that there is such an office as that of a teacher mentioned in the Scripture.

The SECOND opinion is, That although a teacher be a church officer, yet no distinct office is intended in that denomination. It is, say they, only another name for a pastor, the office being one and the same, the same persons being both pastors and teachers, or called by these several names, as they have other titles also ascribed unto them.

So it is fallen out, and so it is usual in things of this nature, that men run into extremes; truth pleaseth them not. In the first deviation of the church from its primitive institution, there were introduced sundry offices to the church that were not of divine institution, borrowed partly of the Jews and partly of the Gentiles; which issued in the seven orders of the church of Rome. They did not utterly reject any that were of a divine original, but retained some kind of figure, shadow, or image of them; but they brought in others that were merely of their own invention. In the rejection of this exorbitancy, some are apt to run into the other extreme; they will deny and reject some of them that have a divine warranty for their original. Howbeit they are not many nor burdensome; yea, they are all such as without the continuation of them, the edification of the church cannot be carried on in a due manner: for unto the beauty and order of the church, in its rule and worship, it is required not only that there be many officers in each church, but also that they be of sundry sorts; all harmony in things natural, political, and ecclesiastical, arising from variety with proportion. And he that shall with calmness and without prejudice consider the whole work that is to be done in churches, with the end of their institution, will be able to understand the necessity of pastors, teachers, ruling-elders, and deacons, for those ends, and no other. And this I hope I shall demonstrate in the consideration of these respective offices, with the duties that belong



unto them, as I have considered one of them already. Wherefore, as unto the opinion under present consideration, I say,—

1. In the primitive church, about the end of the second century, before there was the least attempt to introduce new officers into the church, there were persons called unto the office and work of public teaching who were not pastors, nor called unto the administration of other ordinances. Those of this sort in the church of Alexandria were, by reason of their extraordinary abilities, quickly of great fame and renown. Their constant work was, publicly unto all comers, believers and unbelievers, to explain and teach the principles of Christian religion, defending and vindicating it from the opposition of its heathen adversaries, whether atheists or philosophers. This had never been so exactly practised in the church if it had not derived from divine institution. And of this sort is the ὁ κατηχῶν, "the catechist," intended by the apostle, Gal. 6:6; for it is such a one as constantly labours in the work of preaching, and hath those who depend upon his ministry therein, οἱ κατηχούμενοι, those that are taught or catechised by him; for hence alone it is that maintenance is due unto him for his work: "Let the catechised communicate unto the catechist," the taught unto the teacher, "in all good things." And it is not the pastor of the church that he intends; for he speaks of him in the same case in another manner, and nowhere only with respect unto teaching alone.

2. There is a plain distinction between the offices of a pastor and a teacher: Eph. 4:11, "Some pastors and teachers." This is one of the instances wherein men try their wits in putting in exceptions unto plain Scripture testimonies, as some or other do in all other cases; which if it may be allowed, we shall have nothing left us certain in the whole book of God. The apostle enumerates distinctly all the teaching officers of the church, both extraordinary and ordinary. "It

is granted that there is a difference between apostles, prophets, and evangelists; but there is none," say some, "between pastors and teachers," which are also named distinctly. Why so? "Because there is an interposition of the article τοὺς between those of the former sort, and not between 'pastors and teachers;' "—a very weak consideration to control the evidence of the design of the apostle in the words. We are not to prescribe unto him how he shall express himself. But this I know, that the discretive and copulative conjunction καί, "and," between "pastors" and "teachers," doth no less distinguish them the one from the other than the τοὺς μὲν and τοὺς δὲ before made use of; and this I shall confirm from the words themselves:—

(1.) The apostle doth not say "pastors or teachers," which, in congruity of speech, should have been done if the same persons and the same office were intended; and the discretive particle in the close of such an enumeration of things distinct as that in this place is of the same force with the other notes of distinction before used.

(2.) After he hath named pastors he nameth teachers, with a note of distinction. This must either contain the addition of a new office, or be an interpretation of what went before, as if he had said, "Pastors, that is, teachers." If it be the latter, then the name of teachers must be added as that which was better known than that of pastors, and more expressive of the office intended (it is declared who are meant by pastors in calling them teachers), or else the addition of the word is merely superfluous. But this is quite otherwise, the name of pastor being more known as unto the indigitation of office power and care, and more appropriated thereunto, than that of teacher, which is both a common name, not absolutely appropriated unto office, and respective of one part of the pastoral office and duty only.

(3.) No instance can be given, in any place where there is an enumeration of church-officers, either by their names, as 1 Cor. 12:28, or by their work, as Rom. 12:6–8, or by the offices themselves, as Phil. 1:1, of the same officer, at the same time, being expressed under various names; which, indeed, must needs introduce confusion into such an enumeration. It is true, the same officers are in the Scriptures called by several names, as pastors, bishops, presbyters; but if it had been said anywhere that there were in the church bishops and presbyters, it must be acknowledged that they were distinct officers, as bishops and deacons are, Phil. 1:1.

(4.) The words in their first notion are not synonymous; for all pastors are teachers, but all teachers are not pastors: and therefore the latter cannot be exegetical of the former.

3. As these teachers are so called and named in contradistinction unto pastors in the same place, so they have distinct office-works and duties assigned unto them in the same place also: Rom. 12:7, 8, "He that teacheth on teaching, he that exhorteth on exhortation." If they have especial works to attend unto distinctly by virtue of their offices, then are their offices distinct also; for from one there is an especial obligation unto one sort of duties, and to another sort from the other.

4. These teachers are set in the church as in a distinct office from that of prophets, "secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers," 1 Cor. 12:28. And so they are mentioned distinctly in the church of Antioch, Acts 13:1, "There were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers." But in both places pastors are comprised under the name of prophets, exhortation being an especial branch of prophesy, Rom. 12:6–8.

5. There is a peculiar institution of maintenance for these teachers, which argues a distinct office, Gal. 6:6.

From all these considerations it appears that the teachers mentioned in the Scripture were officers in the church distinct from pastors: for they are distinguished from them,—

- (1.) By their name, declarative of the especial nature of their office;
- (2.) By their peculiar work which they are to attend unto, in teaching by virtue of office;
- (3.) By their distinct placing in the church as peculiar officers in it, distinct from prophets or pastors;
- (4.) By the especial constitution of their necessary maintenance;
- (5.) By the necessity of their work, to be distinctly carried on in the church. Which may suffice for the removal of the second opinion.

The THIRD is, that teachers are a distinct office in the church, but such whose office, work, and power, is confined unto teaching only, so as that they have no interest in rule or the administration of the sacraments. And,—

1. I acknowledge that this seems to have been the way and practice of the churches after the apostles; for they had ordinarily catechists and teachers in assemblies like schools, that were not called unto the whole work of the ministry.
2. The name of a teacher, neither in its native signification nor in its ordinary application, as expressive of the work of this office, doth extend itself beyond or signify any thing but the mere power and duty of teaching. It is otherwise as unto the names of pastors, bishops or overseers, elders; which, as unto the two former, their constant use in the Scripture, suited unto their signification, include the whole work of the ministry, and the latter is a name of dignity

and rule. Upon the proposal of church-officers under these names, the whole of office-power and duty is apprehended as included in them. But the name of a teacher, especially as significant of that of rabbi among the Jews, carries along with it a confinement unto an especial work or duty.

3. I do judge it lawful for any church, from the nature of the thing itself, Scripture, general rules and directions, to choose, call, and set apart, meet persons unto the office, work, and duty of teachers, without an interest in the rule of the church, or the administration of the holy ordinances of worship. The same thing is practised by many, for the substance of it, though not in due order; and, it may be, the practice hereof, duly observed, would lead us unto the original institution of this office. But,—

4. Whereas a teacher, merely as such, hath no right unto rule or the administration of ordinances, no more than the doctors among the Jews had right to offer sacrifices in the temple, yet he who is called to be a teacher may also at the same time be called to be an elder, and a teaching elder hath the power of all holy administrations committed to him.

5. But he that is called to be a teacher in a peculiar manner, although he be an elder also, is to attend peculiarly unto that part of his work from whence he receiveth his denomination.

And so I shall at present dismiss this third opinion unto further consideration, if there be any occasion for it.

The FOURTH opinion I rather embrace than any of the others, namely, upon a supposition that a teacher is a distinct officer in the church, his office is of the same kind with that of the pastor, though

distinguished from it as unto degrees, both materially and formally; for,—

1. They are joined with pastors in the same order, as their associates in office, Eph. 4:11: so they are with prophets, and set in the church as they are, 1 Cor. 12:28; Acts 13:1.
2. They have a peculiar work, of the same general nature with that of pastors, assigned unto them, Rom. 12:7. Being to teach or preach the gospel by virtue of office, they have the same office for substance with the pastors.
3. They are said λειτουργῆσαι in the church, Acts 13:1, 2, which compriseth all sacred administrations.

Wherefore, upon the consideration of all that is spoken in the Scripture concerning church-teachers, with the various conjectures of all sorts of writers about them, I shall conclude my own thoughts in some few observations, and then inquire into the state of the church with reference unto these "pastors and teachers." And I say,—

1. There may be teachers in a church called only unto the work of teaching, without any further interest in rule or right unto the administration of the sacraments. Such they seem to be who are mentioned, Gal. 6:6. They are there called peculiarly κατηχοῦντες, "catechists;" and παιδαγωγοί, "instructors of those that are young" in the rudiments of religion, 1 Cor. 4:15. And such there were in the primitive churches; some whereof were eminent, famous, and useful. And this was very necessary in those days when the churches were great and numerous; for whereas the whole rule of the church, and the administration of all ordinances in it, are originally committed unto the pastor, as belonging entirely unto his office, the discharge of it in all its parts, unto the edification of the church, especially when it

is numerous, being impossible for any one man, or it may be more, in the same office, where all are obliged unto an especial attendance on one part of it, namely, the word and prayer, it pleased the Lord Christ to appoint such as, in distinct offices, should be associated with them for the discharge of sundry parts of their duty. So were deacons ordained to take care of the poor and the outward concerns of the church, without any interest in rule or right to teach. So were, as we shall prove, elders ordained to assist and help in rule, without any call to preach or administer the sacraments. And so were teachers appointed to instruct the church and others in the truth, who had no right to rule or the administration of other ordinances. And thus, although the whole duty of the edification of the church be still incumbent on the pastors, yet being supplied with assistance to all the parts of it, it may be comfortably discharged by them. And if this order were observed in all churches, not only many inconveniencies would be prevented, but the order and edification of the church greatly promoted.

2. He who is peculiarly called to be a teacher, with reference unto a distinction from a pastor, may yet at the same time be called to be an elder also; that is, to be a teaching elder. And where there is in any officer a concurrence of both these,—a right unto rule as an elder and power to teach or preach the gospel,—there is the same office and office-power, for the substance of it, as there is in the pastor.

3. On the foregoing supposition, there yet remains a distinction between the office of a pastor and teacher;—which, as far as light may be taken from their names and distinct ascriptions unto them, consists materially in the different gifts which those to be called unto office have received, which the church in their call ought to have respect unto; and formally in the peculiar exercise of those gifts in

the discharge of their office, according unto the assignation of their especial work unto them, which themselves are to attend unto.

Upon what hath been before discoursed concerning the office of pastors and teachers, it may be inquired whether there may be many of them in a particular church, or whether there ought only to be of one of each sort? And I say,—

1. Take teachers in the third sense, for those who are only so, and have no further interest in office-power, and there is no doubt but that there may be as many of them in any church as are necessary unto its edification, and ought so to be. And a due observation of this institution would prevent the inconvenience of men's preaching constantly who are in no office of the church; for although I do grant that those who have once been regularly and solemnly set apart or ordained unto the ministry have the right of constant preaching inherent in them, and the duty of it incumbent on them, though they may be separated from those churches wherein and unto whom they were peculiarly ordained, yet for men to give themselves up constantly unto the work of teaching by preaching the gospel who never were set apart by the church thereunto, I know not that it can be justified.

2. If there be but one sort of elders mentioned in the Scripture, it is out of all question that there may be many pastors in the same church; for there were many elders in every church, Acts 14:23, 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:5: but if there are sundry sorts of elders mentioned in the Scripture, as pastors who peculiarly feed the flock, those teaching elders of whom we have spoken, and those rulers concerning whom we shall treat in the next place, then no determination of this inquiry can be taken from the multiplication of them in any church.



3. It is certain that the order very early observed in the church was one pastor, ὁ προεστώς, "præses," quickly called "episcopus," by way of distinction, with many elders assisting in rule and teaching, and deacons ministering in the things of this life, whereby the order of the church was preserved and its authority represented; yet I will not deny but that in each particular church there may be many pastors with an equality of power, if the edification of the church do require it.

4. It was the alteration of the state of the church from its primitive constitution, and deviation from its first order, by an occasional coalescency of many churches into one, by a new form of churches never appointed by Christ, which came not in until after the end of the second century, that gave occasion to corrupt this order into an episcopal pre-eminence, which degenerated more and more into confusion under the name of order. And the absolute equality of many pastors in one and the same church is liable unto many inconveniencies if not diligently watched against.

5. Wherefore let the state of the church be preserved and kept unto its original constitution, which is congregational, and no other, and I do judge that the order of the officers which was so early in the primitive church,—namely, of one pastor or bishop in one church, assisted in rule and all holy administrations with many elders teaching or ruling only,—doth not so overthrow church-order as to render its rule or discipline useless.

6. But whereas there is no difference in the Scripture, as unto office or power, intimated between bishops and presbyters, as we have proved, when there are many teaching elders in any church, an equality in office and power is to be preserved. But yet this takes not off from the due preference of the pastoral office, nor from the

necessity of precedence for the observation of order in all church assemblies, nor from the consideration of the peculiar advantages which gifts, age, abilities, prudence, and experience, which may belong unto some, according to rule, may give.

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## **CHAPTER VII**

### **Of the rule of the church, or of ruling elders**

1. THE rule and government of the church, or the execution of the authority of Christ therein, is in the hand of the elders. All elders in office have rule, and none have rule in the church but elders. As such, rule doth belong unto them. The apostles, by virtue of their especial office, were intrusted with all church-power; but therefore they were elders also, 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1. See Acts 21:18; 1 Tim. 5:17. There are some of them, on other accounts, called "bishops, pastors, teachers, ministers, guides;" but what belongs unto any of them in point of rule, or what interest they have therein, it belongs unto them as elders, and not otherwise, Acts 20:17, 28.

So under the old testament, where the word doth not signify a difference in age, but is used in a moral sense, elders are the same with rulers or governors, whether in offices civil or ecclesiastical; especially the rulers of the church were constantly called its elders. And the use of the word, with the abuse of the power or office intended by it, is traduced to signify men in authority ("seniores, aldermanni") in all places.

2. Church-power, acted in its rule, is called "The keys of the kingdom of heaven," by an expression derived from the keys that were a sign of office-power in the families of kings, Isa. 22:22; and it is used by our Saviour himself to denote the communication of church-power unto others, which is absolutely and universally vested in himself, under the name of "The key of David," Rev. 3:7; Matt. 16:19.

3. These keys are usually referred unto two heads,—namely, the one of order, the other of jurisdiction.

4. By the "key of order," the spiritual right, power, and authority of bishops or pastors to preach the word, to administer the sacraments, and doctrinally to bind and loose the consciences of men, are intended.

5. By "jurisdiction," the rule, government, or discipline of the church is designed; though it was never so called or esteemed in the Scripture, or the primitive church until the whole nature of church rule or discipline was depraved and changed. Therefore, neither the word, nor any thing that is signified by it or which it is applied unto, ought to be admitted unto any consideration in the things that belong unto the church or its rule, it being expressive of and directing unto that corrupt administration of things ecclesiastical, according unto the canon law, by which all church rule and order is destroyed. I do therefore at once dismiss all disputes about it, as of things foreign to the gospel and Christian religion; I mean as unto the institutions of Christ in his church. The civil jurisdiction of supreme magistrates about the externals of religion is of another consideration; but that these keys do include the two fold distinct powers of teaching, and rule, of doctrine and discipline, is freely granted.

6. In the church of England (as in that of Rome) there is a peculiar distribution made of these keys. Unto some,—that is, unto one special sort or order of men,—they are both granted, both the key of order and of jurisdiction; which is unto diocesan bishops, with some others, under various canonical restrictions and limitations, as deans and archdeacons. Unto some is granted the key of order only, without the least interest in jurisdiction or rule by virtue of their office; which are the parochial ministers, or mere presbyters, without any additional title or power, as of commissary surrogates, or the like. And unto a third sort there is granted the key of rule or jurisdiction almost plenipotent, who have no share in the key of order,—that is, were never ordained, separated, dedicated unto any office in the church,—such as are the chancellors, etc.

7. These chancellors are the only lay elders that I know anywhere in any church; that is, persons intrusted with the rule of the church and the disposition of its censures, who are not ordained unto any church-office, but in all other things continue in the order of the laity or the people. All church-rulers by institution are elders; to be an elder of the church and a ruler in it is all one: wherefore these persons being rulers in the church, and yet thus continuing in the order of the people, are lay elders; whom I wonder how so many of the church came so seriously to oppose, seeing this order of men is owned by none but themselves. The truth is, and it must be acknowledged, that there is no known church in the world (I mean, whose order is known unto us, and is of any public consideration) but they do dispose the rule of the church, in part, into the hands of persons who have not the power of authoritative preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments committed unto them; for even those who place the whole external rule of the church in the civil magistrate do it as they judge him an officer of the church, intrusted by Christ with church-power. And those who deny any such

officers as are usually called "ruling elders" in the reformed churches to be of divine institution, yet maintain that it is very necessary that there should be such officers in the church, either appointed by the magistrate or chosen by the people, and that with cogent arguments. See Imp. Sum. Pot. circ. sacra.

8. But this distribution mentioned of church-power is unscriptural, nor is there any footsteps of it in antiquity. It is so as unto the two latter branches of it. That any one should have the power of order to preach the word, to administer the seals, to bind and loose the conscience doctrinally, or ministerially to bind and loose in the court of conscience, and yet by the virtue of that office which gives him this power not to have a right and power of rule or discipline, to bind and loose in the court of the church, is that which neither the Scripture nor any example of the primitive church doth give countenance unto. And as by this means those are abridged and deprived of their power to whom it is granted by the institution and law of Christ (as it is with all elders duly called unto their office), so in the third branch there is a grant of church-power unto such as by the law of Christ are excluded from any interest therein; the enormity of which constitution I shall not at present insist upon.

But inquiry must be made what the Scripture directs unto herein. And,—

1. There is a work and duty of rule in the church distinct from the work and duty of pastoral feeding by the preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments. All agree herein, unless it be Erastus and those that follow him, who seem to oppose it; but their arguments lie not against rule in general, which were brutish, but only a rule by external jurisdiction in the elders of the church. So they grant the general assertion of the necessity of rule, for who can

deny it? only they contend about the subject of power required thereunto. A spiritual rule, by virtue of mutual voluntary confederation, for the preservation of peace, purity, and order in the church, few of that opinion deny, at least it is not that which they do oppose; for to deny all rule and discipline in the church, with all administration of censures, in the exercise of a spiritual power internally inherent in the church, is to deny the church to be a spiritual political society, overthrow its nature, and frustrate its institution, in direct opposition unto the Scripture. That there is such a rule in the Christian church, see Acts 20:28; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 3:5, 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17; Rev. 2, 3.

2. Different and distinct gifts are required unto the discharge of these distinct works and duties. This belongs unto the harmony of the dispensation of the gospel. Gifts are bestowed to answer all duties prescribed. Hence they are the first foundation of all power, work, and duty in the church: "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ;" that is, ability for duty according to the measure wherein Christ is pleased to grant it, Eph. 4:7. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; ... but the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal," 1 Cor. 12:4, 7–10. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us," etc., Rom. 12:6–8. "As every man hath received the gift, so minister the same one to another, is good stewards of the manifold grace of God," 1 Pet. 4:10. Hence are they called "The powers of the world to come," Heb. 6:4, 5. Wherefore, differing gifts are the first foundation of differing offices and duties.

3. That differing gifts are required unto the different works of pastoral teaching on the one hand, and practical rule on the other, is evident,—

(1.) From the light of reason, and the nature of the works themselves being so different; and,

(2.) From experience. Some men are fitted by gifts for the dispensation of the word and doctrine in a way of pastoral feeding who have no useful ability for the work of rule, and some are fitted for rule who have no gifts for the discharge of the pastoral work in preaching; yea, it is very seldom that both these sorts of gifts do concur in any eminency in the same person, or without some notable defect. Those who are ready to assume all things unto themselves are, for the most part, fit for nothing at all. And hence it is that most of those who esteem both these works to belong principally unto themselves do almost totally decline the one, or that of pastoral preaching, under a pretence of attending unto the other, that is, rule, in a very preposterous way; for they omit that which is incomparably the greater and more worthy for that which is less and inferior unto it, although it should be attended unto in a due manner.

But this, and sundry other things of the like nature, proceed from the corruption of that traditional notion, which is true in itself and continued among all sorts of Christians, namely, that there ought to be some on whom the rule of the church is in an especial manner incumbent, and whose principal work it is to attend thereunto; for the great depravations of all church-government proceed from the corruption and abuse of this notion, which in itself and its original is true and sacred. Herein also, "*Malum habitat in alieno fundo;*" there is no corruption in church order or rule but is corruptly derived from or set up as an image of some divine institution.

4. The work of rule, as distinct from teaching, is in general to watch over the walking or conversation of the members of the church with authority, exhorting, comforting, admonishing, reproofing,

encouraging, directing of them, as occasion shall require. The gifts necessary hereunto are diligence, wisdom, courage, and gravity; as we shall see afterward. The pastoral work is principally to "declare the whole counsel of God," to "divide the word aright," or to "labour in the word and doctrine," both as unto the general dispensation and particular application of it, in all seasons and on all occasions. Hereunto spiritual wisdom, knowledge, sound judgment, experience, and utterance, are required, all to be improved by continual study of the word and prayer. But this difference of gifts unto these distinct works doth not of itself constitute distinct offices, because the same persons may be meetly furnished with those of both sorts.

5. Yet distinct works and duties, though some were furnished with gifts for both, were a ground, in the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, for distinct offices in the church, where one sort of them was as much as those of one office could ordinarily attend unto, Acts 6:2–4. Ministration unto the poor of the church for the supply of their temporal necessities is an ordinance of Christ. For the administration hereof the apostles were furnished with gifts and wisdom above all others; but yet, because there was another part of their work and duty superior hereunto, and of greater necessity unto the propagation of the gospel and edification of the church,—namely, a diligent attendance unto the word and prayer,—the wisdom of the Holy Ghost in them thought meet to erect a new office in the church for the discharge of that part of the ministerial duty, which was to be attended unto, yet not so as to be any obstruction unto the other. I do not observe this as if it were lawful for any others after them to do the same,—namely, upon a supposition of an especial work to erect an especial office. Only, I would demonstrate from hence the equity and reasonable ground of that institution, which we shall afterward evince.



6. The work of the ministry in prayer and preaching of the word, or labour in the word and doctrine, whereunto the administration of the seals of the covenant is annexed, with all the duties that belong unto the especial application of these things (before insisted on) unto the flock, are ordinarily sufficient to take up the whole man, and the utmost of their endowments who are called unto the pastoral office in the church. The very nature of the work in itself is such as that the apostle, giving a short description of it, adds, as an intimation of its greatness and excellency, "Who is sufficient for these things?" 2 Cor. 2:16. And the manner of its performance adds unto its weight; for,—not to mention that intension of mind, in the exercise of faith, love, zeal, and compassion, which is required of them in the discharge of their whole office,—the diligent consideration of the state of the flock, so as to provide spiritual food convenient for them, with a constant attendance unto the issues and effects of the word in the consciences and lives of men, is enough, for the most part, to take up their whole time and strength.

It is gross ignorance or negligence that occasioneth any to be otherwise minded. As the work of the ministry is generally discharged, as consisting only in a weekly provision of sermons and the performance of some stated offices by reading, men may have time and liberty enough to attend unto other occasions; but in such persons we are not at present concerned. Our rule is plain, 1 Tim. 4:12–16.

7. It doth not hence follow that those who are called unto the ministry of the word, as pastors and teachers, who are elders also, are divested of the right of rule in the church, or discharged from the exercise of it, because others not called unto their office are appointed to be assistant unto them, that is, helps in the government; for the right and duty of rule is inseparable from the

office of elders, which all bishops or pastors are. The right is still in them, and the exercise of it, consistently with their more excellent work, is required of them. So was it in the first institution of the sanhedrim in the church of Israel, Exod. 18:17–23. Moses had before the sole rule and government of the people. In the addition that was made of an eldership for his assistance, there was no diminution of his right or the exercise of it according to his precedent power. And the apostles, in the constitution of elders in every church, derogated nothing from their own authority, nor discharged themselves of their care. So when they appointed deacons to take care of supplies for the poor, they did not forego their own right nor the exercise of their duty, as their other work would permit them, Gal 2:9, 10; and in particular, the apostle Paul manifested his concernment herein in the care he took about a collection for the poor in all churches.

8. As we observed at the entrance of this chapter, the whole work of the church, as unto authoritative teaching and rule, is committed unto the elders; for authoritative teaching and ruling is teaching and ruling by virtue of office, and this office whereunto they do belong is that of elders, as it is undeniably attested, Acts 20:17, etc. All that belongs unto the care, inspection, oversight, rule, and instruction of the church, is committed unto the elders of it expressly; for "elders" is a name derived from the Jews, denoting them that have authority in the church. The first signification of the word, in all languages, respects age. Elders are old men, well stricken in years; unto whom respect and reverence is due by the law of nature and Scripture command, unless they forfeit their privilege by levity or wickedness, —which they often do. Now, ancient men were originally judged, if not the only, yet the most meet for rule, and were before others constantly called thereunto. Hence the name of "elders" was appropriated unto them who did preside and rule over others in any kind.

Only, it may be observed that there is in the Scripture no mention of rulers that are called elders, but such as are in a subordinate power and authority only. Those who were in supreme, absolute power, as kings and princes, are never called "elders;" but elders by office were such only as had ministerial power under others. Wherefore, the highest officers in the Christian church being called elders, even the apostles themselves, and Peter in particular, 1 Epist. v. 1, 2, it is evident that they have only a ministerial power; and so it is declared, verse 4. The pope would now scarce take it well to be esteemed only an elder of the church of Rome, unless it be in the same sense wherein the Turkish monarch is called the Grand Seignior. But those who would be in the church above elders have no office in it, whatever usurpation they may make over it.

9. To the complete constitution of any particular church, or the perfection of its organical state, it is required that there be many elders in it, at least more than one. In this proposition lies the next foundation of the truth which we plead for; and therefore it must be distinctly considered. I do not determine what their number ought to be, nor is it determinable, as unto all churches; for the light of nature sufficiently directs that it is to be proportioned unto the work and end designed. Where a church is numerous, there is a necessity of increasing their number proportionably unto their work. In the days of Cyprian there were in the church of Carthage ten or twelve of them, that are mentioned by name; and at the same time there were a great many in the church of Rome, under Cornelius. Where the churches are small, the number of elders may be so also; for no office is appointed in the church for pomp or show, but for labour only, and so many are necessary in each office as are able to discharge the work which is allotted unto them. But that church, be it small or great, is not complete in its state, is defective, which hath not more elders than one which hath not so many as are sufficient for their work.

10. The government of the church, in the judgment and practice of some, is absolutely democratical or popular. They judge that all church power or authority is seated and settled in the community of the brethren, or body of the people; and they look on elders or ministers only as servants of the church, not only materially in the duties they perform, and finally for their edification, serving for the good of the church in the things of the church, but formally also, as acting the authority of the church by a mere delegation, and not any of their own received directly from Christ by virtue of his law and institution. Hence they do occasionally appoint persons among themselves, not called unto, not vested with any office, to administer the supper of the Lord, or any other solemn office of worship. On this principle and supposition I see no necessity for any elders at all, though usually they do confer this office on some with solemnity. But as among them there is no direct necessity of any elders for rule, so we treat not at present concerning them.

11. Some place the government of many particular churches in a diocesan bishop, with those that act under him and by his authority, according unto the rule of the canon law and the civil constitution of the land. These are so far from judging it necessary that there should be many elders for rule in every particular church, as that they allow no rule in them at all, but only assert a rule over them. But a church where there is no rule in itself, to be exercised in the name of Christ by its own rulers, officers, guides, immediately presiding in it, is unknown to Scripture and antiquity. Wherefore with these we deal not in this discourse, nor have any apprehension that the power of presenting men, for any pretended disorder, unto the bishop's or chancellor's court is any part of church power or rule.

12. Others place the rule of particular churches, especially in cases of greatest moment, in an association, conjunction, or combination of

all the elders of them in one society; which is commonly called a classis. So in all acts of rule there will be a conjunct acting of many elders. And no doubt it is the best provision that can be made, on a supposition of the continuance of the present parochial distribution. But those also of this judgment who have most weighed and considered the nature of these things, do assert the necessity of many elders in every particular church; which is the common judgment and practice of the reformed churches in all places.

