

A

**BRIEF SCRIPTURAL VIEW**

--OF--

THE CHURCH OF GOD,

--BY--

**ELDER JOHN WINEBRENNER.**

**(REVISED EDITION.)**

---

Set in order the things that are wanting. *Tit 1:5.*  
And so ordain I in all churches. *1Co 7:17.*

---

HARRISBURG, PA.

Board of Publications of the General Eldership of the Church of God.  
1885.

**CONTENTS.**

---

- [PREFACE](#). To the Revised Edition.  
[PREFACE](#). Containing the design of the following work.  
[CHAPTER I](#). The Church.  
[CHAPTER II](#). The Formation of the Church.  
[CHAPTER III](#). The Character of Church Members.  
[CHAPTER IV](#). The Duties of Church Members.  
[CHAPTER V](#). The Officers of the Church.  
[CHAPTER VI](#). The Office of Elder.  
[CHAPTER VII](#). The Office of Deacon.  
[CHAPTER VIII](#). Church Government.  
[CHAPTER IX](#). Church Discipline.

## PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION.

---

BY THE REVISION COMMITTEE.

---

In 1829 there appeared an unpretentious little book from the press of Montgomery & Dexter, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, of which "John Winebrenner, an Elder of the Churches of God," was the author. The object of its publication was to point out and correct certain "lamentable evils in ecclesiastical matters," and to induce ministers and churches to adopt what the author conceived "to be the best, or the scriptural, view" of "ecclesiastical polity." The work was not written with the design or intention of making it in any sense a Discipline of the Church of God; but simply to set forth the author's views as to what the Scriptures teach concerning the "formation, government and discipline of the church of God." The book was well received by the churches, and was widely circulated among them. It however provoked great and general opposition in the following years when churches of God were being organized in various parts of Pennsylvania, in Ohio and westward.

The views set forth are so eminently scriptural that but little could be said against them from a biblical point of view. But the ministers and members of the Church everywhere repudiated Disciplines, Confessions of Faith, and suchlike symbols. Here there was an apparent weakness. Was not Elder Winebrenner's *View of the Church* a Discipline? Was not he, as well as all the ministers of the Church, organizing churches according to this *View*? And did they not all defend and advocate the positions taken in the book? Accordingly, ministers and churches felt themselves placed in a defensive attitude. The book was everywhere cited as a "Discipline" by those who had Disciplines to defend, and this in the face of the fact that the author only claimed to set forth his [3] "view" of the formation, government and discipline of the church of God according to the Scriptures; as well as the further fact that the book was not published by authority, nor adopted by the churches, or any of their representative bodies, either as a Discipline or as a standard work in matters relating to Church polity. As a Discipline it was everywhere repudiated by the ministers and members of the Church; not because they dissented from the doctrines taught, but because it is not a Discipline, and because they were radically opposed to Disciplines other than the sacred Scriptures. In 1840 a series of editorials appeared in *The Church Advocate* (then called *The Gospel Publisher*) in which the primary intention is expressed "of proving the assertion, that the book is the *adopted Discipline* of the churches known in different places under the Scripture name of the 'Church of God,' and to be *false*."

The contention about the book greatly stimulated a desire to see and read it; so that, as in many like cases, the counsels of the enemies of truth were turned against themselves, and their opposition secured a wider dissemination of the principles set forth by Elder Winebrenner than otherwise would have been possible. This demand made the publishing of a new edition advisable, and accordingly, without any revision or correction of typographical errors, a second edition was published in 1847. But the enemy was defeated; the interest in the discussion of the status and the merits of the book gradually died out, and even the book itself has seldom been seen by the present generation of church members. At the time of his death (1860), Elder Winebrenner was engaged on a revision of the work, with a view to its early publication. But the republication of the book invariably met with opposition from members of the General Eldership. They remembered the use which had been made of the book to the detriment of the Church by many who stood identified with various sects. They felt that incidentally the book had done serious harm; and they feared that to have it republished, especially by the general body, would put them again at absolute disadvantage in their opposition to Creeds, [4] Confessions, Disciplines, and everything of a sectarian character. Others thought differently; while all who were familiar with the book regarded it as possessing superior merits.

At the sessions of the General Eldership held at Wooster, Ohio, A.D. 1884, the Board of Publication made the following recommendation:

"Years ago Elder John Winebrenner published a small book called a *Brief View of the Church*. It has been out of print for many years. There are still a few copies in the hands of some of the older brethren, and those who have seen and read the work speak highly in its favor. It will tend to uniformity in practice, and be of great advantage in the formation of churches upon the Scripture plan. We recommend that such action be taken as will tend to secure a republication of this important little work at an early day."

A committee was appointed to take the recommendation of the Board into consideration. This committee at a subsequent stage of the sessions reported, "That we heartily recommend and authorize the republication of Winebrenner's *View of the Church*." This report, after being amended so as to place the book into the hands of a "committee to be revised and republished," was adopted. The minutes further state that "The revising and republishing of Winebrenner's *View of the Church* was placed in the hands of the following committee: G. Seigler, C. H. Forney, R. L. Byrnes and W. B. Allen." This committee effected an organization before leaving Wooster, and agreed upon the main features of their work. It subsequently held a meeting in Harrisburg, Pa., where the final details touching the revision were fixed. The committee agreed to make a change in the title of the book without changing the sense. Also to incorporate all the corrections, alterations or changes indicated in the margins of the copy which Elder Winebrenner used in preparing the intended revision of 1860. Beyond these alterations, no changes have been made by the committee in the text of the [5] book. Other necessary corrections of a typographical character were made to a considerable number.

On some points the positions taken in this book are not in harmony with the views and practices of the Church at the present time. Elder Winebrenner himself in his later writings expressed views on a few points which are in conflict with "these early and not fully matured" sentiments contained in this work. When he wrote *A Brief View of the Church*, Elder Winebrenner was not quite thirty-two years old. He did not profess to write an infallible "view," nor to give a "guide to those who should follow him, or to teach succeeding generations." He believed what he wrote to be scriptural; but he also readily conceded that he was fallible. And when in his riper years he saw what seemed errors in his earlier teachings, he was not slow in abandoning them. The committee, however, did not think it advisable to attempt to harmonize the sentiments contained in this book with those which Elder Winebrenner published later in life. This purports to be a republication of a work written in 1829; and the committee deemed it preferable that as to the language, the text, the sentiments and the doctrine, it should be an exact reproduction.

The committee heartily commends this work to the churches. Its merits are unquestioned. It sets forth the truth in plain, clear, simple language. The faithful practical embodiment of the scriptural truths taught relative to church organization, character and duties of church members and officers, church government and discipline would result in great gain to all the churches. It is a work which, through its republication, is authorized by the General Eldership, comes to its readers and to the churches with no other sanctions or authority than that of the truth which it teaches. As such we send it again upon its mission in the world, hopefully commending it to all who "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." [6]

## PREFACE.

---

### BY THE AUTHOR.

---

All the duties of religion are highly important; yet, some are more so than others. And those which are the most important doubtless deserve our first and greatest attention because they ought to be best understood and most conscientiously performed. These sentiments will, no doubt, be readily conceded on all hands, and need, therefore, no illustration.

Now among the various duties of our glorious religion, there are, in my opinion, none more arduous and more pre-eminently important than the duties of forming and regulating the church of God. These, therefore, ought to be most carefully investigated and most strictly observed.

But experience and observation furnish sufficient grounds to believe that these weighty matters are very little investigated, very imperfectly understood, and no less imperfectly practiced. Under a deep conviction of this fact. "I have taken in hand to set forth in order" [*Lu 1:1*] a brief view of the formation, government, and discipline of the church of God.

There are some learned and good men, both in this country and in Europe, who have written extremely well on this important subject; but their works are very frequently not to be had at all, or else they are published and bound up with their other writings, which make them too expensive for the people in general to purchase.

Others have written and preached on these interesting topics, but, without doubt, more to the injury of the cause and misleading of the people than otherwise.

Some are still employed in preaching and talking about [7] these things, both in public and in private, with similar mischief. For the most they do is to read, explain, and recommend to others the adoption of their favorite creeds and books of discipline.

Besides these, there are others again, who, seeing the sectarian jealousies and party feelings that exist in various parts of Christendom, are induced from prudential considerations to keep silent in relation to these matters. The principal one among these, perhaps, is the fear of giving offense, and thereby making bad worse, as the saying is. Yet it is neither policy, duty, nor Christianity to let a great evil alone for fear a greater one might follow.

Now, taking all these things into review, let us look at the sad consequences. What are they? They are evidently these: that many people are left in great ignorance; others are thrown into great perplexity of mind; whilst others again are led into bewildering notions and erroneous ideas on these weighty subjects.

These unhappy and deplorable circumstances, under which thousands are placed, should excite our tenderest sympathies, and prompt us to speedy and energetic efforts to ameliorate their condition and bring about a salutary, remedial reformation in regard to these ecclesiastical matters so manifestly wrong, and so much confused.

This benevolent object is primarily contemplated in the following work.

And should the summary view which the author has taken of this subject be the happy means to give information to the ignorant; to resolve the difficulties and remove the perplexities of the sincere inquirers after truth, and show them the right way of establishing and conducting the affairs of the New Testament church; or

"to set in proper order the things that are wanting" [Tit 1:5] in those churches which are already established; and should it furthermore be the means to detect, show, and correct the mistaken and unscriptural views of the erroneous, and induce them to adopt the system illustrated on the following pages, so far as it accords with the doctrine of our Lord (and no farther), he shall [8] have accomplished his purpose, and consider himself amply compensated for his labor.

The author, however, is not so sanguine in his expectations on this subject as to believe that this publication will immediately correct and do away with all the lamented evils before mentioned, and produce a perfect reform in ecclesiastical polity. He does not expect, in the present imperfect state of things, that all the different views entertained by men respecting these things will be relinquished forthwith, and everybody adopt what he conceives to be the best, or the scriptural, view. To reform Christendom and save the world is no easy matter. The work of reform is the work of time. Old forms and opinions, though wrong, most men are loath to part with. This sentiment is beautifully expressed by the venerable framers of the Declaration of American Independence. "All experience," they say, "hath shown that mankind is more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed." Now, although this fact is undeniable, yet when both men and things are evidently going wrong, and the people love to have it so, we cannot always let them alone and remain guiltless. It is our duty to "*overcome evil with good*" [Ro 12:21]. And the more time any good work ordinarily requires, the more promptly and vigorously should an expedient and well-organized system of means be used for its accomplishment.

The great variety of opinions in religious matters, the numerous sects and factions, and the various forms of church government which exist at the present day strongly argue the necessity of a reform. For without controversy, "these things ought not to be" [Jas 3:10]. On this point all true Christians are agreed. Accordingly, many thousands have labored, not merely for "the unity of the Spirit" [Eph 4:3], but also for "the unity of the faith" [Eph 4:13] in matters essentially appertaining to the salvation of the soul and the prosperity of the church of God.

In this blessed labor of love many are now engaged. And from a sincere desire to assist all who are embarked in this work, [9] and especially in that of replacing church order to its original consistency, purity, and simplicity, the subsequent treatise is presented to the church and to a candid public.

Before I conclude, I beg leave to remark, that I sincerely hope no one will mistake my motives, and think that I am become their enemy because I have given "my opinion" on these subjects. When I do so, I am chargeable with nothing more than we all hold to be an inherent and mutual right. To a republican, as well as to a Christian, the rights of conscience and the liberty of speech and of the press are precious and unalienable privileges. These privileges, however, ought not to be perverted from their proper uses and made the occasions of strife, controversy, and war. Controversies I am much opposed to, because there is generally more loss than gain by them; and because there is often more religion in not contending than there is in that about which men contend. And were contending parties to sit down and consider how they shall account for their quarrels and contentions when at the end of their journey, they would not be so apt to fall out by the way. But if after all, some should take offense at this book, I venture to predict, that none will be more offended, and look at it with a more evil eye, than those who are most in the habit of binding great burdens, such as *Creeds and Books of Discipline*, and laying them on men's shoulders and consciences. And where do men get such a privilege from? Surely not from the Scriptures?

Nevertheless when they do, they want others not merely to be silent, but to justify them in the deed. I ask not this; I merely ask for unprejudiced investigation. Many things lie hidden from us for want of it. Did men but properly examine things for themselves, and take less for granted, there would be many more wise and good men in the world. I solicit those, therefore, into whose hands this little work may happen to fall, to peruse and consider what I have written concerning these things attentively, candidly and in humble reliance on the divine teaching. Jesus Christ says, "Learn of Me" [Mt 11:29]. Go then, dear reader, and take this book with [10] you to

the school of Jesus. Read it; and as you read, test it by *His* doctrine. I don't ask you to *try it* by your "test of orthodoxy," or by any human creed; but try it, I say, by the *Scriptures*. And if, after a fair trial, you find its doctrine to be false, reject it; yea, I say again, reject it. But if, on the other hand, you should find that it contains the scriptural view of forming and ordering the affairs of the Christian church, then you will have but one duty left you with regard to it; namely, to receive and obey the same, which I pray God you may never want grace to perform. [11]

## CHAPTER I. THE CHURCH.

---

The word *ecclesia*, which is usually translated *church* in the New Testament, has different meanings in the Holy Scriptures.

1. It is used to signify the whole collective body of real Christians, or true believers, throughout the world.
2. It denotes a particular religious society, located in some city, town, or country, united by mutual consent, and meeting together for the worship of God, in the way and manner prescribed in the gospel by Jesus Christ, its adorable author.

*First.* The word *church* is used to signify the whole number of real Christians, or true believers throughout the world.

In this large and extensive sense we find the word used in the following places:

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (*Mt 16:18*).

"For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (*Ga 1:13*).

"And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (*Eph 1:22,23*).

"Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (*Eph 3:21*).

"And He [Christ Jesus] is the head of the body, the church" (*Col 1:18*).

"To the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven" (*Heb 12:23*). [13]

To these passages many more might easily be added; but it is deemed unnecessary.

I observe,

*Second.* The term *church* is very frequently used in Scripture to denote a distinct society of saints, or a certain number of true believers, voluntarily associated together, and meeting with each other in some particular place for the dispensation of divine ordinances, according to the manner prescribed in the Word of God.

The first Christians of any given place were usually and uniformly joined together into one religious society, which society or congregation of Christians constituted the church of God in that place. Hence, we never read of more than one church in any one place. And this accounts for the peculiar manner in which the saints in different places are commonly spoken of in the New Testament.