13. And some there are who begin to maintain that there is no need of any more but one pastor, bishop, or elder in a particular church, which hath its rule in itself, other elders for rule being unnecessary. This is a novel opinion, contradictory to the sense and practice of the church in all ages; and I shall prove the contrary.

(1.) The pattern of the first churches constituted by the apostles, which it is our duty to imitate and follow as our rule, constantly expresseth and declares that many elders were appointed by them in every church, Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 16:4, 20:17, etc.; 1 Tim. 5:17; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1. There is no mention in the Scripture, no mention in antiquity, of any church wherein there were not more elders than one; nor doth that church answer the original pattern where it is otherwise.

(2.) Where there is but one elder in a church, there cannot be an eldership or presbytery, as there cannot be a senate where there is but one senator; which is contrary unto 1 Tim. 4:14.

(3.) The continuation of every church in its original state and constitution is, since the ceasing of extraordinary offices and powers, committed to the care and power of the church itself. Hereunto the calling and ordaining of ordinary officers, pastors, rulers, elders, teachers, do belong; and therein, as we have proved, both the

election of the people, submitting themselves unto them in the Lord, and the solemn setting of them apart by imposition of hands, do concur. But if there be but one elder only in a church, upon his death or removal, this imposition of hands must either be left unto the people, or be supplied by elders of other churches, or be wholly omitted; all which are irregular: and that church-order is defective which wants the symbol of authoritative ordination.

(4.) It is difficult, if not impossible, on a supposition of one elder only in a church, to preserve the rule of the church from being prelatical or popular. There is nothing more frequently objected unto those who dissent from diocesan bishops, than that they would every one be bishops in their own parishes and unto their own people. All such pretences are excluded on our principles, of the liberty of the people, of the necessity of many elders in the same church in an equality of power, and the communion of other churches in association; but practically, where there is but one elder, one of the extremes can hardly be avoided. If he rule by himself, without the previous advice, in some cases, as well as the subsequent consent of the church, it hath an eye of unwarrantable prelacy in it. If every thing be to be originally transacted, disposed, ordered by the whole society, the authority of the elder will quickly be insignificant, and he will be little more, in point of rule, than any other brother of the society. But all these inconveniencies are prevented by the fixing of many elders in each church, which may maintain the authority of the presbytery, and free the church from the despotical rule of any Diotrephes. But in case there be but one in any church, unless he have wisdom to maintain the authority of the eldership in his own person and actings, there is no rule, but confusion.

(5.) The nature of the work whereunto they are called requires that, in every church consisting of any considerable number of members,

there should be more elders than one (when God first appointed rule in the church under the old testament, he assigned unto every ten persons or families a distinct ruler, Deut. 1:15); for the elders are to take care of the walk or conversation of all the members of the church, that it be according unto the rule of the gospel. This rule is eminent, as unto the holiness that it requires, above all other rules of moral conversation whatever; and there is, in all the members of the church, great accuracy and circumspection required in their walking after it and according unto it. The order also and decency which is required in all church-assemblies stands in need of exact care and inspection. That all these things can be attended unto and discharged in a due manner in any church, by one elder, is for them only to suppose who know nothing of them. And although there may be an appearance for a season of all these things in such churches, yet, there being not therein a due compliance with the wisdom and institution of Christ, they have no present beauty, nor will be of any long continuance.

These considerations, as also those that follow, may seem jejune and contemptible unto such as have another frame of church rule and order drawn in their minds and interests. A government vested in some few persons, with titles of pre-eminence, and legal power, exercised in courts with coercive jurisdiction, by the methods and processes of canons of their own framing, is that which they suppose doth better become the grandeur of church-rulers and the state of the church than these creeping elders with their congregations. But whereas our present inquiry after these things is only in and out of the Scripture, wherein there is neither shadow nor appearance of any of these practices, I beg their pardon if at present I consider them not.

We shall now make application of these things unto our present purpose. I say, then,—

1. Whereas there is a work of rule in the church distinct from that of pastoral feeding; and,
2. Whereas this Work is to be attended unto with diligence, which includes the whole duty of him that attends unto it; and,
3. Whereas the ministry of the word and prayer, with all those duties that accompany it, is a full employment for any man, and so, consequently, his principal and proper work, which it is unlawful for him to be remiss in by attending on another with diligence; and,
4. Whereas there ought to be many elders in every church, that both the works of teaching and ruling may be constantly attended unto; and,
5. Whereas, in the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, distinct works did require distinct offices for their discharge (all which we have proved already), our inquiry hereon is,—

Whether the same Holy Spirit hath not distinguished this office of elders into these two sorts,—namely, those who are called unto teaching and rule also, and those who are called unto rule only? which we affirm.

The testimonies whereby the truth of this assertion is confirmed are generally known and pleaded. I shall insist on some of them only, beginning with that which is of uncontrollable evidence, if it had any thing to conflict withal but prejudices and interest; and this is

1 Tim. 5:17: οἱ καλῶς προεδιῶτες πρεσβύτεροι διπλῆς τιμῆς ἀξιούσθωσαν, μάλιστα οἱ κοπιῶντες ἐν λόγῳ καὶ διδασκαλίᾳ.



Προΐστημι, or προΐσταμαι, is "præsum, præsideo," to preside, to rule: "Præsident probati seniores," Tertul. And the bishop or pastor in Justin Martyr is ὁ προεστῶς. So is the word constantly used in the New Testament: Rom. 12:8, Ὁ προϊστάμενος,— "That ruleth;" 1 Thess. 5:12, Προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν,— "That are over you," that is, in place of rule; 1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12, it is applied unto family rule and government; as it is also unto care and diligence about good works, Tit. 3:8, 14. Προστασία is the whole presidency in the church, with respect unto its rule. Translators agree in the reading of these words: so the Hebrew of Munster, זְקֵנֵי הָעֵדָוָה אֲשֶׁר מְיַטְּבִים לְנֶהוּג,—"The elders of the congregation who well discharge their rule or conduct;" so the Syriac, קְשִׁיטֵי אֵילִין,— "Those elders;" "Qui bene præsunt presbyteri," Vulg. Lat.; "Seniori che governano bene," Ital. All agree that it is the governors and government of the church in general that are here intended. Μάλιστα is the word most controverted; all translators esteem it distinctive: Heb. וְעֵלָה, "eminently;" Syr. יְתִרְאִית, "chiefly, principally;" "maxime;" οἱ κοπιῶντες ἐν ῥητῇ,—"who labour painfully," labour to weariness, travail in the word and doctrine.

"The elders, or presbyters in office, elders of the church, that rule well, or discharge their presidency for rule in due manner, are to be counted worthy, or ought to be reputed worthy, of double honour, especially those of them who labour or are engaged in the great labour and travail of the word and doctrine."

And some things may be observed in general concerning these words:—

1. This testimony relates directly unto the rules and principles before laid down, directing unto the practice of them. According unto the analogy of those principles these words are to be interpreted; and unless they are overthrown, it is to no purpose to put in exceptions

against the sense of this or that word. The interpretation of them is to be suited unto the analogy of the things which they relate unto. If we consider not what is spoken here in consent with other scriptures treating of the same matter, we depart from all sober rules of interpretation.

2. On this supposition, the words of the text have a plain and obvious signification, which at first view presents itself unto the common sense and understanding of all men; and where there is nothing contrary unto any other divine testimony or evident reason, such a sense is constantly to be embraced. There is nothing here of any spiritual mystery, but only a direction concerning outward order in the church. In such cases the literal sense of the words, rationally apprehended, is all that we are concerned in. But on the first proposal of this text, "That the elders that rule well are worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine," a rational man who is unprejudiced, who never heard of the controversy about ruling elders, can hardly avoid an apprehension that there are two sorts of elders, some that labour in the word and doctrine, and some who do not so do. The truth is, it was interest and prejudice that first caused some learned men to strain their wits to find out evasions from the evidence of this testimony. Being so found out, some others of meaner abilities have been entangled by them; for there is not one new argument advanced in this cause, not one exception given in unto the sense of the place which we plead for, but what was long since coined by Papists and Prelatists, and managed with better colours than some now are able to lay on them who pretend unto the same judgment.

3. This is the substance of the truth in the text:—There are elders in the church; there are or ought to be so in every church. With these elders the whole rule of the church is intrusted; all these, and only

they, do rule in it. Of these elders there are two sorts; for a description is given of one sort distinctive from the other, and comparative with it. The first sort doth rule and also labour in the word and doctrine. That these works are distinct and different was before declared; yet as distinct works they are not incompatible, but are committed unto the same person. They are so unto them who are not elders only, but moreover pastors or teachers. Unto pastors and teachers, as such, there belongs no rule; although by the institution of Christ the right of rule be inseparable from their office, for all that are rightfully called thereunto are elders also, which gives them an interest in rule. They are elders, with the addition of pastoral or teaching authority. But there are elders which are not pastors or teachers; for there are some who rule well, but labour not in the word and doctrine,—that is, who are not pastors or teachers.

Elders that rule well, but labour not in the word and doctrine, are ruling elders only; and such are they in the text.

The most learned of our protestant adversaries in this case are Erastus, Bilson, Saravia, Downham, Scultetus, Mede, Grotius, Hammond; who agree not at all among themselves about the sense of the words: for,—

1. Their whole design and endeavour is to put in exceptions against the obvious sense and interpretation of the words, not fixing on any determinate exposition of it themselves, such as they will abide by in opposition unto any other sense of the place. Now, this is a most sophistical way of arguing upon testimonies, and suited only to make controversies endless. Whose wit is so barren as not to be able to raise one exception or other against the plainest and most evident testimony? So the Socinians deal with us in all the testimonies we produce to prove the deity or satisfaction of Christ. They suppose it

enough to evade their force if they can but pretend that the words are capable of another sense, although they will not abide by it that this or that is their sense; for if they would do so, when that is overthrown, the truth would be established. But every testimony of the Scripture hath one determinate sense. When this is contended about, it is equal that those at difference do express their apprehensions of the mind of the Holy Spirit in the words which they will abide by. When this is done, let it be examined and tried whether of the two senses pretended unto doth best comply with the signification and use of the words, the context or scope of the place, other Scripture testimonies, and the analogy of faith. No such rule is attended unto in this case by our adversaries. They think it enough to oppose our sense of the words, but will not fix upon any of their own, which if it be disproved, ours ought to take place. And hence,—

2. They do not in the least agree among themselves, scarce any two of them, on what is the most probable sense of the words, nor are any of them singly well resolved what application to make of them, nor unto what persons, but only propose things as their conjecture. But of very many opinions or conjectures that are advanced in this case, all of them but one are accompanied with the modesty of granting that divers sorts of elders are here intended; which, without more than ordinary confidence, cannot be denied. But,—

Some, by "elders that rule well," do understand bishops that are diocesans; and by "those that labour in the word and doctrine," ordinary preaching presbyters; which plainly gives them the advantage of pre-eminence, reverence, and maintenance, above the others!

Some, by "elders that rule well," understand ordinary bishops and presbyters; and by "those that labour in the word and doctrine,"

evangelists; so carrying the text out of the present concernment of the church. Deacons are esteemed by some to have an interest in the rule of the church, and so to be intended in the first place, and preaching ministers in the latter.

Some speak of two sorts of elders, both of the same order, or ministers; some that preach the word and administer the sacraments; and others that are employed about inferior offices, as reading and the like: which is the conceit of Scultetus.

Mr Mede weighs most of these conjectures, and at length prefers one of his own before them all,—namely, that by "elders that rule well" civil magistrates are intended, and by "those that labour in the word and doctrine" the ministers of the gospel.

But some, discerning the weakness and improbability of all these conjectures, and how easily they may be disproved, betake themselves unto a direct denial of that which seems to be plainly asserted in the text, namely, that there are two sorts of elders here intended and described; which they countenance themselves in by exception unto the application of some terms in the text, which we shall immediately consider.

Grotius, as was before intimated, disputes against the divine institution of such temporary, lay-elders as are made use of in sundry of the reformed churches: but when he hath done, he affirms that it is highly necessary that such conjunct associates in rule from among the people should be in every church; which he proves by sundry arguments. And these he would have either nominated by the magistrate or chosen by the people.

Wherefore, omitting all contests about the forementioned conceits, or any other of the like nature, I shall propose one argument from

these words, and vindicate it from the exceptions of those of the latter sort.

Preaching elders, although they rule well, are not worthy of double honour, unless they labour in the word and doctrine;

But there are elders who rule well that are worthy of double honour, though they do not labour in the word and doctrine:

Therefore there are elders that rule well who are not teaching or preaching elders,—that is, who are ruling elders only.

The proposition is evident in its own light, from the very terms of it; for to preach is to "labour in the word and doctrine." Preaching or teaching elders, that do not labour in the word and doctrine, are preaching or teaching elders that do not preach or teach. And to say that preachers, whose office and duty it is to preach, are worthy of that double honour which is due on the account of preaching, though they do not preach, is uncouth and irrational. It is contrary to the Scripture and the light of nature, as implying a contradiction, that a man whose office it is to teach and preach should be esteemed worthy of double honour on the account of his office, who doth not as an officer teach or preach.

The assumption consists upon the matter in the very words of the apostle; for he who says, "The elders who rule well are worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine," saith there are, or may be, elders who rule well who do not labour in the word and doctrine,—that is, who are not obliged so to do.

The argument from these words maybe otherwise framed, but this contains the plain sense of this testimony.

Sundry things are excepted unto this testimony and our application of it. Those which are of any weight consist in a contest about two words in the text, *μάλιστα* and *κοπιῶντες*. Some place their confidence of evasion in one of them, and some in another, the argument from both being inconsistent. If that sense of one of these words which is pleaded as a relief against this testimony be embraced, that which unto the same purpose is pretended to be the sense of the other must be rejected. Such shifts doth an opposition unto the truth put men to.

Some say that *μάλιστα*, "especially," is not distinctive, but descriptive only; that is, it doth not distinguish one sort of elders from another, but only describes that single sort of them by an adjunct of their office, whereof the apostle speaks. The meaning of it, they say, is, as much as, or seeing that: "The elders that rule well are worthy of double honour, seeing that they also labour," or "especially considering that they labour," etc.

That this is the sense of the word, that it is thus to be interpreted, must, be proved from the authority of ancient translations, or the use of it in other places of the New Testament, or from its precise signification and application in other authors learned in this language, or that it is enforced from the context or matter treated of.

But none of these can be pretended.

1. The rendering of the word in old translations we have before considered. They agree in "*maxime illi qui*," which is distinctive.
2. The use of it in other places of the New Testament is constantly distinctive, whether applied to things or persons: Acts 20:38, Ὀδυνώμενοι *μάλιστα ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ*,—"Sorrowing chiefly at the word" of seeing his face no more. Their sorrow herein was distinct from all

their other trouble. Gal. 6:10, "Let us do good unto all, μάλιστα δὲ πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους τῆς πίστεως,"—"but chiefly," especially, "unto the household of faith." It puts a distinction between the household of faith and all others, by virtue of their especial privilege; which is the direct use of the word in that place of the same apostle, Phil, 4:22, "All the saints salute you, μάλιστα δὲ οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας,"—"especially they that are of Cæsar's house." Two sorts of saints are plainly expressed,—first, such as were so in general; such as were so also, but under this especial privilege and circumstance, that they were of Cæsar's house, which the others were not. So it is here with respect unto elders: all "rule well," but some moreover "labour in the word and doctrine." 1 Tim. 5:8, Εἰ δὲ τις τῶν ἰδίων, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν οἰκείων οὐ προνοεῖ.—"If a man provide not for his own, especially those of his own house," especially children or servants, which live in his own house, and are thereby distinguished from others of a more remote relation. 2 Tim. 4:13, "Bring the books, μάλιστα τὰς μεμβράνας,"—"especially the parchments;" not because they are parchments, but among the books, the parchments in particular and in an especial manner. 2 Pet. 2:9, 10, "The Lord knoweth how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished, μάλιστα δὲ τοὺς ὀπίσω σαρκός," etc.,—"especially those that walk after the flesh," who shall be singled out to exemplary punishment. It is but once more used in the New Testament, namely, Acts 26:3, where it includes a distinction in the thing under consideration.

Whereas this is the constant use of the word in the Scripture (being principally used by this apostle in his writings), wherein it is distinctive and comparative of the things and persons that respect is had unto, it is to no purpose to pretend that it is here used in another sense or is otherwise applied, unless they can prove from the context that there is a necessity of their peculiar interpretation of it.



3. The use of the word in other authors is concurrent with that of it in the Scripture: Herodian, lib. ii. cap. xxviii., Φιλέορτοι δὲ φύσει Σύρον ὧν μάλιστα οἱ τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν κατοικοῦντες, κ.τ.λ.—"The Syrians are naturally lovers of festivals, especially they that dwell at Antioch." It is the same phrase of speech with that here used; for all they that dwelt at Antioch were Syrians, but all the Syrians dwelt not at Antioch. There is a distinction and distribution made of the Syrians into two sorts,—such as were Syrians only, and such as, being Syrians, dwelt at Antioch, the metropolis of the country. If a man should say that all Englishmen were stout and courageous, especially the Londoners, he would both affirm the Londoners to be Englishmen and distinguish them from the rest of their countrymen. So, all that labour in the word and doctrine are elders. But all elders do not labour in the word and doctrine, nor is it their duty so to do; these we call "ruling elders," and, as I judge, rightly.

4. The sense which the words will give, being so interpreted as that a distinction of elders is not made in them, is absurd, the subject and predicate of the proposition being terms convertible. It must be so if the proposition be not allowed to have a distinction in it. "One sort of elders only," it is said, "is here intended." I ask who they are, and of what sort? It is said, "The same with pastors and teachers, or ministers of the gospel;" for if the one sort of elders intended be of another sort, we obtain what we plead for as fully as if two sorts were allowed. Who, then, are these elders, these pastors and teachers, these ministers of the church? are they not those who labour in the word and doctrine? "Yes," it will be said, "it is they, and no other." Then this is the sense of the words, "Those who labour in the word and doctrine, that rule well, are worthy of double honour, especially if they labour in the word and doctrine;" for if there be but one sort of elders, then "elders" and "those that labour in the word and

doctrine" are terms convertible. But "elders" and "labour in the word and doctrine" are subject and predicate in this proposition.

Wherefore there are few of any learning or judgment that make use of this evasion; but, allowing a distinction to be made, they say that it is as to work and employment, and not as unto office,—those who, in the discharge of their office as elders, do so labour as is intended and included in the word *κοπιῶντες*, which denotes a peculiar kind of work in the ministry. Yea, say some, "This word denotes the work of an evangelist, who was not confined unto any one place, but travelled up and down the world to preach the gospel." And those of this mind do allow that two sorts of elders are intended in the words. Let us see whether they have any better success in this their conjecture than the others had in the former answer.

1. I grant that *κοπιᾶν*, the word here used, signifies to labour with pains and diligence, "ad ultimum virium, usque ad fatigationem,"—unto the utmost of men's strength, and unto weariness. But,—

2. So to labour in the word and doctrine is the duty of all pastors and teachers, and whosoever doth not so labour is negligent in his office, and worthy of severe blame instead of double honour: for,—

(1.) *Κόπος*, whence is *κοπιᾶω*, is the labour of a minister, and so of any minister in his work of teaching and preaching the gospel: 1 Cor. 3:8, "Ἐκαστος δὲ τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν λήψεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον.—"Every one" (that is, every one employed in the ministry, whether to plant or to water, to convert men or to edify the church) "shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour." He that doth not strive, *κοπιᾶν*, in the ministry, shall never receive a reward *κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον*, according to his own labour, and so is not worthy of double honour.

(2.) It is a general word, used to express the work of any in the service of God; whereon it is applied unto the prophets and teachers under the old testament: John 4:38, "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: ἄλλοι κεκοπιάκασι, καὶ ὑμεῖς εἰς τὸν κόπον αὐτῶν εἰσεληλύθατε,"—"others have laboured, and ye have entered into their labours;" that is, of the prophets and John the Baptist. Yea, it is so unto the labour that women may take in the serving of the church: Rom. 16:6, "Salute Mary, ἣτις πολλὰ ἐκοπίασε,"—"who laboured much;" which is more than simply κοπιᾶν. Verse 12, "Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, τὰς κοπιώσας ἐν Κυρίῳ,"—"who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, ἣτις πολλὰ ἐκοπίασεν ἐν Κυρίῳ,"—"who laboured much in the Lord." So wide from truth is it that this word should signify a labour peculiar to some sorts of ministers, which all are not in common obliged unto.

3. If the labour of evangelists, or of them who travelled up and down to preach the word, be intended, then it is so either because this is the proper signification of the word, or because it is constantly used elsewhere to express that kind of labour; but the contrary unto both of these is evident from all places wherein it is used. So is it expressly applied to fixed elders, 1 Thess. 5:12, "We exhort you, brethren, to know τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν,"—"them that labour among you," who are the rulers and instructors.

It is therefore evident that this word expresseth no more but what is the ordinary, indispensable duty of every teaching elder, pastor, or minister; and if it be so, then those elders,—that is, pastors or teachers,—that do not perform and discharge it are not worthy of double honour, nor would the apostle give any countenance unto them who were any way remiss or negligent, in comparison of others, in the discharge of their duty. See 1 Thess. 5:12.

There are, therefore, two sorts of duties confessedly here mentioned and commanded;—the first is, ruling well; the other, labouring in the word and doctrine. Suppose that both these, ruling and teaching, are committed to one sort of persons only, having one and the same office absolutely, then are some commended who do not discharge their whole duty, at least not comparatively unto others; which is a vain imagination. That both of them are committed unto one sort of elders, and one of them only unto another, each discharging its duty with respect unto its work, and so both worthy of honour, is the mind of the apostle.

[To] that which is objected from the following verse, namely, "That maintenance belongs unto this double honour, and so, consequently, that if there be elders that are employed in the work of rule only, maintenance is due unto them from the church," I answer, It is so, no doubt, if,—

1. The church be able to make them an allowance;
2. If their work be such as to take up the whole or the greatest part of their industry; and,
3. If they stand in need of it;—without which considerations it may be dispensed withal, not only in them, but in teaching elders also.

Our next testimony is from the same apostle: Rom. 12:6–8, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministry: 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 showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

Our argument from hence is this: There is in the church ὁ προϊστάμενος, "one that ruleth." Προΐστημι is "to rule with authority by virtue of office;" whence is προεστώς and προϊστάμενος, one that presides over others with authority. For the discharge of their office, here is χάρισμα διάφορον, a "differing peculiar gift," bestowed on some: Ἐχοντες χαρίσματα διάφορα, verse 6. And there is the especial manner prescribed for the discharge of this especial office, by virtue, of that especial gift; ἐν σπουδῇ, it is to be done with peculiar "diligence." And this ruler is distinguished from "him that exhorteth" and "him that teacheth," with whose especial work, as such, he hath nothing to do; even as they are distinguished from those who "give" and "show mercy;"—that is, there is an elder by office in the church, whose work and duty it is to rule, not to exhort nor teach ministerially; which is our ruling elder.

It is answered, "That the apostle doth not treat in this place of offices, functions, or distinct officers, but of differing gifts in all the members of the church, which they are to exercise according as their different nature doth require."

Sundry things I shall return hereunto, which will both explain the context and vindicate our argument:—

1. Those with whom we have to do principally allow no exercise of spiritual gifts in the church but by virtue of office. Wherefore, a distinct exercise of them is here placed in distinct officers, one, as we shall see, being expressly distinguished from another.
2. Give such a probable enumeration of the distinct offices in the church, which they assert, namely, of archbishops, bishops, presbyters, and chancellors, etc., and we shall yield the cause.

3. Gifts alone do no more, give no other warranty nor authority, but only render men meet for their exercise as they are called, and as occasion doth require. If a man hath received a gift of teaching, but is not called to office, he is not obliged nor warranted thereby to attend on public teaching, nor is it required of him in a way of duty, nor given in charge unto him, as here it is.

4. There is in one "rule" required "with diligence." He is ὁ προϊστάμενος, a "ruler;" and it is required of him that he attend unto his work with diligence. And there are but two things required unto the confirmation of our thesis,—

(1.) That this rule is an act of office-power;

(2.) That he unto whom it is ascribed is distinguished from them unto whom the pastoral and other offices in the church are committed.

For the first, it is evident that rule is an act of office or of office-power: for it requires,—

[1.] An especial relation; there is so between him that ruleth and them that are ruled; and this is the relation of office, or all confusion will ensue.

[2.] Especial prelation. He that rules is over, is above them that are ruled: "Obey them that are over you in the Lord." This, in the church, cannot be in any but by virtue of office.

[3.] Especial authority. All lawful rule is an act of authority; and there is no authority in the church but by virtue of office. Secondly, That this officer is distinct from all others in the church we shall

immediately demonstrate, when we have a little farther cleared the context. Wherefore,—

5. It is confessed that respect is had unto gifts,—“Having differing gifts,” verse 6,—as all office-power in the church is founded in them, Eph. 4:7, 8, 11, 12. But gifts absolutely, with reference unto common use, are not intended, as in some other places; but they are spoken of with respect unto offices or functions, and the communication of them unto officers for the discharge of their office. This is evident from the text and context, with the whole design of the place; for,—

(1.) The analysis of the place directs unto this interpretation. Three sorts of duties are prescribed unto the church in this chapter.—

[1.] Such as are universal, belonging absolutely unto all and every one that appertains unto it; which are declared, Rom. 12:1, 2.

[2.] Such as are peculiar unto some, by virtue of that especial place which they have in the church, verses 3–8. This can be nothing but office.

[3.] Such as are general or common, with respect unto occasions, from verse 8 to the end of the chapter. Hence the same duty is doubly prescribed,—to some in way of especial office, to others in the way of a gracious duty in general. So here, “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity,” verse 8, is the same duty or work, for the substance of it, with “Distributing to the necessity of saints,” verse 13. And the apostle doth not repeat his charge of the same duty, in so few words, as required in the same manner and of the same persons but in the first place, he speaks of the manner of its performance by virtue of office, and in the latter of its discharge, as to the substance of it, as a grace in all believers. The design of the apostle lies plain in the analysis of this discourse.

(2.) The context makes the same truth evident; for,—

[1.] The whole ordinary public work of the church is distributed into προφητεία and διακονία,—“prophecy and ministry;” for the extraordinary gift of prophecy is not here intended, but only that of the interpretation of the Scripture, whose rule is the “analogy of faith:” Εἴτε προφητείαν, κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως. It is such prophecy as is to be regulated by the Scripture itself, which gives the “proportion of faith.” And there is not any thing in any or both of these, prophecy and ministry, but it belongs unto office in the church; neither is there any thing belonging unto office in the church but may be reduced unto one of these, as they are all of them here by the apostle.

[2.] The gifts spoken of are, in general, referred unto all them who are intended. Now, these are either the whole church and all the members of it, or all the officers of the church only. Hence it is expressed in the plural number, “Ἐχοντες χαρίσματα, “We having;” that is, all we that are concerned herein. This cannot be “all of the church,” for all the church have not received the gifts of prophecy and ministry; nor can any distinction be made of who doth receive them and who doth not but with respect unto office. And therefore,—

[3.] In the distribution which ensues of prophecy into exhorting and teaching, and of ministry into showing mercy, rule, and giving, having stated these gifts in general, in the officers in general, making distinct application of them unto distinct officers, he speaks in the singular number: Ὁ διδάσκων, ὁ παρακαλῶν, ὁ προϊστάμενος.—“He that teacheth, he that exhorteth, he that ruleth.”

6. It is, then, evident that offices are intended, and it is no less evident that distinct offices are so, which was to be proved in the second place: for,—



(1.) The distributive particle εἴτε, and the indicative article ὁ, prefixed unto each office in particular, do show them [to be] distinct, so far as words can do it. As by the particle εἴτε, "whether," they are distinguished in their nature, whether they be of this or that kind; so by the article prefixed to each of them in exercise, they are distinguished in their subjects.

(2.) The operations, works, and effects ascribed unto these gifts, require distinct offices and functions in their exercise. And if the distribution be made unto all promiscuously, without respect unto distinct offices, it were the only way to bring confusion into the church, whereas, indeed, here is an accurate order in all church-administrations represented to us. And it is further evident that distinct offices are intended,—

(1.) From the comparison made unto the members of the body, verse 4, "All members have not the same office;" the eye hath one, the ear hath another.

(2.) Each of the duties mentioned and given in charge is sufficient for a distinct officer, as is declared Acts 6:1–4.

7. In particular, "He that ruleth" is a distinct officer,—an officer, because rule is an act of office or office-power; and he is expressly distinguished from all others. But say some, " 'He that ruleth' is he that doth so, be who he will,—that is, the pastor or teacher, the teaching elder," But the contrary is evident:—

(1.) He that says, "He that exhorteth," and then adds, "He that ruleth," having distinguished before between prophecy, whereunto exhortation doth belong, and ministry, whereof rule is a part, and prefixing the pre-positive indicative article to each of them, doth as plainly put a difference between them as can be done by words.

(2.) Rule is the principal work of him that ruleth, for he is to attend unto it ἐν σπουδῇ, "with diligence,"—that is, such as is peculiar unto rule, in contradistinction unto what is principally required in other administrations. But rule is not the principal work of the pastor, requiring constant and continual attendance; for his labour in the word and doctrine is ordinarily sufficient for the utmost of his diligence and abilities.

8. We have, therefore, in this context, a beautiful order of things in and of the church,—all the duties of it, with respect unto its edification, derived from distinct differing spiritual gifts, exercised in and by distinct officers unto their peculiar ends, the distinction that is in the nature of those gifts, their use and end, being provided for in distinct subjects. The mind of no one man, at least ordinarily, is meet to be the seat and subject of all those differing gifts in any eminent degree. The person of no man being sufficient, meet, or able, to exercise them in a way of office towards the whole church, especially, "those who labour in the word and doctrine" being obliged to "give themselves wholly thereunto," and those that "rule" to attend thereto with "diligence," so many distinct works, duties, and operations, with the qualifications required in their discharge, being inconsistent in the same subject, all things are here distributed into their proper order and tendency unto the edification of the church. Every distinct gift, required to be exercised in a peculiar manner, unto the public edification of the church, is distributed unto peculiar officers, unto whom an especial work is assigned, to be discharged by virtue of the gifts received, unto the edification of the whole body. No man alive is able to fix on any thing which is necessary unto the edification of the church that is not contained in these distributions, under some of the heads of them; nor can any man find out any thing in these assignations of distinct duties unto distinct offices that is superfluous, redundant, or not directly necessary unto the edification

of the whole, with all the parts and members of it; nor do I know any wise and sober man, who knows any thing how the duties enjoined are to be performed, with what care, diligence, circumspection, prayer, and wisdom, suited unto the nature, ends, and objects of them who can ever imagine that they can all of them belong unto one and the same office, or be discharged by one and the same person.

Let men advance any other church-order in the room of that here declared; so suited unto the principles of natural light, operations and duties of diverse natures, being distributed and assigned to such distinct gifts, acted in distinct offices, as renders those unto whom they are prescribed meet and able for them; so correspondent to all institutions, rules, and examples of church-order in other places of Scripture; so suited unto the edification of the church, wherein nothing which is necessary thereunto is omitted, nor any thing added above what is necessary,—and it shall be cheerfully embraced.

The truth is, the ground of the different interpretations and applications of this [text and] context of the apostle ariseth merely from the prejudicate apprehensions that men have concerning the state of the church and its rule; for if the state of it be national or diocesan, if the rule of it be by arbitrary rules and canons, from an authority exerting itself in courts ecclesiastical, legal or illegal, the order of things here described by the apostle doth no way belong nor can be accommodated thereunto. To suppose that we have a full description and account in these words of all the offices and officers of the church, of their duty and authority, of all they have to do, and the manner how they are to do it, is altogether unreasonable and senseless, unto them who have another idea of church affairs and rule conceived in their minds, or received by tradition, and rivetted by interest. And, on the other hand, those who know little or nothing of what belongs unto the due edification of the church beyond

preaching the word and reaping the advantage that is obtained thereby, cannot see any necessity of the distribution of these several works and duties unto several officers, but suppose all may be done well enough by one or two in the same office. Wherefore, it will be necessary that we treat briefly of the nature of the rule of the church in particular, and of what is required thereunto; which shall be done in the close of this discourse.

9. The exceptions which are usually put in unto this testimony have not the least countenance from the text or context, or the matter created of, nor confirmation from any other divine testimony. It is therefore in vain to contend about them, being such as any man may multiply at his pleasure on the like occasion; and they are used by those who, on other considerations, are not willing that things should as they are here declared to be by the apostle. Yet we may take a brief specimen of them. Some say it is gifts absolutely, without respect unto distinct offices, that the apostle treats of; which hath been disproved from the text and context before. Some say that rule is included in the pastoral office, so as that the pastor only is here intended. But,—

(1.) Rule is not his principal work, which he is to attend unto in a peculiar manner, with diligence above other parts of his duty.

(2.) The care of the poor of the flock belongs also to the pastoral office, yet is there another officer appointed to attend unto it in a peculiar manner, Acts 6:1–6.

(3.) "He that ruleth" is in this place expressly distinguished from "him that exhorteth" and "him that teacheth." Some say that "He that ruleth" is he that ruleth his family; but this is disproved by the analysis of the chapter before declared; and this duty, which is common unto all that have families, and confined unto their families,

is ill placed among those public duties which are designed unto the edification of the whole church. It is objected that "He that ruleth" is here placed after "Him that giveth,"—that is, the deacon; I say, then, it cannot be the pastor that is intended, if we may prescribe methods of expressing himself unto the apostle. But he useth his liberty, and doth not oblige himself unto any order in the annumeration of the offices of the church. See 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28. And some other exceptions are insisted on of the same nature and importance, which indeed deserve not our consideration.

10. There is the same evidence given unto the truth argued for in another testimony of the same apostle: 1 Cor. 12:28, "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." I shall not insist on this testimony and its vindication in particular, seeing many things would be required thereunto which have been treated of already. Some things may be briefly observed concerning it. That there is here an annumeration of officers and offices in the church, both extraordinary, for that season, and ordinary, for continuance, is beyond exception. Unto them is added the present exercise of some extraordinary gifts, as "miracles, healings, tongues." That by "helps" the deacons of the church are intended, most do agree, because their original institution was as helpers in the affairs of the church. "Governments" are governors or rulers, the abstract for the concrete,—that is, such as are distinct from "teachers;" such hath God placed in the church, and such there ought to be. But it is said "That gifts, not offices, are intended,—the gift of government, or gift for government." If so, then these gifts are either ordinary or extraordinary. If ordinary, how come they to be reckoned among "miracles, healings, and tongues" if extraordinary, what extraordinary gifts for government were then given distinct from

those of the apostles, and what instance is anywhere given of them in the Scripture? Again: if God hath given gifts for government to abide in the church, distinct from those given unto teachers, and unto other persons than the teachers, then is there a distinct office of rule or government in the church; which is all we plead for.

11. The original order of these things is plain in the Scripture. The apostles had all church-power and church-office in themselves, with authority to exercise all acts of them everywhere on all occasions: but considering the nature of the church, with that of the rule appointed by the Lord Christ in it or over it, they did not, they would not, ordinarily exercise their power by themselves or in their own persons alone; and therefore, when the first church consisted of a small number, the apostles acted all things in it by the consent of the whole multitude, or the fraternity, as we have proved from Acts. 1:15–26. And when the number of believers increased, so as that the apostles themselves could not in their own persons attend unto all the duties that were to be performed towards the church by virtue of office, they added, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, the office of the deacons, for the especial discharge of the duty which the church oweth unto its poor members. Whereas, therefore, it is evident it that the apostles could no more personally attend unto the rule of the church, with all that belongs thereunto, without an in-reachment on that labour in the word and prayer which was incumbent on them, than they could attend unto the relief of the poor, they appointed elders to help and assist in that part of office-work, as the deacons did in the other.

These elders are first mentioned Acts 11:30; where they are spoken of as those which were well known, and had now been of some time in the church. Afterward they are still mentioned in conjunction with the apostles, and in distinction from the church itself, Acts 5:2, 4, 6, 22, 16:4, 21:18. Now, the apostles themselves were caching elders,—

that is, such as had the work of teaching and rule committed to them, 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1,—and these elders are constantly distinguished from them; which makes it evident that they were not teaching elders: and therefore, in all the mention that is made of them, the work of teaching or preaching is nowhere ascribed unto them, which, at Jerusalem, the apostles reserved to themselves, Acts 6:2–4; but they are everywhere introduced as joining with the apostles in the rule of the church, and that in distinction from the church itself, or the brethren of it. Yea, it is altogether improbable that whilst the apostles were at Jerusalem, giving themselves wholly unto the word and prayer, they should appoint in the same church many more teaching elders, though it is plain that the elders intended there many.

I shall add, for a close of all, that there is no sort of churches in being but are of this persuasion, that there ought to be rulers in the church that are not in "sacred orders," as some call them, or have no interest in the pastoral or ministerial office, as unto the dispensation of the word and administration of the sacraments; for as the government of the Roman church is in the hands of such persons in a great measure, so in the church of England much of the rule of it is managed by chancellors, officials, commissaries, and the like officers, who are absolutely laymen, and not at all in their holy orders. Some would place the rule of the church in the civil magistrate, who is the only ruling elder, as they suppose. But the generality of all Protestant churches throughout the world, both Lutheran and Reformed, do, both in their judgment and practice, assert the necessity of the ruling elders which we plead for; and their office lies at the foundation of all their order and discipline, which they cannot forego without extreme confusion, yea, without the ruin of their churches. And although some among us, considering particular churches only as small societies, may think there is no

need of any such office on officers for rule in them, yet when such churches consist of some thousands, without any opportunity of distributing themselves into several congregations, as at Charenton in France, it is a weak imagination that the rule of Christ can be observed in them by two or three ministers alone. Hence, in the primitive times, we have instances often, twenty, yea, forty elders, in a particular church; where in they had respect unto the institution under the old testament whereby each ten families were to have a peculiar ruler. However it is certain that there is such a reformation in all sorts of churches that there ought to be some attending unto rule that are not called to labour in the word and doctrine.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### **The nature of church polity or rule, with the duty of elders**

HAVING declared who are the rulers of the church, something must be added concerning the rule itself which is to be exercised therein. Hereof I have treated before in general; that which I now design is what in particular respects them who are called unto rule, only, whereunto some considerations must be premised:—

1. There is power, authority, and rule, granted unto and residing in some persons of the church, and not in the body of the fraternity or community of the people. How far the government of the church may be denominated democratical from the necessary consent of the



people unto the principal acts of it in its exercise, I shall not determine; but whereas this consent, and the liberty of it, are absolutely necessary, according to the law of obedience unto Christ, which prescribed unto the church, requiring that all they do in compliance therewith be voluntary, as unto the manner of its exercise, being in dutiful compliance with the guidance of the rule, it changeth not the state of the government. And therefore, where any thing is acted and disposed in the church by suffrage, or the plurality of voices, the vote of the fraternity is not determining and authoritative, but only declarative of consent and obedience. It is so in all acts of rule where the church is organical or in complete order.

2. That there is such an authority and rule instituted by Christ in his church is not liable unto dispute. Where there are "bishops, pastors, elders, guides, rulers, stewards," instituted, given, granted, failed, ordained; and some to be ruled, "sheep, lambs, brethren," obliged by command to "obey them, follow them, submit unto them in the Lord, regard them as over—them," there is rule and authority in some persons, and that committed unto them by Jesus Christ; us all these things are frequently repeated in the Scripture. And when, in the practical part or exercise of rule, due respect is not had into their authority, there is nothing but confusion and disorder. When the people judge that the power of the keys is committed unto them as such only, and in them doth the right of their use and exercise reside; that their elders have no interest in the disposing of church-affairs or in acts of church-power, but only their own suffrage, or what they can obtain by reasoning; and think there is no duty incumbent on them to acquiesce in their authority in any thing (an evil apt to grow in churches),—it overthrows all that beautiful order which Jesus Christ hath ordained. And if any shall take advantage of this complaint, that where the people have their due liberty granted unto them, they are apt to assume that power unto themselves which

belongs not unto them, an evil attended with troublesome impertinencies and disorder, tending unto anarchy, let them remember, on the other hand, how, upon the confinement of power and authority unto the guides, bishops, or rulers of the church, they have changed the nature of church-power, and enlarged their surpation, until the whole rule of the church issued in absolute tyranny. Wherefore, no fear of consequents that may ensue and from the darkness, ignorance, weakness, lusts, corruptions, or interests of men, ought to entice us unto the least alteration on of the rule by any prudential provisions of our own.

3. This authority in the rulers of the church is neither autocratical or sovereign, nor nomothetical or legislative, nor despotical or absolute, but organical and ministerial only. The endless controersies which have sprung out of the mystery of iniquity, about an autocratically and monarchical government in the church, about power make laws to bind the consciences of men, yea, to kill and destroy them, with the whole manner of the execution of this power, are not concerned in. A pretence of any such power in the church is destructive of the kingly office of Christ, contrary to express commands of Scripture, and condemned by the apostles, Isa. 33:22; James 4:12; Matt. 17:5, 23:8–11; Luke 22:25, 26; 2 Cor. 1:24; 1 Cor. 3:21–23; 2 Cor. 4:5; 1 Pet. 5:1–3.

4. As the rule of the church, in those by whom it is exercised, is merely ministerial, with respect unto the authority of Christ, his law, and the liberty of the church, wherewith he hath made it free, so in its nature it is spiritual, purely and only; so the apostle affirms expressly, 2 Cor. 10:4–6. For its object is spiritual,—namely, the souls and consciences of men, whereunto it extends, which no other human power doth; nor doth it reach those other concerns of men that are subject unto any political power. Its end is spiritual,—

namely, the glory of God, in the guidance and direction of the minds and souls of men to live unto him, and come to the enjoyment of him. The law of it is spiritual, even the word, command and direction of Christ himself alone. The acts and exercise of it, in binding and loosing, in remitting and retaining sin, in opening and shutting the kingdom of heaven, are all spiritual merely and only. Neither can there be an instance given of any thing belonging unto the rule of the church that is of another nature; yea, it is sufficient eternally to exclude any power or exercise of it, any act of rule of government, from any interest in church-affairs, that it can be proved to be carnal, political, despotic, of external operation, or not entirely spiritual.

5. The change of this government of the church fell out and was introduced gradually, upon an advantage taken from the unmeetness of the people to be laid under this spiritual rule; for the greatest part of them that made up Christian churches being become ignorant and carnal, that rule which consists in a spiritual influence on the consciences of men was no way able to retain there within the bounds of outward obedience, which was at last only aimed at. There was therefore another kind of rule and government judged necessary, to retain them in any order or decorum. And it must be acknowledged that where the members of the church are not in some degree spiritual, a rule that is merely spiritual will be of no great use unto them. But principally this change was introduced by those that were in possession of the rule itself and that on two grounds:—(1.) Their unskilfulness in the management of this spiritual rule, or weariness of the duties which are required thereunto,—this made them willing to desert it,—with that; perpetual labour and exercise of all sorts of graces which are required in it, and to embrace another more easy and more suited unto their inclinations. (2.) A desire of the secular advantages profit, honour, and veneration, which tendered themselves unto the in another kind of rule. By these means was the

original government of the church, which was of divine institution, utterly lost and a worldly domination introduced in the room thereof. But the brief delineation given of it before, with what shall now be added, will demonstrate sufficiently that all those disputes and contests which are in the world between the church of Rome and others about church power and rule are utterly foreign unto Christian religion.

I shall therefore briefly inquire into these three things:—1. What is the skill and polity that are required unto the exercise or administration of the government of the church; 2. What is the sole law and rule of it; 3. What are the acts and duties of it, what it is conversant about, especially those wherein the office of ruling elders doth take place:—

1. The polity of church-government, subjectively considered, is generally supposed to consist,—

(1.) In a skill, learning, or understanding in the civil, and especially the canon law, with the additional canons accommodating that law unto the present state of things of the nation, to be interpreted according unto the general rules of it.

(2.) Knowledge of and acquaintance with the constitution, power, jurisdiction, and practice, of some law-courts, which being, in their original, grant of power, manner of proceeding, pleas and censures, merely secular, are yet called ecclesiastical or spiritual.

(3.) A good discretion to understand aright the extent of their power, with the bounds and limits of it; that on the one hand they let none escape whom they can reach by the discipline of their courts, and on the other not intrench so far on the civil power and the jurisdiction of

other courts, according to the law of the land, as to bring themselves unto charge or trouble.

(4.) An acquaintance with the table of fees, that they may neither lose their own profit nor give advantage unto others to question them for taking more than their due. But in these things we are not at present concerned.

The skill, then, of the officers of the church for the government of it is a spiritual wisdom and understanding in the law of Christ or that end, with an ability to make application of it in all requisite instances, unto the edification of the whole church and all its members, through a ministerial exercise of the authority of Christ himself, and a due representation of his holiness, love, care, compassion, and tenderness, towards his church.

(1.) The sole rule and measure of the government of the church being the law of Christ,—that is, the intimation and declaration of his mind and will, in his institutions, commands, prohibitions, and promises,—an understanding herein, with wisdom from that understanding, is, and must be, the whole of the skill inquired after. How his wisdom is bestowed as a spiritual gift, how it is to be acquired a way of duty, by prayer, meditation, and study of the word, hath been intimated before, and shall fully be declared in our discourse of Spiritual Gifts. All decrees and decretals, canons and glosses, come properly in this matter under one title of them, namely, extravagant. The utmost knowledge of them and skill in them will contribute nothing unto this wisdom; neither are any sort of men more strangers unto it or unacquainted with it than they are, for the most part, who are eminently cunning in such laws and the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts. But wisdom in the knowledge of the will of Christ as revealed

in the Scripture is that alone which is of use in the government of the church.

(2.) A part of this wisdom consisteth in an ability of mind to make application of the law of Christ, in all requisite instances, unto the edification of the church in general and all the members of it respectively. This wisdom is not notional only, but practical. It consists not in a speculative comprehension of the sense of the rule, or of the mind of Christ therein only, though that be required in the first place; but in an ability of mind to make application of it, whereunto diligence, care, watchfulness, and spiritual courage, are required. Some are to be admonished, some to be rebuked sharply, some to be cut off; in which and the like cases a spirit of government acting itself in diligence, boldness, and courage, is necessary. And this is one reason why the Lord Christ hath appointed many elders in each church, and those of several sorts; for it is seldom that any one man is qualified for the whole work of rule. Some may have a good understanding in the law of the church's government, yet, through a natural tenderness and an insuperable kind of modesty, not be so ready and prompt for that part of this discipline which consists in reproofs and severity of censures. Some may not have so great an ability for the indagation of the sense of the law as others have, who yet, upon the knowledge of it being discovered unto them, have readiness and boldness in Christ to apply it as occasion doth require. All elders, therefore, in their variety of gifts, are to be helpful to each other in the common work which they are called unto. But such as are utterly destitute of these gifts are not called unto this work, nor to any part of it.

(3.) The power that is exercised herein is the power and authority of Christ, committed unto the elders: "Our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for destruction," 2 Cor. 10:8. It

is granted unto the rulers of the church, not formally to reside in them, as the power of a king is in his own person, but ministerially and instrumentally only; for it must be the authority of Christ himself, whereby the consciences of men are spiritually affected with reference unto spiritual ends,—whereby they are bound or loosed in heaven and earth, have their sins remitted or retained. And the consideration hereof is that alone which gives a due regard unto the ministry of the church, in the discharge of their office, among them that desire to commend their consciences unto the Lord Christ in what they do.

(4.) The especial design of the rule of the church in its government is, to represent the holiness, love, compassion, care, and authority of Christ towards his church. This is the great end of rule in the church, and of all the discipline which is to be exercised by virtue thereof. Whilst this is not attended unto, when the officers and rulers of the church do not endeavour, in all the actings of their power and office, to set forth these virtues of Christ, to exemplify that impression of them which he hath left in his laws and rule, with the divine testimonies which he gave of them in his own person, they utterly deviate from the principal end of all rule in the church. For men to act herein in a way of domination, with a visible elation of mind and spirit above their brethren; with anger, wrath, and passion; by rules, order, and laws of their own devising, without the least consideration of what the Lord Christ requires, and what is the frame of his heart towards all his disciples,—is to reflect the highest dishonour imaginable upon Christ himself. He who comes into the courts of the king in Westminster Hall, when filled with judges, grave, learned, and righteous, must ordinarily be allowed to judge of the king himself, his wisdom, justice, moderation, and clemency, by the law which they proceed upon and their manner of the administration of it. But God forbid that Christians should make a judgment

concerning the holiness, wisdom, love, and compassion of Christ by the representation which, as is pretended, is made of him and them in some courts wherein church rule and discipline is administered! When any had offended of old, their censure by the church was called the bewailing of them, 2 Cor. 12:21; and that because of the sorrow, pity, and compassion whereby, in that censure, they evidenced the compassion of the Lord Christ towards the souls of sinners. This is scarce answered by those pecuniary mulcts and other penalties, which, with indignation and contempt, are inflicted on such as are made offenders, whether they will or no. Certainly, those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and have a due honour for the gospel, will, at one time or another, begin to think meet that this stain of our religion should be washed away.

2. The rule and law of the exercise of power in the elders of the church is the holy Scripture only. The Lord Christ is the only lawgiver of the church; all his laws unto this end are recorded in the Scripture; no other law is effectual, can oblige or operate upon the objects or unto the ends of church-rule. If the church make a thousand rules, or canons, or laws for government, neither any of them, nor all of them in general, have any the least power to oblige men unto obedience or compliance with them, but only so far as virtually or materially they contain what is of the law of Christ, and derive force from thence: as the judges in our courts of justice are bound to judge and determine in all cases out of and according to the law of the land; and when they do not, their sentence is of no validity, but may and ought to be reversed. But if, wilfully or of choice, they should introduce laws or rules not legally established in this nation, judging according unto them, it would render them highly criminal and punishable. It is no otherwise in the kingdom of Christ and the rule thereof. It is by his law alone that rule is to be exercised in it. There is nothing left unto the elders of the church but the application



of his laws and the general rules of them unto particular cases and occasions. To make, to bring, to execute, any other rules, laws, or canons, in the government of his church, is to usurp on his kingly dominion, whereunto all legislative power in the church is appropriate. Nor is it possible that any thing can fall out in the church, that any thing can be required in the rule of it, nor can any instance be given of any such thing, wherein, for the ends of church-rule, there is, or can be, any more left unto the rulers of it but only the application and execution of the laws of Christ. Unto this application, to be made in a due manner, the wisdom and skill before described is requisite, and that alone. Where there are other laws, rules, or canons of the government of the church, and where the administration of them is directed by laws civil or political, there is a skill in them required unto that administration, as all will confess. So is the wisdom we before described, and that alone, necessary unto that rule of the church which the Lord Christ hath ordained; the instrument and means whereof is his word and law alone.

3. The matter of this rule about which it is conversant, and so the acts and duties of it, may be reduced unto three heads:—

(1.) The admission and exclusion of members. Both these are acts of church power and authority, which are to be exercised by the elders only, in a church that is organical and complete in its officers. There is that in them both which is founded in and warranted from the light and law of nature and rules of equity. Every righteous voluntary society, coalescing therein rightfully, upon known laws and rules for the regulation of it unto certain ends, hath naturally a power inherent in it, and inseparable from it, to receive into its incorporation such as, being meet for it, do voluntarily offer themselves thereunto; as also to reject or withhold the privileges of the society from such as refuse to be regulated by the laws of the

society. This power is inherent in the church essentially considered, antecedently unto the instating of officers in it. By virtue of their mutual confederation, they may receive into the privileges of the society those that are meet, and withdraw the same privileges from those that are unworthy. But in these actings of the church, essentially considered, there is no exercise of the power of the keys as unto authoritative rule but what is merely doctrinal. There is in what it doth a declaration of the mind of Christ as unto the state of the persons whom they do receive or reject. But unto the church as organical, as there are elders or rulers instated in it according unto the mind of Christ, there is a peculiar authority committed for those acts of the admission and exclusion of members. Unto this end is the key of rule committed unto the elders of the church, to be applied with the consent of the whole society, as we shall see afterward.

(2.) The direction of the church, in all the members of it, unto the observance of the rule and law of Christ in all things, unto his glory and their own edification. And all these things may be reduced unto these four heads:—

[1.] Mutual, intense, peculiar love among themselves, to be exercised continually in all the duties of it.

[2.] Personal holiness, in gracious moral obedience.

[3.] Usefulness towards the members of the same church, towards other churches, and all men absolutely, as occasion and opportunity do require.

[4.] The due performance of all those duties which all the members of the church owe mutually unto each other, by virtue of that place and order which they hold and possess in the body. About these

things is church-rule to be exercised; for they all belong unto the preservation of its being and the attainment of its ends.

(3.) Hereunto also belongs the disposal of the outward concernments of the church in its assemblies, and in the management of all that is performed in them, that "all things may be done decently and in order." The disposal of times, seasons, places, the way and manner of managing all things in church-assemblies, the regulation of speeches and actions, the appointment of seasons for extraordinary duties, according unto the general rules of the word and the reason of things from present circumstances, are acts of rule, whose right resides in the elders of the church.

These things being premised, we may consider what is the work and duty of that sort of elders which we have proved to be placed by Christ for rule in the church; for considering that which hath been spoken before concerning the pastoral office, or the duty of teaching elders of the church, and what hath now been added concerning its rule in general, I cannot but admire that any one man should have such a confidence in his own abilities as to suppose himself meet and able for the discharge of the duties of both sorts in the least church of Christ that can well be supposed. Yea, supposing more teaching elders in every church than one, yet if they are all and every one of them equally bound to give themselves unto the word and prayer, so as not to be diverted from that work by any inferior duties, if they are obliged to labour in the word and doctrine to the utmost of their strength continually, it will appear at length to be necessary that there should be some whose peculiar office and duty is to attend unto rule with diligence. And the work of these elders consists in the things ensuing:—

1. They are joined unto the teaching elders in all acts and duties of church-power for the rule and government of the church; such are those before declared. This is plain in the text, 1 Tim. 5:17. Both sorts of elders are joined and do concur in the same rule and all the acts of it, one sort of them labouring also in the word and doctrine. Of both sorts is the presbytery or eldership composed, wherein resides all church-authority. And in this conjunction, those of both sorts are every way equal, determining all acts of rule by their common suffrage. This gives order, with a necessary representation of authority, unto the church in its government.

2. They are, in particular, to attend unto all things wherein the rule or discipline of the church is concerned, with a due care that the commands of Christ be duly observed by and among all the members of the church. This is the substance of the rule which Christ hath appointed, whatever be pretended unto the contrary. Whatever is set up in the world in opposition unto it or inconsistent with it, under the name of the government of the church, is foreign unto the gospel. Church-rule is a due care and provision that the institutions, laws, commands, and appointments of Jesus Christ be duly observed, and nothing else. And hereof, as unto the duty of the elders, we may give some instances; as,—

(1.) To watch diligently over the ways, walking, and conversation of all the members of the church, to see that it be blameless, without offence, useful, exemplary, and in all things answering the holiness of the commands of Christ, the honour of the gospel, and the profession which in the world they make thereof; and upon the observation which they so make, in the watch wherein they are placed, to instruct, admonish, charge, exhort, encourage, comfort, as they see cause. And this are they to attend unto with courage and diligence.

(2.) To watch against all risings or appearances of such differences and divisions, on the account of things ecclesiastical or civil, as unto their names, rights, and proprieties in the world, as are contrary unto that love which the Lord Christ requireth in a peculiar and eminent manner to be found amongst his disciples. This he calls his own "new commandment," with respect unto his authority requiring it, his example first illustrating it in the world, and the peculiar fruits and effects of it which he revealed and taught. Wherefore, the due observance of this law of love, in itself and all its fruits, with the prevention, removal, or condemnation, of all that is contrary unto it, is that in which the rule of the church doth principally consist. And, considering the weakness, the passions, the temptations of men, the mutual provocations and exasperations that are apt to fall out even among the best, the influence that earthly occasions are apt to have upon their minds, the frowardness sometimes of men's natural tempers, the attendance unto this one duty or part of rule requires the utmost diligence of them that are called unto it; and it is merely either the want of acquaintance with the nature of that law and its fruits which the Lord Christ requires among his disciples, or an undervaluation of the worth and glory of it in the church, or inadvertency unto the causes of its decays and of breaches made in it, or ignorance of the care and duties that are necessary unto its preservation, that induces men to judge that the work of an especial office is not required hereunto.

(3.) Their duty is to warn all the members of the church of their especial church-duties, that they be not found negligent or wanting in them. There are especial duties required respectively of all church-members, according unto the distinct talents, whether in things spiritual or temporal, which they have received. Some are rich, and some are poor; some are old, and some are young; some are in peace, some in trouble; some have received more spiritual gifts than others

and have more opportunities for their exercise. It belongs unto the rule of the church that all be admonished, instructed, and exhorted to attend unto their respective duties, not only publicly in the preaching of the word, but personally as occasion doth require, according to the observation which those in rule do make of their forwardness or remissness in them. In particular, and in the way of instance, men are to be warned that they contribute unto the necessities of the poor and other occasions of the church, according unto the ability that God in his providence hath intrusted them withal, and to admonish them that are defective herein, in order to their recovery unto the discharge of this duty in such a measure as there may be an equality in the church, 2 Cor. 8:14. And all other duties of an alike nature are they to attend unto.

(4.) They are to watch against the beginnings of any church-disorders, such as those that infested the church of Corinth, or any of the like sort, with remissness as unto [attending] the assemblies of the church and the duties of them, which some are subject unto, as the apostle intimates, Heb. 10:25. On the constancy and diligence of the elders in this part of their work and duty, the very being and order of the church do greatly depend. The want hereof hath opened a door unto all the troubles, divisions, and schisms, that in all ages have invaded and perplexed the churches of Christ from within themselves; and from thence also have decays in faith, love, and order insensibly prevailed in many, to the dishonour of Christ and the danger of their own souls. First one grows remiss in attending unto the assemblies of the church, and then another, first to one degree, then to another, until the whole lump be infected. A diligent watch over these things, as to the beginnings of them, in all the members of the church, will either heal and recover them that offend, or it will warn others, and keep the church from being either corrupted or defiled, Heb. 3:12, 12:15.