Those saints residing in any one place, forming a religious society, are always addressed, or spoken of, in the singular number; whereas, those of a kingdom, province, district, or region of country, and those in different cities and towns, forming different societies, are usually mentioned in the plural number. As, for instance, Paul, when writing to the saints at Corinth, said:

"Unto the church of God which is at Corinth," &c. (*1Co 1:2*). There was also at church at Cenchrea, a port of Corinth, distinct from the church of that city.

"I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (*Ro 16:1*).

In the same manner, the Christian societies of many other places are spoken of, as the following texts plainly show.

"And when they were come [to Antioch], and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (*Ac 14:27*).

"Paul and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God our Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (*1Th 1:1*). [14]

"Unto the angel of the church at Ephesus write," &c. (*Re 2:1*).

On the other hand, when the Christians of a province, or those residing in different cities, are spoken of, the plural word *churches* is used, because they composed various societies.

Thus when St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, that is, to the believers scattered throughout that region of country, and constituting different societies, he said:

"Unto the churches of Galatia," &c. (*Ga 1:2*).

When speaking of the different communities of saints in Judea he says: "I was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ" (*Ga 1:22*).

The same phraseology, or peculiar form of expression, is used in the following Scriptures. And to avoid tediousness, I will only quote a few among many recorded in the New Testament.

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (*Ac 14:23*).

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied" (*Ac 9:31*).

"I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service" (*2Co 11:8*).

"What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia" (*Re 1:11*).

These remarks I think to be quite sufficient to show the true sense or signification of the term *church*. It is very generally used by the sacred writers as we have here defined it. And in its appropriated application to a religious use, it has not intermediate sense between a single congregation and the whole community of Christians. However, it may not be improper here to take notice of a few other quotations attached to the word *church*, different from either of the aforementioned. [15]

In *Ac 7:28*, it means the congregation of the Jews, which formerly were the church and people of God.

Again, in *Ac 19:32,39* it denotes a concourse or multitude of people assembled together. It is translated in both verses *assembly*. In a civil application of the term, it usually meant among the ancients an assembly of any description, whether lawful or unlawful, called out or associated together.

Besides these, I know not that it has any other meaning in the Holy Scriptures.

Howbeit, there are persons who contend that it has.

Some think it means the officers or rulers of a church. Accordingly, we find the Romanist applies it to *the Pope, or Pope and Cardinals in conclave assembled*. The Episcopalian, to *a general council, composed of the clergy, with the Bishop at their head*. The Presbyterian, to *the Session, or the Presbytery, or the Synod, or the General Assembly, with their presiding moderators*. In like manner, it is applied by other denominations of professing Christians.

The passage in *Mt 18:17*, "Tell it to the church," &c., is generally claimed as justifying the use of the word in this sense, but I think improperly. It is sometimes applied to the members of a church as distinguished from the officers, but never *vice versa*.

Others take it for a place of worship, and call such a place *a church*. This opinion they usually try to support by the texts *1Co 11:18 14:34*. But in both places it may be better understood of the saints assembled.

The word is also used by modern writers to signify any particular denomination of professing Christians distinguished from other sects and connections by certain peculiarities in doctrine, government, discipline, modes of worship, &c., as,

The Greek Church.

The Roman Church.

The Protestant Church. And this latter again into a great variety of lesser divisions and persuasions, as, [16]

The Episcopal Church.

The Presbyterian Church.

The Lutheran Church.

The Reformed Church.

The Methodist Church.

The Baptist Church, &c., &c.

The unhappy division of the church into such a variety of voluntary associations and parties, wearing different human names and titles, is, in my opinion, utterly wrong.

And why is it wrong?

1st. Because it is unscriptural; and,

2d. Because it is the means of creating and promoting sectarianism, or party spirit.

*First*. It is contrary to Scripture to divide the church of God into different sects and denominations. This is sufficiently evident from the fact, as I before showed, that the word *ecclesia*, or *church*, is never used by the inspired penmen in such a sense, but always as denoting either the whole collective body of the faithful

throughout the world, or a distinct congregation of Christians located in some given place. Accordingly, there are individual or particular churches; and those collectively constitute one general or universal church. Beside this division of the church, there is no divine warrant given for any other. Hence, the combination of two or more individual churches into a sect or distinct connection wearing a sectarian name and governed by human laws is highly improper and anti-scriptural.

This fact is more evident still from sundry passages bearing explicitly on the subject. Among all the primitive churches there was but one, that I know of, so unfortunate as to be divided into various parties. I mean the church in the city of Corinth. There the separating principle first originated. The saints were unhappily divided into different factions or parties. These parties avowedly set themselves up under different heads, and distinguished themselves by various names. One, for instance, said, "I am for [17] Paul"; and a second, "I am for Apollos"; and a third, "I am for Cephas"; whilst a fourth said, "I am for Christ." Thus the whole church was rent into fixed parties, whence ensued grievous heart-burnings, envyings, and strifes. But what did Paul, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, think of these inglorious dissensions? And what did the Holy Ghost move him to write to the Christians at Corinth concerning this carnal matter? Let the Apostle's own letters furnish an answer to these queries. "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?" (*1Co 1:11-13*). "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (*1Co 3:3*). "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (*Ro 16:17*). What was the doctrine which they had learned in relation to this subject? Why, that they should "be perfectly joined together" [*1Co 1:10*].

"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (*1Co 1:10*).

From these texts and other analogous texts it is to my mind very evident that the division of the church into various sects and parties, as they exist at present in Christendom, is unscriptural.

And I would add, to divide the church is likewise unreasonable. It is so for the same reasons it is unscriptural. For reason and revelation do perfectly harmonize. But for the sake of further illustration I would here merely ask, would it not be thought very improper and unreasonable for a woman to refuse to go by the name of her husband, and call herself after the name of one of her husband's servants, or after some other man? Reason says it undoubtedly would. Even so reason teaches us that it is highly [18] unreasonable for the church, denominated in the Bible "the bride," "spouse," "Lamb's wife," &c., to divide into different parties, assume and wear the names of men and other human titles instead of the name of the Lord God who bought her with His own blood. For says God, "Thou [the church] shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name" [*Isa 62:2*]. Surely, then, the naming of the church by men cannot have God for its author. No, it is an evil invention of poor, mistaken man. Let the wise and prudent, therefore, who can foresee this evil, hide themselves in good time from it, and not act the part of the simple, who pass on and are punished. But,

*Second.* To divide the church of God into various denominations is wrong, *because it begets and promotes sectarianism.*

By sectarianism I mean a spirit of bigotry or party prejudice. And what can be more inconsistent and hateful in a professor of the blessed and holy religion of Jesus Christ than such a satanic spirit? "Nothing," saith a certain author, "in the whole range of mental poison corrodes like party spirit. It seems by some demoniac magic to change our very being; influence the life blood itself, and penetrate the whole system of the patient, who knows not himself while under its influence." Besides, nothing doubtless has a more withering influence, and is on the whole more hurtful to the cause of Christianity than a sectarian partiality. This deplorable fact the

concurrent testimony of the faithful in every age and clime does most unequivocally and invincibly prove. However, all this may be admitted whilst the proposition we have laid down will be doubted. It remains, then, for us to show that sects and parties and their assumed powers are in fact the main cause of a sectarian or party spirit. Having asserted this as my decided opinion, I shall endeavor now to establish it. And in confirmation of it I allege, as evidence:

1st. *Scripture history*; and

2d. *Daily experience*. [19]

*First. I allege as evidence sacred or scriptural history.* The history of the church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, plainly shows the fact that sectarianism or bigotry grows out of religious parties. The devil is no doubt the great mover and the efficient cause of the iniquitous thing, but sects and parties in the church are most unquestionably the instrumental cause of it. In all places, therefore, where Christians stood united together under Christ the great head of the church and constituted but one religious society, there heavenly union and delightful fellowship prevailed; and there nothing of that venomous kind of feeling existed known among us by the names of sectarianism, bigotry, party prejudice, &c. Or, if it did exist at all, we at least have no account of it in the Scriptures. But, on the contrary, wherever schism took place and parties were formed, as in the Corinthian church (where this terrible mystery of iniquity first began to work), there, instead of peace and harmony, partyism, contention, and strife soon prevailed. It is natural and rational, therefore, to conclude that sects and parties must have been the cause of it. In further confirmation of this opinion, I allege,

*Second. Daily experience; that is, the experience and history of the church in all ages.*

The Old Testament church was divided into a variety of sects and parties, as Samaritans, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, &c. The sad consequence of which was that they hated and opposed one another. This is evident from a number of passages in the New Testament.

And soon after the New Testament church was established in the world, "the Dragon, that old serpent which is the Devil and Satan" [*Re 20:2*], began to sow the seeds of discord among the followers of the Lamb. And that this arch enemy of God and man has actually succeeded in his attempt to divide the flock of God is too obvious to need any proof. But, oh, what a pity that this dividing principle ever invaded the hallowed pale of the church of Christ! For who [20] is so blind as not to see the mischief it has done? And who among men is competent to estimate the vast amount of mischief that has grown out of the same? Oh, it is past finding out! It far exceeds the bounds of imagination's utmost stretch to conceive. The solemn and momentous transactions of the last day can only make a full disclosure of it. "Fix," says one, "on any period of the Christian church; look into the ecclesiastical history of that period, and what will you find it to be? Little more, I suspect, than the history of the struggles of different sects and parties to overturn the system of others in order to build up their own."

This appalling fact will, perhaps, be found nowhere more strictly true than in the history of the church since the days of Martin Luther, the celebrated Saxon reformer. Since that memorable time a great variety of opposing parties has sprung up in almost every part of Protestant Christendom. And I know not that these religious sects are more numerous in any country than in our own. North America abounds with them. Here, then, we have a fine opportunity to know whether they are a blessing or a curse to the cause of God, or the religion of Jesus. So far as my observation and experience enable me to form any judgment of this matter, I feel not hesitation in saying that I believe them to be a most dreadful curse to the kingdom of our Redeemer. This I believe because they have a tendency, as was stated before, to promote a sectarian spirit, and thereby destroy that intimate union, that heaven-descended peace, harmony, and good will which ought always to characterize the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Now let us consider, for a few moments, plain matters of fact. Facts are not only *stubborn things*, but they will likewise speak for themselves. When the Lord our God pours

out His Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost, and revives His work, so that many are converted and made happy in redeeming love, all experience shows that these new-born souls are sweetly knit and joined together as one man; or like David and Jonathan, and like the first Christians, they are all of one heart and one soul. And like our heavenly Father, they have no respect to person. But no sooner than different sectarians [21] come in among them, and begin to divide them into various sects and parties, *love to one another*, which is the cardinal mark and badge of discipleship, rapidly declines, or *waxes cold*, as the Scripture expresses it [Mt 24:12]. Now, instead of living in peace, loving as brethren, and so fulfilling their Master's law, we soon see them acquire a sectarian likeness; they will, ere long, have common sentiments, common language, and common habits, which, when acquired, frequently give rise to a mistaken zeal for the honor of God, a blind attachment to their respective peculiarities, and such an inveterate prejudice against one another that they seldom or never meet together again for the worship of that God who made them, and whose children they profess to be. And if they do happen to meet with each other at a religious meeting, it requires but very little discernment to observe the unhallowed partiality which they manifest toward their respective sects. And besides, a great and manifest difference is often observed in their common dealing and intercourse with each other. Everything seems to assume a sectarian aspect between these unhappy partisans. But, O! can these things be true? Would to God they were not! Yet, alas! their frequent occurrence has given them a universal notoriety and leaves us no room to doubt their correctness. And if so, then our position is established by the incontrovertible argument of experience, namely, that the division of the church into different sects and parties gives rise to, or occasions, sectarian and party feelings; and that these anti-Christian feelings go to destroy peace and union among Christians. O sectarianism, what hast thou done? Thou hast perverted the right ways of the Lord. And by so doing thou hast made more the infidels than all the swearers, and drunkards, and whoremongers, and thieves, and robbers, and murderers in the world.

On these grounds, then, I assert and maintain it to be utterly wrong and sinful in the sight of God to set up and promote sectarian churches. This many will acknowledge to be true, notwithstanding, persist in acting on this separating principle. And [22] then as a kind of atonement for their sin will afterwards preach and pray for the destruction of bigotry, prejudice, and partiality, and for unity and harmony among the people of God. Thus by their doings they promote the separating principle, and by their words they advocate the principle of union. With their lips and words they labor to build up what with their hands and actions they are the means of destroying. But how often do they thus labor and spend their words in vain? And no wonder, for who is so blind as not to see that by such strange conduct they contradict both the Scriptures and common sense. Instead of following our Lord's direction, "First make the tree good" [Mt 12:33], they corrupt the good tree by splitting it into pieces, and then wish and pray that it might bring forth *good fruit*. Like Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, these partisans cause a revolt in the Israel of God [1Ki 11:26]. This result leads to perpetual wars between the revolved tribes and parties, and these wars again lead to *the building of fenced cities and high places* (spiritually the doctrine and commandments of men), and *divers strengthening of themselves against each other in order to reign*. Now, one of two things such people, in order to be consistent, ought to do--either leave off praying for a union among Christians, or quit building up sects and parties. For "no man can serve two masters" [Mt 6:24].

It is a principle in natural philosophy that every effect has an adequate cause. And on this principle the following rule is founded: *Remove the cause and the effect will cease*. Now, if the establishment of sectarian churches is the primary cause of bigotry or sectarian prejudice, then, in order to effect a destruction of the latter evil, which is the effect, the former, which is the cause, ought first to be removed. And not until this is done can any rational hope be entertained of seeing Christians *perfectly joined together, loving each other with a pure heart fervently*, and living in *unity and peace among themselves*. Thus I have ventured to give my opinion in this matter; whether I am right, and if so, how far I [23] have succeeded in demonstrating the same, I shall leave to my unprejudiced readers to judge.

From what I have said on this subject the reader may discover the principal reason why I have not felt more solicitous to be in full connection with some religious denomination. In this sectarian section of our country it is thought to be sinful by many not to belong to some particular sect. Accordingly they have charged me and

others with a breach of order, and sometimes with an intention of "setting up for ourselves," "forming a new sect," or beginning something new, &c.

At other times they have said "that we are ashamed to be called by their name," "that we were opposed to discipline," and what not.

I know not how to account for such vain babbling but on the mischievous principle of sectarianism. None but high-toned sectarians would indulge themselves in speaking so unadvisedly.

The real truth is, instead of setting up for ourselves, we wish to set up for God; instead of raising a new sect, we would rather put down sects; instead of beginning something new, we wish to fall back and assume the old apostolic ground.

As for being ashamed to wear a sectarian or nick name, I disown not the allegation. And the day is coming when, I have no doubt, there will be a great many more ashamed of it, and those perhaps who now glory in it will then be most ashamed.