(5.) It belongs unto them also to visit the sick, especially such as whose inward or outward conditions do expose them unto more than ordinary trials in their sickness; that is, the poor, the afflicted, the tempted in any kind. This in general is a moral duty, a work of mercy; but it is moreover a peculiar church-duty by virtue of institution. And one end of the institution of churches is, that the disciples of Christ may have all that spiritual and temporal relief which is needful for them and useful to them in their troubles and distresses. And if this duty were diligently attended unto by the officers of the church, it would add much unto the glory and beauty of our order, and be an abiding reserve with relief in the minds of them whose outward condition exposeth them to straits and sorrows in such a season.

I add hereunto, as a duty of the same nature, the visitation of those who suffer under restraint and imprisonment upon the account of their profession, adherence unto church-assemblies, or the discharge of any pastoral or office duties in them. This is a case wherewith we are not unacquainted, nor are like so to be. Some look on this as the duty of all the members of the church who yet enjoy their liberty; and so it is as their opportunities and abilities will allow them, provided the discharge of it be useful unto those whom they visit, and inoffensive unto others. But this duty diligently attended unto by the elders, representing therein the care and love of the whole church, yea, of Christ himself unto his prisoners, is a great spring of relief and comfort unto them. And by the elders may the church be acquainted what yet is required of them in a way of duty on their account. The care of the primitive churches herein was most eminent.

(6.) It belongs unto them and their office to advise with and give direction unto the deacons of the church as unto the making

provision and distribution of the charity of the church for the relief of the poor. The office of the deacons is principally executive, as we shall see afterward. Inquisition into the state of the poor, with all their circumstances, with the warning of all the members of the church unto liberality for their supply, belongs unto the elders.

(7.) When the state of the church is such, through suffering, persecution, and affliction, that the poor be multiplied among them, so as that the church itself is not able to provide for their relief in a due manner, if any supply be sent unto them from the love and bounty of other churches, it is to be deposited with these elders, and disposed according to their advice, with that of the teachers of the church, Acts 11:30.

(8.) It is also their duty, according to the advantage which they have, by their peculiar inspection of all the members of the church, their ways and their walking, to acquaint the pastors, or teaching-elders of the church, with the state of the flock; which may be of singular use unto them for their direction in the present work of the ministry. He who makes it not his business to know the state of the church which he ministers unto in the word and doctrine, as to their knowledge, their judgment and understanding, their temptations and occasions, and applies not himself in his ministry to search out what is necessary and useful unto their edification, he fights uncertainly in his whole work, as a man beating the air. But whereas their obligation to attend unto the word and prayer confines them much unto a retirement for the greatest part of their time, they cannot by themselves obtain that acquaintance with the whole flock but that others may greatly assist therein from their daily inspection, converse, and observation.



(9.) And it is their duty to meet and consult with the teaching-elders about such things of importance as are to be proposed in and unto the church, for its consent and compliance. Hence nothing crude or indigested, nothing unsuited to the sense and duty of the church, will at any time be proposed therein, so as to give occasion unto contests or janglings, disputes contrary unto order or decency, but all things may be preserved in a due regard unto the gravity and authority of the rulers.

(10.) To take care of the due liberties of the church, that they be not imposed on by any Diotrepes, in office or without it.

(11.) It is incumbent on them, in times of difficulties and persecution, to consult together with the other elders concerning all those things which concern the present duty of the church from time to time, and their preservation from violence, according unto the will of Christ.

(12.) Whereas there may be, and oftentimes is, but one teaching-elder, pastor, or teacher in a church, upon his death or removal it is the work and duty of these elders to preserve the church in peace and unity, to take care of the continuation of its assemblies, to prevent irregularities in any persons or parties among them, and to go before, to direct and guide the church in the call and choice of some other meet person or persons in the room of the deceased or removed.

These few instances have I given of the work and duty of ruling-elders. They are all of them such as deserve a greater enlargement in their declaration and confirmation than I can here afford unto them, and sundry things of the like nature, especially with respect unto communion with other churches and synods; but what hath been spoken is sufficient unto my present purpose. And to manifest that it is so, I shall add the ensuing observations:—

1. All the things insisted on do undoubtedly and unquestionably belong unto the rule and order appointed by Christ in his church. There is no one of them that is liable unto any just exception from them by whom all church-order is despised. Wherefore, where there is a defect in them, or any of them, the church itself is defective as unto its own edification; and where this defect is great in many of them, there can be no beauty, no glory, no order in any church, but only an outward show and appearance of them. And that all these things do belong unto the duty of these elders, there needs no other proof or confirmation but that they all undoubtedly and unquestionably belong unto that rule and order which the Lord Christ hath appointed in his church, and which the Scripture testifieth unto both in general and particular; for all the things which belong unto the rule of the church are committed to the care of the rulers of the church.

2. It is a vain apprehension, to suppose that one or two teaching officers in a church, who are obliged to "give themselves unto the word and prayer," to "labour" with all their might "in the word and doctrine," to "preach in season and out of season,"—that is, at all times, on all opportunities, as they are able,—to convince gainsayers, by word and writing pleading for the truth, to assist and guide the consciences of all under their temptations and desertions, with sundry other duties, in part spoken to before, should be able to take care of, and attend with diligence unto, those things that do evidently belong unto the rule of the church. And hence it is that churches at this day do live on the preaching of the word, the proper work of their pastors, which they greatly value, and are very little sensible of the wisdom, goodness, love, and care of Christ, in the institution of this rule in the church, nor are partakers of the benefits of it unto their edification. And the supply which many have had hitherto herein, by persons either unacquainted with their duty, or insensible

of their own authority, or cold, if not negligent, in their work, doth not answer the end of their institution. And hence it is that the authority of government and the benefit of it are ready to be lost in most churches. And it is both vainly and presumptuously pleaded, to give countenance unto a neglect of their order, that some churches do walk in love and peace, and are edified without it, supplying some defects by the prudent aid of some members of them; for it is nothing but a preference of our own wisdom unto the wisdom and authority of Christ, or at best an unwillingness to make a venture on the warranty of his rule, for fear of some disadvantages that may ensue thereon.

3. Whereas sundry of the duties before mentioned are, as unto the substance of them, required of the members of the church in their several stations, without any especial obligation to attend unto them with diligence, to look after them, or power to exercise any authority in the discharge of them, to leave them from under the office-care of the elders is to let confusion and disorder into the church, and gradually to remove the whole advantage of the discipline of Christ; as it is come to pass in many churches already.

It is therefore evident, that neither the purity, nor the order, nor the beauty or glory of the churches of Christ, nor the representation of his own majesty and authority in the government of them, can be long preserved without a multiplication of elders in them, according to the proportion of their respective members, for their rule and guidance. And for want hereof have churches, of old and of late, either degenerated into anarchy and confusion, their self-rule being managed with vain disputes and janglings, unto their division and ruin, or else given up themselves unto the domination of some prelatical teachers, to rule them at their pleasure, which proved the

bane and poison of all the primitive churches; and they will and must do so in the neglect of this order for the future.

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## CHAPTER IX

### Of Deacons

THE original institution, nature, and use, of the office of deacons in the church, are so well known as that we need not much insist upon them; nor shall I treat of the name, which is common unto any kind of ministry, civil or sacred, but speak of it as it is appropriated unto that especial work for which this office was ordained.

The remote foundation of it lieth in that of our Saviour, "The poor always ye have with you," John 12:8. He doth not only foretell that such there should be in the church, but recommends the care of them who should be so unto the church: for he maketh use of the words of the law, Deut, 15:11 "The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy." This legal institution, founded in the law of nature, doth the Lord Christ by his authority transfer and translate unto the use of gospel churches among his disciples.

And it may be observed, that at the same instant hypocrisy and avarice began to attempt their advantage on the consideration of this provision for the poor, which they afterward effected unto their safety; for, on the pretence hereof, Judas immediately condemned an eminent duty towards the person of Christ, as containing a cost in it, which might have been better laid out in provision for the poor. The ointment poured on our Saviour he thought might have been "sold for three hundred pence" (it may be about forty or fifty pounds), "and given to the poor." But "this he said, not that he cared for the

poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag," out of which he could have made a good prey unto himself, John 12:6. And it may be observed, that although Judas maliciously began this murmuring, yet at last some of the other disciples were too credulous of his insinuation, seeing the other evangelists ascribe it to them also. But the same pretence, on the same grounds, in following ages, was turned unto the greatest advantage of hypocrisy and covetousness that ever was in the world: for under this pretence of providing for the poor, the thieves who had got the bag,—that is, the ruling part of the clergy, with the priests, friars, and monks, who served them,—allowed men in the neglect of the greatest and most important duties of religion towards Christ himself, so as that they would give all that they had to the poor; not that they cared for the poor, but because they were thieves, and had the bag; by which means they possessed themselves of the greatest part of the wealth of the nations professing Christian religion. This was their compliance with the command of Christ, which they equally made use of in other things.

This foundation of their office was further raised by the preaching of the gospel among the poor. Many of them who first received it were of that state and condition, as the Scripture everywhere testified: "The poor are evangelized," Matt. 11:5; "God hath chosen the poor," James 2:5. And so it was in the first ages of the church, when the provision for them was one of the most eminent graces and duties of the church in those days. And this way became the original propagation of the gospel; for it was made manifest thereby that the doctrine and profession of it were not a matter of worldly design or advantage. God also declared therein of how little esteem with him the riches of this world are. And also provision was made for the exercise of the grace of the rich in their supply; the only way whereby they may glorify God with their substance. And it were well if all churches, and all the members of them, would wisely consider how

eminent is this grace, how excellent is this duty, of making provision for the poor,—how much the glory of Christ and honour of the gospel are concerned herein; for whereas, for the most part, it is looked on as an ordinary work, to be performed transiently and cursorily, scarce deserving any of the time which is allotted unto the church's public service and duties, it is indeed one of the most eminent duties of Christian societies, wherein the principal exercise of the second evangelical grace, namely, love, doth consist.

The care of making provision for the poor being made in the church an institution of Christ, was naturally incumbent on them who were the first, only officers of the church; that is, the apostles. This is plain from the occasion of the institution of the office of the deacons, Acts 6:1–6. The whole work and care of the church being in their hands, it was impossible that they should attend unto the whole, and all the parts of it in any manner. Whereas, therefore, they gave themselves, according to their duty, mostly unto those parts of their work which were incomparably more excellent and necessary than the other,—namely, preaching of the word and prayer,—there was such a defect in this other part, of ministration unto the poor, as must unavoidably accompany the actings of human nature, not able to apply itself constantly unto things of diverse natures at the same time. And hereon those who were concerned quickly, as the manner of all is, expressed their resentment of a neglect in somewhat an undue order; there was "a murmuring" about it, verse 1. The apostles hereon declared that the principal part of the work of the ministry in the church, namely, the word and prayer, was sufficient for them constantly to attend unto. Afterward, indeed, men began to think that they could do all in the church themselves; but it was when they began to do nothing in a due manner. And whereas the apostles chose as their duty the work of prayer and preaching, as that which they would and ought entirely to give up themselves unto, and for the

sake of that work would deposit the care of other things in other hands, they are a strange kind of successors unto them who lay aside that work, which they determined to belong unto them principally and in the first place, to apply themselves unto any thing else whatever.

Yet did not the apostles hereon utterly forego the care of providing for the poor, which being originally committed unto them by Jesus Christ, they would not divest themselves wholly of it; but, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, they provided such assistance in the work as that for the future it might require no more of their time or pains but what they should spare from their principal employment. And the same care is still incumbent on the ordinary pastors and elders of the churches, so far as the execution of it doth not interfere with their principal work and duty; from which those who understand it aright can spare but little of their time and strength.

Hereon the apostles, by the authority of Christ and direction of the Holy Spirit, under whose infallible guidance they were in all the general concernments of the church, instituted the office of deacons, for the discharge of this necessary and important duty in the church, which they could not attend unto themselves. And whereas the Lord Christ had in an especial manner committed the care of the poor unto the disciples, there was now a declaration of his mind and will in what way and by what means he would have them provided for.

And it was the institution of a new office, and not a present supply in a work of business, which they designed; for the limitation of an especial ecclesiastical work, with the designation of persons unto that work, with authority for the discharge of it, set over this business, with a separation unto it, do completely constitute an office, nor is there any thing more required thereunto.



But whereas there are three things that concur and are required unto the ministration unto the poor of the church,—1. The love, charity, bounty, and benevolence of the members of the church, in contribution unto that ministration; 2. The care and oversight of the discharge of it; and, 3. The actual exercise and application of it,—the last only belongs unto the office of the deacons, and neither of the first is discharged by the institution of it: for the first is both a duty of the light and law of nature, and in its moral part enforced by many especial commands of Christ, so as that nothing can absolve men from their obligation thereunto. The office and work of the deacons is to excite, direct, and help them, in the exercise of that grace and discharge of the duty therein incumbent on them. Nor is any man, by the intrusting a due proportion of his good things in the hands of the deacons for its distribution, absolved thereby from his own personal discharge of it also; for it being a moral duty, required in the law of nature, it receiveth peculiar obligations unto a present exercise by such circumstances as nature and providence do suggest. The care also of the whole work is, as was said, still incumbent on the pastors and elders of the church; only the ordinary execution is committed unto the deacons.

Nor was this a temporary institution, for that season, and so the officers appointed extraordinary, but it was to abide in the church throughout all generations; for,—1. The work itself, as a distinct work of ministry in the church, was never to cease; it was to abide for ever: "The poor ye shall have always with you." 2. The reason of its institution is perpetual, namely, that the pastors of the churches are not sufficient in themselves to attend unto the whole work of praying, preaching, and this ministration. 3. They are afterward, not only in this church at Jerusalem, but in all the churches of the Gentiles, reckoned among the fixed officers of the church, Phil. 1:1. And, 4. Direction is given for their continuation in all churches, with

a prescription of the qualifications of the persons to be chosen and called unto this office, 1 Tim. 3:8–10, 12, 13. 5. The way of their call is directed, and an office committed unto them: "Let them be first proved, then let them use the office of a deacon." 6. A promise of acceptance is annexed unto the diligent discharge of this office, verse 13.

Hence those who afterward utterly perverted all church-order, taking out of the hands and care of the deacons that work which was committed to them by the Holy Ghost in the apostles, and for which end alone their office was instituted in the church, assigning other work unto them, whereunto they are not called nor appointed, yet thought meet to continue the name and the pretence of such an office, because of the evident institution of it unto a continuation. And whereas, when all things were swelling with pride and ambition in the church, no sort of its officers contenting themselves with their primitive institution, but striving by various degrees to some what in name and thing that was high and aloft, there arose from the name of this office the meteor of an archdeacon, with strange power and authority, never heard of in the church for many ages, this belongs unto the mystery of iniquity, whereunto neither the Scripture nor the practice of the primitive churches doth give the least countenance. But some think it not inconvenient even to sport themselves in matters of church order and constitution.

This office of deacons is an office of service, which gives not any authority or power in the rule of the church; but being an office, it gives authority with respect unto the special work of it, under a general notion of authority; that is, a right to attend unto it in a peculiar manner, and to perform the things that belong thereunto. But this right is confined unto the particular church whereunto they do belong. Of the members of that church are they to make their

collections, and unto the members of that church are they to administer. Extraordinary collections from or for other churches are to be made and disposed by the elders, Acts 11:30.

Whereas the reason of the institution of this office was, in general, to free the pastors of the churches who labour in the word and doctrine from avocations by outward things, such as wherein the church is concerned, it belongs unto the deacons not only to take care of and provide for the poor, but to manage all other affairs of the church of the same kind; such as are providing for the place of the church-assemblies, of the elements for the sacraments, of collecting, keeping, and disposing of the stock of the church for the maintenance of its officers and incidences, especially in the time of trouble or persecution. Hereon are they obliged to attend the elders on all occasions, to perform the duty of the church towards them, and receive directions from them. This was the constant practice of the church in the primitive times, until the avarice and ambition of the superior clergy enclosed all alms and donations unto themselves; the beginning and progress whereof is excellently described and traced by Paulus Sarpus in his treatise of matters beneficiary.

That maintenance of the poor which they are to distribute is to be collected by the voluntary contributions of the church, to be made ordinarily every first day of the week, and as occasion shall require in an extraordinary manner, 1 Cor. 16:1, 2. And this contribution of the church ought to be,—1. In a way of bounty, not sparingly, 2 Cor. 9:5–7; 2. In a way of equality, as unto men's abilities, chap. 8:13, 14; 3. With respect unto present successes and thriving in affairs, whereof a portion is due to God, "As God hath prospered him," 1 Cor. 16:2; 4. With willingness and freedom, 2 Cor. 8:12. Wherefore it belongs unto the deacons, in the discharge of their office,—1. To acquaint the church with the present necessity of the poor; 2. To stir up the

particular members of it unto a free contribution, according unto their ability; 3. To admonish those that are negligent herein, who give not according to their proportion, and to acquaint the elders of the church with those who persist in a neglect of their duty.

The consideration of the state of the poor, unto whom the contributions of the church are to be administered, belongs unto the discharge of this office; as,—1. That they are poor indeed, and do not pretend themselves so to be for advantage; 2. What are the degrees of their poverty, with respect unto their relations and circumstances, that they may have suitable supplies; 3. That in other things they walk according unto rule; 4. In particular, that they work and labour according to their ability, for he that will not labour must not eat at the public charge; 5. To comfort, counsel, and exhort them unto patience, submission, contentment with their condition, and thankfulness: all which might be enlarged and confirmed, but that they are obvious.

The qualifications of persons to be called unto this office are distinctly laid down by the apostle, 1 Tim. 3:8–13. Upon the trial, knowledge, and approbation of them, with respect unto these qualifications, their call to this office consists,—1. In the choice of the church; 2. In a separation unto it by prayer and imposition of hands, Acts 6:3, 5, 6. And the adjuncts of their ministration are,—1. Mercy, to represent the tenderness of Christ towards the poor of the flock, Rom. 12:8. 2. Cheerfulness, to relieve the spirits of them that receive against thoughts of being troublesome and burdensome to others. 3. Diligence and faithfulness, by which they "purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

It remains only that we inquire into some few things relating unto this office and those that are called unto it; as,—

1. What is the meaning of the apostle where he affirms that the deacons, in the discharge of their office, βαθμὸν ἑαυτοῖς καλὸν περιποιῶνται, 1 Tim. 3:13, "purchase (or procure) to themselves a good degree." Βαθμός is "a step, a degree, a seat a little exalted;" and metaphorically it is applied to denote dignity and authority. This good degree, which deacons may obtain, is, in the judgment of most, the office of presbytery. This they shall be promoted unto in the church; from deacons they shall be made presbyters. I cannot comply with this interpretation of the words: for,—

(1.) The office of presbytery is called καλὸν ἔργον, "a good work," nowhere καλὸς βαθμός, "a good degree."

(2.) The difference between a deacon and a presbyter is not in degree but in order. A deacon made a presbyter is not advanced unto a farther degree in his own order, but leaves it for another.

(3.) The diligent discharge of the work of a deacon is not a due preparation for the office of the presbytery, but a hinderance of it: for it lies wholly in the providing and disposal of earthly things, in a serving of the tables of the church, and those private, of the poor; but preparation for the ministry consists in a man's giving himself unto study, prayer, and meditation.

I shall only give my conjecture on the words. The apostle seems to me to have respect unto church-order, with decency therein, in both these expressions, "Purchase to themselves a good degree," and, "Great confidence in the faith." Βαθμός is of the same signification with Βαθμός, which is a seat raised in an assembly, to hear or speak. So saith the schol. on Soph. Œd. Tyr. 142: Ὁ τόπος ἔνθα ἡ ἑακκλησία ἐγένετο, βαθμίσιν ἦν κύκλω διελημμένος, ἄλλαις ἐπ' ἄλλαις· ἔνθα οἱ συνελθόντες πάντες καθήμενοι ἀνεμποδίστως ἤκροῶντο τοῦ ἱσταμένου ἐν μέσῳ.—"The place where the assembly (or church) met

was divided round about with seats in degrees, some above others, where all that met might without trouble hear him that stood in the midst as they sat." And countenance is given hereunto by what is observed concerning the custom of sitting in the Jewish synagogues. So Ambrose: "Traditio est synagogæ, ut sedentes disputarent, seniores dignitate in cathedris, subsequentes in subselliis, novissimi in pavimento;"—"It is the tradition (or order) of the synagogue, that the elders in dignity (or office) should discourse sitting in chairs, the next order on forms (or benches), and the last on the floor." So speaks Philo before him: *Ἡς ἱεροῦς ἀφικνούμενοι τόπους καθ' ἡλικίας ἐν τάξεσιν ὑπὸ πρεσβυτέροις νέοι καθίζονται*—"When we meet in sacred places," places of divine worship, "the younger sort, according to their quality, sit in orders under the elders." And this James the apostle hath respect unto, in the primitive assemblies of the Christian Jews; for, reproving their partiality in accepting of men's persons, preferring the rich immoderately before the poor, he instanceth in their disposing of them unto seats in their assemblies. They said unto the rich man, *Σὺ κάθου ὧδε καλῶς*, "Sit thou here in a good place,"—that is, in *βάθμῳ καλῷ*, "in the best degree,"—and to the poor, "Stand thou there," on the floor, or "Sit at my footstool," without respect unto those other qualifications whereby they were to be distinguished. Wherefore, the apostle having respect unto church-assemblies, and the order to be observed in them, the *καλὸς βαθμὸς* here intended may signify no more but a place of some eminency in the church-assemblies, which is due unto such deacons, where with boldness and confidence they may assist in the management of the affairs of the church, which belongs unto the profession of the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

If any shall rather think that both of the expressions do signify an increase in gifts and grace, which is a certain consequence of men's

faithful discharge of their office in the church, wherein many deacons of old were eminent unto martyrdom, I shall not contend against it.

2. Whereas there are qualifications expressly required in the wives of deacons, as that they should be "grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things," 1 Tim. 3:11, which are to be considered before their call to office, supposing that any of them do fall from the faith, as becoming Papists, Socinians, or Quakers, [it is asked] whether their husbands may be continued in their office?

Ans. 1. He who in his own person faithfully dischargeth his office may be continued therein, yea, though his wife should be actually excommunicated out of the church. Every one of us must give an account of himself unto the Lord. He rejects us not for what we cannot remedy. The sinning person shall bear his own judgment.

2. Such an one ought to take care, by virtue of his authority as a husband, that as little offence as possible may be given to the church by his wife, when she loseth the qualification of not being a slanderer, which is inseparable from such apostates.

3. May a deacon be dismissed from his office wholly, after he hath been solemnly set apart unto it by prayer?

Ans. 1. The very end of the office being only the convenience of the church and its accommodation, the continuation of men in this office is to be regulated by them; and if the church at any time stand not in need of the ministry of this or that person, they may, upon his desire, discharge him of his office.

2. Things may so fall out with men as unto their outward circumstances, with respect unto either their persons in bodily distempers and infirmities, or their condition in the world, as that

they are not able any longer to attend unto the due discharge of this office; in which case they ought to be released.

3. A man may be solemnly set apart unto a work and duty by prayer for a limited season, suppose for a year only; wherefore this doth not hinder but that a man may, on just reasons, be dismissed at any time from his office, though he be so set apart unto it.

4. A deacon, by unfaithfulness and other offences, may forfeit his office and be justly excluded from it, losing all his right unto it and interest in it; and therefore, on just reasons, may be dismissed wholly from it.

5. For any one to desert his office, through frowardness, covetousness, sloth, or negligence, is an offence and scandal which the church ought to take notice of.

6. He who desires a dismissal from his office ought to give an account of his desires and the reasons of them unto the church, that the ministry which he held may be duly supplied, and love continued between him and the church.

4. How many deacons may there be in one congregation?

Ans. As many as they stand in need of for the ends of that ministry, and they may be at all times increased as the state of the church doth require; and it is meet that there should always be so many as that none of the poor be neglected in the daily ministration, nor the work be made burdensome unto themselves.

5. What is the duty of the deacons towards the elders of the church?

Ans. Whereas the care of the whole church, in all its concernments, is principally committed unto the pastors, teachers, and ruling elders,



it is the duty of the deacons, in the discharge of their office,—1. To acquaint them from time to time with the state of the church, and especially of the poor, so far as it falls under their inspection; 2. To seek and take their advice in matters of greater importance relating unto their office; 3. To be assisting unto them in all the outward concerns of the church.

6. May deacons preach the word and baptize authoritatively by virtue of their office?

Ans. 1. The deacons, whose office is instituted, Acts 6, and whose qualifications are fixed, 1 Tim. 3, have no call unto or ministerial power in these things. The limitation of their office, work, and power is so express as will not admit of any debate. 2. Persons once called unto this office might of old in an extraordinary manner, may at present in an ordinary way, be called unto the preaching of the word but they were not then, they cannot be now, authorized thereunto by virtue of this office. 3. If a new office be erected under the name of deacons, it is in the will of them by whom it is erected to assign what power unto it they please.

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## **CHAPTER X**

### **Of Excommunication**

THE power of the church towards its members (for it hath nothing to do with them that are without) may be referred unto three heads: 1. The admission of members into its society; 2. The rule and edification of them that belong unto it; 3. The exclusion out of its society of such as obstinately refuse to live and walk according unto

the laws and rules of it. And these things belong essentially and inseparably unto every free society, and are comprehensive of all church-power whatever.

The second of these hath been treated of in the discourse concerning church offices and rule; and all that belongs unto the first of them is fully declared in the chapters of the essential constituent parts of gospel churches, namely, their matter and form. The third must be now spoken unto, which is the power of excommunication.

There is nothing in Christian religion about which the contest of opinions hath been more fierce than this of excommunication, most of them proceeding evidently from false assumptions and secular interests; and no greater instance can be given of what the serpentine wits of men, engaged by the desire of domination and wealth, and assisted by opportunities, may attain unto. For whereas, as we shall see immediately, there is nothing more plain, simple, and more exposed unto the common understanding of all Christians, yea of all mankind, than is this institution of Christ, both as unto its nature, form, and manner of administration; nothing more wholesome nor useful unto the souls of men; nothing more remote from giving the least disturbance or prejudice to civil society, to magistrates or rulers, unto the personal or political rights or concernments of any one individual in the world;—it hath been metamorphosed into a hideous monster, an engine of priestly domination and tyranny, for the deposition or assassination of kings and princes, the wasting of nations with bloody wars, the terror of the souls of men, and the destruction of their lives, with all their earthly concerns, unto the erection of a tyrannical empire, no less pernicious unto the Christian world than those of the Saracens or the Turks. He is a stranger unto all that hath passed in the world for nearly a thousand years who knows not the truth of these things. And to this very day, the greatest

part of them that are called Christians are so supinely ignorant and doting, or so infatuated and blinded by their prejudices and corrupt interests, as to suppose or to say that if the pope of Rome do excommunicate kings or princes, they may be lawfully deposed from their rule, and in some cases killed; and that other persons, being rightly excommunicated, according unto certain laws, rules, and processes, that some have framed, ought to be fined, punished, imprisoned, and so destroyed! And about these things there are many disputes and contests, when, if men were awakened out of their lethargy, they would be laughed at as the most ridiculous and contemptible mormos that ever appeared in the world; though they are no laughing matter at present unto them that are concerned in them.

Supposing, then, ecclesiastical excommunication (as I at present suppose, and shall immediately prove it) to be an appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ, these things are plain and evident concerning it, not capable of any modest contradiction:—1. That there is no divine evangelical institution that is more suited unto the light of nature, the rules of common equity, and principles of unseared consciences, as unto the nature, efficacy, and rule of it, than this is. 2. That the way of the administration and exercise of the power and acts of it is so determined, described, and limited in the Scripture and the light of nature, as that there can be no gross error or mistake about it but what proceeds from secular interests, pride, ambition, covetousness, or other vicious habits and inclinations of the minds of men. 3. That the whole authority of it, its sentence, power, and efficacy, are merely spiritual, with respect unto the souls and consciences of men only; and that to extend it, directly or indirectly, immediately or by consequences, unto the temporal hurt, evil, or damage of any, in their lives, liberties, estates, natural or legal privileges, is opposite unto and destructive of the whole government of Christ in and over

his church. All these things will fully appear in the account which we shall give of it.

It is therefore evident, as was intimated, that nothing in Christian practice hath been or is more abused, corrupted, or perverted, than this of excommunication hath been and is. The residence of the supreme power of it, to be exercised towards and over all Christians, rulers and subjects, in the pope of Rome, or in other single persons absolutely, over less or greater distributions of them; the administration of it by citations, processes, pleadings, and contentions, in wrangling law-courts, according unto arbitrary canons and constitutions, whose original is either known or unknown; the application of it unto the hurt, damage, evil, or loss of men, in their temporal concerns,—are utterly and openly foreign unto the gospel, and expressly contrary unto what the Lord Christ hath appointed therein. It would require a whole volume to declare the horrible abuses both in point of right and in matter of fact, with the pernicious consequences that have issued thereon, which the corruption of this divine institution hath produced: but to make a declaration hereof doth not belong to my present design; besides, it hath in some good measure been done by others. In brief, it is so come to pass that it is made a mere political engine of an external, forcible government of the persons of men, unto the ends of the interests of some who have got a pretence of its power; administered by such ways and means as wherein the consciences of men, neither of those by whom it is administered nor of those unto whom it is applied, are any way concerned, with respect unto the authority of any institution of Jesus Christ.

From an observation hereof, and a desire to vindicate as well Christian religion from such a scandalous abuse as mankind from bondage to such a monstrous fiction as is the present power and

exercise of it, some have fallen into another extreme, denying that there is any such thing as excommunication appointed or approved by the gospel. But this neither is nor ever will be a way to reduce religion, nor any thing in it, unto its primitive order and purity. To deny the being of any thing because it hath been abused, when there could have been no abuse of it but upon a supposition of its being, is not a rational way to reprove and convince that abuse. And when those who have corrupted this institution find the insufficiency of the arguments produced to prove that there never was any such institution, it makes them secure in the practice of their own abuses of it; for they imagine that there is nothing incumbent on them, to justify their present possession and exercise of the power of excommunication, but that excommunication itself is appointed in the church by Christ: whereas the true consideration of this appointment is the only means to divest them of their power and practice; for the most effectual course to discharge and disprove all corruptions in the agenda or practicals of religion, as the sacraments, public worship, rule, and the like, is to propose and declare the things themselves in their original simplicity and purity, as appointed by Christ and re-corded in the Scriptures. A real view of them in such a proposal will divest the minds of men, not corrupted and hardened by prejudice and interest, of those erroneous conceptions of them that, from some kind of tradition, they have been prepossessed withal; and this I shall now attempt in this particular of excommunication.

There hath been great inquiry about the nature and exercise of this ordinance under the old testament, with the account given of it by the later Jews; for the right and power of it in general belongs unto a church as such,—every church, and not to that which is purely evangelical only. This I shall not inquire into; it hath been sifted to the bran already, and intermixed with many rabbinical conjectures

and mistakes. In general, there is nothing more certain than that there was a double removal of persons by church-authority from the communion of the whole congregation in divine worship,—the one for a season, the other for ever; whereof I have given instances elsewhere. But I intend only the consideration of what belongs unto churches under the new testament. And to this end we may observe,

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1. That all lawful societies, constituted such by voluntary confederation, according unto peculiar laws and rules of their own choice, unto especial duties and ends, have a right and power, by the light of nature, to receive into their society those that are willing and meet, engaging themselves to observe the rules, laws, and ends of the society, and to expel them out of it who wilfully deviate from those rules. This is the life and form of every lawful society or community of men in the world, without which they can neither coalesce nor subsist. But it is required hereunto,—

(1.) That those who so enter into such a society have right or power so to do. And many things are required unto this end; as,—

[1.] That those who enter into such a society be "sui juris," have a lawful right to dispose of themselves as unto all the duties and ends such a society. Hence children, servants, subjects, have no power in themselves to enter into such societies without the interposition of and obligation from a power superior unto that of parents, masters, or princes, namely, that of God himself.

[2.] That the rules, laws, and ends of the society be lawful, good, and useful, unto themselves and others; for there may be a confederation in and for evil, which is a combination that gives no right nor power over one another, or towards others that enter into it.

[3.] That it contains nothing that is prejudicial unto others, in things divine or human.

[4.] Nor obliges unto the omission or neglect of any duty that men, by virtue of any relations, natural, moral, or political, do owe unto others.

[5.] Nor is hurtful unto themselves, in their lives, liberties, names, reputation, usefulness in the world, or any thing else, unto whose preservation they are obliged by the law of nature.

[6.] Nor are nor can be such persons obliged to forsake the conduct of themselves, in things divine and human, by the light of their own consciences, by an engagement of blind obedience unto others; which would render very society unlawful by the law of God and light of nature.

[7.] Least of all have any persons right or power to oblige themselves in such societies unto things evil, sinful, superstitious, or idolatrous.

These things are plain and evident in themselves, and every way sufficient to divest all the religious societies and fraternities that are erected in the church of Rome of all that right and power which belong unto lawful societies, constituted by voluntary confederation. And if any thing inconsistent with these principles of natural light be pretended in churches, it divests them of all power, as to the exercise of it, by virtue of any compact or confederation whatsoever.

(2.) It is required that a society by voluntary consent vested with the right and power mentioned do neither give nor take away any right, privilege, or advantage, to or from any members of the society which belongs unto them naturally or politically; but their power is confined unto those things alone wherein men may be benefited and

advantaged by the society. And this is the foundation of all political societies. Men for the sake and benefit of them may and ought to forego many particular advantages, which without them they might make unto themselves; but they cannot forego any of those rights which, in their several relations, are inseparably annexed unto them by the law of nature, nor give power over themselves in such things unto the society. So is it with churches: the power of expulsion out of their society extends only unto the benefits and advantages which the society, as such, doth afford and communicate. Now, these are only things spiritual, if churches be an institution of Him whose kingdom is not of this world. The power, then, that is in churches, by virtue of their being what they are, extends not itself unto any outward concernments of men, as unto their lives, liberties, natural or political privileges, estates, or possessions; unless we shall say that men hold and possess these things by virtue of their relation unto the church, which is to overthrow all natural and human right in the world. "De facto," men are now compelled, whether they will or no, to be esteemed to be of this or that church, and to be dealt withal accordingly; but if they had not been divested of their natural liberty, they know not how, without their own consent, and should be taught that by entering into a church, they must come under a new tenure of their lives, liberties, and estates, at the will of the lords of the society, according to the customs of their courts, there would not be so many wise men in churches as now there are thought to be.

But this is the true state of things in the church of Rome, and among others also. Christians are esteemed to be of them, and belong unto them, whether they will or no. Immediately hereon all the rights, liberties, privileges, and possessions which they enjoy by the law of God and nature, and by the just laws and constitutions of men in the civil governments under which they live, come to depend upon and be subject unto the especial laws and rules of the society which they



are adjudged to belong unto; for upon expulsion out of that society by excommunication, according unto the laws and rules which it hath framed unto itself, all their rights and titles, and liberties and enjoyments, are forfeited and exposed to ruin. Some, indeed, do earnestly and learnedly contend that the pope of Rome hath not power to excommunicate sovereign kings and princes, and that if he do, they make no forfeiture of life or dignity thereby; and there are good reasons why they do so. But, in the meantime, they deal with other poor men after the same manner; for if a poor man be excommunicated, immediately he loseth the free tenure of his goods, liberty, and life, by the law of the church and the land, and is committed to the jail without bail or mainprise. So that, by this artifice, all men hold their natural and civil rights by the rules of the church-society whereto they are supposed to belong. And as this utterly overthrows the foundation of all that [right of] property according to the laws of the land, which is so much talked of and valued, so indeed it would be destructive of all order and liberty, but that the church is wise enough not to employ this engine unto great men and men in power, who may yet deserve excommunication as well as some of their poor neighbours, if the gospel be thought to give the rule of it; but those that are poor, helpless, and friendless, shall, in the pursuit of this excommunication, be driven from their houses, cast into prisons, and kept there until they and their families starve and perish. And it is apparent that we are beholden unto the greatness, authority, and wealth of many, whom the ecclesiastical courts care not to conflict withal, that the whole nation is not actually brought under this new tenure of their lives, liberties, and estates, which, on this presumption, they are obnoxious unto.

And all this evil ariseth from the neglect and contempt of this fundamental rule of all societies, apparent unto all in the light of nature itself,—namely, That they have no power in or over any thing,

right, privilege, or advantage, but what men are made partakers of by virtue of such societies, their rules and laws, whereunto they are obliged. But of this sort are not the lives, the liberties, the houses and possessions of men, with respect unto the church. They receive them not from the church, and a man would certainly think that the church could not take them away.

Yea, we live and subsist in order upon the good nature and wisdom of men who judge it best neither to exert their power nor act their principles in this matter: for whereas they esteem all the inhabitants of the land to belong unto their church, if they should in the first place excommunicate all that ought to be excommunicated by the rule and law of the gospel, and then all that ought to be so according to their own laws and canons,—both which a man would think they were obliged in point of conscience unto,—and in pursuit of their sentence send out the "capias" for them all, I very much question whether any of them would go to prison or no, and then in what a fine case would this government be! and if they should all go to jail, I am persuaded the king would be in an ill state to defend his realms against his enemies.

(3.) Every society hath this power towards those who are incorporated in it by their own consent, and not towards others; for whence should they have such a power, or who should commit it unto them? Nor can any be cast out from those privileges which they never had an interest in nor a right unto. The apostle's rule holds in this case, especially with respect unto churches, "What have we to do to judge them that are without?" And as unto the exercise of this power, they are all to be esteemed to be without who are not rightly incorporated into that particular church by which they may be ejected out of it. A power of excommunication at random, towards all that those who exercise it can extend force unto, hath no foundation

either in the light of nature or authority of the Scripture; and it would be ridiculous in any corporation to disfranchise such as never belonged unto it, who were never members of it.

(4.) The only reason or cause for the expulsion of any person out of such a society is a wilful deviation from the rules and laws of the society, whose observance he had engaged unto upon his entrance into it. Nothing else can be required, unto the preservation of a man's interest in any right or privilege, but what he took upon himself to perform in his admittance into it. And if the great rule of every church-society be, "That men observe and do whatsoever the Lord Christ hath commanded," none can be justly ejected out of that society but upon a wilful disobedience unto his commands. And therefore the casting of men out of church-communion on light and trivial occasions, or for any reasons or causes whatever but such as essentially belong unto the rules and laws whereon the church doth originally coalesce into a society, is contrary unto natural light and the reason of the things themselves.

Thus far, I say, is every lawful confederate society enabled and warranted, by the light of nature, to remove from its communion, and from a participation in its rights and privileges, any of its number who will not walk according to the rules and principles of its coalescency and constitution. Whereas, therefore, the rule of the constitution of the church is, "That men walk together in holy obedience unto the commands of Christ, and in the observance of all his institutions, without giving offence unto one another or those that are without by any sinful miscarriage, and do abide in the profession of the truth," if any one shall wilfully and obstinately transgress in any of these things, it is the right and duty, and in the power, of the church to remove him from its society.

2. But this is not the entire nor the next immediate ground, reason, or warranty, of ecclesiastical excommunication; for this natural equity will not extend itself unto cases that are in things spiritual and supernatural, nor will the actings of the church thereon reach unto the consciences of men for the proper ends of excommunication. Wherefore it was necessary that it should have a peculiar institution in the church by the authority of Jesus Christ; for,—

(1.) The church is such a society as no men have right or power either to enter into themselves or to exclude others from but by virtue of the authority of Christ. No warranty from the light of nature, nor from the laws of men, nor their own voluntary confederation, can enable any to constitute a church-society, unless they do all things expressly in obedience unto the authority of Christ; for his church is his kingdom, his house, which none can constitute or build but himself. Wherefore it is necessary that the power of admission into and exclusion from the church do arise from his grant and institution; nor is it in the power of any men in the world to admit into or exclude from this society but by virtue thereof.

(2.) Excommunication is an act of authority, as we shall see afterward. But no authority can be exercised in the church towards any person whatever but by virtue of the institution of Christ; for the authority itself, however ministerially exercised by others, is his alone, and he exerts it not but in the ways of his own appointment. So, in particular, the apostle directs that excommunication be exerted "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;" that is, in and by his authority, 1 Cor. 5:4.

(3.) The privileges from which men are excluded by excommunication are not such as they have any natural or civil right unto (as hath been proved), but merely such as are granted unto the

church by Jesus Christ; and men cannot, by virtue of any agreement among themselves, without a warranty from him by his institution, expel others from the privileges which are merely of his grant and donation. He alone, therefore, hath given and granted this power unto the church, namely, of excluding any, by the rules and ways of his appointment, from the privileges of his grant; which is the peculiar power of excommunication inquired after.

(4.) There is such an efficacy assigned unto excommunication, in binding the consciences of men, in retaining their sins, in the destruction or mortification of the flesh, in the healing and recovery of sinners, as nothing but the authority of a divine institution can give unto it. By virtue of natural light and mutual consent, men may free themselves from the company and society of those who will not walk with them according to rules of communion agreed upon among them, but they cannot reach the minds and consciences of others with any of these effects.

(5.) That excommunication is an express ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ in his churches is fully declared in the Scripture; for,—

[1.] The power of it is contained in the authority given by Christ unto the church, under the name of "The keys of the kingdom of heaven;" for the power expressed therein is not merely doctrinal and declarative, as is the preaching of the gospel,—the consequent whereof, upon the faith or unbelief of them that hear it, is the remitting or retaining of their sins in heaven and earth,—but it is disciplinary also, as it is appropriated unto the house, whose keys are committed unto the stewards of it. And seeing the design of Christ was, to have his church holy, unblamable, and without offence in the world, that therein he might make a representation of his own holiness and the holiness of his rule; and whereas those of whom it is

constituted are liable and subject unto sins scandalous and offensive, reflecting dishonour on himself and the church, in being the occasion of sinning unto others,—that design would not have been accomplished had he not given this authority unto his church to cast out and separate from itself all that do by their sins so give offence. And the neglect of the exercise of this authority in a due manner was the principal means whereby the glory, honour, and usefulness of the churches in the world were at length utterly lost.

[2.] It hath a direct institution: Matt. 18:15–20, "If thy brother shall trespass," etc., "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. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," etc. After all the learned and unlearned contests that have been about this place, the sense of it is plain and obvious unto such as whose minds are not clouded with prejudices about such churches and such excommunications as are utterly foreign unto the Scripture. But that by "trespasses" in this place, sins against God, giving scandal or offence, are intended, hath been proved before; as also, that by "church" a particular Christian congregation is intended. This church hath the cognizance of the scandalous offences of its members committed unto it, when brought before it in the due order described. Hereon it makes a determination, designing in the first place the recovery of the person offending from his sin, by his hearing of its counsel and advice; but, in case of obstinacy, it is to remove him from its communion, leaving him in the outward condition of a "heathen man and a publican:" so is he to be esteemed by them that were offended with his sin; and that because of the authority of the church binding him in heaven and earth unto the punishment due unto his sin, unless he doth repent. The rejection of an offending brother out of the society of the church, leaving him, as

unto all the privileges of the church, in the state of a heathen, declaring him liable unto the displeasure of Christ and everlasting punishment, without repentance, is the excommunication we plead for; and the power of it, with its exercise, is here plainly granted by Christ and ordained in the church.

[3.] According unto this institution was the practice of the apostles, whereof we have several instances. I might insist on the excommunication of Simon the magician, a baptized professor, by Peter, who declared him to have "neither part nor lot" in the church, upon the discovery of his wickedness, Acts 8:13, 20–23; yet because it was the single act of one apostle, and so may be esteemed extraordinary, I shall omit it. However, that fact of the apostle is sufficiently declarative of what is to be done in the church in like cases; and which if it be not done, it cannot be preserved in its purity, according unto the mind of Christ. But that which was directed by the apostle Paul to be done towards the incestuous person in the church of Corinth is express, 1 Cor. 5:1–7: 1st. He declares the sin whereof the person charged was guilty, with the ignominy and scandal of it, verse 1. 2dly. He blames the church that they had not been affected with the guilt and scandal of it, so as to have proceeded to his removal or expulsion out of the church, that he might be "taken away" or cut off from them, verse 2. 3dly. He declares his own judgment in the case,—that he ought to be so taken away or removed; which yet was not actually effected by that judgment and sentence of his, verse 3. 4thly. He declares the causes of this excision: (1st.) The supreme efficient cause of it is the power or authority of the Lord Jesus Christ instituting this ordinance in his church, giving right and power unto it for its administration in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with his power; (2dly.) The declarative cause of the equity of this sentence, which was the spirit of the apostle, or the authoritative declaration of his judgment in the case, "With my

spirit;" (3dly.) The instrumental, ministerial cause of it, which is the church, "Do it 'in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together," verse 4; "and thereby purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump," verse 7; whence the punishment of this sentence is said to be "inflicted by many," 2 Cor. 2:6; that is, all those who, on his repentance, were obliged to forgive and comfort him,—that is, the whole church, verse 7. 5thly. The nature of the sentence is, the "delivering of such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," 1 Cor. 5:5; not the destruction of his body by death, but through the "mortification of the flesh," whereby he was shortly afterward recovered and restored unto his former condition.

The whole of what we plead for is here exemplified; as,—

[1.] The cause of excommunication, which is a scandalous sin unrepented of.

[2.] The preparation for its execution, which is the church's sense of the sin and scandal, with humiliation for it.

[3.] The warranty of it, which is the institution of Christ, wherein his authority is engaged.

[4.] The manner and form of it, by an act of authority, with the consent of the whole church.

[5.] The effect of it, in a total separation from the privileges of the church.

[6.] The end of it,—1st. With respect unto the church, its purging and vindication; 2dly. With respect unto the person excommunicated, his repentance, reformation, and salvation.



It is usually replied hereunto, "That this was an extraordinary act of apostolical power, and so not to be drawn by us into example; for he himself both determines the case and asserteth his presence in spirit,—that is, by his authority,—to be necessary unto what was done. Besides, it was a delivery of the man to Satan,—that is, into his power,—to be afflicted and cruciated by him, to be terrified in his mind and punished in his body to the destruction of the flesh, that is, unto death. Such was the delivery of a man to Satan by the apostle, mentioned here and 1 Tim. 1:19, 20, in the judgment of many of the ancients. But there is no such power in any church at present to deliver an offender unto Satan, nor any appearing effects of such a pretence. Wherefore this is a matter which belongs not unto churches at present.

I answer,—1. What the apostles did in any church, whether present or absent, by their own authority, did not prejudice the right of the churches themselves, nor their power, acted in subordination unto them and their guidance. So it is evident in this place, that, notwithstanding the exerting of any apostolical power intimated, the church itself is charged with its duty, and directed to exercise its authority in the rejection of the offender. 2. There is nothing extraordinary in the case:—

(1.) It is not so that a member of a church should fall into a scandalous sin, unto the dishonour of Christ and the church, giving offence unto persons of all sorts.

(2.) It is an ordinary rule, founded in the light of nature, confirmed here and elsewhere by express divine commands, that such an one be rejected from the society and communion of the church, until he give satisfaction by repentance and reformation.

(3.) It is that without which the church cannot be preserved in its purity, nor its being be continued, as both reason and experience do manifest.

(4.) The judgment both of the fact and right was left unto the church itself; whence it was afterward highly commended by the apostle for the diligent discharge of its duty herein, 2 Cor. 2:6–8. In brief, it is such a divine order that is here prescribed as without the observance whereof no church can long subsist.

(5.) There is no difficulty in the other part of the objection, about the delivery unto Satan; for,

—[1.] It cannot be proved that hereon the offender was delivered so into the power of Satan, to be cruciated, agitated, and at length killed, as some imagine; nor can any instance of any such thing be given in the Scripture or antiquity, though there be many of them who, upon their rejection out of the church, were enraged unto an opposition against it, as it was with Simon Magus, Marcion, and others.

[2.] Yea, it is evident that there was no such thing included in their delivery unto Satan as is pretended: for the design and end of it was the man's humiliation, recovery, and salvation, as is expressly affirmed in the text; and this effect it actually had, for the man was healed and restored. Wherefore this delivery unto Satan is an ordinance of Christ for the exciting of saving grace in the souls of men, adapted unto the case of falling by scandalous sins, peculiarly effectual, above any other gospel ordinance. Now, this cannot be such a delivery unto Satan as that pretended, which can have no other end but destruction and death.

[3.] This delivery unto Satan is no more but the casting of a man out of the visible kingdom of Christ, so giving him up, as unto his outward condition, into the state of heathens and publicans, which belonged unto the kingdom of Satan; for he who, by the authority of Christ himself, according unto his law and institution, is not only debarred from a participation of all the privileges of the gospel, but also visibly and regularly divested of all present right to them and interest in them, he belongs unto the visible kingdom of Satan. The gathering of men into the church by conversion is the "turning of them from the power of Satan unto God," Acts 26:18; a "delivery from the power of darkness,"—that is, the kingdom of Satan, and—a translation into the kingdom of Christ, Col. 1:13. Wherefore, after a man hath, by faith and his conjunction unto a visible church, been translated into the kingdom of Christ, his just rejection out of it is the redelivery of him into the visible kingdom of Satan; which is all that is here intended. And this is an act suited unto the end whereunto it is designed; for a man hereby is not taken out of his own power and the conduct of his own mind, not acted or agitated by the devil, but is left unto the sedate consideration of his present state and condition. And this, if there be any spark of ingenuous grace left in him, will be effectually operative, by shame, grief, and fear, unto his humiliation, especially understanding that the design of Christ and his church herein is only his repentance and restoration.

Here is, therefore, in this instance, an everlasting rule given unto the church in all ages, the ordinary occurrence of the like cases requiring an ordinary power for relief in them; without which the church cannot be preserved. That it is the duty of the church, enjoined unto it by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that necessary unto its glory, its own honour, and edification, to reject scandalous offenders out of its communion, is evidently declared in this place; and to suppose that to be the duty of the church which it hath no power and authority to

discharge (seeing without them it cannot be discharged) is a wild imagination.

The duty of the church herein, with such other particular duties as suppose the institution hereof, are in many places directed and enjoined. It is so in that insisted on, 1 Cor. 5. The foundation of the whole discourse and practice of the apostle there recorded lies in this, that churches ought to cut off from among them scandalous offenders, and that to the end they may preserve themselves pure; and that this they ought to do in the name of Christ, and by virtue of his authority, verses 2–5, 7. And this is the whole of that excommunication which we plead for. The manner of its administration we shall consider afterward. 2 Cor. 2:6–8, the apostle commends the church for what they had done in the excommunication of the incestuous person, calling it a punishment inflicted on him by them, verse 6. He gives also an account of the effect of this sentence against him; which was his humiliation and repentance, verse 7: and hereon he gives direction for his restoration, by an act of the church forgiving him and confirming their love unto him. Men may fancy to themselves strange notions of excommunication, with reference unto its power, the residence of that power, its effects, extent, and ends; and so either, on the one hand, erect it into an engine of arbitrary domination over the church and all the members of it, or deny, on the other, that there is any such institution of Christ in force in his churches: but we can be taught nothing more plainly of the mind of Christ than that he hath given power unto his church to cast out of their communion obstinate, scandalous offenders, and to restore them again upon their repentance, enjoining it unto them as their duty. And it is an evidence of a woful degeneracy in churches from their primitive institution, when the sentence is so administered as that it hath an effect by virtue of human laws or the outward concerns of men, but

no influence on their consciences unto humiliation and repentance; which is the principal end of its appointment. The apostle treats of the same matter, Gal. 5:7–12. He speaks of those false teachers who opposed and overthrew, what lay in them, the fundamental doctrine of the gospel. These at that time were in great power and reputation in the churches of the Galatians, which they had corrupted with their false opinions, so that the apostle doth not directly enjoin their immediate excision; yet he declares what they did deserve, and what was the duty of the church towards them when freed from their delusions: Verse 12, "I would they were even cut off that trouble you." Men have exercised their minds incurious conjectures about the sense of these words, altogether in vain and needlessly. The curiosity of some of the best of the ancients, applying it unto a forcible eunuchism, is extremely fond. No other excision is intended but that which was from the church, and to be done by the church, in obedience unto the truth. Neither the subject-matter treated of, the nature of the crime condemned, nor the state of the church or design of the apostle, will admit of any other exposition. 2 Thess. 3:6, the apostle gives command unto the brethren of the church, and that "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," to "withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly." What it is to "walk disorderly" he declares immediately,—namely, to live in an open disobedience unto any of the commands of Christ, and "not after the tradition which he received of us;" that is, the doctrine of the gospel which he had delivered unto them. This withdrawing is as unto church-communion; which cannot be done but upon some act of the church depriving him of the right of it: for if every member of the church should be left unto his own judgment and practice herein, it would bring all things into confusion. And therefore, verse 14, he requires that a note be set on such a person by the church,—that is, a sentence be denounced against him,—before the duty of withdrawing from

him by the brethren be incumbent on them. See to the same purpose Tit. 3:10, 11; 1 Tim. 5:20; Rev. 2:2, 14, 15, 20, 21.

It is therefore evident that this censure, judgment, spiritual punishment, is an institution of Christ, for whose administration he hath given authority unto his church, as that which is necessary unto its edification, with its preservation in honour, purity, and order.

There have been many disputes about it, as unto its order and kinds. Some suppose that there are two sorts of excommunication,—the one they call the "lesser," and the other the "greater;" some, three sorts, as it is supposed there were among the Jews. There is no mention in the Scripture of any more sorts but one, or of any degrees herein. A segregation from all participation in church-order, worship, and privileges, is the only excommunication spoken of in the Scripture. But whereas an offending person may cause great disorder in a church, and give great scandal unto the members of it, before he can be regularly cut off or expelled the society, some do judge that there should a suspension of him from the Lord's table at least precede total or complete excommunication in case of impenitency; and it ought in some cases so to be. But this suspension is not properly an especial institution, but only an act of prudence in church-rule, to avoid offence and scandal. And no men question but that this is lawful unto, yea, the duty of the rulers of the church, to require any one to forbear for a season from the use of his privilege in the participation of the supper of the Lord, in case of scandal and offence which would be taken at it and ensue thereon. And if any person shall refuse a submission unto them in this act of rule, the church hath no way for its relief but to proceed unto the total removal of such a person from their whole communion; for the edification of the whole church must not be obstructed by the refractoriness of any one among them.

This excommunication, as we have proved before, is an act of church-authority exerted in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and if so, then it is an act of the officers of the church,—namely, so for as it is authoritative,—for there is no authority in the church, properly so called, but what resides in the officers of it. There is an office in the church which is merely ministerial, without any formal authority,—that is, of the deacons; but there is no authority in exercise but what is in the elders and rulers of the church. And there are two reasons which prove that the power of excommunication, as to the authoritative exercise of it, is in the elders of the church:—1. Because the apostles, by virtue of their office-power in every church, did join in the authoritative excommunication, as is plain in the case insisted on, 1 Cor. 5; and there is no office-power now remaining but what is in the elders of the church. 2. It is an act of rule; but all rule, properly so called, is in the hands of rulers only. We may add hereunto, that the care of the preservation of the church in its purity, of the vindication of its honour, of the edification of all its members, of the correction and salvation of offenders, is principally incumbent on them, or committed unto them, as we have declared; as also, that they are best able to judge when and for what the sentence ought to be denounced against any, which requires their best skill in the wisdom of spiritual rule. And therefore the omission of the exercise of it, when it was necessary, is charged as a neglect on the elders or rulers of the churches, as the due execution of it is commended in them; and therefore unto them it doth belong, with respect unto their office, and is thereon an office-act or an act of authority.

Howbeit, it cannot be denied but that the interest, yea, the power of the whole church, in the fraternity of it, is greatly to be considered herein; for indeed wherever the apostle treats of it, he doth not anywhere recommend it unto the officers of the church in a peculiar manner, but unto the whole church or the brethren therein. This is

evident in the places before quoted. Wherefore the whole church is concerned herein, both in point of duty, interest, and power:—1. In point of duty; for by virtue of the mutual watch of all the members of the church over each other, and of the care incumbent on every one of them, for the good, the honour, the reputation, and edification of the whole, it is their duty, jointly and severally, to endeavour the purging out from among them of every thing that is contrary unto these ends. And they who are not concerned in these things are dead and useless members of the church. 2. In interest they have also a concernment therein. They are to look that no root of bitterness spring up amongst them, lest themselves be at length defiled thereby. It is usually said that the good are not defiled by holding communion with them that are wicked in a participation of holy ordinances; and there is some truth in what is said, with reference unto wicked, undiscovered hypocrites, or such as are not scandalously flagitious: but to promote this persuasion, so as to beget an opinion in church-members that they are no way concerned in the scandalous sins and lives of those with whom they walk in all duties of spiritual communion, openly avowing themselves members of the same body with them, is a diabolical engine, invented to countenance churches in horrible security, unto their ruin. But yet, besides that defilement which may be contracted in a joint participation of the same ordinances with such persons, there are other ways, almost innumerable, whereby their example, if passed by without animadversion, may be pernicious unto their faith, love, and obedience. Wherefore they are obliged in point of spiritual interest, as they take care of their own souls, to concur in the ejection out of the church of obstinate offenders. 3. In point of power; for the execution of this sentence is committed unto and rests in the body of the church. According as they concur and practise, so it is put in execution or suspended; for it is they who must withdraw communion from them, or the sentence is of no use or validity. This



punishment must be inflicted by the "many;" who also are to restore him who is so rebuked. Wherefore, excommunication without the consent of the church is a mere nullity.

But if any one shall say that excommunication is not an act of authority or of office, but of power residing in the community, resulting from their common suffrage, guided and directed by the officers or elders of the church, I shall again take up this inquiry immediately, and speak unto it more distinctly, lest what is here spoken should not be sufficient unto the satisfaction of any.