A scriptural church discipline I have never opposed. But sectarian laws, penal codes, and divers machinations, which pass for ecclesiastical Disciplines, in some places and among some sects, I do not, and cannot, approve.

Having endeavored to show what the church is, and what it is not, I propose in the next chapter to point out the manner of forming or constituting the church of God according to the primitive mode. [24]

## CHAPTER II. THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH.

---

To form or establish an individual church on the New Testament plan, or according to the principles and practices of the Apostles and primitive Christians, two things are essentially necessary, namely:

1. That there be a competent number of Christians in any given place.

2. That these Christians voluntarily and mutually agree to associate together in a church-state, or a distinct ecclesiastical community.

*First.* In order to constitute or form a regular and complete gospel church it is essentially necessary that there should be a competent number of true Christians in any one place. The reason for this is obvious. No church of God can be established where there is no suitable material. Christians are the only fit material for the formation of a Christian church. And if so, it follows as a necessary consequence that no society of Christians or saints can be formed where there are none. The practice of erecting churches with "wood, hay, and stubble" [1Co 3:12], after the manner of some, that is, with unconverted people or even with the heterogeneous or discordant materials of converted and unconverted persons, is beyond all doubt not merely a great piece of folly, but of iniquity also. For, says the Apostle, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1Co 3:17).

With respect to the number of believers requisite for constituting a gospel church, the Holy Scriptures are silent. Consequently no particular or permanent rule can be given to regulate this point. Some have thought that three persons were sufficient, inasmuch as Christ has promised to be in the midst of two or three, wherever they meet together in His name (Mt 18:20). Others are of opinion [25] that it requires about twelve members at least, seeing the church at Ephesus was begun with twelve members, or thereabouts (Ac 19:7).

No individual church should consist of more members than what can conveniently meet together in one place of worship, where all may hear and be edified. As a hive of bees, when there are too many, swarms, so should a church agree to divide and form another whenever her members multiply beyond what can meet to worship in one place.

*Second.* To constitute or form a regular church it is necessary that the Christians of any given place mutually agree to unite together in a church-state, or in an ecclesiastical society. This, however, is a contested principle.

There are some Christians who boldly declare that the combination of individual Christians into regular religious societies is both inexpedient and unlawful. Accordingly they plead for religious liberty, and strenuously maintain that every Christian is and ought to remain free and unconnected with all religious associations of the opinion to defend and support the same are these:

*First.* That the formation of such societies destroys union and promotes discord among Christians.

*Second.* That it leads to the establishment of sectarian laws and the assumption of human authority in the church.

*Third.* That the Scriptures prohibit it, inasmuch as Christians are therein declared to be *free*, and exhorted to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made [them] free" [Ga 5:1].

Plausible as this train of argument may appear at first sight, little of it will bear a due examination.

The first argument is founded in a radical error, resulting no doubt from the misconceptions and false notions which are generally formed of churches, or religious societies. The amalgamation of different individual and local churches into sundry connections and denominations, distinguished from each other by a great mass of [26] human appendages, I freely admit, have a tendency to destroy union and promote discord, envy, and strife among Christians.

But the establishment of religious societies on the plan of independency, the principle acted on by the Apostles and primitive Christians, has no such tendency. As, therefore, the abuse of any principle or duty ought never to set aside the use of it, the fallacy of this argument must be apparent to all.

The second argument is analogous to the former and derives all its apparent validity from the same mistaken theory of church establishments. The formation of sectarian churches may lead to the enactment of sectarian laws and the exercise of human power by aspiring ecclesiastics, whereas the formation of individual churches on scriptural principles does not. As men, however, are very apt to fly from one extreme to another, it is, perhaps, more than likely that the former error of some men has driven others into the latter.

The last argument I suppose to be no less unfounded in its principle and originates in mistaken views of religious or Christian liberty.

What is Christian liberty? Or, wherein does it lie? Does it consist in the right of self-government, or in the privilege of every man to do that which is right in his own eyes? For a person to live without law, and to enjoy an uncontrollable right to act in every instance as he pleases, is neither civil nor religious liberty. It may be called a Hermit's liberty, or the liberty of solitude; for it can only comport with a state of loneliness and solitude; but with no kind of propriety can it be denominated Christian liberty.

Christian liberty lies in a recovery from the ruins of apostasy, and restoration unto God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and sanctification of the spirit unto the obedience of faith. Accordingly a Christian is freed from the condemnation of the law, from the tyranny of the devil, from the dominion of sin, from the fear and power of death, and from eternal condemnation, or the awful wrath of a sin avenging God. But he is not free from the [27] obedience of faith, that is, from the law of God as the great authoritative rule of his faith, his experience, and his practice.

If then Christians, as social beings, are subject to the same common head, they are to live under the same laws of God, and if they have the same religious and relative duties to perform, they of course cannot be allowed to act as they please, but are bound in all their religious and social transactions to demean themselves agreeably to the Word of God, and in harmony with the general benefit of the whole community of which they are members.

The combination of Christians in a church-state is therefore not incompatible with religious liberty. We deem these remarks quite sufficient to expose the fallacy and futility of these arguments against the formation of churches.

We shall now adduce a few direct arguments in favor of the combination of individual Christians into regular ecclesiastical societies. The necessity and propriety of this duty the subsequent considerations will, I think, very lucidly and forcibly demonstrate.

*First.* That the church of God is a divinely appointed and regular society. A society denotes a number of individuals associated together upon certain specific principles and for certain specific purposes. Now this I think is the nature and character of the Christian church, agreeably to the account given of her in the New Testament. She is never spoken of, or represented, as a confused multitude of persons, independent of one another, but as a well-formed and regular society; that is to say, an indefinite number of persons called out of

nature into grace, and combined or united together for religious purposes. Hence the inspired penman represents the church under the idea of a "body" (*Ro 12:4,5*), "a house" (*Eph 2:19*), "a city" (*Heb 12:22*), "a kingdom" (*Col 1:13*), "a nation" (*1Pe 2:9*), &c. All and every one of which include the idea or notion of a well-regulated society. If, then, from these and other names and allusions by which the church is described in Scripture, it sufficiently appears that she is a regular society, we cannot help but perceive and admit the necessity [28] of the position under consideration; for no regular society, whether civil or moral, can exist at all without some kind of compact or confederation. This truth is no less forcibly illustrated by the fact,

*Second.* That the Apostles uniformly united the first Christians together into regular religious societies. These religious societies they called churches. And they generally went by the names of the places where they were located, and not by the names of the persons who first planted or established them, as is often the case nowadays. Thus, for instance, when Paul and Silas went to Macedonia to preach the gospel unto the inhabitants of that country they commenced their benevolent work in the city of Philippi. Thence they went to Thessalonica, and thence to other places. In these places it pleased God to make them the honored instruments of converting many people. These young converts were immediately formed into ecclesiastical societies or churches, which were called by the names of the cities or towns where they were located. And this was their general practice everywhere.

Again, this doctrine will with equal plainness appear when we consider,

*Third.* That it is authorized by the gospel and required by the order of Christ's house.

It is authorized by the gospel. This, if I am not mistaken, will sufficiently appear from the following passages:

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be," or as it ought to read, "were saved" (*Ac 2:47*).

"And of the rest [namely, such as were not saved] durst no man join himself to them" (*Ac 5:13*).

These texts plainly show,

1st. That the saved and the unsaved were divided into distinct classes.

2d. That the former were *added together*, and that the latter were not permitted to join them. [29]

3d. That the whole matter was thus ordered by the Lord. Consequently the adding or joining together of saints in a church-state is of no human invention, but is appointed by divine authority.

Again, it is required by the order of Christ's house. This is fully established by the fact that the New Testament economy requires church government. Now, as experience clearly shows that no well-organized system of government can be maintained by any people in a disjointed and confused state, it necessarily follows that Christians ought and must unite together in religious societies in order to observe the sacred system of order established in the church by her adorable Author. And besides, it is both reasonable and necessary that it should be so, because without it there can be no reciprocating assurance of moral concord and no systematic cooperation in the discharge of various and highly important duties incumbent on church members in their sacred relation. The accomplishment of these ends not only justifies, but renders the union of Christians into religious societies or churches of great and vital importance.

"Hence," says a learned author, "I affirm it is the duty of every one who professeth faith in Christ Jesus, and takes due care of his own eternal salvation, to join himself unto the church of God." And this is not a duty which believers may do as a convenience or an advantage; not that which others may do for them, but which

they must do for themselves as an act of obedience to the authority and commands of Christ. Yet this duty of joining themselves to the church always is, or ought to be, *a voluntary act*, or an act of free choice.

This truth is so sacred, so evident from the Word of God, so clearly testified by the uniform practice of all the first churches, as that it despiseth all opposition. "It is this confederacy, consent and agreement that is the formal cause of the church. It is this which not only distinguishes a church from the world, but from all other particular churches." And as the original constitution of [30] churches is by consent and confederation, so the admission of new members to them is upon the same footing.

The practice which prevails in some churches to compel men into their communion and keep them in it *by fire and fagot*, or by any other means of external force, derives more from the *Alcoran* than the gospel. And no less inconsistent is the custom of other churches to make men members of the church by the laws of the land, or to pretend they are so by birth. From all which it follows,

1. That a church of God is not *parochial*. Men do not become church members by habitation in a parish, for unbelievers and hypocrites, Turks and Jews, adulterers and adulteresses may dwell in the same parish.

2. A church is not *diocesan* or *provincial*. We read of a plurality of elders and bishops in one church (*Ac 20:17 Php 1:1*), and of a number of churches in one province, as of the churches of Judea, and of Galatia, and of Macedonia; but we never read of a diocese and province under one elder or bishop.

3. It is not *national*. So far from it that we not only read of more churches in a nation, but even of churches in houses (*Ro 16:5 1Co 16:19 Col 4:15*).

4. It is not *Presbyterian*. We never read of a church of presbyters or elders, though of elders ordained in churches, by which it appears there were churches before there were any presbyters or elders in them (*Ac 19:23*).

But a particular visible gospel church is a society of Christians united together for the celebration of the worship of God. A church of saints thus essentially constituted as to matter and form is the only one of which the Scriptures make any mention. *And in no approved writers, for the space of two hundred years after Christ, is there mention made of any other.*

Now, whenever, or wherever, a competent number of Christians associate themselves together to form a church they possess full power and authority to organize, that is, to elect by a plurality of votes their own proper officers. And after they are regularly [31] organized they possess in their organic state sufficient power to perform all acts of religious worship, and everything relating to ecclesiastical government and discipline. But in no respect are they entitled to exercise legal authority over other churches. And whereas they are entitled to no jurisdiction over other churches, so neither are they subject to any extrinsic jurisdiction. Every individual church is strictly independent of all others, as it respects religious worship and the general government of its own affairs. This, however, I shall endeavor to establish more fully when I come to treat of *church government*. [32]

## **CHAPTER III. THE CHARACTER OF THE CHURCH MEMBERS.**

---

Church members are those who compose, or belong to, the church. The distinguishing character of those who attach themselves to the church of God should be real, experimental religion, or true piety. None should be admitted into the church but real Christians, truly converted persons, or such as are born again, and who lead holy and unblamable lives. None other ought to belong to the church.

The doctrine indeed militates against the practice of nearly all sects and denominations, but in this fact there is no proof that the doctrine is false. The fact that the church of Christ ought to consist of true believers only, and that the unconverted ought not to be admitted to membership, is capable of proof, and the truth of the doctrine may be shown by a variety of considerations. The following I advance as evidence of its truth:

**I. The nature and end of church fellowship.**

**II. Several duties incumbent on church members.**

**III. The appellations given to the church of God in the Scriptures.**

**IV. Her sacred character.**

**V. God's express prohibition to His people to unite with unbelievers, and which is equivalent to unbelievers or wicked persons not to unite with His people. And**

**VI. The example and general practice of the Apostles in constituting the church.**

For the truth of the position I have taken I offer as evidence,

### **I. The Nature and End of Church Fellowship.**

Religious, or church, fellowship is two-fold, viz., Divine and Christian. [33]

*First.* It is divine. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (*1Jo 1:3*). This sacred communion with the Deity lies in a mutual intercourse between God and His people. It is variously expressed in Holy Writ as

1. By their mutual indwelling in each other. "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (*1Jo 4:16*).

2. By a mutual walking together. "I will dwell in them, and walk in them" (*2Co 6:16*). "And Enoch walked with God" (*Ge 5:24*). This shows agreement, and is expressive of fellowship, for how "can two walk together, except they be agreed" (*Am 3:3*)?

3. By a mutual converse together, as in prayer. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you" (*Jas 4:8*). This holy fellowship with God forms one of the hidden mysteries of our holy religion to the natural man. Sinners can have no idea of it, neither lot in it, except they repent and be converted.

*Second.* Church fellowship is Christian and consists in church members participating in all the ordinances of divine worship. "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (*1Jo 1:7*).

Now, fellowship, or communion, is founded in union, and arises from it. This is true of all kinds, but especially of religious communion.

Christ is the head; the church is His body. The saints are all members of Him, from whom they receive life and nourishment. Christ is the vine, believers are the branches, and by virtue of this union they have communion one with another.

If, then, we are "united with Christ" and "walk in the light" [*1Jo 1:7*], we have fellowship one with another, and not otherwise.

The unconverted have no union with Christ, neither walk they in the light, but are alienated from Him and walk in darkness. They can, therefore, have no fellowship either with God or the saints. And on this account they ought to be excluded from church membership. "For what fellowship hath righteousness with [34] unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (*2Co 6:14*).

The same might be argued from the end or design of church fellowship, which is to glorify God in the mutual comfort and edification of His children. But sinners cannot be comforted and edified whilst they are walking in the broad way to hell. It is written, "Comfort ye My people" [*Isa 40:1*], but "Woe unto the wicked" [*Isa 3:11*].

## **II. The doctrine is no less forcibly illustrated by sundry duties incumbent on church members.**

A few of these need only to be mentioned to establish the point in hand.

1. It is the duty of all church members to reprove each other for their faults (*Mt 18:15*).

This duty a true believer is only willing to perform, but also to receive with meekness and thankfulness. He can adopt the language of the royal Psalmist and say,

"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head" [*Psa 141:5*].

Sinners, on the contrary, will neither give nor receive reproof but with reluctance and resentment. They are, therefore, plainly unqualified to hold a place among the sons in the house of God.

2. But a single point will set this part of the subject in the clearest light. It is this: Christ has enjoined upon all His followers *brotherly love*. This affection is that which is commonly called *complacency*, or *the love of virtue*, and it is directed, not like benevolence towards the happiness of intelligent beings, but towards the virtue of good beings. Now it is evident that the unconverted do not, and cannot, exercise this affection towards Christians whilst in their carnal state. Nor can Christians exercise this affection towards sinners, because sinners do not possess the virtue which this command requires Christians to love. Christ cannot require of His disciples anything which is physically impossible; but it is physically impossible to love virtue in those who have it not. Yet Christ has required *all the members of His church* to exercise this affection *towards all*. He [35] intended, therefore, in this command, as well as elsewhere, that all the members of His church should be such as could be the objects of this affection.

To this command He accordingly subjoins the following declaration: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" [*Joh 13:25*]. But it is impossible that sinners, who are not His disciples, should be known as His disciples. Sinners, therefore, were not included by Him in the number of those of whom He speaks in these passages; or in other words, are not proper members of His church.

## **III. The truth under consideration may be proved with similar clearness by the appellations given to the church of God in the Scriptures.**

As for instance, the church is called the Body of Christ.

"The church, which is His body" (*Eph 1:22,23*).

"And He is the head of the body, the church" (*Col 1:18*).

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another" (*Ro 12:5*).

Now Christ's body is a living body.

But sinners are dead.

Sinners, therefore, can have no union or communion with "the church, which is His body" [*Eph 1:22,23*].

Again, the church is denominated "the sons," or "the children of God."

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (*1Jo 3:1*).

"They shall be called the children of God" (*Mt 5:9*). The members of the church are called "sons of God" twelve times in the Scriptures; "His children" twice in the Old and ten times in the New Testament; and "His people" in instances too numerous to be reckoned. In all these instances "the sons" and "children" of God denote those who are such by adoption; and in very many the phrase "the people of God" has the same meaning. But the adopted children of God [36] are Christians. The original church, therefore, consisted of Christians, or in other words those who were subjects of repentance, faith, and holiness.

Again, the church is styled *the fold of Christ*.

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd" (*Joh 10:16*). The fold, or flock of God, shall receive the gift of God, which is eternal life.

But the unrighteous shall not inherit eternal life. Therefore, they ought not to attach themselves to the fold, or church of Christ.

Moreover, there is a variety of other appellations, or names given to the church, which show the same thing.

"Lively stones" (*1Pe 2:5*).

"Temple of the Holy Ghost" (*1Co 3:16,17*).

"Spouse," or "Lamb's wife" (*Re 19:7*).

"Holy Nation" (*1Pe 2:9*).

"Peculiar People" (*1Pe 2:9*).

#### **IV. The sacred character of the church clearly demonstrates the same truth.**

The character of the church, as given in the New Testament, may be sufficiently learned from the following passages:

To the church of *Rome St. Paul writes* in these terms: "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (*Ro 1:7*).

To the churches of Galatia he writes: "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise" (*Ga 4:28*).

To the Ephesians he writes: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (*Eph 1:1*).

"Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (*Eph 5:25-27*). [37]

To the Colossians he writes: "Paul, an apostle, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, which are at Colosse: we give thanks to God since we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (*Col 1:1-5*).

St. James, speaking of himself and of the churches to whom he wrote, says: "Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures" (*Jas 1:18*).

"In these and a multitude of other passages exactly the same character is given of the church. One character, and one only, is given of her; and that is, a holy and Christian character. Even when the faults of its members are mentioned, they are mentioned solely as the backslidings of Christians, and never as the sins of unbelievers and impenitent men. How, then, can we entertain a rational doubt *that God*, when He instituted His church, intended it to be an assembly of saints or holy ones?"

**V. The doctrine is also evident from the fact that God has expressly prohibited His people from uniting with unbelievers, and which is equivalent, that unbelievers, or wicked persons, are forbidden to unite with His people.**

God has expressly forbidden His children to unite with unbelievers, that is, with unconverted people. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (*2Co 6:14*). "This," says one, "is a military term: keep in your *ranks*; do not leave the Christian communion *to join those of a different kind*, as that would be unfit, or improper."

Concerning the communion here forbidden there have been various opinions.

"Some apply the exhortation to pious persons marrying with those who are not decidedly religious and converted to God. That the exhortation may be thus applied, I grant; but it is certainly not [38] the meaning of the Apostle in this place; because there is not, before or afterward, a syllable said concerning this subject; and because the direction given in the seventeenth verse of the context, concerning the communion here specified, would, if marriage were intended, contradict the precept given by the Apostle" (*1Co 7:12,13*).

Religious communion, therefore, is intended by the passage. This is forbidden with unbelievers. To this end the questions following the passage are asked by the Apostle. For the same end it is said also, in the seventeenth verse, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord," &c. [*2Co 6:17*]. And Paul, speaking of such as had the form of godliness, but were devoid of power, says: "From such turn away" (*2Ti 3:5*).

Thus saith the Lord: "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth: let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them" (*Jer 15:19*; see *Eze 22:26 44:23*).

The same thing is also evident from God's prohibiting the wicked to join with His people.

Unto the wicked God saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth" (*Ps 50:16*)? "And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (*2Ti 2:19*). In these passages, if I am not mistaken, wicked or sinful men are absolutely prohibited from making a profession of religion, or joining the church of God in their carnal state. And what can be the use of their joining the church, if they are only "dead weights," "corrupt trees" [*Mt 12:33*], "cumberers of the ground" [*Lu 13:7*], "ravenous wolves" [*Ac 20:29*], "a generation of vipers" [*Mt 23:33*], and "children of the wicked one" [*Mt 13:38*], who have neither *lot* nor *part* with the *saints of God* after all.

#### **VI. The same thing is equally manifest from the practice of the Apostles in constituting the Christian church.**

It was the usage and uniform practice of the Apostles and first founders of the church to collect and band together the primitive [39] followers of Christ, at the different places where they resided, into religious societies. These societies were called churches, and they consisted of true converts from Judaism and Heathenism to Christianity. And I know not of a single instance recorded in Scripture where they admitted any to church communion whose profession was incredible, and whose lives furnished no evidence of their being Christians, that is, persons truly and radically changed from nature to grace. We read of some, it is true, who are styled "false brethren" [*2Co 11:26 Ga 2:4*], "disorderly walkers" [*2Th 3:6,11*], "enemies of the cross of Christ" [*Php 3:18*], "the synagogue of Satan" [*Re 2:9*], "cursed children" [*2Pe 2:14*], &c.; but at the same time they are spoken of as being either such as had "crept in unawares" (*Jude 1:4*), or such as had "forsaken the right way" after they had known it (*2Pe 2:15*).

It is likely also that the first founders of the church may have been deceived in receiving members into the church in some cases. But they never admitted wolves to the fold of Christ when they knew them to be such. "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them" (*Ac 5:13*). And why not? Because the Apostles would not let them. And why would they not let them? Because they would not repent and believe on Jesus Christ. A very good reason. For the same reason church privileges ought to be refused to such men now. If men will not receive Christ, what right has the church to receive *them*?

The first Christians were faithful householders. Their remedy and rule of procedure, in case of deception and apostasy, was immediate expulsion from the church. "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (*1Co 5:13*).

In First Corinthians, Paul zealously warned the builders of the church at Corinth against building with discordant materials, such as "gold, silver, precious stones" and "wood, hay, stubble" [*1Co 3:12*]. His obvious meaning is that they should not unite together in church fellowship *the precious and the vile* [*Jer 15:19*], lest their "work shall be burned" and they themselves "suffer loss" [*1Co 3:15*]; yea, lest they should "defile the temple of God" [40] [*1Co 3:17*].

These things viewed in connection plainly show that the Apostles endeavored to rear the church without "spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" [*Eph 5:27*].

Thus the erection of the church ought to have been continued in every succeeding age, and thus it ought to be now. None should be admitted into the church but true believers; and if at any time there should any one backslide, or fall away into open sins, church discipline should be exercised forthwith. But is it so? Is the building of God built up with "lively stones"? [*1Pe 2:5*]. Are wicked persons put away, or cast out of the church? Ah, alas! alas! who does not know that the reverse is true? Who can consider the customs of the churches at the present day and not see and know that the unconverted are as readily received and tolerated in the church as what the converted are! Some churches are made up of nearly all, and others perhaps entirely of

unconverted persons. Impious and profane men are often placed at the head of affairs; hence, the truly pious are frequently persecuted and driven out of the church, whilst the profane, intemperate, filthy, and abominable of all sorts are retained. Oh, what a corrupt and lamentable state of things! Who among the sons of God should not weep and mourn to see the appalling corruption, the disastrous plague, the abomination of desolation spread far and wide through almost every denomination.

Oh, ye ministers of God, consider these things! And not merely so, but reform these things. And here you will find much to do every way.

*First.* Cease to build the temple of God with wood, hay, and stubble; or in plain terms, quit receiving into the church persons who give no evidence of true conversion.

*Second.* Exercise a salutary discipline, wherever you find Jehovah's laws and cause require the same. Expel profane and wicked men from the church, and let them be unto you as heathen men and publicans. By doing so ye shall save yourselves and the church of God; whereas, if ye build up churches with unrenewed [41] men, God will spew you, and such depraved churches, or rather such "synagogues of Satan" [Re 2:9] out of His mouth. [42]

To those who belong to different churches, and are destitute of religion, I would say, either repent and be converted immediately, or withdraw from the church; for, sinful and unholy as ye are, it is presumption for you to claim brotherhood with the saint, and fellowship with the skies.

## CHAPTER IV. THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS.

---

The several duties incumbent on the members of a church may be divided and arranged as follows:

- I. Duties towards God.
- II. Duties towards themselves.
- III. Duties towards each other.
- IV. Duties towards the office-bearers of the church.
- V. Duties towards them that are without.

### I. Duties Towards God.

"In one sense every duty is a duty towards God, since it is His will which makes it a duty; but there are some duties of which God is the object, as well as the author; and these are properly, and in a more appropriate sense, called *duties towards God*." The following may be considered as properly belonging to these duties:

1st. *To love God.* "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves that ye love the Lord your God" (*Jos 23:11*).

"O love the Lord, all ye His saints" (*Ps 31:23*).

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (*Mr 12:30*).

2d. *To pray to God.*

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (*Lu 21:36*).

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (*Php 4:6*).

"Pray without ceasing" (*1Th 5:17*). [43]

3d. *To praise and give thanks to God.*

"O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise Him, all ye people" (*Ps 117:1*).

"Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord" (*Ps 106:1*).

"Offer unto God thanksgiving" (*Ps 50:14*).

4th. *To worship and serve God.*

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (*Mt 4:10*). God should be worshiped:

a. *In secret, or private.*

"Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray" (*Ps 55:17*).

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret" (*Mt 6:6*).

b. *In families.*

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (*Jos 24:15*).

"Pour out Thy fury upon the families that call not on Thy name" (*Jer 10:25*).

c. *In public.*

"O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker" (*Ps 95:6*).

"For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand" (*Ps 95:7*).

"All nations shall come and worship before Thee" (*Re 15:4*).

## II. **Duties Towards Themselves.**

Church members owe various and weighty duties to themselves. To these personal duties we may reckon such as,

1st. *To provide for themselves the necessaries of life.* [44]

Be "not slothful in business" (*Rom. 12:11*).

"Do your own business, and to work with your own hands" (*1Th 4:11*).

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (*1Ti 5:8*).

"Let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (*Eph 4:28*).

2d. *To watch against their enemies.*

The most formidable of these are the world, the flesh, and the devil. "Watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men, be strong" (*1Co 16:13*).

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (*1Pe 5:8*).

3d. *To deny themselves of all evil.*

"He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul" (*Pr 8:36*).

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself" (*Mt 16:24*).

"Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" (*Tit 2:12*).

"Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (*Heb 12:1*).

4th. *To be steadfast in religion.*

"My beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable" (*1Co 15:58*).

"Keep yourselves in the love of God" (*Jude 1:21*).

"But that which ye have already hold fast till I come" (*Re 2:25*).

5th. *To grow in grace and knowledge.*

"But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (*2Pe 3:18*).

"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (*2Co 7:1*). [45]

6th. *To work out their own soul's salvation.*

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (*Php 2:12*).

"Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (*2Pe 1:10*).

7th. *To stand prepared for death and judgment.*

"Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (*Mt 24:44*).

"They that were ready went in with him to the marriage" (*Mt 25:10*).

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord" (*Lu 12:35,36*).

### **III. The Duties of Church Members Towards Each Other.**

These are various and highly important. They are such as,

1st. *To love one another.*

This duty is pre-eminently important, and is enjoined upon the disciples of Christ with peculiar emphasis.

"Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves" (*1Pe 4:8*).

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (*Joh 13:34,35*).

"This is My commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (*Joh 15:12*).

"Let brotherly love continue" (*Heb 13:1*).

"See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (*1Pe 1:22*).

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (*1Jo 4:20*).

"And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1Jo 4:21). [46]

This love of Church members one to another ought to be,

1st. Sincere. 2d. Universal. 3d. Fervent. 4th. Constant

Cultivate, therefore, this heaven-descended spirit of charity. Evermore cherish a liberal, free and expansive spirit, a Christian spirit or temper of mind, "that shall disdain the fetters of bigotry, rise superior to party zeal, stand above the ground of party prejudice and exclaim 'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen'" [Eph 6:24].

2d. *To live in peace and unity.*

This duty will be very easy so long as church members live up to the former, and no longer. For when *love* decays the bond of peace and union soon breaks asunder. And whenever this occurs evil speaking, censoriousness, envying and strife will immediately ensue as an almost unavoidable consequence. Hence, Christians should be mindful to "love the brotherhood" [1Pe 2:17], and then they will find no difficulty in keeping "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" [Eph 4:3]. There is nothing more delightful than the communion of saints, where this harmonious spirit predominates.

"Behold," says David, "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" [Ps 133:1]. How highly important also is this duty. "United we stand; divided we fall."

"Have peace one with another" (Mr 9:50).

"Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1Co 1:10).

"Be of one mind, live in peace" (2Co 13:11).

"Be at peace among yourselves" (1Th 5:13).

Thus we see the strong obligation that lies on all Christians to preserve the peace and unity of the church.

3d. *To pray for one another.*

"Pray for one another" (Jas 6:16).

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph 6:18). [47]

4th. *To comfort and edify one another.*

"Let all things be done unto edifying" (1Co 14:26).

"Comfort one another" (1Th 4:18).

"Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another" (1Th 5:11).

5th. *To exhort one another.*

"Exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (*Heb 3:13*).

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (*Heb 10:24*).

"Exhorting one another" (*Heb 10:25*).

6th. *To admonish, rebuke, and reprove one another.*

"I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are able also to admonish one another" (*Ro 15:14*).

"Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him" (*Le 19:17*).

"If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him" (*Lu 17:3*).