Our next inquiry is concerning the objects of this church-censure, or who they are that ought to be excommunicated. And,—

1. They must be members of that church by which the sentence is to be denounced against them; and this, as we have proved before, they cannot be without their own consent. One church cannot excommunicate the members of another. They are unto them, as unto this matter, "without," and they have no power to judge them. The foundation of the right to proceed against any herein is in their own voluntary engagement to observe and keep the rules and laws of the society whereunto they are admitted. The offence is given unto that church in the first place, if not only; and it is an act of that church for its own edification. And there is a nullity in the sentence which is ordained, decreed, or denounced, by any who are not officers of that church in particular wherein the sin is committed.

2. These church-members that may be justly excommunicated are of two sorts:—

- (1.) Such as continue obstinate in the practice of any scandalous sin after private and public admonition. The process from the first offence in admonition is so stated, in ordinary cases, Matt. 18:15–20,

that there is no need further to declare it. The time that is to be allotted unto the several degrees of it shall be spoken unto afterward. And unto a right judgment of obstinacy in any scandalous sin, it is required,—

[1.] That the sin, considered in itself, be such as is owned to be such by all, without doubting, dispute, or hesitation. It must be some sin that is judged and condemned in the light of nature or in the express testimony of Scripture; yea, such as the Holy Ghost witnesseth, that, continued in without repentance, it is inconsistent with salvation. If the thing itself to be animadverted on be dubious, or disputable whether it be a sin or no, especially such a sin, either from the nature of the fact, or the qualifications of the person offending, or from other circumstances, so as that the guilty person is not self-condemned, nor are others fully satisfied in their minds about the nature of it, there is no room for excommunication in such case. And if it be once allowed to be applied towards any sins but such as are evident to be so (as the apostle says, "The works of the flesh are manifest") in the light of nature and express testimony of Scripture, not only will the administration of it be made difficult, a matter of dispute, unfit for the determination of the body of the church, but it will leave it unto the wills of men to prostitute it unto litigious brawls, quarrels, and differences, wherein interest and partiality may take place; which is to profane this divine institution. But confine it, as it ought to be, unto such sins as are condemned in the light of nature or by express testimony of Scripture, as inconsistent with salvation by Jesus Christ, if persisted in, and all things that belong unto the administration of it will be plain and easy.

From the neglect of this rule proceeded that horrible confusion and disorder, in excommunication and the administration of it, which for sundry ages prevailed in the world; for as it was mostly applied unto

things holy, just, and good, or the performance of such gospel duties as men owed to Christ and their own souls, so being exercised with respect unto irregularities that are made such merely by the arbitrary constitutions and laws of men, and that in cases frivolous, trifling, and of no importance, it was found necessary to be managed in and by such courts, such processes, such forms of law, such pleadings and intricacies of craft, such a burden of cost and charge, as it is uncertain whether it ought to be more bewailed or derided.

[2.] It is required hereunto that the matter of fact as unto the relation of the sin unto the particular offender be confessed, or not denied, or clearly proved. How far this is to extend, and what ground of procedure there may be in reports or fame concurring with leading circumstances, we shall inquire afterward. And although in such cases of public fame, a good testimony, from those of credit and repute in the church, given unto the supposed guilty person is of use, and sufficient, in some cases, singly to oppose unto public reports, yet to require a man to purge himself by others from any feigned scandalous imputation is an unwarrantable tyranny.

[3.] It is also required that the previous process, in and by private and public admonition, and that repeated, with patient waiting for the success of each of them, be duly premised. Whether this extend itself unto all causes of excommunication shall be afterward inquired into. Ordinarily it is so necessary unto the conviction of the mind and conscience of the offender, and to leave him without either provocation from the church or excuse in himself, so suited to be expressive of the grace and patience of Christ toward sinners, so requisite unto the satisfaction of the church itself in their procedure, as that the omission of it will probably render the sentence useless and ineffectual. A crying out, "I admonish a first, a second, a third

time," and so, to excommunication, is a very absurd observation of a divine institution.

[4.] It is required that the case of the person to be censured, as unto his profession of repentance on the one hand, or obstinacy on the other, be judged and determined by the whole church in love and compassion. There are few who are so profligately wicked but that, when the sin wherewith they are charged is evidently such in the light of nature and Scripture, and when it is justly proved against them, they will make some profession of sorrow and repentance. Whether this be sufficient, as in most cases it is, to suspend the present proceeding of the church, or quite to lay it aside, is left unto the judgment of the church itself, upon consideration of present circumstances and what is necessary unto its own edification. Only, this rule must be continually observed, that the least appearance of haste or undue precipitation herein is to be avoided in all these cases, the bane of church rule and order.

Again; the manner of its administration according to the mind of Christ may be considered. And hereunto are required,—1. Prayer, without which it can no way be administered in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The administration of any solemn ordinance of the gospel without prayer is a horrible profanation of it; and theneglect or contempt hereof, in any who take upon them to excommunicate others, is an open proclamation of the nullity of their act and sentence. And the observation of the administration of it without any due reverence of God, without solemn invocation of the name of Christ, thereby engaging his presence and authority in what they do, is that principally which hath set the consciences of all mankind at liberty from any concernment in this ecclesiastical censure, and whence those that administer it expect no other success of what they do but what they can give it by outward force: and where this fails,

excommunication is quickly laid aside; as it was when the pope threatened the cantons of the Swiss, that if they complied not with some of his impositions, he would excommunicate them; whereon they sent him word. "They would not be excommunicated;" which ended the matter. Wherefore, when our Lord Jesus Christ gives unto his church the power of binding and loosing, directing them in the exercise of that power, he directs them to ask assistance by prayer when they are gathered together, Matt. 18:18–20: and the apostle directs the church of Corinth that they should proceed unto this sentence when they were gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 5:4; which could not be without calling on his name. In brief, without prayer, neither is the ordinance itself sanctified unto the church, nor are any meet to administer it, nor is the authority of Christ either owned or engaged, nor divine assistance obtained, neither is what is done any more excommunication than any rash curse is; so that many [such] proceed inordinately out of the mouths of men.

And the prayer required herein is of three sorts:—

(1.) That which is previous, for guidance and direction in a matter of so great weight and importance. It is no small thing to fall into mistakes when men act in the name of Christ, and so engage his authority in what he will not own; and the best of men, the best of churches, are liable unto such mistakes, when they are not under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which is to be obtained by prayer only.

(2.) In or together with the administration of it, that what is done on earth may be ratified in heaven, by the approbation of Christ, and be made effectual unto its proper end.

(3.) It must be followed with the prayer of the church unto the same purpose; all with respect unto the humiliation, repentance, healing,

and recovery, of the offender.

2. It is to be accompanied with lamentation or mourning. So the apostle, reproving the church of Corinth for the omission of it when it was necessary, tells them that they had not "mourned" that the offender might be taken away from among them, 1 Cor. 5:2. It is not to be done without mourning. And himself calls the execution of this sentence, from this adjunct, his bewailing of them: "I shall bewail many that have sinned already," 2 Cor. 12:21 Compassion for the person offending, with respect unto that dangerous condition whereinto he hath cast himself, the excision of a member of the same body, with whom they have had communion in the most holy mysteries of divine worship and sat down at the table of the Lord, with a due sense of the dishonour of the gospel by his fall, ought to ingenerate this mourning or lamentation in the minds of them who are concerned in the execution of the sentence; nor is it advisable for any church to proceed thereunto before they are so affected.

3. It is to be accompanied with a due sense of the future judgment of Christ; for we herein judge for Christ in the matters of his house and kingdom. And woe to them who dare pronounce this sentence without a persuasion, on good grounds, that it is the sentence of Christ himself! And there is a representation also in it of the future judgment, when Christ will eternally cut off and separate from himself all hypocrites and impenitent sinners. This is well expressed by Tertullian: "Ibidem etiam exhortationes, castigationes et censura divina" (speaking of the assemblies of the church), "nam et judicatur magno cum pondere, ut apud certos de Dei conspectu; summumque futuri judicii præjudicium est, si quis ita deliquerit ut a communicatione orationis et conventus, et omnis sancti commercii relegetur," Apol. cap. xxxix. Were this duty observed, it would be a preservative against that intermixture of corrupt affections and

corrupt ends which often impose themselves on the minds of men in the exercise of this power.

Lastly, The nature and end of this judgment or sentence being corrective, not vindictive,—for healing, not destruction,—what is the duty of the church and those principally concerned in the pursuit of it, to render it effectual, is plainly evident. Of what use a "significabit" and "capias" may be in this case I know not; they belong not unto Christian religion,—much less do fire and fagot do so. Prayer for the person cut off, admonition as occasion is offered, compassion in his distressed estate (which is so much the more deplorable if he know it not), forbearance from common converse, with readiness for the restoration of love in all the fruits of it, contain the principal duties of the church and all the members of it towards them that are justly excommunicated.

What further belongeth unto this head of church rule or order shall be spoken unto in the resolution of some cases or inquiries, wherein some things only mentioned already shall be more fully explained.

I have made some inquiry before whether excommunication be an act of authority and jurisdiction in the officers of the church, or an act of power in the fraternity of the church; but, for the sake of some by whom it is desired, I shall a little more distinctly inquire after the truth herein, though I shall alter nothing of what was before laid down. And,—

1. It is certain, it hath been proved, and I now take it for granted, that the Lord Christ hath given this power unto the church. Wherefore, in the exercise of this power, both the officers and members of the church are to act according unto their respective interests; for that exercise of power in the church towards any which is not an act of obedience unto Christ in them that exercise it, is in itself null. There

is, therefore, no distinction or distribution of power in the church, but by the interposition of especial duty.

2. The institution of Christ with respect unto a church as it is a peculiar society, for its especial ends, doth not deprive it of its natural right as it is a society. There is in every community, by voluntary confederation, a natural right and power to expel those from its society who will not be ruled by the laws of its constitution. And if the church should, by the institution of a power new as unto the way, manner, and ends of its exercise, be deprived of its original, radical power, with respect unto the general end of its own preservation, it would not be a gainer by that institution. It may be easily understood that the Lord Christ should, in particular, appoint the way and manner of the exercise of this power, or administration of this sentence, committing the care thereof unto the officers of the church; but it cannot be well understood that thereby he should deprive the church of its right, and forbid them their duty in preserving their society entire and pure. Neither can it be in so an especial manner committed unto any, as that upon their neglect, whereby those who by the law and rule of Christ ought to be cast out of the church's communion are continued in it, unto its sin and defilement, the church itself should be free from guilt. Wherefore the apostle expressly chargeth the whole church of Corinth with sin and neglect of duty, in that the incestuous person was not put away from among them. This could not be, if so be the power of it were so in the hands of a few of the officers that the church had no right to act in it; for none can incur guilt merely by the defect of others in discharge of their duty.

3. The church, essentially considered, is before its ordinary officers; for the apostles ordained officers in every church. But the church in that state hath power to put away from among them and their



communion an obstinate offender: they have it as they are a society by voluntary confederation. Wherein this comes short of authoritative excommunication will immediately appear.

4. Where a church is complete and organized with its stated rulers, as the church of Corinth was, yet rules, instructions, and commands, are given expressly unto the fraternity or community of the church, for their duty and acting in the administration of this sentence, and the cutting off of an offender, 1 Cor. 5:1–7; 2 Cor. 2:7, 8; yea, the ἐπιτιμία, or infliction of the sentence, is ascribed unto them, verse 6. All these things do suppose a right and duty thereon to act according to their interest in excommunication to reside in the whole church. Wherefore,—

5. There are some acts belonging hereunto that the church itself, in the body of the fraternity, cannot be excluded from without destroying the nature of the sentence itself and rendering it ineffectual. Such are, the previous cognizance of the cause, without which they cannot be blamed for any neglect about it; preparatory duties unto its execution, in prayer, mourning, and admonition, which are expressly prescribed unto them; and a testification of their consent unto it by their common suffrage. Without these things excommunication is but a name with a noise; it belongs not unto the order appointed by Christ in his church.

6. Hence arise the duties of the church towards an excommunicated person that are consequential unto his exclusion from among them. Such are, praying for him, as one noted by the church and under the discipline of Christ; avoiding communion with him in public and private, that he may be ashamed, and the like;—all which arise from their own voluntary actings in his exclusion, and such as without a judgment of the cause they cannot be obliged unto.

7. Yet, on the other side, unto the formal completeness of this sentence, an authoritative act of office-power is required: for,—

(1.) There is in it such an act of rule as is in the hands of the elders only;

(2.) The executive power of the keys in binding and loosing, so far as it compriseth authority to be acted in the name of Christ, is intrusted with them only.

8. Wherefore I shall say no more, in answer unto this inquiry, but that excommunication is an act of church-power in its officers and brethren, acting according unto their respective rights, interests, and duties, particularly prescribed unto them. The officers of the church act in it as officers, with authority; the brethren, or the body of the church, with power, yet so as that the officers are no way excluded from their power, consent, and suffrage, in the acting of the church, but have the same interest therein with all the other members of the church;—but the community of the church have no interest in those authoritative actings of the officers which are peculiar unto them. Where either of these is wanting, the whole duty is vitiated, and the sense of the sentence rendered ineffectual.

FIRST. It is inquired, Whether excommunication, justly deserved, may and ought to be omitted in case of trouble or danger that may ensue unto the church thereon?

It is usually granted that so it may and ought to be; which seems in general to have been the judgment of Austin.

The troubles and dangers intended are threefold:—

1. From the thing itself;

2. From the persons to be excommunicated;

3. From the church.

1. "Trouble may arise from the thing itself; for there being an exercise of authority or jurisdiction in it over the persons of men not granted from the civil magistrate by the law of the land, those that execute it may be liable unto penalties ordained in such cases.

2. "The persons to be excommunicated may be great, and of great interest in the world, so as that if they receive a provocation hereby, they may occasion or stir up persecution against the church, as it hath often fallen out.

3. "The church itself may be divided on these considerations, so as that lasting differences may be occasioned among them, which the omission of the sentence might prevent."

For answer hereunto, some things must be premised; as,—

1. Here is no supposition of any thing sinful or morally evil in the church, its officers or any of its members, by refusing to omit the pronouncing of this sentence. Whether there be any sin in giving occasion unto the troubles mentioned, to be avoided by an omission of duty, is now to be inquired into.

2. We must suppose,—

(1.) That the cause of excommunication be clear and evident, both as unto the merit of the fact and the due application of it unto the person concerned, so as that no rational indifferent man shall be able to say that it is meet that such a one should be continued a member of such a society; as it ought to be wherever excommunication is administered.

(2.) That sufficient time and space for repentance, and for giving satisfaction unto the church (whereof afterward), hath been allowed unto the person after admonition.

(3.) That the church doth really suffer in honour and reputation by tolerating such a scandalous offender among them.

I answer, on these suppositions, I see no just reason to countenance the omission of the execution of this sentence, or to acquit the church from the guilt of sin in so doing; for,—

1. The first pretence of danger is vain. There is not the least shadow of jurisdiction in this act of the church. There is nothing in it that toucheth any thing which is under the protection and conservation of human laws. It reacheth not the persons of men in their lives, or liberties, or estates, or the least secular privileges that they do enjoy; it doth not expose them to the power or censures of others, nor prejudice them as unto office or advantage of life. There is, therefore, no concernment of the law of the land herein,—no more than in a parent's disinheriting a rebellious child.

2. As unto danger of persecution by the means of the person provoked, I say,—

(1.) The same may be pleaded as unto all other duties of obedience unto Jesus Christ wherewith the world is provoked, and so the whole profession of the church should give place to the fear of persecution. To testify against sin in the way of Christ's appointment is a case of confession.

(2.) The apostles were not deterred by this consideration from the excommunication of Simon Magus, the seducing Jews, Hymeneus and Alexander, with others.

(3.) The Lord Christ commendeth or reproveth his churches, according as they were strict in the observation of this duty or neglective of it, notwithstanding the fear of persecution thereon, Rev. 2, 3. And,—

(4.) He will take that care of his church, in all their obedience unto him, as shall turn all the consequences thereof unto their advantage.

3. As unto danger of differences in the church there is nothing to be said, but that if rule, order, love, and duty, will not prevent such differences, there is no way appointed of Christ for that end; and if they are sufficient for it (as they are abundantly), they must bear their own blame who occasion such differences.

SECONDLY. But it may be said, What if such an offender as justly deserves to be excommunicated, and is under admonition in order thereunto in case of impenitency, should voluntarily withdraw himself from and leave the communion of the church, is there any necessity to proceed against him by excommunication?

Ans. 1. Some say it is enough if it be declared in the church that such a one hath cut off himself from the church, and is therefore no longer under their watch or care, but is left unto himself and the world. And this is sufficient with them who own no act of office-power or authority in excommunication, but esteem it only a noted cessation of communion; which destroys a principal branch of the power of the keys. Wherefore,—

2. Where the offence is plain, open, scandalous, persisted in,—where admonition is despised or not complied with,—it is the duty of the church to denounce the sentence of excommunication against such a person notwithstanding his voluntary departure; for,—

(1.) No man is to make an advantage unto himself, or to be freed from any disadvantage, censure, or spiritual penalty, by his own sin, such as is the voluntary relinquishment of the church by a person under admonition for scandalous offences.

(2.) It is necessary unto the church, both as unto the discharge of its duty and the vindication of its honour, as also from the benefit and edification it will receive by those duties of humiliation, mourning, and prayer, which are necessary unto the execution of this sentence.

(3.) It is necessary for the good and benefit of him who so deserves to be excommunicated; for,—

[1.] The end of the institution of the ordinance is his correction, not his destruction; and may be effectual unto his repentance and recovery.

[2.] It is to be followed with sharp admonition and prayer; which in due time may reach the most profligate sinner.

(4.) It becomes not the wisdom and order of any society intrusted with authority for its own preservation, as the church is by Christ himself, to suffer persons obnoxious unto censure by the fundamental rules of that society to cast off all respect unto it, to break their order and relation, without animadverting thereon, according to the authority wherewith they are intrusted. To do otherwise is to expose their order unto contempt, and proclaim a diffidence in their own authority for the spiritual punishment of offenders.

(5.) One end of the appointment of the power and sentence of excommunication in the church, is to give testimony unto the future

final judgment of Christ against impenitent sinners, which none of them can run away from nor escape.

A THIRD inquiry may be, Whether, in case of any great and scandalous sin, the church may proceed unto excommunication without any previous admonition?

Ans. 1. Persons may be falsely accused of and charged with great sins, the greatest of sins, as well as those of a lesser degree, and that both by particular testimonies and public reports, as it was with the Lord Christ himself; which daily experience confirms. Wherefore all haste and precipitation, like that of David in judging the case of Mephibosheth, is carefully to be avoided, though they are pressed under the pretences of the greatness and notoriety of the sin.

2. There is no individual actual sin but is capable of great aggravation or alleviation from its circumstances. These the church is to inquire into, and to obtain a full knowledge of them, that all things being duly weighed, they may be affected with the sin in a due manner, or after a godly sort; which is essential unto the right administration of this ordinance.

3. This cannot be done without personal conference with the offender, who is to be allowed to speak for himself. This conference, in case guilt be discovered, cannot but have in it the nature of an admonition, whereon the church is to proceed, as in the case of previous solemn admonition, in the order and according to the rule which shall be immediately declared.

FOURTHLY. Whether, on the first knowledge of an offence or scandalous sin, if it be known unto the church that the offending party is penitent, and willing to declare his humiliation and

repentance for the satisfaction of the church, the church may proceed unto his excommunication, in case the sin be great and notorious?

Ans. 1. It is certain that, in an orderly progress, as unto more private sins, a compliance by repentance with the first or second admonition doth put a stop unto all further ecclesiastical procedure.

2. But whereas the inquiry is made concerning sins either in their own nature or in their circumstances great and of disreputation unto the church, I answer,—

If repentance be evidenced unto the consciences of the rulers of the church to be sincere, and proportionable unto the offence in its outward demonstration, according unto the rule of the gospel, so as that they are obliged to judge in charity that the person sinning is pardoned and accepted with Christ, as all sincerely penitent sinners undoubtedly are, the church cannot proceed unto the excommunication of such an offender; for,—

(1.) It would be publicly to reject them whom they acknowledge that Christ doth receive. This nothing can warrant them to do; yea, so to do is to set up themselves against Christ, or at least to make use of his authority against his mind and will. Yea, such a sentence would destroy itself; for it is a declaration that Christ doth disapprove them whom he doth approve.

(2.) Their so doing would make a misrepresentation of the gospel, and of the Lord Christ therein; for whereas the principal design of the gospel, and of the representation that is made therein of Christ Jesus, is to evidence that all sincerely penitent sinners, that repent according unto the rule of it, are and shall be pardoned and accepted, by the rejection of such a person in the face of his sincere repentance, there is an open contradiction thereunto. Especially it would give an



undue sense of the heart, mind, and will of Christ towards repenting sinners, such as may be dangerous unto the faith of believers, so far as the execution of this sentence is doctrinal; for such it is, and declarative of the mind of Christ according unto the judgment of the church. The image, therefore, of this excommunication which is set up in some churches, wherein the sentence of it is denounced without any regard unto the mind of Christ, as unto his acceptance or disapprobation of those whom they excommunicate, is a teacher of lies.

(3.) Such a procedure is contrary unto the nature and end of this sentence; for it is corrective and instructive, not properly punishing and vindictive. The sole end of it, with respect whereunto it hath its efficacy from divine institution, is the humiliation, repentance, and recovery, of the sinner; and if this be attained before, the infliction of this sentence is contrary to the nature and end of it.

It will be said "That it hath another end also,—namely, the preservation of the purity of the church, and the vindication of its honour and reputation, wherein it suffers by the scandalous offences of any of its members." Whereunto I say,—

(1.) No church is or can be made impure by them whom Christ hath purged, as he doth all those who are truly penitent;

(2.) It is no dishonour unto any church to have sinners in it who have evidenced sincere repentance;

(3.) The present offence and scandal may be provided against by an act of rectorial prudence, in causing the offending person to abstain from the Lord's table for a season.

FIFTHLY. It is inquired, Whether such as voluntarily, causelessly, and disorderly, do leave the communion of any church whereof they are members, though not guilty of any scandalous immoralities, may and ought to be excommunicated?

Ans. 1. Where persons are esteemed members of churches by external causes, without their own consent, or by parochial cohabitation, they may remove from one church unto another by the removal of their habitation, according unto their own discretion; for such cohabitation being the only formal cause of any relation to such a church in particular, upon the ceasing of that cause, the relation ceaseth of its own accord.

2. Where persons are members of churches by mutual confederation or express personal consent, causeless departure from them is an evil liable unto many aggravations.

3. But whereas the principal end of all particular churches is edification, there may be many just and sufficient reasons why a person may remove himself from the constant communion of one church unto that of another; and of these reasons he himself is judge, on whom it is incumbent to take care of his own edification above all other things. Nor ought the church to deny unto any such persons their liberty, desired peaceably and according unto order.

4. It was declared before that where any persons guilty of, and under admonition for, any scandalous sin do withdraw from the communion of any church, their so doing is no impediment unto a further procedure against them.

5. Whereas there are amongst us churches, or those which are so esteemed in the consciences of men, so far differing in principles and practices as that they have not entire communion with one another

in all parts of divine worship, it may be inquired, Whether, if a man leave a church of one sort to join with one of another, as suppose he leave a select congregation to join in a parochial church constantly and totally, he may be justly excommunicated for so doing without the consent of the church whereunto he did belong?

Ans. 1. It is certain, on the one hand, that if any man leave the communion of parochial assemblies to join himself unto a select congregation, those who have power over those parishes will make no question whether they shall excommunicate him or no in their way. But,—

2. Supposing persons so departing from particular congregations,—

(1.) To be free from scandalous sins;

(2.) That they depart quietly, without attempting disorder or confusion in the church;

(3.) That they do actually join themselves unto the communion of some church, whose constitution, principles, and worship, they do approve, whereby their visible profession is preserved,—the church may not justly proceed unto their excommunication; it may suffice to declare that such persons have, of their own accord, forsaken the communion of the church, are no more under its watch and care, neither is the church further obliged towards them, but as unto Christian duties in general.

6. As for those whose departure is, as voluntary and causeless, so accompanied with other evils, such as are revilings, reproaches, and false accusations (as is usual in such cases), they may be proceeded against as obstinate offenders.

The SIXTH inquiry is, What time is to be given after solemn admonition, before actual excommunication?

Ans. 1. The manner of some, to run over the words, "I admonish you a first, second, and third time," so immediately to make way for the sentence of excommunication, is that wherein men are greatly to be pitied, for their ignorance of the nature of those things which they take on themselves to act, order, and dispose of,—that we ascribe it not unto worse and more evil causes.

2. The nature of the thing itself requires a considerable season or space of time between solemn admonition and excommunication: for the end and design of the former is the repentance and recovery of the offender; nor doth its efficacy thereunto depend on or consist in the actual giving of it, but it is as other moral causes, which may work gradually upon occasional advantages. Want of light, some present exasperation and temptation, may seem to frustrate a present admonition, when they do but suspend its present efficacy, which it may afterward obtain on the conscience of the offender.

3. It being a church-admonition that is intended, it is the duty of the church to abide in prayer and waiting for the fruit of it, according to the appointment of Christ; and herein the case may possibly require some long time to be spent.

4. No present appearance of obstinacy or impenitence under admonition (which is usually pleaded) should cause an immediate procedure unto excommunication; for,—

(1.) It is contrary unto the distinct institution of the one and the other, wherein the former is to be allowed its proper season for its use and efficacy.

(2.) It doth not represent the patience and forbearance of Christ towards his church and all the members of it.

(3.) It is not suited unto the rule of that love which "hopeth all things, beareth all things," etc.

(4.) All grounds of hope for the recovery of sinners by repentance are to be attended unto, so as to defer the ultimate sentence.

"Nulla unquam de morte hominis cunctatio longa est."—Juv. Sat. vi. 220.

5. If new sins are added, of the same or any other kind, unto former scandals, whilst persons are under admonition, it is an indication of the necessity of a procedure.

SEVENTHLY. It may be further inquired, Whether a man may be excommunicated for errors in matters of faith, or false opinions about them?

Ans. 1. The case is so plainly and positively stated, Rev. 2:2, 6, 14, 15, 20, 1 Tim. 1:19, 20, Tit. 3:10, 11, and other places, that it needs no further determination. Wherefore,—

2. If the errors intended are about or against the fundamental truths of the gospel, so as that they that hold them cannot "hold the Head," but really make "shipwreck of the faith," no pretended usefulness of such persons, no peaceableness as unto outward deportment, which men guilty of such abominations will frequently cover themselves withal, can countenance the church in forbearing, after due admonition, to cut them off from their communion. The nature of the evil, the danger that is from it unto the whole church, as from a gangrene in any member unto the body, the indignation of Christ

expressed against such pernicious doctrines, the opposition of them to the building of the church on the Rock, which in most of them is opposed, do render a church altogether inexcusable who omit their duty herein.

3. False opinions in lesser things, when the foundation of faith and Christian practice is not immediately concerned, may be tolerated in a church; and sundry rules are given unto this end in the Scripture, as Rom. 14:1–3, etc., Phil. 3:15, 16. Howbeit, in that low ebb of grace, love, and prudence, which we are come unto, it is best for edification that all persons peaceably dispose themselves into those societies with which they most agree in principles and opinions, especially such as relate or lead unto practice in any duties of worship. But,—

4. With respect unto such opinions, if men will, as is usual, wrangle and contend, to the disturbance of the peace of the church, or hinder it in any duty, with respect unto its own edification, and will neither peaceably abide in the church nor peaceably depart from it, they may and ought to be proceeded against with the censures of the church.

EIGHTHLY. Whether persons excommunicated out of any church may be admitted unto the hearing of the word in the assemblies of that church?

Ans. 1. They may be so, as also to be present at all duties of moral worship; for so may heathens and unbelievers, 1 Cor. 14:23, 24.

2. When persons are under this sentence, the church is in a state of expecting of their recovery and return, and therefore are not to prohibit them any means thereof, such as is preaching of the word.

NINTHLY. How far extends the rule of the apostle towards persons rejected of the church, 1 Cor. 5:11, "With such an one no not to eat;"

as that also, "Note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed," 2 Thess. 3:14?

1. To "eat" compriseth all ordinary converse in things of this life: "Give us our daily bread." To "note" is either the act of the church setting the mark of its censure and disapprobation on him, or the duty of the members of the church to take notice of him as unto the end of not keeping company with him. Wherefore,—

2. Herein all ordinary converse of choice, not made necessary by previous occasions, is forbidden. The rule, I say, forbids,—

(1.) All ordinary converse of choice, not that which is occasional;

(2.) Converse about earthly, secular things, not that which is spiritual, for such an one may and ought still to be admonished whilst he will hear the word of admonition;

(3.) It is such converse as is not made previously necessary by men's mutual engagements in trade and the like, for that is founded on such rules of right and equity, with such obligations in point of truth, as excommunication cannot dissolve.