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (*1Ti 5:20*).

"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (*Eph 5:11*).

"He that regardeth reproof shall be honored" (*Pr 13:18*).

"He that hateth reproof shall die" (*Pr 15:10*).

7th. *To watch over and care for one another.*

"The members should have the same care one for another" (*1Co 12:25*).

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (*Php 2:4*).

"Looking diligently [*act the part of an overseer, as the word imports*], let any man fail of the grace of God" (*Heb 12:15*).

8th. *To bear with and forgive one another.*

"We, then, that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (*Ro 15:1*).

"Forbearing one another in love" (*Eph 4:2*). [48]

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (*Ga 6:2*).

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of the people" (*Le 19:18*).

"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (*Eph 4:32*).

"But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (*Mt 6:15*).

"So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (*Mt 18:35*).

9th. *To assist and communicate to one another in temporal affairs.*

"Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality" (*Ro 12:13*).

"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (*1Ti 6:17,18*).

"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (*Heb 13:16*).

"By love serve one another" (*Ga 5:13*).

10th. *To worship God regularly and orderly with one another.*

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (*Ps 96:9*).

"The true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (*Joh 4:23*).

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (*Heb 10:25*).

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (*Ac 1:14*).

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (*Ac 5:42*).

#### **IV. Duties of the Members of a Church Towards Her Officers.**

These several duties are,

1st. *To love them.*

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among [49] you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (*1Th 5:12,13*).

"Show a proof of your love" (*2Co 8:24*).

2d. *To honor them.*

"Render honor to whom honor is due" (*Ro 13:7*).

"Hold such in reputation" (*Php 2:29*).

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor; especially they who labor in the word and doctrine" (*1Ti 5:17*).

3d. *To pray for them.*

"Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (*Ro 15:30*).

"Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the mystery of Christ" (*Col 4:3*).

"Brethren, pray for us" (*1Th 5:25*).

"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you" (2Th 3:1).

4th. *To obey them.* That is, to receive their instruction and be subject to their authority.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Heb 13:17).

"Submit yourselves unto such [as have addicted themselves to the ministry], and to everyone that helpeth with us, and laboreth" (1Co 16:16).

"And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2Th 3:14).

"For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things" (2Co 2:9).

5th. *To maintain or support them.* [50]

That is, to make a suitable provision for their subsistence. This duty they owe, however, only to those officers who give themselves wholly to the service of the church, and have no other adequate maintenance to expect. All such are fully authorized to look to the church for a reasonable support for themselves and families. And those Christians who refuse to contribute according to their abilities towards the maintenance of such servants of the church plainly resist an ordinance of God. The correctness of these remarks the following passages clearly evince:

"The laborer is worthy of his hire" (Lu 10:7).

"Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things" (Ga 6:6).

"If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1Co 9:11,13,14).

#### **V. Duties Towards Them Which Are Without.**

By "them that are without" are meant the unconverted. For though many of them profess to belong to the Churches; and though in some places they are readily received to the communion of them, yet they must be regarded as belonging to the world, like all other carnal and unregenerate persons. However, the true members of the church owe to such as are without many and highly important duties. Such as,

1st. *To pray for them.*

"Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Mt 5:44).

"I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men" (1Ti 2:1).

2d. *To give them a good example.*

"Ye are the light of the world" (*Mt 5:14*). [51]

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (*Mt 5:16*).

"Walk honestly towards them that are without" (*1Th 4:12*).

"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (*1Pe 2:12*).

"Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (*Php 2:15*).

3d. *To reprove them for their sins.*

"To them that rebuke [the wicked] shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them" (*Pr 24:25*).

"Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and suffer not sin upon him" (*Le 19:17*).

"The words of the wise are as goads and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies" (*Ec 12:11*).

"Warn them that are unruly" (*1Th 5:14*).

"Them that sin rebuke before all" (*1Ti 5:20*).

"Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (*Eph 5:11*).

4th. *To love them and labor for their conversion.*

This duty, like many others, is solemnly enjoined on all Christians both by precept and example.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies" (*Mt 5:44*).

"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (*Lu 6:31*).

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men" (*Ga 6:10*).

"He that winneth souls is wise" (*Pr 11:30*).

The example of Christ and His apostles also clearly points out and enforces the duty of laboring for the conversion of sinners.

5th. *To submit to their civil government.* [52]

The duties of subjection and obedience to magistrates and civil government are frequently enjoined on Christians in the sacred writings. Thus, for instance, it is said,

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (*Mt 22:21*).

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (*Ro 13:1*).

"Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates" (*Tit 3:1*; see also *De 17:11,12 Mt 23:2,3 IPe 2:13,14*).

The duty of subjection to them that are without, when clothed with magisterial authority, can, however, only remain a duty so long as they rule in the fear of God, or according to His laws. For whenever they abuse their power by commanding things contrary to God's law, disobedience rather than obedience becomes a duty. Instances of this may be seen,

In Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (*Da 3:15-18*).

In the Prophet Daniel (*Da 6:7-10*).

In the Apostles (*Ac 4:18-20 5:27-29*).

Thus I have briefly sketched out and exhibited some of the cardinal duties incumbent upon the members of the church of God. Many more might have been noticed, and these enlarged upon, had not the brevity of the view we are taking of this general subject disallowed it. I here, therefore, dismiss this subject with an expression of my heart's desire that my readers generally, and my brethren particularly, may become *doers* of these things. For it is said, Whoso knoweth his master's will and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes. But on the contrary it is written, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord" (*Ps 107:43*). And if these several duties were faithfully observed and constantly transcribed in the daily work and conversation of all who make a profession of religion, what a vastly different complexion of the religious world would exhibit. And oh, what a delightful and glorious revolution [53] might soon be anticipated in its moral condition! Our world would then again favor an *Eden*. Grace would be made to abound and righteousness prevail. "The mountains [would skip] like rams, and the little hills like lambs" [*Ps 114:4*]. "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee" (*Ps 22:27*).

Let, then, the followers of Jesus be careful to observe *all things* whatsoever their Lord and Master hath commanded them. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (*Jas 2:10*). [54]

## CHAPTER V. THE OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH.

---

Having investigated the character and duties of the ordinary members of the church, I shall now proceed to consider,

- I. **The different orders, classes, or kinds of church officers which Christ has instituted.** And
- II. **Their character, their vocation, and their official duties, respectively.** [Chapters [VI](#) and [VII](#).]

Church officers are persons chosen or appointed to superintend church affairs. That certain officers are actually appointed by Christ in His church needs no proof, since the sacred Scripture abounds with incontestable evidence of the fact. Assuming this, therefore, as an acknowledged truth, I proceed to consider, as was proposed,

### I. **The different orders, classes or kinds of officers divinely constituted in the church of God.**

There are two kinds, and in my own opinion only two kinds of orders, of permanent officers established by divine authority in the Christian church. These distinct orders of officers are usually and appropriately called

*Elders and Deacons.*

The word *elder* literally signifies a senior, or the one most advanced in age, wisdom, and experience. But in the customary language of the Jews the word *elder* denoted a ruler and counselor. Hence, it is indifferently applied by them both to civil and ecclesiastical officers, or to officers both in church and state. This word transferred by the Apostles to those officers who held the first rank or place in the New Testament church. And accordingly the word *elder* is generally used by the New Testament writers to [55] denote a person whose office it is to *teach, oversee, and rule the flock* or church of God.

This order or class of officers is spoken of in the Scriptures under various other names, as *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, bishops, ambassadors, ministers, stewards, angels, &c.*

But why is one kind of officers designated by some many different titles? Because of the various duties and offices assigned them. These titles are merely descriptive of their different employments.

*Pastor*, for example, signifies one who takes care of and feeds a flock of sheep. This is the duty of the elder with respect to the flock or church of God; hence they are styled pastors or shepherds.

*Bishop* denotes an *overseer*; hence, elders are called bishops or overseers. For similar reasons they are called by many other names, as was observed.

There are some, however, of opinion that bishops are not the same persons with elders, but constitute a distinct and superior order of standing in the church of Christ. But this opinion, I think, is wholly indefensible from the Scriptures. For the Scriptures, so far from proving that bishop and elder denote different officers, do explicitly teach us that they are the same officer. Accordingly we find,

1st. *That Scripture confounds bishops and elders together.*

2d. *That wherever the different classes of church officers are spoken of there are never more than two mentioned together.*

That there is no essential difference between the office of bishop and elder, but that they both belong to the same order, I allege from the facts following:

1st. *The Scripture confounds them together.*

When the Apostle Paul had called together in Miletus the *elders* of the church at Ephesus, he addressed them as overseers (*episkopos*), *bishops*.

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus. and called the elders of the church" (*Ac 20:17*). [56]

A part of the direction which he gave to these elders is recited thus:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (*Ac 20:28*).

On these two verses thus connected I remark:

*First.* That at Ephesus there were several elders of the church.

*Second.* That these elders were bishops, or overseers, as the original signifies. Consequently these passages show that elders and bishops mean the same persons.

Again, when the Apostle says he left Titus in Crete to ordain elders in every city, he proceeds to give the qualifications of an elder under the name of a bishop. "A bishop must be blameless," &c. [*Tit 1:7*], plainly suggesting that an elder and a bishop are the same officer. His words are:

"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee" (*Tit 1:5*).

"If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot, or unruly" (*Tit 1:6*).

"For a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God" (*Tit 1:7*).

The reason here given by *St. Paul* why *Titus* should *ordain or constitute elders in every city, who should be blameless, is that a bishop, or a man who has the oversight of others, must himself be blameless* as an example to those he oversees.

If a bishop was the same person with an elder, the application of pertinence of this reason will be obvious. But if they were different person, it seems difficult to conjecture why it should have been assigned. The word *elder* appears to me to be *the proper and peculiar title of that officer*, and the *bishop* to be *merely descriptive of one, and that a subordinate one, of his employments, viz.: overseeing the affairs of the church, preaching being evidently the supreme employment of a Christian minister.* [57]

The same truth is no less forcibly and decisively attested by the fact,

2d. *That wherever the standing officers of the church are spoken of in the Scriptures no more than two orders are ever mentioned.*

In the address of the Epistle to the Philippians, in the first chapter, first verse, St. Paul says:

"Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" (*Php 1:1*).

Concerning this passage I observe:

*First.* That there are but two orders of ecclesiastical officers mentioned in it, namely, *bishops and deacons*.

*Second.* That *elders* and *bishops* being the same, and belonging to one order of officers, there is no mention of *elders*. On any other supposition the omission of them is inexplicable.

*Third.* "Had it been addressed to *bishops, elders, and deacons*, it would have been thought by an advocate for prelatical episcopacy absolutely decisive in favor of *three orders* of ecclesiastical officers. As it now stands, and as it is uncontradicted by any other passage of Scripture, I think it equally decisive that there are but *two*." The same may be said of other churches. For there is no reason to conclude that the Philippian church was, in this respect, differently constituted from other churches.

Correspondent with this address to the Philippian church, and pointing to the same thing, is the instruction given by St. Paul to his son Timothy.

The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy at large in the qualifications of ecclesiastical officers, and discusses this subject in form, and more extensively than we find done in any other part of the Scripture. But even there we find no other officers mentioned beside *bishop* (or *overseer*) and *deacon*.

The omission of *elder* can only be accounted for as before, viz.: because *bishop* and *elder* are the same person. In the church at [58] Jerusalem, which was the only Christian church in the world for about twelve years after the ascension of Jesus Christ, we read of no *bishop*, but of *elders* and *deacons* (see the fifteenth and sixth chapters of Acts).

Thus, I think, it may be fairly concluded that Scriptures have established but two orders, or classes, of officers in the Christian church, viz.: *elders* and *deacons*.

And in the review of the whole of what has been said on this subject, it may be fairly concluded that elders and bishops are the same persons, and consequently belong to the same order of church officers, destined to exactly the same purposes, and invested with exactly the same powers.

Some have thought that in the primitive churches there were *extraordinary officers*, such as *Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists*; and that they have no successors in their respective offices. This may be so in some respects; yet I think it is more in accordance with truth to say that there were certain persons in the primitive church who were endowed with extraordinary gifts and authority, such as *Apostles, Prophets, &c.* For, in my opinion, these officers were not of different or superior orders, but distinguished from other elders of the church by extraordinary gifts and employments. They, no doubt, all belonged to the eldership of the church. In other terms, they belonged to the order, or rank, of officers who were usually and appropriately called the *elders*. All other names, as I have already said, were only descriptive of some, or any one employment of the office of an elder. The Scriptures very generally give to one person, or officer, different names and titles, as for instance,

Jesus Christ is call "Apostle" (*Heb 3:1*), "Bishop" (*1Pe 2:25*), "Counselor" (*Isa 9:6*), "Governor" (*Mt 2:6*), "Prophet" (*Lu 24:19*), "Ruler" (*Mic 5:2*), "Shepherd" (*Joh 10:11-14*). Besides these, He has, perhaps, more than one hundred other different titles.

Christians are called *believers, brethren, disciples, the righteous, saints, &c.* [59]

Thus, also, we find many other persons designated by various titles. In like manner, Christians and elders have various appellations and titles given them. *Apostle* properly signifies a messenger sent upon any special errand. It is sometimes, and very generally, applied to those persons who were immediately called, and sent by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel (*Mt 10:2 Ga 1:1*). At other times, it is given to the ordinary traveling elders of the church (*Ro 16:7 Php 2:25*), though in our translation the last is rendered *messenger*. Peter and John are likewise called elders (*1Pe 5:1 3Jo 1:1*). Seeing, then, that these characters are promiscuously used in sundry passages, we may infer that they are not used to signify different kinds of officers, but merely to designate different persons belonging to that order of church officers called *elders*.

The word *prophet* comes from the Greek *prophetes*, which signifies one that foretells future events. But this term is also applied by St. Paul to those who preach, or spake to the church in public (*1Co 14:29*). These prophets, or preachers, doubtless, were the elders of the church.

*Evangelist* denotes one who publishes glad tidings, or a preacher of good news. Such were Philip, Timothy, Titus, Mark, Silas, &c. Such were all the teaching elders of the church. And such they are, or ought to be, now.

Judging, then, from the import or meaning of these terms, it would seem no more likely that these names were the appropriate titles of extraordinary and distinct kinds of church officers, than that the terms *steward*, *bishop*, *minister*, &c., are.

The passage where the Apostle says that Christ, when He ascended to heaven, "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" [*Eph 4:11*], is no conclusive evidence that they were to constitute so many distinct orders of men, but only that He intended different employments for them. This is evident from the fact that these different appellations are often confounded [60] together, and indifferently applied to persons of that one class of permanent ecclesiastical officers which is commonly designated by the word *elders*.