3. No suspension of duties antecedently necessary by virtue of natural or moral relation is allowed or countenanced by this rule; such are those of husband and wife, parents and children, magistrates and subjects, masters and servants, neighbours, relations in propinquity or blood. No duties arising from or belonging unto any of these relations are released, or the obligation unto them weakened, by excommunication. Husbands may not hereon forsake their wives if they are excommunicated, nor wives their husbands; magistrates may not withdraw their protection from any of their subjects because they are excommunicated, much less

may subjects withhold their obedience on any pretence of the excommunication of their magistrates as such. And the same is true as unto all other natural or moral relations.

4. The ends of this prohibition are,—

(1.) To testify our condemnation of the sin and disapprobation of the person guilty of it, who is excommunicated;

(2.) The preservation of ourselves from all kinds of participation in his sin;

(3.) To make him ashamed of himself, that if he be not utterly profligate and given up unto total apostasy, it may occasion in him thoughts of returning.

TENTHLY. How ought persons excommunicated to be received into the church upon their repentance?

Ans. 1. As unto the internal manner, with all readiness and cheerfulness, with,—

(1.) Meekness, to take from them all discouragement and disconsolation, Gal. 6:1;

(2.) With compassion and all means of relief and consolation, 2 Cor. 2:7;

(3.) With love in all the demonstrations of it, verse 8;

(4.) With joy, to represent the heart of Christ towards repenting sinners.



2. The outward manner of the restoration of such a person consists in,—

(1.) His testification of his repentance unto the satisfaction of the church;

(2.) The express consent of the church unto his reception;

(3.) His renewed engagement in the covenant of the church, whereby he is re-instated or jointed again in the body in his own proper place;—in all which the elders, by their authority, are to go before the church.

All sorts of persons do now condemn the opinions of the Novatians in refusing the re-admission of lapsed sinners into the church, upon repentance. But there may be an evil observed amongst some leading that way, or unto what is worse; and this is, that they seek not after the recovery of those that are excommunicated, by prayer, admonition, exhortation, in a spirit of meekness and tenderness, but are well satisfied that they have quitted themselves of their society. It is better never to excommunicate any, than so to carry it towards them when they are excommunicated. But there is a sort of men unto whom if a man be once an offender, he shall be so for ever.

ELEVENTHLY. Our last inquiry shall be, Whether excommunication may be regular and valid when the matter of right is dubious and disputable,—as many such cases may fall out, especially with respect unto the occasions of life and mutual converse,—or when the matter of fact is not duly proved by positive witnesses on the one hand, and is denied on the other?

Ans. 1. The foundation of the efficacy of excommunication, next and under its divine institution, lies in the light and conviction of the

consciences of them that are to be excommunicated. If these are not affected with a sense of guilt, as in dubious cases they may not be, the sentence will be of no force or efficacy.

2. A case wherein there is a difference in the judgment of good and wise men about it is to be esteemed such a dubious case as is exempted from this censure. Nothing is to be admitted here to take place but what is reprobable by natural light and the concurrent judgment of them that fear God.

3. If the case be about such a right or wrong, in pretended fraud, over-reaching, or the like, as is determinable by civil laws, the church is no judge in such cases, unless it be by way of arbitration, 1 Cor. 6.

4. If the question be about doctrines that are not on points fundamental, so as those who dissent from the church do carry it peaceably and orderly, there can be no procedure unto ecclesiastical censure; but if men will dote on their own opinions, wrangling, contending, and breaking the peace of the church about them, there are other rules given in that case.

5. If the matter of fact be to be determined and stated by witness, it is absolutely necessary, by virtue of divine institution, that there be two or three concurrent testimonies; one witness is not to be regarded. See Deut. 19:15; Num. 35:30; Matt. 18:16, etc.

Wherefore the ensuing rules or directions are to be observed in the matter of excommunication:—

1. No excommunication is to be allowed in cases dubious and disputable, wherein right and wrong are not easily determinable unto all unprejudiced persons that know the will of God in such

things; nor is it to be admitted when the matter of fact stands in need of testimony, and is not proved by two witnesses at the least.

2. All prejudices, all partiality, all provocations, all haste and precipitation, are most carefully to be avoided in this administration; for the judgment is the Lord's. Wherefore,—

3. We are continually, in all things that tend unto this sentence, and eminently in the sentence itself, to charge our consciences with the mind of Christ and what he would do himself in the case, considering his love, grace, mercy, and patience, with instances of his condescension which he gave us in this world.

4. There is also required of us herein a constant remembrance that we also are in the flesh and liable to temptation; which may restrain and keep in awe that forwardness and confidence which some are apt to manifest in such cases. In all these things a watchful eye is to be kept over the methods of Satan, who by all means seeks to pervert this ordinance unto the destruction of men, which is appointed for their edification; and he too often prevails in that design. And if, by the negligence of a church in the management and pursuit of this ordinance, he get advantage to pervert it unto the ruin of any, it is the fault of that church, in that they have not been careful of the honour of Christ therein.

Wherefore,—1. As excommunication by a cursed noise and clamour, with bell, book, and candle (such as we have instances of in some papal councils), is a horrible antichristian abomination: so,—

2. It is an undue representation of Christ and his authority, for persons openly guilty of profaneness in sinning to excommunicate them who are blameless in all Christian obedience.

3. All excommunication is evangelically null where there is wanting an evangelical frame of spirit in those by whom it is administered, and there is present an anti-evangelical order in its administration.

4. It is sufficiently evident that, after all the contests and disputes about this excommunication that have been in the world, the noise that it hath made, the horrible abuses that it hath been put unto, the wresting of all church order and rule to give countenance unto a corrupt administration of it, with the needless oppositions that have been made against its institution, there is nothing in it, nothing belongs unto it, nothing is required unto its administration, wherein men's outward interests are at all concerned, and which the smallest number of sincere Christians in any church-society may not perform and discharge unto the glory of Christ and their own edification.

It is the mystery of iniquity that hath traversed these things into such a state and posture as is unintelligible unto spiritual wisdom, unpracticable in the obedience of faith, and ruinous unto all evangelical order and discipline.

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## **CHAPTER XI**

### **Of the communion of churches**

CHURCHES so appointed and established in order as hath been declared ought to hold communion among themselves, or with each other, as unto all the ends of their institution and order, for these are the same in all; yea, the general end of them is in order of nature considered antecedently unto their institution in particular. This end is, the edification of the body of Christ in general, or the church

catholic. The promotion hereof is committed jointly and severally unto all particular churches. Wherefore, with respect hereunto, they are obliged unto mutual communion among themselves; which is their consent, endeavour, and conjunction, in and for the promotion of the edification of the catholic church, and therein their own, as they are parts and members of it.

This communion is incumbent on every church with respect unto all other churches of Christ in the world equally. And the duties and acts of it in all of them are of the same kind and nature; for there is no such disparity between them or subordination among them as should make a difference between the acts of their mutual communion, so as that the acts of some should be acts of authority, and those of others acts of obedience or subjection. Wherever there is a church, whether it be at Rome or Eugubium, in a city or a village, the communion of them all is mutual, the acts of it of the same kind, however one church may have more advantages to be useful and helpful therein than another. And the abuse of those advantages was that which wrought effectually in the beginning of that disorder which at length destroyed the catholic church, with all church-communion whatever: for some churches, especially that of Rome, having many advantages, in gifts, abilities, numbers, and reputation above many, above most churches, for usefulness in their mutual communion, the guides of it insensibly turned and perverted the addresses made unto them, the advices and assistances desired of them in way of communion, or their pretences of such addresses and desires, into a usurpation, first of a primacy of honour, then of order, then of supremacy and jurisdiction, unto the utter overthrow of all church order and communion, and at length of the whole nature of the catholic church, as stated and subsisting in particular churches; as we shall see.

All churches, on their first institution, quickly found themselves indigent and wanting, though not as unto their being, power, and order, yet as unto their well-being, with their preservation in truth and order upon extraordinary occurrences, as also with respect unto their usefulness and serviceableness unto the general end of furthering the edification of the church catholic. The care hereof, and the making provision for this defect, was committed by our Lord Jesus Christ unto the apostles during their lives, which Paul calls Ἡ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, 2 Cor. 11:28, "The care of all the churches;" yet what was only a pressing care and burden unto them was afterward contended for by others as a matter of dignity and power! the pretence of it, in one especially, being turned into a cursed domination, under the style and title of "Servus servorum Dei."

But if a thousand pretences should be made of supplying churches defects, after the decease of the apostles, by any other order, way, or means besides this of the equal communion of churches among themselves, they will be all found destitute of any countenance from the Scripture, primitive antiquity, the nature, use, and end of churches, yea, of Christian religion itself. Yet the pretence hereof is the sole foundation of all that disposal of churches into several stories of subordination, with an authority and jurisdiction over one another, which now prevails in the world. But there is no place for such imagination, until it be proved either that our Lord Jesus Christ hath not appointed the mutual communion of churches among themselves by their own consent, or that it is not sufficient for the preservation of the union and furtherance of the edification of the church catholic, whereunto it is designed.

Wherefore, our Lord Jesus Christ, in his infinite wisdom, hath constituted his churches in such a state and order as wherein none of

them are able of themselves, always and in all instances, to attain all the ends for which they are appointed, with respect unto the edification of the church catholic; and he did it for this end, that whereas the whole catholic church is animated by one spirit, which is the bond of union between all particular churches (as we shall see), every one of them may act the gifts and graces of it unto the preservation and edification of the whole.

Herein then, we acknowledge, lieth the great difference which we have with others about the state of the church of Christ in this world. We do believe that the mutual communion of particular churches amongst themselves, in an equality of power and order, though not of gifts and usefulness, is the only way appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, after the death of the apostles, for the attaining the general end of all particular churches, which is the edification of the church catholic, in faith, love, and peace. Other ways and means have been found out in the world for this end, which we must speak unto immediately. Wherefore it behoveth us to use some diligence in the consideration of the causes, nature, and use, of this communion of churches.

But it must be moreover premised, that whereas this communion of churches is radically and essentially the same among all churches in the world, yet, as unto the ordinary actual exercise of the duties of it, it is confined and limited by divine providence unto such churches as the natural means of the discharge of such duties may extend unto; that is, unto those which are planted within such lines of communication, such precincts or boundaries of places and countries, as may not render the mutual performance of such duties insuperably difficult. Yet is not the world itself so wide but that, all places being made pervious by navigation, this communion of churches may be visibly professed, and in some instances practised,

among all churches, "from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same," where the name of Christ is known among the Gentiles; wherein the true nature of the catholic church and its union doth consist, which is utterly overthrown by the most vehement pretences that are made unto it, as those in the church of Rome.

Wherefore such a communion of churches is to be inquired after as from which no true church of Christ is or can be excluded; in whose actual exercise they may and ought all to live, and whereby the general end of all churches, in the edification of the catholic church, may be attained. This is the true and only catholicism of the church; which whosoever departs from, or substitutes any thing else in the room of it under that name, destroys its whole nature, and disturbs the whole ecclesiastical harmony that is of Christ's institution.

However, therefore, we plead for the rights of particular churches, yet our real controversy with most in the world is for the being, union, and communion of the church catholic; which are variously perverted by many, separating it into parties, and confining it to rules, measures, and canons, of their own finding out and establishment: for such things as these belong neither to the internal nor external form of that catholic church whose being in the world we believe, and whose union we are obliged to preserve. And whosoever gives any description of or limitation to the catholic church besides what consists in the communion of particular churches intended, doth utterly overthrow it, and therein an article of our faith.

But this communion of churches cannot be duly apprehended unless we inquire and determine wherein their union doth consist, for communion is an act of union that receives both its nature and power from it or by virtue of it; for of what nature soever the union of



things distinct in themselves be, of the same is the communion that they have among themselves.

In the church of Rome, the person of the pope, as he is pope, is the head and centre of all church-union, nor is there allowed any union of particular churches with Christ or among themselves but in and through him. A universal subjection unto him and his authority is the original spring of all church-union among them: and if any one soul fail herein,—if, as unto things of faith and divine worship, he do not depend on the pope and live in subjection unto him,—he is reputed a stranger and foreigner unto the catholic church; yea, they affirm that be a man never so willing for and desirous of an interest in Christ, he cannot have it but by the pope!

The communion of churches congenial and suited unto this union, proceeding from it and exercised by virtue of it, ariseth from a various contignation of order, or the erection of one story of church-interest upon another, until we come to the idol placed on the top of this Babel. So is this communion carried on from the obedience and subjection of the lowest rubbish of ecclesiastical order unto diocesans, of them to metropolitans, of them to patriarchs or cardinals, of them to the pope; or an ascent is made from diocesan synods, by provincial and national, to those that are called œcumenical, whose head is the pope.

Yet two things must be further observed, to clear this communion of the Roman Catholic church; as,—

1. That there is no ascent of church order or power by a vital act of communion from the lower degrees, orders, or consociations, and by them to the pope, as though he should receive any thing of church-power from them; but all the plenitude of it being originally vested in

him, by these several orders and degrees he communicates of it unto all churches, as the life of their conjunction and communion.

2. That no man is so jointed in this order, so compacted in this body, but that he is also personally and immediately subject to the pope, and depends on him as unto his whole profession of religion.

And this is that which constitutes him formally to be what he is,—that is, antichrist; and the church-state arising from its union unto him, holding him as its head, subsisting in a communion by virtue of power received through various orders and constitutions from him, to be antichristian: for he and it are set up in the room of, and in direct opposition unto, the Lord Christ, as the head of the catholic church and the church-state thereon depending. This we have described, Eph. 4:15, 16: "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up," etc.; as also Col. 2:19, where there is a rejection of them who belong not unto the church catholic, taken from its relation unto Christ, and the nature of its dependence on him: "Not holding the Head," etc.

When men shall cease to be wilfully blind, or when the powers of the "strong delusion," that begin to abate, shall expire, they will easily see the direct opposition that is between these two heads and two churches, namely, Christ and the pope, the catholic church and that of Rome.

I know well enough all the evasions and distinctions that are invented to countenance this antichristianism: as, "That there is a double head,—one of internal influence of grace, which Christ is, and the pope is not; the other of rule and authority, which the pope is. But this also is twofold, supreme and remote, and immediate and subordinate; the first is Christ, the latter is the pope. And there is yet further a twofold head of the church,—the one invisible, which is Christ; the other visible, which is the pope."

Not to insist on these gross and horrible figments of a twofold head of the catholic church, in any sense, which are foreign to the Scripture, and foreign to antiquity, whereof never one word was heard in the church for six hundred years after Christ, deforming the beautiful spouse of Christ into a monster, we will allow, at present, that the pope is only the immediate, visible, subordinate head of all rule and authority to their church; which is what they plead for. Then I say, that the church whereof he is the head is his body, that it holds him as its head, that it is compacted together by the officers and orders that depend on him and receive all their influence of church power and order from him: which though he communicates not by an internal influence of grace and gifts, (alas, poor wretch!) yet he doth it by officers, offices, orders, and laws; so giving union and communion unto the whole body by the effectual working of every joint and part of the hierarchy under him, for its union, communion, and edification. This, I say, is the antichrist and the antichristian church-state, as I shall be at any time ready to maintain.

Let any man take a due prospect of this head and this body, as related and united by the bond of their own rules, constitutions, and laws, acting in worldly pomp, splendour, and power, with horrid, bloody cruelties against all that oppose them, and he will not fail of an open view of all the scriptural lineaments of the apostate, antichristian state of the church.

I say again, this assigning of the original of all church order, union, and communion, unto the pope of Rome, investing him therewith as an article of faith, constituting him thereby the head of the church, and the church thereon his body,—as it must be if he be its head, so as that from him all power of order, and for all acts of communion, should be derived, returning all in obedience and subjection unto him,—doth set up a visible, conspicuous, antichristian church-state

in opposition unto Christ and the catholic church. But with this sort of men we deal not at present.

There is a pretence unto a union of churches not derived from the papal headship; and this consists in the canonical subjection of particular churches unto a diocesan bishop, and of such bishops to metropolitans, which though "de facto" it be at present terminated and stated within the bounds of a nation, yet "de jure" it ought to be extended unto the whole catholic church.

According unto this principle, the union of the catholic church consists in that order whereby particular churches are distributed into deaneries, archdeaconries, exempt peculiars, under officials; dioceses, provinces, under metropolitans; and so by or without patriarchs, to avoid the rock of the Papacy, issuing in a general council, as I suppose. But,—

1. To confine the union and communion of the catholic church hereunto is at present absolutely destructive both of the church and its communion: for all particular churches, when they are by a coalescency extended unto those which are provincial or national, have, both politically and ecclesiastically, such bounds fixed unto them as they cannot pass to carry on communion unto and with the church as catholic, by any acts and duties belonging unto their order; and hereby the union and communion of the church is utterly lost, for the union of the catholic church, as such, doth always equally exist, and the communion of it is always equally in exercise, and can consist in nothing but what doth so exist and is so exercised. Wherever is the catholic church, there is the communion of saints; but nothing of this can be obtained by virtue of this order.

2. We inquire at present after such a union as gives particular churches communion among themselves, which this order doth not,

but absolutely overthrows it, leaving nothing unto them but subjection to officers set over them, who are not of them, according to rules and laws of their appointment; which is foreign to the Scripture and antiquity.

3. This order itself, the only bond of the pretended union, having no divine institution, especially as to its extent unto the whole catholic church, nor any intimation in the Scripture, and being utterly impossible to be put in execution or actual exercise, no man can declare what is the original or centre of it, whence it is deduced, and whereon it rests.

Having removed these pretences out of our way, we may easily discern wherein the union, and consequently the communion, of all particular churches doth consist; and in the due observation whereof all that church-order which the Lord Christ hath appointed and doth accept is preserved.

I say, then, that the true and only union of all particular churches consists in that which gives form, life, and being unto the church catholic, with the addition of what belongs unto them as they are particular; and this is, that they have all one and the same God and Father, one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith and one doctrine of faith, one hope of their calling, or the promised inheritance, one regeneration, one baptism, one bread and wine, and are united unto God and Christ in one Spirit, through the bond of faith and love.

This description, with what is suited thereunto and explanatory of it, is all the account which is given us in the Scripture of the constituting form of the catholic church, and of the union of particular churches among themselves. What church soever fails in the essential parts of this description, or any of them, it is separated

from the catholic church, nor hath either union or communion with any true churches of Christ.

Two things concur unto the completing of this union of churches,—1. Their union or relation unto Christ; 2. That which they have among themselves.

1. The Lord Christ himself is the original and spring of this union, and every particular church is united unto him as its head; besides which, with or under which, it hath none. This relation of the church unto Christ as its head the apostle expressly affirms to be the foundation and cause of its union, Eph. 4:15, 16, Col. 2:19,—the places before quoted. Hereby it is also in God the Father, 2 Thess. 1:1, or hath God as its Father. And unless this union be dissolved, unless a church be disunited from Christ, it cannot be so from the catholic church, nor any true church of Christ in particular, however it may be dealt withal by others in the world.

From Christ, as the head and spring of union, there proceedeth unto all particular churches a bond of union, which is his Holy Spirit, acting itself in them by faith and love, in and by the ways and means and for the ends of his appointment.

This is the kingly, royal, beautiful union of the church: Christ, as the only head of influence and rule, bringing it into a relation unto himself as his body, communicating of his Spirit unto it, governing it by the law of his word, enabling it unto all the duties of faith, love, and holiness.

For unto the completing of this union on the part of the church, these things are required:—

(1.) Faith in him, or holding him as the head, in the sincere belief of all things concerning his person, office, and doctrine in the gospel, with whatever belongs thereunto;

(2.) Love unto him and all that is his;

(3.) That especial holiness whose foundation is repentance and effectual vocation;

(4.) The observance of his commands as unto all duties of divine worship. These things are essentially requisite unto this union on the part of the church. The reality and power of them is the internal form of the church, and the profession of them is its external form.

2. There concurrerth hereunto an union among themselves, I mean all particular churches throughout the world, in whom the church catholic doth act its power and duty. And the relation that is between these churches is that which is termed "relatio æquiparentiæ," wherein neither of the "relata" is the first foundation of it, but they are equal. It doth not arise from the subordination of one unto another, they being all equal as unto what concerns their essence and power. And the bond hereof is that especial love which Christ requireth among all his disciples, acting itself unto all the ends of the edification of the whole body.

Take in the whole, and the union of churches consists in their relation unto God as their Father, and unto Christ as their only immediate head of influence and rule, with a participation of the same Spirit in the same faith and doctrine of truth, the same kind of holiness, the same duties of divine worship, especially the same mysteries of baptism and the supper, the observance of the same rules or commands of Christ in all church-order, with mutual love,

effectual unto all the ends of their being and constitution, or the edification of the church catholic.

There may be failures in them or some of them, as unto sundry of these things; there may be differences among them about them, arising from the infirmities, ignorance, and prejudices of them of whom they do consist, the best knowing here but in part; but whilst the substance of them is preserved, the union of all churches, and so of the catholic church, is preserved.

This is that blessed oneness which the Lord Christ prayed for so earnestly for his disciples,—that they might be one in the Father and the Son, one among themselves, and "made perfect in one," John 17:20–23, without any respect unto that horrid image of it which was set up in the latter days of the church, which all men were compelled to bow down unto and worship by the fire of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. Of any other union there is not the least mention in the Scripture.

This union of the catholic church in all particular churches is always the same, inviolable, unchangeable, comprehending all the churches in the world at all times, not confinable unto any state or party, not interruptible by any external form, nor to be prevailed against by the gates of hell; and all such disputes about a catholic church and its union as can be so much as questionable among them that profess to believe the gospel are in direct opposition unto the prayers and promises of Jesus Christ. Whilst evangelical faith, holiness, obedience unto the commands of Christ, and mutual love, abide in any on the earth, there is the catholic church; and whilst they are professed, that catholic church is visible. Other catholic church upon the earth I believe none, nor any that needs other things unto its constitution.



These things being premised, I proceed unto that which is our present inquiry,—namely, wherein the communion of particular churches among themselves doth consist.

The communion of churches is their joint actings in the same gospel duties towards God in Christ, with their mutual actings towards each other with respect unto the end of their institution and being, which is the glory of Christ in the edification of the whole catholic church.

As unto the actings of the FIRST sort, the ground of them is faith, and therein is the first act of the communion of churches. And this communion in faith among all the churches of Christ is fivefold:—

1. General, in the belief of the same doctrine of truth, which is according unto godliness, the same articles of faith, and the public profession thereof; so that every one of them is the pillar and ground of the same truth. This the primitive church provided for in creeds and symbols, or confessions of faith, as is known. But as never any one of them was expressly owned by all churches, so in process of time they came to be abused, as expressing the sense of the present church, whether true or false. Hence we have as many Arian creeds yet extant as those that are orthodox. But unto the communion of all particular churches in the world, there is nothing required but a belief of the Scripture to be the word of God, with a professed assent unto all divine revelations therein contained, provided that no error be avowed that is contrary to the principal or fundamental doctrines of it. For although any society of men should profess the Scripture to be the word of God, and avow an assent unto the revelations made therein, yet, by the conceptions of their minds, and misunderstanding of the sense of the Holy Spirit therein, they may embrace and adhere unto such errors as may cut them off from all communion with the catholic church in faith: such are the denial of

the holy Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, his divine person or office, the redemption of the church by his blood, the necessity of regeneration by his Spirit, and the like. And they may also add that of their own unto their professed belief as shall exclude them from communion with the catholic church: such are the assertions of traditions as equal with the written word, of another head of the church besides the Lord Christ, of another sacrifice besides what he once offered for all, and the like. But where any are preserved from such heresies on the one hand and the other, there is no more required unto communion with the whole church, as unto faith in general, but only the belief before described.

2. This communion in faith respects the church itself as its material object; for it is required hereunto that we believe that the Lord Christ hath had in all ages, and especially hath in that wherein we live, a church on the earth, confined unto no places nor parties of men, no empires nor dominions, nor capable of any confinement; as also, that this church is redeemed, called, sanctified by him; that it is his kingdom, his interest, his concernment in the world; that thereunto, and [unto] all the members of it, all the promises of God do belong and are confined; that this church he will save, preserve, and deliver, from all opposition, so as that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and after death will raise it up and glorify it at the last day. This is the faith of the catholic church concerning itself; which is an ancient, fundamental article of our religion. And if anyone deny that there is such a church called out of the world, separated from it, unto which alone, and all the members of it, all the promises of God do appertain, in contradistinction unto all others, or confine it unto a party unto whom these things are not appropriate, he cuts himself off from the communion of the church of Christ.

In the faith hereof all the true churches of Christ throughout the world have a comforting, refreshing communion; which is the spring of many duties in them continually.

3. This communion of churches in faith consists much in the principal fruit of it, namely, prayer. So is it stated, Eph. 2:18, "For through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." And that therein the communion of the catholic church doth consist the apostle declares in the following verses, 19–22, "Now therefore," etc.; for prayers in all churches having one object, which is God even the Father, God as the Father; proceeding in all from one and the same Spirit, given unto them as a Spirit of grace and supplications to make intercession for them; and all of them continually offered unto God by the same High Priest, who adds unto it the incense of his own intercession, and by whom they have all an access unto the same throne of grace,—they have all a blessed communion herein continually. And this communion is the more express in that the prayers of all are for all, so as that there is no particular church of Christ in the world,—not any one member of any of them, but they have the prayers of all the churches in the world and of all the members of them every day. And however this communion be invisible unto the eyes of flesh, yet is it glorious and conspicuous unto the eye of faith, and is a part of the glory of Christ the mediator in heaven. This prayer, proceeding from or wrought by one and the same Spirit in them all, equally bestowed on them all by virtue of the promise of Christ, having the same object, even God as a Father, and offered unto him by the same High Priest, together with his own intercession, gives unto all churches a communion far more glorious than what consists in some outward rites and orders of men's devising.

But now if there be any other persons or churches which have any other object of their prayers but God even the Father, and as our Father in Christ, or have any other mediators or intercessors by whom to convey or present their prayers unto God but Christ alone, the only high priest of the church, or do renounce the aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of grace and supplications, they cut themselves off from all communion with the catholic church herein.

4. The unity of faith in all churches effecteth communion among them in the administration of the same sacraments of baptism and the supper of the Lord. These are the same in, unto, and amongst them all; neither do some variations in the outward manner of their administration interrupt that communion. But wherever the continuation of these ordinances is denied, or their nature or use is perverted, or idolatrous worship is annexed unto their administration, there communion with the catholic church is renounced.

5. They have also by faith communion herein, in that all churches do profess a subjection unto the authority of Christ in all things, and an obligation upon them to do and observe all whatsoever he hath commanded.

Other instances of the like nature might be given, but these are sufficient to manifest how unscriptural the notion is, that there is no proper communion with or among churches but what consists in a compliance with certain powers, orders, and rites, the pressing where of under the name of "uniformity" hath cast all thoughts of real, evangelical church-communion into oblivion.

SECONDLY. Churches ordained and constituted in the way and manner, and for the ends, declared in our former discourse on this

subject, and, by virtue of their union unto Christ and among themselves, living constantly, in all places of the world, in the actual exercise of that communion which consists in the performance of the same church-duties towards God in Christ, unto their own continuation, increase, and edification, have also an especial union among themselves, and a mutual communion thence arising.

The bond of this union is love; not the common regulated affection of human nature so called, not merely that power and duty which is engraven on the hearts of men by the law of creation towards all of the same kind and blood with themselves, but an especial grace of the Holy Spirit, acting in the church as the principle and bond of its union unto itself; whence the command of it is called a "new commandment," because in itself, as unto the only example of it, in the person of Christ, the causes and motives unto it, with its peculiar ends and proper exercise, it was absolutely new and evangelical. An explanation of the nature of it belongs not unto this place; although it be a grace and a duty of so much importance,—wherein so much of the life, power, and peculiar glory of Christian religion doth consist,—and is either so utterly lost or hath such vile images of it set up in the world, that it deserves a full consideration; which it may receive in another place.

I say, the Holy Spirit of grace and love being given from Christ, the fountain and centre of all church-union, to dwell in and abide with his church, thereby uniting it unto himself, doth work in it and all the members of it that mutual love which may and doth animate them unto all those mutual acts which are proper unto the relation wherein they stand, by virtue of their union unto Christ their head, as members of the same body one with another.

Herein consists the union of every church in itself, of all churches among themselves, and so of the whole catholic church, their communion consisting in regular acts and duties proceeding from this love, and required by virtue of it.

This account of the union and communion of churches may seem strange unto some, who are enamoured of that image which is set up of them in the world, in canons, constitutions of rites, and outward order, in various subordinations and ceremonies, which are most remote from making any due representation of them.

The church, in its dependence on Christ its head, being by its institution disposed into its proper order for its own edification, or fitly joined together and compacted, this love working effectually in every office, officer, and member, according unto its disposal in the body for the receiving and communicating supplies for edification, gives the whole both its union and communion, all the actings of it being regulated by divine rule and prescription.

Instead hereof, to erect a machine, the spring and centre of whose motions are unknown (any other, I mean, but external force), compacted by the iron joints and bands of human laws, edifying itself by the power of offices and officers foreign unto the Scripture, acting with weapons that are not spiritual but carnal, and mighty through him whose work it is to cast the members of the church of Christ into prison, as unto an outward conformity, is to forsake the Scripture and follow our own imagination.

The outward acts of communion among churches, proceeding from this love, and the obligation that is on them to promote their mutual edification, may be referred unto the two heads of advice and assistance.