When an elder is employed as a missionary, and sent out to preach the gospel and plant churches, he may properly be called an *apostle*, or an *evangelist*. When he is engaged in feeding and governing churches, he may be styled a *pastor*, a *prophet*, a *bishop*, a *minister*, &c. The reason, therefore, why so many different names are given to one order or kind of officers is because they have so many different duties to perform.

If, then, my view of this subject be correct, there are, according to the doctrine of the New Testament, but two kinds of officers appointed in the church of God, viz.: *elders* and *deacons*. And agreeably to this view there is a striking correspondence between the orders of officers in the Jewish and the Christian church. In the former there existed a *high priest*, *ordinary priests*, and *Levites*. In the latter Jesus Christ is the *Great High Priest* of our profession; *elders* corresponded to the ordinary priests, and the *deacons* to the Levites.

This order of things was foretold by the prophet Isaiah, when he spoke of the days of the Messiah, or the Christian Economy. "And I will also take of them for *priests* and for *Levites*, saith *Jehovah*" (*Isa 66:21*). [61]

## **CHAPTER VI. THE OFFICE OF ELDER.**

---

In the preceding chapter I examined into the different orders of church offices.

The result of the examination was, that according to the New Testament there are but two distinct orders or kinds of officers which are of divine appointment, namely, *elders* and *deacons*.

In this chapter I intend to consider the three following particulars respecting the first order of officers, viz.:

### I.

**The character,**

II. **The vocation,** and

III. **The duties of elders.**

### **I. The Character of Church Elders.**

The general character and qualifications of this class of officers are described in the following passages of sacred Writ:

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods" (*Mt 24:45-47*).

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must [62] have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (*1Ti 3:1-7*).

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

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (*2Pe 5:1-4*).

From what is said in these and in other parallel texts of Scripture concerning the character and qualifications of an elder of the church, we may justly observe that he ought to be a man who has *grace, gifts, a disposition to use them, and a blameless or holy life.*

These four particulars form the principal ingredients, or prominent features, in the character of a faithful *elder* or ruler of the house of God.

1. He must have *grace*. That is to say, he must be no more carnal, but reconciled to God, and truly pious. In other words, he must be a soundly converted man, a man radically changed in heart, and *a partaker of the grace of God in truth*.

Without this experimental religion he ought not so much as to belong to, far less be a teacher and ruler in, the church of God. Without heartfelt religion, man is blind; and if, says Jesus, "the [63] blind lead the blind," both the blind leaders and the blind followers "shall fall into the ditch" [*Mt 15:14 Lu 6:39*]. In full accordance with this awfully solemn truth a learned and pious author has justly remarked: "He who has never passed through the travail of the soul in the work of regeneration in his own heart can never make plain the way of salvation to others." Such a one may learn to *fleece*, but to *feed* the flock of God he never can. It is indispensably necessary, therefore, that an elder be "holy" (*Tit 1:9*). Holy in heart and life, destitute of which he is neither fit to minister in holy things in the kingdom of grace, nor yet to triumph in the praises, or enjoy the sacred sweets, of the kingdom of glory.

The gospel treasure, though lodged in "earthen vessels" [*2Co 4:7*] is never put into unsanctified ones. And the dispensation of it ought to be left exclusively to those who, of God, are counted worthy to be entrusted therewith. These qualifications are pre-eminently important in forming the sacred character of an ecclesiastical *elder*, otherwise called *bishop, steward, &c.*

2. An elder must have *gifts*, or proper abilities. Accordingly we find in the Scriptures above quoted, where the various characteristics and the different qualifications of this officer are enumerated, that it is requisite for him to be

*Sober*. This word, it is commonly believed, refers to the natural qualities of the mind, and according to the import of the original it denotes a man of *a sound mind* or of *a good understanding*.

*Wise*. To be wise is to be prudent, skillful, discreet, knowing, intelligent. It also implies two things, namely:

*First*. A mental capacity, which enables a man to know what is fit and best to be done, according to time and circumstances. A wise man is he who is endowed with the power of proposing the best ends, and of choosing the fittest means to accomplish the same.

*Second*. A well-improved or cultivated mind. A preacher of the gospel ought to have his mind well-informed and stored with suitable materials for the all momentous *work of the ministry*. [64] Hence, the Apostle Paul exhorted his spiritual son Timothy to "give attendance to reading" [*1Ti 4:13*] and to "study to show [himself] approved" [*2Ti 2:15*], though he had known the Holy Scriptures "from a child" [*2Ti 3:15*]. "The Christian minister," says an able commentator, "should *cultivate his mind* in the most diligent manner, for he can neither learn nor know too much."

*Apt to teach*. *To teach* supposeth not only that he is himself well-taught, but also that he is capable of teaching, that he possesses a faculty for communicating his knowledge to others. And to be *apt* to teach denotes that he should be ready and willing to do so on every suitable occasion. "Not only in the pulpit and on the Sabbath; but at the fireside, by the way, in the social circle, and from house to house, Jesus and his salvation should be all his theme."

3. An elder must have a *disposition of mind to use* both his *grace* and his *gifts* in the great work of the gospel ministry. Accordingly we read:

"Feed the flock of God; not by *constraint*, but *willingly*" and "*of a ready mind*" (1Pe 5:2).

"If a man *desire* the office of a bishop" (1Ti 3:1).

From these expressions of the Apostles, we see plainly that to sustain the high and dignified office of the Christian ministry there ought to be a *desire*, or a *willingness of mind*, for it. In other words, a divine call to the work; without this, it is far more than probable that in nine cases out of ten it would prove a heavy, painful, and irksome office, and consequently no reasonable expectations could be entertained of such a person's usefulness. Instead of his being a "wise and faithful servant" [Mt 24:45], it is much more likely that he would turn out a "wicked and slothful" one [Mt 25:26]. The practice of some societies to appoint persons by lot, or otherwise, who have no desire for the office, fully justifies these remarks.

4. An elder, or bishop, must have a *blameless and holy life*. Agreeably to this, the Apostles say, [65]

*He must be blameless*, irreproachable in his general deportment, a man of good report, against whom there can be no evil proved. Happy, yea, thrice happy is that minister, who, like Paul, can appeal both to his hearers and his God, saying, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe" (1Th 2:10).

*He must be the husband of one wife*. This does not mean that he must be a married man, but that he should have only one wife at a time.

*He must have his children in subjection*. Train up his children in the way they should go [Pr 22:6] and manage all his domestic affairs "decently and in order" [1Co 14:40]. He that is not capable of this ought by no means to be put in trust with the management of church affairs.

*He must be of good behavior*. Conduct himself with propriety, exemplify the reality and excellency of religion in his daily walk, and thus let his life coincide with, and corroborate, his preaching in the pulpit.

*He must be a lover of, and given to, hospitality*. Ready to entertain strangers, and relieve the necessitous.

*A lover of good men*. Of the truly pious and virtuous of whatever color, rank, name, age, or nation they may be. Accordingly, the Apostle says: "Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons" [Jas 2:1].

*Just and righteous* in his person and nature, through faith in Jesus Christ, and also in his life, by giving to every one his due.

*Temperate* in his food, drink, sleep, clothing, business, &c.

*Patient* in afflictions, persecutions, and in all things.

*Vigilant*. Zealous and industrious in his employment.

*Not self-willed*. He must not be headstrong, obstinate, and stubborn, or determined to have his own way in every thing.

*Not soon angry*. He must not let his temper rise and become cross, passionate, and irritable on every trivial opposition, but keep a due command over his temper. [66]

*Not given to wine.* He must not drink to excess, nor unnecessarily. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging" [Pr 20:1].

*No striker.* Give no unkind blows, not with the tongue, nor with the fist.

*Not greedy of filthy lucre.* He must not be anxious of sordid or base gain, or the gain of unlawful employments.

*Not a brawler.* No litigious or contentious person.

*Not covetous.* Not stingy, or avaricious; not one that loves money.

*Not a novice.* That is, a freshman, or one newly converted, who is not acquainted with the rudiments or first principles of Christianity. The reason assigned by the Apostle why such a new and inexperienced convert should not be a bishop, or overseer, in the church of God, is a very reasonable and benevolent one. It is this: for fear this untimely elevation in the church should puff him up with pride, and this crime become the occasion of a woeful "fall into the condemnation of the devil" [1Ti 3:6].

It is necessary, therefore, that a bishop, or elder, should be well-acquainted with the "faithful word," the true gospel system, whereby "he may be able both to exhort," or instruct, "and to convince the gainsayers," those who contradict it [Tit 1:9].

*Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without.* He should be a man of such correct principles, and of such a devout and godly life, that even sinners would be constrained to say, We find no fault with him. And if a minister of the gospel sustains such a distinguished character as will involve the various qualifications here recounted, if his life be a visible comment on the doctrines he preaches, and the people's eyes be taught by the holiness of his life, as well as their ears by the soundness of his doctrine, he will be accepted of God and approved by men. But if he lack *these things* he will be in danger of "falling into reproach," and in consequence of that be taken in "the snare of the devil" [1Ti 3:7]. [67]

From a survey of these different items in the character of an elder it is abundantly obvious that he should be, as was stated before, a man of *gifts, grace, a willing mind, and a holy life.*

## II. The Vocation of Elders.

Their vocation, or call, is twofold, to wit: internal and external.

1. It is internal, or inward, which lies in a divine move and inclination of the mind to dedicate themselves to, and make use of their gifts and grace in, the service of the church.

2. It is external, or outward, the essence of which lies in the election and choice of the church. The right of vocation belongs to the church, and not to the civil authorities, nor yet to the bishop, neither to the Pope. "As every civil society has a right to choose, appoint and ordain their officers, so also have churches, which are religious societies, a right to choose and ordain their own officers." The election and call of them, with their acceptance, is ordination. Election and ordination are spoken of as the same, To ordain, to choose, to elect, &c., are indifferently used for each other, as the following passages prove:

"And he ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach" (Mr 3:14).

"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (*Joh 15:16*).

"And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen" (*Ac 1:24*).

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (*Ac 14:23*).

The manner of electing or choosing them should be by a vote of the church, either by all, or the male members exclusively.

The best method of voting is, perhaps, by ballot.

The number of persons to be chosen is discretionary or optional with every particular church.

Their number should be in proportion to the size and exigencies of each individual church. [68]

When the choice is made and accepted, there ought to be a public declaration and recognition of it, accompanied with earnest prayer and fasting, and either with or without the laying on of the hands of the *presbytery*, or elders of the church.

Their time in office should be determined by the will of the church. Some contend that they are all life officers, that is to say, that every church officer receives his appointment for life, and ought, therefore, never to be removed but for misdemeanor in office, or some crime requiring excision or expulsion from the church. But as Scripture gives no specified rule in this matter, it is unquestionably right for a majority of the members of each particular church to determine whether its officers are to be temporary or perpetual.

When any church-member thinks himself called to God to take upon him the sacred office of the ministry and to preach the gospel of the grace of God, he should be permitted to exercise his gifts before the church for a time; and provided they are found to be such as the nature of the holy office requires; and provided, also his general character answers the same, the individual church of which he is a member should proceed to ordain him an *elder of the church of God*. This should be done by the eldership of the church, but never without the consent and the direction of a majority of its members. When the ordination is regularly performed, the *presbytery* or *eldership* of the church ought to give to the person ordained a written certificate of his ordination, signed by them on behalf of the church. The form thereof may be after the following manner, to wit:

We, the *elders* of the church at \_\_\_\_\_ do hereby certify that our beloved brother, A. B., has been regularly ordained and constituted a *teaching elder* of the church of God; and accordingly, that he is fully licensed and authorized to preach the gospel within the bounds [69] of this church, and wherever else God, in His providence, may call him.

### III. The Official Duties of Elders.

Among the various official duties of this class of officers we shall take notice only of the principal duties they owe to the church to which they belong and in which they are appointed to officiate. It is their duty,

*First.* To pray for the church committed to their care.

This may be concluded from the nature and extent of the duty of prayer in general.

It might also be argued from reason.

But a few instances from Scriptures may suffice to set this subject in the clearest light.

"We cease not to pray for you" (*Col 1:9*).

"Laboring fervently for you in prayers" (*Col 4:12*).

"We pray always for you" (*2Th 1:11*).

These and many other passages show us how elders and ministers in primitive times labored and abounded in prayer to God for their people. And herein they gave us an example, that we should be followers of them, as they were of Christ.

*Second.* It is the duty of elders to give a Christian example to the church.

Accordingly we read,

"Being examples to the flock" (*1Pe 5:3*).

"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example" (*Php 3:17*).

"Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (*1Ti 4:12*).

"In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works" (*Tit 2:7*).

Thus we see that they are bound to give a good example to the church. And by so doing, they will enforce all the doctrines and duties of religion upon the people in the most powerful manner, for example teaches better than precept. But an elder whose life contradicts his preaching is one of the worst men in the world; and if [70] there be one place hotter than another in the burning lake, that will be his portion.

*Third.* It is the duty of *elders* to *rule* the church. Concerning this duty we have the following passages:

"One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (*1Ti 3:4*).

"For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God" (*1Ti 3:5*)?

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine" (*1Ti 5:17*).

"He that ruleth, with diligence" (*Ro 12:8*).

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God" (*Heb 13:7*).

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves" (*Heb 13:17*).

"Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints" (*Heb 13:24*).

From the Scripture quoted, two things may be fairly inferred.

1st. That the right and power of ruling the church is, by divine appointment, lodged in the hands of the elders of the church.

2d. That in the complete form of a gospel church, that is, a church formed upon the plan laid down in the gospel, there are both *teaching and ruling elders*.

They are of the same order, but of different employments. The one is called both to teach and rule, the other to rule only. *A teaching, or preaching elder* should have a divine and ecclesiastical call, whereas a *ruling elder* may be appointed to office by the latter only.

Being co-ordinate officers, they may and should cooperate in all their official duties, except that of preaching the gospel, which duty properly belongs to, and is the distinguishing prerogative of, the preaching part of these officers to dispense. [71]

But as the elders collectively constitute the *presbytery* of the church, they should in that capacity co-act,

a. *In appointing all the church meetings.*

b. *In presiding over and leading church meetings, whether for divine worship or otherwise.*

c. *In examining and recommending applicants for membership.* And

d. *In taking care of, directing, and executing the moral discipline of the church.*

In these and such like duties they should always act together, because they belong to *elders* in general. But,

*Fourth.* To the teaching elders belongs the duty of preaching the gospel exclusively.

It is their duty to preach. Now observe.

1st. *What they are to preach.* They are directed to preach the gospel. By the gospel is meant a revelation of the boundless love and mercy of God towards the human race, through Christ the mediator. It literally signifies *good news*, but it is frequently put for the Christian system. To preach the gospel, therefore, includes all the subjects of preaching: every thing respecting doctrine, experience, and practice, or the several duties of religion.

There was something similar to it from the beginning, during the Old Testament dispensation.

a. In the patriarchal state.

The gospel was first preached by the Son of God to Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden (*Ge 3:15*).

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, or preached. of the second coming of Christ (*Jude 1:14*).

Noah was the eighth preacher of righteousness, for so the words in *2Pe 2:5* may be rendered.

As Abraham had the gospel preached to him, so he preached it to others as he had opportunity (*Ge 16:14*).

In the times of Job (who seems to have lived before the giving [72] of the law) the sons of God, professors of religion, met together on a certain stated day to present themselves, soul and body, to the Lord in the performance of religious duties (*Job 6:10*).

b. Under the Mosaic dispensation.

Hence we read of the tabernacle of the congregation, of *teaching priests* and that *the priest's* lips should keep knowledge and publish it (*2Ch 15:3 Mal 2:7*).

In the times of Ezra and Nehemiah they "read the book in the law of God" in the hearing of all the people, "and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (*Ne 8:8*).

During this time the prophets also taught the Word of the Lord. The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others were delivered as the Word of the Lord and published separately and singly as sermons or discourses to the people. And of Ezekiel it is particularly said that the people came in a body and sat before him and heard him (*Eze 33:31*).

c. After the Babylonish captivity.

Some time after the Jews' return from Babylon to their own land synagogues were erected and synagogue worship was set up. A part of worship lay in public reading and preaching the law in them every Sabbath day. This was their practice in the times of Christ and His Apostles, as appears from *Ac 15:21*. In these synagogues our Lord Himself taught, and the Apostles also.

Thus we see that preaching was an ordinance under the Old Testament dispensation.

But the preaching of the gospel is more expressly made an ordinance of the New Testament.

The Apostles of our Lord were called, qualified, and sent forth by Him to be public ministers of the Word, to "teach all nations" [*Mt 28:19*] and to "preach the gospel to every creature" [*Mr 16:15*]. Since then he has raised up and sent out others to proclaim the gospel's joyful sound. And thus he will continue to do until the end of time shall come. Among all the official duties incumbent on church elders preaching [73] is doubtless the most laborious and important. This, therefore, merits the preacher's utmost care, study, prayer, and attention.

The truth of this will appear more manifest when we consider,

2d. *The end or design of preaching*. This is twofold, namely:

*First*. The conversion of sinner. And

*Second*. The perfecting of the saints.

The first chief end of preaching the gospel is *the conversion of the unconverted*. God having laid the executed the gracious plan of human recovery, through the mediation of His Son, dispatched His heralds abroad to inform the world of this all-merciful provision and to beseech men, in Christ's stead, to become "reconciled to God" [*2Co 5:20*] by the exercise of "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" [*Ac 20:21*]. This economy of grace contemplates the salvation of sinners as its chief end. And this glorious end the preaching of the gospel is the principal instrument of accomplishing. Agreeably to this, we read,

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (*Mr 16:15*).

"He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (*Mr 16:16*).

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (*Ro 1:16*).

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (*Ro 10:17*).

"Of his own will He begat us with the word of truth" (*Jas 1:18*).

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (*1Pe 1:23*).

These and other passages of the New Testament express and confirm the aforementioned doctrine in the most decisive manner.

The second end contemplated by the preaching of the gospel is *the perfecting of the saints*. Wherefore it is written,

"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (*1Pe 2:2*). [74]

"For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (*1Co 14:31*).

"Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (*Joh 21:17*).

"The elders which are among you I exhort: Feed the flock of God" (*1Pe 5:1-2*; see also *Ac 20:28 Eph 4:11-12 1Th 3:2 Col 1:28, &c.*).

Thus we see that the main end of preaching the gospel is to save sinners and to edify saints. But in order to effect this great and benevolent object it is highly important to pursue a proper method of preaching. Observe, therefore,

### 3d. *The manner of preaching.*

Of this subject men have formed and expressed various views, and their manner is as different as their views. But let it be borne in mind that there is but one way of doing things right; and except it be done right, it were better left undone. Why are some preachers so much more successful in their preaching than others? Because God blesses them much more than he does others. Very well. But why does he choose to bless them more than what he does others? It is because he is partial, or because he is a respecter of persons? Nay, surely not. Why then? One grand reason undoubtedly is because some take the right way of preaching the gospel, whilst others content themselves to take the wrong. Therefore, whatever other reasons may be assigned to solve this matter, it nevertheless behooves every one to see well to it that his manner of preaching be in perfect harmony with the word of God. Now, the best and most effectual method of preaching, according to what we may gather from God's word on this subject, is, in my opinion, fairly delineated in the following platform. The gospel ought to be preached,

#### 1st. *Plainly.*

So that all may easily understand what is said. To preach signifies to discourse publicly on religious subjects. To communicate knowledge is one of its objects. But the preacher who is not [75] understood communicates nothing. Therefore, he should use great *plainness of speech* (see *1Co 2:1-5 2Co 3:12*).

#### 2d. *Boldly.*

Without either fearing the frowns or courting the favor of men. Paul desired an interest in the prayers of his brethren that God would enable him to speak boldly, as he ought to speak (*Eph 6:19,20*).

### 3d. *Solemnly.*

This of great moment and should be carefully attended to by every minister. Both the author and end of the gospel are eminently solemn. Of the same nature are the subjects about which it is employed. A corresponding solemnity, therefore, should always characterize the manner of preaching them.

"He that negotiates between God and man,  
As God's ambassador, the grand concerns  
Of judgment, and of mercy, should beware  
Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful  
To court a grin, when you should woo a soul;  
To break a jest, when pity would inspire  
Pathetic exhortation; and to address  
The skittish fancy, with fictitious tales,  
When sent with God's commission to the heart."

### 4th. *Affectionately.*

The gospel is a benevolent system. It ought, therefore, to be preached with the utmost affection and tenderness. Hence, the Apostle exhorted his brethren to speak "the truth in love" [*Eph 4:14*].

### 5th. *Earnestly.*

Thus our Lord himself preached. Thus the infinite importance of a message from God requires every one to speak when delivering it. Nothing seems more inconsistent than for an ambassador of Christ to be careless, cold, and lifeless in delivering his message to a revolted race of human beings. And no one is more deficient than he who wants zeal and earnestness in a work the most [76] momentous in its nature and the most affecting and appalling in its consequences. Let ministers, then, forget not to be earnest in their preaching, nor to pray that God would make them a flaming fire.

### 6th. *Sincerely.*

Without a mixture of truth and error, not deceitfully, but with consistency and purity, and from the purest and best of motives. The gospel is a two-edged sword, and woe to those who handle it deceitfully.

### 7th. *Believingly.*

That is, with a firm and unshaken faith in the promises and cooperating power of God. Faith is the pith and soul of successful preaching, without which we cannot please God, nor hope to win one soul. A man that preaches without faith is like a gunner shooting with blank cartridges. Neither of them expects to do execution.

### 8th. *Prayerfully.*

With earnest fasting and prayer for success, both before and after preaching.

### 9th. *Submissively.*

With humility and dependence, and with a perfect willingness that God should work in his own way. This is much more important than, perhaps, many are aware of.

### 10th. *Constantly.*

With diligence and perseverance.

The gospel ministry is no *sinecure*. It is a *work*, and not only a Sunday work, but an everyday work. The Apostles were "daily in the temple, and in every house," teaching and preaching Jesus Christ [*Ac 5:42*]. Paul labored both night and day, and taught publicly, and from house to house. But, oh, how unlike this manner of preaching the gospel is the course pursued by many at the present day! How many stand all the day idle! And how many others count it pleasure to riot, to eat and drink, and to be drunken! Oh, what a melancholy thought! What a horrible thing to see Jehovah's ambassador playing the fool and acting like a son of Belial! But [77] surely such wicked men shall bear their iniquity. The Lord "will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall" [*Jer 9:15*]; He will also "cut [them] in sunder, and will appoint [them their] portion with the unbelievers" [*Lu 12:46*]. These preachers, however, who strive faithfully and conscientiously to do their duty and make full proof of their ministry, "shall in no wise lose [their] reward" which is great, in the kingdom of heaven. Then,

"Preach on, thou man of God,  
Nor once at ease sit down;  
Thy arduous work will not be done  
'Till thou hast got thy crown."

Thus I have compendiously described the manner of preaching.

The discourses of our Lord and His Apostles furnish illustrious specimens of the correctness of this sketch of the manner of preaching the gospel. And whoever will adopt this plan, and thus follow the example of his Lord and Master, shall doubtless realize the pleasure of seeing the work of the Lord revive and prosper in his hands. And by becoming the honored instrument of *turning many unto righteousness, and edifying the body of Christ*, he may hope to approve himself a faithful steward to his householder and judge and be amply compensated in the day of retribution with the best and highest plaudit: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of thy lord" [*Mt 25:21,23*], But whosoever, on the contrary, neglects, or mismanages, this notable point, so as to spoil *the work of the Lord and of Christ*, shall not only suffer loss, but have "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" [*Heb 10:27*], which will suddenly join him, and that without remedy. [78]

## CHAPTER VII. THE OFFICE OF DEACON.

---

Concerning this order of ecclesiastical officers, I propose to consider,

- I. **The qualifications they ought to possess.**
- II. **The manner of their appointment to office.** And,
- III. **Their official work.**

I propose to consider

### **I. The Qualifications Requisite for the Office of Church Deacon.**

Of these we have a summary account given by the Apostle in the third chapter of the first Epistle to Timothy, in connection with the third verse of the sixth chapter of Acts.

"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (*1Ti 3:8-13*).

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (*Ac 6:3*).

Concerning the qualifications of persons for the deacon's office, as exhibited in these passages, a highly respectable writer observes: [79]

1st. "That they should be men of dignified gravity, in their speech and gesture; and not light, frothy, and vain. *The deacons must be grave.*

2d. They must be sincere. *Not double-tongued.*

3d. Temperate. *Not given to much wine.*

4th. Free from avarice. *Not greedy of filthy lucre.*

5th. Acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel. *Holding the mysteries of the faith, that is, the gospel.*

6th. Honestly attached to the doctrines of the gospel. *Holding the mysteries of the faith in, or with, a pure conscience.*

7th. Of a fair Christian reputation. *Brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report; that is, well reported of, or having an unblemished and irreproachable character."*

They ought to be men of distinguished piety, *full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.*

8th. "They ought to be proved antecedently to their introduction into office. *And let these first be proved.*

An ancient, perhaps the original, mode was this:

The name of the candidate was published in a Christian assembly, that if those who belonged to the church had anything to object to his character they might have an opportunity of declaring it to the church.

But as no mode is described by the Apostles, and as the end or object of the trial is a thorough knowledge of the candidate's character, whatever will accomplish this end in a satisfactory manner is undoubtedly sufficient. The accomplishment of the end is, however, always to be insisted on.

9th. They are required to *be the husbands of one wife*.

In an age when *polygamy* was so common this direction was important. From this, however, we are not to conclude that it is necessary for a deacon to be a married man; but if married, he should not have more than one wife at the same time. [80]

10th. They ought to be such as rule well their own families. *Ruling their children and their own houses well.*"

The eleventh verse in the text quoted from the third chapter of First Timothy prescribes the qualifications of the deacons' wives. "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things" [1Ti 3:11], or, as some think the original should be translated, "Let the women likewise be grace." This is applicable to *believing women* in general, but it may refer particularly to *the women* who belonged to the *order* called *deaconesses*.

That there existed such an *order*, or *rank*, in the primitive church the following verses of Scripture seem to favor, and render highly probable:

"I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Ro 16:1).

It is generally allowed that Phoebe, who is here expressly called *diakonon*, a deaconess, or *servant of the church*, was one of this order.

Such, it is reasonable to think, were also Euodias and Syntyche, two pious women in the church at Philippi, that had "labored with" the Apostle "in the gospel"; "and who were assistants to others also who had assisted him" (Php 4:2,3).

And such, likewise, in all probability, were Philip's four daughters (Ac 21:9).

Concerning these stated servants of the church the Apostle judged it expedient to enumerate several requisite qualifications for the office which they sustained. They are required to be

1st. *Grave*. Of a solemn and dignified behavior.

2d. *Not slanderers*. No false accusers of the brethren, and others, which is devilish.

3d. *Sober*. Prudent and watchful, so some render the word.

4th. *Faithful in all things*.

Deaconesses were servants of the church, and as such they must be faithful in serving the church in all things belonging to their [81] office; especially in dispensing the bounty of the church, in visiting the sick, in

comforting mourners, in assisting female candidates for baptism, in procuring places of entertainment for female strangers at public meetings, and in performing all those religious offices for the female part of the church which could not with propriety be performed by men, which was particularly their original business and duty.

Howbeit, as the Scripture is entirely silent in respect to the original institution of the office of deaconess, and also as to any explicit rules about it, it can only be defended on grounds of expediency, and not as a matter of divine appointment.

The office of deacon, however, now under consideration is without controversy plainly marked in Scripture as divinely instituted. And those, says the Apostle, "that have used the office of a deacon well," who have faithfully discharged their duty, "purchase to themselves a good degree" of gifts and graces, or of further advancement in a higher office, "and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" [1Ti 3:13]. This some explain as importing an ability to teach, and others as denoting the exercise of prevailing faith in prayer before God. In either sense the passage gives great encouragement to the diligent and faithful performance of the deacon's office. I now go on to consider,

## II. The Manner of Appointing Them to Their Office.

This we may learn from the history of the transaction relative to the subject recorded in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, from the first to the sixth verse inclusive.

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest [82] report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Ac 6:1-6).

This passage contains both the original institution of this order of officers and the manner of their appointment to office.

Now, as it respects the manner of appointing deacons, I observe that they ought to be chosen by a vote of the church, either by the suffrage of all the members of the church, both males and females, or by the male members only. The right of female suffrage in the election of ecclesiastical officers ought to be subject at all times to the majority of the church.

This, I think, is in perfect conformity with the manner of choosing the deacons recorded in the passage as above cited. The Apostles, we are informed, summoned "the multitude of the disciples" together, and then directed *them to choose* seven men of specified qualifications, whom they might appoint over this business [Ac 6:2,3]. "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they [the multitude of the disciples, or the church] chose Stephen, a man full of faith," &c. [Ac 6:5].

Thus, it is sufficiently evident that the original manner in which deacons were chosen was by the vote and suffrage of the whole church.