Churches have communion unto their mutual edification by advice in synods or councils; which must in this place be considered.

SYNODS are the meetings of divers churches by their messengers or delegates, to consult and determine of such things as are of common concernment unto them all by virtue of this communion which is exercised in them.

1. The necessity and warrant of such synods ariseth,—

(1.) From the light of nature; for all societies which have the same original, the same rule, the same interest, the same ends, and which are in themselves mutually concerned in the good or evil of each other, are obliged by the power and conduct of reason to advise in common for their own good on all emergencies that stand in need thereof.

Churches are such societies; they have all one and the same authoritative institution, one and the same rule of order and worship, the same ends, as we have declared, and their entire interest is one and the same. When, therefore, any thing occurs amongst them that is attended with such difficulties as cannot be removed or taken away by any one of them severally, or in whose determination all of them are equally concerned, not to make use herein of common advice and counsel is to forsake that natural light which they are bound to attend unto in all duties of obedience unto God.

(2.) The union of all churches as before described,—in one Head, by one Spirit, through one faith and worship, unto the same ends,—doth so compact them into one body mystical as that none of them is or can be complete absolutely without a joint acting with other members of the same body unto the common good of the whole, as

occasion doth require. And this joint acting with others in any church can be no otherwise but by common advice and counsel; which natural circumstances render impossible by any means but by their convention in synods by their messengers and delegates: for although there may be some use of letters missive, and was so eminently in the primitive churches, to ask the advice of one another in difficult cases (as the first instance we have of the communion of churches after the days of the apostles is, in the letter of the church of Corinth unto that of Rome, desiring their advice about the composing of a difference among them, and the answer of the church of Rome thereunto), yet many cases may fall out among them which cannot be reconciled or determined but by present conference; such as that was recorded, Acts 15. No church, therefore, is so independent as that it can always and in all cases observe the duties it owes unto the Lord Christ and the church catholic, by all those powers which it is able to act in itself distinctly, without conjunction with others. And the church that confines its duty unto the acts of its own assemblies cuts itself off from the external communion of the church catholic; nor will it be safe for any man to commit the conduct of his soul to such a church. Wherefore,—

(3.) This acting in synods is an institution of Jesus Christ, not in an express command, but in the nature of the thing itself, fortified with apostolical example; for having erected such a church-state, and disposed all his churches into such order and mutual relation unto one another as that none of them can be complete or discharge their whole duty without mutual advice and counsel, he hath thereby ordained this way of their communion in synods, no other being possible unto that end. And thereby such conventions are interested in the promise of his presence,—namely, that "where two or three are gathered together in his name, there he will be in the midst of them;" for these assemblies being the necessary effect of his own



constitution, in the nature and use of his churches, are or may be in his name, and so enjoy his presence.

(4.) The end of all particular churches is the edification of the church catholic, unto the glory of God in Christ; and it is evident that in many instances this cannot be attained, yea, that it must be sinfully neglected, unless this way for the preservation and carrying of it on be attended unto. Truth, peace, and love, may be lost among churches, and so the union of the catholic church in them be dissolved, unless this means for their preservation and reparation be made use of. And that particular church which extends not its duty beyond its own assemblies and members is fallen off from the principal end of its institution; and every principle, opinion, or persuasion, that inclines any church to confine its care and duty unto its own edification only, yea, or of those only which agree with it in some peculiar practice, making it neglective of all due means of the edification of the church catholic, is schismatical.

(5.) There is direction hereunto included in the order and method of church proceedings in case of offence, prescribed unto it by Christ himself. The beginning and rise of it is between two individual persons; thence is it carried unto the cognizance and judgment of two or three others before unconcerned; from them it is to be brought unto the church; and there is no doubt but the church hath power to determine concerning it, as unto its own communion, to continue the offender in it or reject him from it. This must abide, as unto outward order and the preservation of peace. But no church is infallible in their judgment absolutely in any case; and in many their determinations may be so doubtful as not to affect the conscience of him who is censured. But such a person is not only a member of that particular church, but, by virtue thereof, of the catholic church also. It is necessary, therefore, that he should be heard and judged as unto

his interest therein, if he do desire it; and this can no way be done but by such synods as we shall immediately describe.

(6.) Synods are consecrated unto the use of the church in all ages by the example of the apostles in their guidance of the first churches of Jews and Gentiles; which hath the force of a divine institution, as being given by them under the infallible conduct of the Holy Ghost, Acts 15; which we shall speak further unto immediately.

2. Having seen the original of church synods, or their formal cause, we shall consider also their material cause, or the subject-matter to be treated of or determined in them; and this, in general, is every thing wherein churches are obliged to hold communion among themselves when any thing falls out amongst them which otherwise would disturb that communion. And hereof some instances may be given:—

(1.) Churches have mutual communion in the profession of the same faith. If any doubts or differences do arise about it, any opinions be advanced contrary unto it, either in any particular church, which they cannot determine among themselves, or among sundry churches, the last outward means for the preservation of the rule of faith among them, and of their communion in the condemnation of errors and opinions contrary unto the form of wholesome words, is by these synods or councils. The care hereof is, indeed, in the first place, committed unto the churches themselves, as was at large before declared; but in case, through the subtlety, prevalency, and interest of those by whom damnable doctrines are broached, the church itself whereunto they do belong is not able to rebuke and suppress them, nor to maintain its profession of the truth, or that by suffering such things in one church others are in danger to be infected or defiled, this is the last external refuge that is left for the

preservation of the communion of churches in the same faith. We have multiplied examples hereof in the primitive churches, before the degeneracy of these synods into superstition and domination. Such was eminently that gathered at Antioch for the condemnation of the heresies of Paulus Samosatenus, the bishop of that church.

(2.) It is so with respect unto that order, peace, and unity, wherein every particular church ought to walk in itself and amongst its own members. There were schisms, divisions, strifes, and contentions, in some of the churches that were of apostolical planting and watering; so there were at Antioch, and afterward at Corinth, as also in some of the churches in Galatia. The duty of remedying and healing these divisions and differences, from what cause soever they arise, is first incumbent on each particular member in every such church. Unto them it is given in charge by the apostle in the first place; and if every one of them do perform their duty in love, an end will be put unto all strife. In case of failure therein, the whole church is charged, in the exercise of its power, authority, and wisdom, to rebuke and compose such differences; but in case it is not able so to do, as it fell out in the church at Antioch, then an assembly of other churches walking in actual communion with that church wherein the difference is arisen, and thereon concerned in their prosperity and edification, by their messengers and delegates, is the last outward means for its composure.

(3.) Where there hath been any maladministration of discipline, whereby any members of a church have been injured,—as suppose they are unduly cast out of the church by the power and interest of some Diotrefes, or that any members of the church make a party and faction to depose their elders, as it was in the church at Corinth when the church at Rome gave them advice in the case,—it is necessary, from the communion of churches and the interest the

persons injured have in the catholic church, whose edification is the end of all church administrations, that the proceedings of such a church be reviewed by a synod, and a remedy provided in the case. Nor was it the mind of the apostles that they should be left without relief which were unduly cast out of the church by any Diotrefes, nor is there any other ordinary way hereof but only by synods; but this case, I suppose, I shall speak unto afterward.

(4.) The same is the case with respect unto worship, as also unto manners and conversation. If it be reported, or known by credible testimony, that any church hath admitted into the exercise of divine worship any thing superstitious or vain, or if the members of it walk like those described by the apostle, Phil. 3:18, 19, unto the dishonour of the gospel and of the ways of Christ, the church itself not endeavouring its own reformation and repentance, other churches walking in communion therewith, by virtue of their common interest in the glory of Christ and honour of the gospel, after more private ways for its reduction, as opportunity and duty may suggest unto their elders, ought to assemble in a synod for advice, either as to the use of further means for the recovery of such a church, or to withhold communion from it in case of obstinacy in its evil ways. The want of a due attendance unto this part of the communion of churches, with respect unto gospel worship in its purity, and gospel obedience in its power, was a great means of the decay and apostasy of them all. By reason of this negligence, instead of being helpful one to another for their mutual recovery, and the revival of the things that were ready to die, they gradually infected one another, according as they fell into their decays, and countenanced one another by their examples unto a continuance in such disorders.

The image which, in late ages, was set up hereof, in diocesan and metropolitical visitations, and those of lesser districts, under officers

of antichristian names, hath been useful rather unto destruction than edification; but so it hath fallen out in most things concerning church order, worship, and discipline. The power and spirituality of divine institutions being lost, a machine hath been framed to make an appearance and representation of them, to divert the minds of men from inquiring after the primitive institutions of Christ, with an experience of their efficacy.

Considering what we have learned in these later ages, by woful experience, of what hath fallen out formerly amongst all the churches in the world, as unto their degeneracy from gospel worship and holiness, with the abounding of temptations in the days wherein we live, and the spiritual decays that all churches are prone unto, it were not amiss if those churches which do walk in express communion would frequently meet in synods, to inquire into the spiritual state of them all, and to give advice for the correction of what is amiss, the due preservation of the purity of worship, the exercise of discipline, but especially of the power, demonstration, and fruit of evangelical obedience.

Hence it is evident what are the ends of such synods among the churches of Christ. The general end of them all is to promote the edification of the whole body or church catholic; and that,—

(1.) To prevent divisions from differences in judgment and practice, which are contrary thereunto. The first Christian synod was an assembly of the first two churches in the world by their delegates. The first church of the Jews was at Jerusalem, and the first church of the Gentiles was at Antioch; to prevent divisions and to preserve communion between them was the first synod celebrated, Acts 15.

(2.) To avoid or cure offences against mutual love among them.

(3.) To advance the light of the gospel by a joint confession and agreement in the faith.

(4.) To give a concurrent testimony against pernicious heresies or errors, whereby the faith of any is overthrown, or in danger so to be.

(5.) To relieve such by advice as may be by any Diotrepes unduly cast out of the church.

What are the ends whereunto they have been used may be seen in the volumes written concerning them, and the numberless laws enacted in them; whereof very little belongs unto the discipline of the gospel or real communion of churches.

3. The measure or extent of them ariseth from concernment and convenience. All unprejudiced persons do now acknowledge that the pretence of œcumenical councils, wherein the whole church of Christ on the earth or all particular churches should be represented, and so obliged to acquiesce in their determinations, is a fond imagination; and it were easy to demonstrate in particular how every one of them which hath in vulgar esteem obtained that title were openly remote from so being. Such councils never were, and, as it is probable, never will nor can be, nor are any way needful unto the edification of the church.

Their due measure and bounds, as was said before, are given them by concernment and convenience; wherein respect also may be had unto the ability of some churches to promote edification above others. Such churches as are, in the same instances, concerned in the causes of them before declared, and may be helpful unto the ends mentioned, are to convene in such synods. And this concernment may be either from some of those causes in themselves, or from that duty which they owe unto other churches which are immediately

concerned. So it was in the assistance given by the church at Jerusalem in that case which was peculiar to the church of Antioch.

With this interest or concernment there must be a concurrence of natural, moral, and political conveniences. Some churches are planted at such distances from others that it is naturally impossible that they should ever meet together to advise by their messengers; and some are at such as that they cannot assemble but with such difficulties and hazards as exempt them from the duty of it. And whereas they are placed under different civil governments, and those oftentimes engaged in mutual enmities, and always jealous of the actings of their own subjects in conjunction with them that are not so, they cannot so convene and preserve the outward peace of the churches. Hence the largest of the councils of old that are called "œcumenical" never extended farther than the single Roman empire, when there were innumerable churches planted under the civil jurisdiction of other sovereigns.

Wherefore, in the assembling of churches in synods, respect is to be had unto the convenience of their meeting, that it may be, so far as is possible, without trouble or danger. And this, with respect unto the causes or occasions of them, will determine what churches (which or how many) may be necessary on such occasions to constitute a synod. And it is useful hereunto that the churches which are planted within such a circumference as gives facility or convenience for such conventions should, by virtue of their mutual communion, be in express readiness to convene on all occasions of common concernment.

Again; in the assistance which, in the way of advice and counsel, any one church may stand in need of from others, respect is to be had, in their desire, unto such churches as are reputed and known to have

the best ability to give advice in the case; on which account the church at Antioch addressed themselves in a peculiar manner unto the church at Jerusalem, which was far distant from them.

But in all these cases use is to be made of spiritual prudence, with respect unto all sorts of circumstances; which although some would deny, [such] as the privilege of even matters of fact, and the application of general Scripture rules unto practice, because we require divine institution unto all parts of religious worship, yet we must not decline from using the best we have in the service of Christ and his church, rather than comply with any thing which, in the whole substance of it, is foreign to his institution.

It was the Roman empire under one monarch, in its civil distributions for rule and government, which gave the first rise and occasion unto a pretended visibly ruling catholic church under one spiritual monarch, distributed into those that were patriarchal, diocesan, metropolitical, and others of inferior kinds; for, retaining the people in their civil distributions, whereinto they were cast according to the polity and interest of the empire, there were ecclesiastical officers assigned unto each distribution, answerable unto the civil officers which were ordained in the polity of the empire. So, in answer unto deputies, exarchs, prefects, governors of provinces and cities, there were found out and erected patriarchs, metropolitans, diocesans, in various allotments of territories and powers, requiring unto their complete state one visible monarchical head, as the empire had;—which was the pope. And whereas the emperors had not only a civil rule and power, but a military also, exercised under them by legates, generals, tribunes, centurions, and the like; so there was raised an ecclesiastical militia, in various orders of monks, friars, and votaries of all sorts, who, under their immediate generals and prefects, did depend absolutely on the



sovereign power of the new ecclesiastical monarch. So was the visible professing church moulded and fashioned into an image of the old Roman pagan empire, as it was foretold it should be, Rev 13:13–15. And although this image was first framed in compliance with it and for a resemblance of it, yet in process of time it substituted itself entirely in the room of the empire, taking all its power unto itself, and doing all its works.

From this distribution of various sorts of new-framed churches in the Roman empire arose a constitution of synods or councils in subordination one unto another, until, by sundry degrees of ascent, they arrived unto those which they called "general," under the conduct of the pope, whose senate they were.

But these things have no countenance given them by any divine institution, apostolical example, or practice of the first churches, but are a mere product of secular interest working itself in a mystery of iniquity.

Since the dissolution of the Roman empire, nations have been cast into distinct civil governments of their own, whose sovereignty is in themselves, by the event of war and counsels thereon emergent. Unto each of these it is supposed there is a church-state accommodated, as the church of England, the church of Scotland, the church of France, and the like; whose original and being depend on the first event of war in that [their?] dissolution. Unto these new church-states, whose being, bounds, and limits, are given unto them absolutely by those of the civil government which they belong unto, it is thought meet that ecclesiastical synods should be accommodated; but in what way this is to be done there is not yet an agreement: but it is not my present business to consider the differences that are about it, which are known unto this nation on a dear account. Yet

this I shall say, that whereas it is eminently useful unto the edification of the church catholic that all the churches professing the same doctrine of faith, within the limits of the same supreme civil government, should hold constant actual communion among themselves unto the ends of it before mentioned, I see not how it can be any abridgment of the liberty of particular churches, or interfere with any of their rights which they hold by divine institution, if, through more constant lesser synods for advice, there be a communication of their mutual concerns unto those that are greater, until, if occasion require and it be expedient, there be a general assembly of them all, to advise about any thing wherein they are all concerned. But this is granted only with these limitations:—

(1.) That the rights of particular churches be preserved in the free election of such as are to be members of all these synods;

(2.) That they assume no authority or jurisdiction over churches or persons, in things civil or ecclesiastical;

(3.) That none are immediately concerned in this proper synodal power or authority (which what it is we shall inquire) who are not present in them by their own delegates.

As for that kind of synods which some call a classis, which is a convention of the elders or officers of sundry parochial churches, distinguished for presential communion ordinarily, in some acts of it, by virtue of their office, and for the exercise of office-power, it is the constitution of a new kind of particular churches by a combination of them into one, whose original distinction is only in the civil limits of their cohabitation; which probably may be done sometimes and in some places unto edification.

4. The persons of whom all sorts of ecclesiastical synods are to consist must be inquired into; and there is nothing of mere human prudential constitution that hath longer obtained in the church than that these should be officers of the churches only. And whereas, after the days of the apostles, we have no record of any synods of more churches than one, until after the distinction was made between bishops and presbyters, they were made up of both sorts of them; but afterward, those who were peculiarly called bishops enclosed this right unto themselves,—on what grounds God knows, there being not one tittle in the Scripture or the light of reason to give them countenance therein.

It must therefore be affirmed, that no persons, by virtue of any office merely, have right to be members of ecclesiastical synods, as such; neither is there either example or reason to give colour unto any such pretence. Further; no office-power is to be exerted in such synods as such, neither conjunctly by all the members of them, nor singly by any of them. Officers of the church, bishops, pastors, elders, may be present in them, ought to be present in them, are meetest for the most part so to be, but merely as such it belongs not unto them. The care, oversight, and rule of the churches whereunto they do belong, the flock among them distinctly, is committed unto them; and for that they are intrusted with power and authority by virtue of their office: but as unto their conjunction in synods, which is a mere act and effect of the communion of churches among themselves, it is not committed unto them in a way of peculiar right by virtue of their office. If it be so, without respect unto the power of the magistrate in calling them, or of the churches in choosing them, then it belongs unto them all; for that which belongs unto any of them, as such, by virtue of office, belongs equally unto all: and if it belong unto all, then it belongs unto all of one sort only, as, for instance, bishops; or unto all of all sorts, as, for instance, presbyters also. If it be stated in

the latter way, then every presbyter, as such, by virtue of his office, hath right and power to be present in all ecclesiastical synods equal with that of the bishops; for although it be supposed that his office is not equal unto theirs, yet it is so also that this right doth equally belong unto his office. If the former be avowed, namely, that this right belongs unto bishops only (such as are pleaded for), by virtue of their office as such, then,—

(1.) I desire that any tolerable proof of the confinement of this right unto such an office be produced, either from the Scripture, or reason, or the example of the first churches; which as yet I have never seen.

(2.) I fear not to say, that a false presumption hereof was one principal cause and means of introducing tyranny into the churches, and the utter ruin of their liberty.

Concerning the composition that is made herein, that some should convene in ecclesiastical synods by their own personal right and in virtue of their office, and others by a kind of delegation from some of their own order, it being a mere political constitution, which I shall immediately speak unto, it is not here to be taken notice of.

There is nothing, therefore, in Scripture example or the light of natural reason, with the principles of all societies in union or communion, that will lead us any farther than this, that such synods are to be composed and consist of such persons as are chosen and delegated by those churches respectively who do act and exert their communion in such assemblies. So was it in the first example of them, Acts 15. The church of Antioch chose and sent messengers of their own number to advise with the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem, at which consultation the members of that church also were present; and this is the whole of the nature and use of ecclesiastical synods. It is on other accounts that they make up so

great a part of the history of the church. For the first three hundred years there were nothing but voluntary conventions of the officers or elders, bishops and presbyters, with some others of neighbouring churches, on the occasion of differences or heresies among them. In and from the council of Nice, there were assemblies of bishops and others, called together by the authority of the Roman emperors, to advise about matters of faith. In after ages, those which were called in the western parts of the world, in Italy, Germany, France, and England, were of a mixed nature, advising about things civil and political, as well as sacred and religious, especially with respect unto mutual contests between popes and princes. In them the whole nature of ecclesiastical synods was lost and buried, and all religion almost destroyed.

Thus this laudable practice of churches acting their mutual communion by meeting in synods or assemblies, by their delegates or messengers, to advise about things of their common concernment and joint edification, as occasion should require, founded in the light of nature, and countenanced by primitive, apostolical example, was turned, by the designing interests and ambition of men, into the instating of all church-power in such synods, and the usurpation of a power given unto no churches nor all of them together; as might be made evident by instances innumerable.

And whereas they have made such a noise in Christian religion, and have filled so many volumes with their acts and doings, yet some of them who, under the pope, would place all religion in them, do grant and contend that they are a mere human invention; so Bellarmine affirms Pighius to have done in his book *De Cœlest. Hierarch. lib. vi. cap. i.* But for his part he judgeth that it is more probable that they have a divine original by virtue of that word, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I will be in the midst of them,"

Matt. 18:20, De Concil. lib. i. cap. iii.; which will not bear the least part of the superstructure pretended to be built upon it.

Of these delegates and messengers of the churches, the elders or officers of them, or some of them at least, ought to be the principal; for there is a peculiar care of public edification incumbent on them, which they are to exercise on all just occasions. They are justly presumed to know best the state of their own churches, and to be best able to judge of matters under consideration; and they do better represent the churches from whom they are sent than any private brethren can do, and so receive that respect and reverence which is due to the churches themselves; as also, they are most meet to report and recommend the synodal determinations unto their churches; and a contrary practice would quickly introduce confusion.

But yet it is not necessary that they alone should be so sent or delegated by the churches, but [they] may have others joined with them, and had so until prelatical usurpation overturned their liberties. So there were others besides Paul and Barnabas sent from Antioch to Jerusalem; and the brethren of that church, whatever is impudently pretended to the contrary, concurred in the decree and determination there made.

5. That which is termed the calling of these synods, is nothing but the voluntary consent of the churches concerned to meet together by their delegates and messengers, for the ends before declared.

I no way deny but that a Christian magistrate may convene, by his authority, the bishops, pastors, or ministers, with such others as he shall think meet, within his own territories, yea, and to receive into his convention meet men out of the territories of others, by their consent; to advise among themselves and to give him advice about the concernments of religion and of the church under his dominion,

and regulate himself accordingly. It hath been practised with good success, and may be with bad also. And I do deny that churches have power, without the consent and authority of the magistrate, to convene themselves in synods to exercise any exterior jurisdiction that should affect the persons of his subjects any otherwise than by the law of the land is allowed.

But whereas the synods whereof we treat, and which are all that belong unto the church, can take no cognizance of any civil affairs wherein the persons of men are outwardly concerned, have no jurisdiction in any kind, can make no determination but only doctrinal declarations of divine truth, of the same nature with the preaching of the word, there is no more required unto their calling, beyond their own consent, but only that they may meet in external peace by the permission of the magistrate; which when they cannot obtain, they must deport themselves as in case of other duties required of them by the law of Christ.

6. In the last place, I shall speak briefly of the power and authority of these synods, in what measures, extent, and numbers soever they are assembled; for although this may be easily collected from what hath been declared concerning their original, nature, causes, use, and ends, yet it may be necessary to be more particularly inquired into, because of the many differences that are about it.

There is a threefold power ascribed unto synods. The first is declarative, consisting in an authoritative teaching and declaring the mind of God in the Scripture; the second is constitutive, appointing and ordaining things to be believed, or done and observed, by and upon its own authority; and, thirdly, executive, in acts of jurisdiction towards persons and churches.

The persons whom the authority pleaded may affect are of two sorts:

—

(1.) Such as have their proper representatives present in such synods, who are directly concerned in its conciliary determinations;

(2.) Such as have no such representatives in them, who can be no otherwise concerned but in the doctrine, materially considered, declared in them.

Wherefore the ground of any church's receiving, complying with, or obeying the determinations and decrees of synods must be either,—

(1.) The evidence of truth given unto those determinations by the synod from the Scripture; or,

(2.) The authority of the synod itself, affecting the minds and consciences of those concerned.

In the first way, wherein the assent and obedience of churches is resolved ultimately into the evidence of truth from the Scripture, upon the judgment which they make thereof, not only the discovery of truth is to be owned, but there is an authoritative proposal of it by virtue of the promised presence of Christ in them, if duly sought and regarded; whence great respect and reverence is due unto them.

The power of a synod for the execution of its decrees respects either,

—

(1.) The things or doctrines declared, and is recommendatory of them, on its authority from the presence of Christ; or,

(2.) Persons, to censure, excommunicate, or punish those who receive them not.



These things being premised, the just power of synods may be positively and negatively declared in the two following assertions:—

(1.) The authority of a synod declaring the mind of God from the Scripture in doctrine, or giving counsel as unto practice synodically, unto them whose proper representatives are present in it, whose decrees and determinations are to be received and submitted unto on the evidence of their truth and necessity, as recommended by the authority of the synod from the promised presence of Christ among them, is suitable unto the mind of Christ and the example given by the apostles, Acts 15.

Hence it is evident that, in and after such synods, it is in the power of churches concerned humbly to consider and weigh,—

[1.] The evidences of the presence of Christ in them, from the manner, causes, and ends, of their assembling, and from their deportment therein.

[2.] What regard, in their constitutions and determinations, there hath been unto the word of God, and whether in all things it hath had its due pre-eminence.

[3.] How all their determinations have been educed from its truth and are confirmed by its authority.

Without a due exercise of judgment with respect unto these things, none can be obliged by any synodical determinations, seeing that, without them and on the want of them, many assemblies of bishops, who have had the outward appearance and title of synods or councils, have been dens of thieves, robbers, idolaters, managing their synodical affairs with fury, wrath, horrible craft, according to

their interests, unto the ruin of the church. Such were the second Ephesine, the second at Nice, and that at Trent, and others not a few.

Hence nothing is more to be feared, especially in a state of the church wherein it is declining in faith, worship, and holiness, than synods, according to the usual way of their calling and convention, where these things are absent, for they have already been the principal means of leading on and justifying all the apostasy which churches have fallen into; for never was there yet synod of that nature which did not confirm all the errors and superstitions which had in common practice entered into the church, and opened a door to a progress in them, nor was ever the pretence of any of them for outward reformation of any use or signification.

(2.) The authority of a synod determining articles of faith, constituting orders and decrees for the conscientious observance of things of their own appointment, to be submitted unto and obeyed on the reason of that authority, under the penalty of excommunication, and the trouble by custom and tyranny thereto annexed, or acted in a way of jurisdiction over churches or persons, is a mere human invention, for which nothing can be pleaded but prescription from the fourth century of the church, when the progress of the fatal apostasy became visible.

The proof of both these assertions depends on what was before declared of the nature and use of these synods; for if they are such as we have evinced, no other power or authority can be ascribed unto them but that here allowed. Yet the whole may be further illustrated by some brief considerations of the assembly at Jerusalem in the nature of a synod, recorded Acts 15.

(1.) The occasion of it was a difference in the church of Antioch, which they could not compose among themselves, because those who

caused the difference pretended authority from the apostles, as is evident, verses 1, 24.

(2.) The means of its convention was the desire and voluntary reference of the matter in debate made by the church at Antioch, where the difference was, unto that at Jerusalem, where, as it was pretended, the cause of the difference arose, unto the hazard of their mutual communion, to be consulted of with their own messengers.

(3.) The persons constituting the synod were the apostles, elders, and brethren of the church at Jerusalem, and the messengers of that of Antioch, with whom Paul and Barnabas were joined in the same delegation.

(4.) The matter in difference was debated, as unto the mind of God concerning it in the Scripture, and out of the Scripture. On James' proposal the determination was made.

(5.) There was nothing imposed anew on the practice of the churches; only direction is given in one particular instance as unto duty, necessary on many accounts unto the Gentile converts, namely, to abstain from fornication and from the use of their liberty in such instances of its practice as whereon scandal would ensue; which was the duty of all Christians even before this determination, and is so still in many other instances besides those mentioned in the decree, only it was now declared unto them.

(6.) The grounds whereon the synod proposed the reception of and compliance with its decrees were four:—

[1.] That what they had determined was the mind of the Holy Ghost: "It pleased the Holy Ghost." This mind they knew either by inspiration, or immediate revelation made unto themselves, or by

what was written or recorded in the Scripture, which on all other occasions they alleged as what was the word and spoken by the Holy Ghost; and it is evident that it was this latter way, namely, a discovery of the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, that is intended. However, it is concluded that nothing be proposed or confirmed in synods but what is well known to be the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, either by immediate inspiration or by Scripture revelation.

[2.] The authority of the assembly, as convened in the name of Christ and by virtue of his presence, whereof we have spoken before: "It pleased the Holy Ghost and us."

[3.] That the things which they had determined were "necessary;" that is, antecedently so unto that determination,—namely, the abstaining from the use of their liberty in things indifferent, in case of scandal.

[4.] From the duty with respect unto the peace and mutual communion of the Jewish and Gentile churches: "Doing thus," say they, "ye shall do well;" which is all the sanction of their decree, manifesting that it was doctrinal, not authoritative in way of jurisdiction.

(7.) The doctrinal abridgment of the liberty of the Gentile Christians in case of scandal they call the "imposing of no other burden," in opposition unto what they rejected, namely, the imposing a yoke of ceremonies upon them, verse 10: so that the meaning of these words is, that they would lay no burden on them at all, but only advise them unto things necessary for the avoidance of scandal; for it is impious to imagine that the apostles would impose any yoke or lay any burden on the disciples but only the yoke and burden of Christ, as being contrary to their commission, Matt. 23:19, 20.

Hence it will follow that a synod convened in the name of Christ, by the voluntary consent of several churches concerned in mutual communion, may declare and determine of the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, and decree the observation of things true and necessary, because revealed and appointed in the Scripture; which are to be received, owned, and observed on the evidence of the mind of the Holy Ghost in them, and on the ministerial authority of the synod itself.

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ePub and .mobi Editions March 2020 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn,

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