After the election was ended, and the choice determined, the Apostles publicly recognized and ratified the same by prayer and imposition of hands. This rite was generally used by the Apostles, and others in their age, to

convey the same extraordinary or miraculous gifts. But as this power has confessedly ceased with the [83] apostolic age, and by consequence no one is now capable of conveying such gifts through the use of this rite, I judge myself authorized to give it as my opinion that this is no "authoritative example of the manner in which deacons are to be introduced into every church."

"This office was instituted when the church was numerous; wherefore, the number of seven in the first church is not a rule and example binding on all future churches; but such a number are to be chosen, and may be changed, increased, or diminished as the exigency of the church requires."

The deacons' destination is only to that particular church to which they belong. Their term of office is optional with the church.

### III. Their Official Work.

*Deacon* signifies a servant, **Diener**. They may be what the Apostle calls elsewhere *helps*; in German, **Helper** (*1Co 12:28*), inasmuch as they are helpful to the elders, church, and poor.

Their work and business is,

1. Not to preach the gospel or administer the ordinances, as baptism and the Lord's Supper. Philip, indeed, one of the seven, did both preach and baptize (*Ac 6:5 8:5-40*); but then he did both by virtue of his office as an evangelist (*Ac 21:8*).

2. Not to rule in the church. We read of ruling elders, but never of ruling deacons.

3. Their principal work and business is *to serve tables* (*Ac 6:2*). As,

1st. *The Lord's table.*

It is their duty to provide the elements of bread and wine, and make all the necessary preparations whenever the Lord's Supper is to be administered.

2d. *The Minister's table.*

It belongs to them to take care that a proper provision be made for the subsistence of those who labor among them "in the ministry [84] of the word" [*Ac 6:4*], or who preach the gospel. "For," as says the Apostle, "the Lord hath ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" [*1Co 9:4*]. But in order that such may "live of the gospel," or be supported by the church or churches among whom they fulfill the work of the gospel ministry, it is necessary that some person or persons should collect the bounty of the church and communicate it to them for that purpose.

This duty properly belongs to the deacon's office.

They should also provide suitable places of lodgings or entertainment for strangers, and for brethren from a distance when traveling or attending meetings of religious worship.

3d. *The Poor's table.*

In the primitive churches there seems to have existed something like a regular system of contribution, designed solely to provide relief for their poor and suffering members.

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (*1Co 16:1,2*).

"They would that we should remember the poor; the same which I was always forward to do" [*Ga 2:10*].

From these and other texts of Scripture we plainly see that the Apostles and first Christian were full of alms-deeds. St. Paul was not only forward himself to remember the poor, but he felt anxious to have others remember and assist them also. He, therefore, gave particular direction to the church at Corinth, as he had previously done to the churches of Galatia, to take up weekly collections for the saints who were poor and necessitous. And on these occasions every one was required to contribute in proportion as "God had prospered him" [*1Co 16:2*].

This laudable and Christian duty ought with similar care to be observed by all Christian churches at the present time. In every church a charitable fund ought to be begun, and to be continually [85] supplied by weekly contributions. Out of this fund the indigent and necessitous widows, orphans, and others ought to be assisted and relieved. "Of this fund the deacons ought to be the standing almoners, as being by the authority of God designated to this office."

Thus we have considered the official work and duties incumbent on church deacons, namely:

*First.* To provide the proper elements for the celebration of the Lord's supper.

*Second.* To procure, or make up, a competent support for the elder or elders who devote themselves to the service of the church. And,

*Third.* To make proper distribution of the alms of the church to its suffering members.

Thus they are to receive, lay out, and distribute the stock of the church to its proper uses. These are the purposes for which their office was established. And whilst they are employed in directing and managing the temporal affairs of the church, it is the proper business of the elders to preside over and direct its spiritual concerns. This doctrine was exhibited and illustrated under its proper head in the last chapter. [86]

## CHAPTER VIII. CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

---

In discussing the subject of ecclesiastical government I shall endeavor to observe the ensuing method, viz.: I shall examine and point out,

I. The Reality.

II. The Form.

III. The Nature and Extent; And

IV. The Ends or Purposes of Church Government.

Having made this formal arrangement for the discussion of the subject in hand, I shall commence, as was proposed, by examining and pointing out,

### I. The Reality of Church Government.

"When any thing," says a learned and pious author, "which belongs to religion is proposed to us, our first inquiry ought to be, *whence is it? from heaven, or of men?* If it is *of men*, it is not *from heaven*; and if it be *from heaven*, it is not *of men*; and, therefore, it must be of divine institution, and by consequence obligatory on men." Now, as I design to treat of church government, I shall first inquire, whence is it? Is it *from heaven*, or *of men*?

I reply, that it is not *of men*; that is, it is not a mere product of the invention and power of men, but it is *from heaven*; that is, of a divine origin, having a divine institution. "It would be absurd to suppose that after Christ gave Himself for His church He would abandon her so far as to make any provision for her government." However, that Jesus Christ, the *great and only head* of the church, has ordained some particular form of government in her is manifest.

*First.* From the relation which He sustains to the church, such as,

*Lord and Lawgiver* (*Ac 2:47 Isa 33:22 Jas 4:12*). [87]

*King, Governor, Ruler, &c.* (*Ps 2:6 24:7-9 Isa 9:6 Mic 5:2*).

*Second.* From the laws and officers established or appointed in the church (*Mt 18:17,18 28:18-20 1Co 12:28*). As the laws and officers of the Jewish church manifest that Christ established a particular form of government therein, so likewise do the laws and officers of the Christian church show the appointment or institution of government in it.

*Third.* From the duty of submission to church officers, which is frequently and earnestly recommended and enjoined upon the church members in the sacred Scripture. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves" (*Heb 13:17*; see also *Ro 13:1*).

*Fourth.* From the account of the apostolic churches. The New Testament teaches us that the primitive churches managed and performed all their religious affairs with a *decency* and *dignity* becoming the things of God, and with due *regularity* and *order*. And, accordingly, we find the Apostles often calling upon Christians to "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (*Col 3:14*). And to have all things "done decently and in order" (*1Co 14:40*).

It appears, moreover, that almost all professing Christians have a belief that some particular form of church government was appointed by divine authority, since they have labored to support their own peculiar form of it from the Scripture. The *reality* of it, then, being established, I proceed to examine and point out,

## II. The Form of Church Government.

There are some who are of opinion that this subject is left at loose ends, that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures exhibit *no* definite or given form of ecclesiastical government. And whereas revelation is silent, or contains no particular, positive prescriptions relating to the form of government, it ought and must of right be left to reason and the common prudence of Christians in all ages and places to determine on, and adopt, such a *form* as they deem most expedient. Others, however, are of a contrary opinion; and they [88] say that not only the name and thing itself, but also the form thereof, are clearly exhibited in the Bible, and, consequently, that it is of divine appointment. But as to what the particular form of government is which Christ has instituted in His church, they hold different opinions. Christians of different denominations identify it with their own favorite form.

As political writers have enumerated and plead for different forms of civil government, viz.: *Monarchy*, which is the government of a single person; *Aristocracy*, which is the government of a select assembly, or body of men, the members of which are the chief and principal persons in that nations; *Democracy*, which is the government of the people at large, either collectively or by representation; so likewise have Christian writers enumerated and contended for different forms of ecclesiastical government. As,

The *Papal*, which is the sovereign jurisdiction exercised by the *Pope of Rome*, throughout the Roman Catholic Church.

The *Patriarchal*, or government of one or more ecclesiastical dignitaries, called *Patriarchs*. The patriarchate is supposed to be the supreme authority in the church by the Greeks throughout the East. Hence, the government of the Oriental or Greek Church is *Patriarchal*, that is, the exercise by the Patriarch of Constantinople.

The *Magisterial*, that is, a government exercised by the magistrates, or the civil government.

The different opinions which are found to be most prevalent at present on the subject of *church government* are the following three, viz.:

- 1st. The Episcopal,
- 2d. The Congregational, and
- 3d. The Presbyterial.

*First.* The *Episcopal* form or mode of church government is that which is administered by *Bishops*, or where the supreme power of the church is vested in a distinct and superior order of church officers called *Bishops*. [89]

*Second.* The *Congregational* or *Independent* form is that which is purely democratic or republican, where the right and power of ruling the church are lodged in the community of the faithful, or the membership, either collectively or by representation.

*Third.* The *Presbyterial*, or *Presbyterian form* is the government of the church by *Presbyteries*, i.e., "by associations of *teaching* and *ruling* elders, all possessing equal powers, without any superiority among them either in office or in order."

All these different forms or modes of government have been, and still are, warmly contended for among professing Christians. But though men entertain various views of this subject, it is still conclusive evidence that

God has not appointed some particular and definite form of church government, nor yet that the said form is not clearly revealed to us in the Scriptures. To admit this would be to concede the infidel claim at once that God has instituted and *revealed nothing to us in the Bible*. For what subject can be named about which fallible men do not differ in their opinions? Why, none; no, not one.

What, then, is that form of ecclesiastical government of which God is the author? In order to clear the way for a proper answer to this question, I here beg leave to say that in my opinion,

It is not *the Papal*. God has no where given to the *Pope of Rome* the supreme and sovereign power of governing the church. In the enumeration of church officers there is no one mentioned as invested with monarchical authority in the church (see *Eph 4:11 1Co 12:28*).

It is not *Patriarchal*. What I have said of the Pope of Rome may, with equal propriety, be affirmed of the Patriarch or Archbishop of Constantinople, who pretends to be the great head and governor of the Eastern or Greek Church.

It is not *Magisterial*. Christ has not bestowed ecclesiastical power into the hands of the civil magistrates. Nowhere in the [90] New Testament are they spoken of as being church officers. Church rulers are appointed to office, not by the state, but by the church, or by her divine founder and head (*Ac 20:28 1Co 12:28*). And by virtue of this their divine appointment, they may execute their office not only without the consent, but contrary to the command, of civil rulers (*Ac 4:19 5:29*). Church government, therefore, is and always ought to be independent of civil government. Thus it was during the first ages of Christianity. For the space of three hundred years, and upwards, the whole power or government of the church was administered by her own officers. Thus it should have been continued. Thus it ought to be now.

It is not *Episcopal*. Ecclesiastical government is not lodged in the hands of Bishops. We have proved before ([see Chapter V](#)) the identity of bishops and elders; consequently, there can be no Episcopal form of government where there is no such an order of officers divinely established in the gospel church. And beside, the Scriptures are not only silent in regard to the claims of Episcopacy, but they expressly forbid all *lordly* dominion in the church (*Lu 22:25,26 1Pe 5:3*).

It is not *Congregational*. Church government is not lodged by Christ in the membership, or in the community of the faithful. There are certain rulers divinely appointed in the church (*Ac 20:28 1Co 12:28*). If all were rulers, who then would remain to be ruled? God, therefore, has vested the executive power of the church in the officers of the church, and not in the brotherhood, or members collectively. Church members are represented as the *flock*, the *family*, the *body*, &c., whilst the officers are described as their *rulers*, *guides*, *overseers*, *governors*, &c. Accordingly, the former are commanded to honor, obey, and submit to the latter; and the latter are commanded to teach, oversee, and rule the former (see *Ac 20:28 1Th 5:12 1Ti 5:17 Heb 13:7-17*).

If, then, the form or mode of church government is neither Papal, nor Patriarchal, nor Magisterial, nor Episcopal, nor Congregational, what is it? [91]

It is *Presbyterian*. The right and power which God has ordained for the government of the church is lodged in the hands of the *presbytery* of each and every duly organized church. But,

By a *presbytery* is not meant a church judicatory, "constituted of different pastors and ruling elders from different congregations." As the combination of different individual churches into a particular sect or denomination is unwarranted in the Scriptures, so likewise is there no divine warrant to constitute church courts of ruling officers from different particular churches, such as classes, councils, synods, conferences, conventions, &c. The argument in favor of such courts, which some have labored to draw from the example of the Apostolic Synod, as they call it, of which we read in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, is, in my opinion, quite forced and

weak; for whoever reads the history of that meeting, as recorded in the chapter just quoted, will readily perceive that it was not a Synod, or a Church Court, made up of commissioners, or representatives from *different churches*, but of the Apostles, elders, and brethren of the *church at Jerusalem*. Whatsoever, therefore, the *church at Jerusalem*, with and by the direction of the Apostles and other inspired men, authoritatively determined as a duty for the *Gentile churches*, and that only in a dubious case, can be no sufficient authority for modern churches to spend their time and money in holding quarterly, half-yearly, and annual Church Courts of the above description.

What, then, is meant by the presbytery, or eldership, of a church? It simply signifies the elders, or presbyters, of an individual church (*1Ti 4:14*). Accordingly, the elders of each particular church constitute the proper judicatory, or court, which Christ has invested with full power and authority to administer the moral government of His church. This will appear evident if we consider,

*First.* The names and titles which are given to church elders in the Scriptures. They are called *leaders, ministers, overseers, presidents, rulers, governors, shepherds, stewards, teachers, &c.*, all which titles are expressive of power and authority; and this, [92] doubtless, they must have the right of exercising in all its parts in those churches over which they are appointed.

*Second.* The express grant, or actual commission, given to them in the Scriptures. It is written, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven," &c. (*Mt 16:19*). "'The keys of the kingdom of heaven' is a metaphorical expression, implying a grant of power to regulate and control the internal and spiritual concerns of the church." In the solemn charge which the Apostle gave to the eldership, or the elders of the church, at Ephesus, he said: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, *over* the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God" (*Ac 20:28*). In *1Co 12:28* it is said that God has set *some*, not *all*, *governments* or *governors* in the church. Again, the commission delivered by St. Peter to the elders of the churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, he says, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof," &c. [*1Pe 5:2*]. The same word in the Greek language [*poimaino*] which signifies *to feed* signifies *to rule* also (see *Mt 2:6*).

*Third.* The exhortations so frequently given to church members to obey and submit themselves to their officers, or elders (*Ro 13:1 Heb 13:7,17*). "Now, the command to obey on the one part implies, necessarily, a power on the other to rule and govern."

Thus we see that the right to exercise this authority in the church belongs, by divine appointment, to the *presbytery*, or elders of the church, and to no one else. On this account the government of the church is, or may be said to be, *Presbyterian*.

And inasmuch as every individual church has a just right, and always ought to elect her own presbyters, or elders, who when elected and ordained to office act in their official capacity as the proper representatives of the church, her form of government is likewise *Republican*, and every particular church corresponds with a little *Republic*. [93]

As, therefore, the right and power of governing the church are by divine appointment lodged in the hands of the *eldership*, what is the nature of that power with which elders are clothed? This introduces what I proposed to show,

### III. The Nature and Extent of Church Government.

The right and power communicated by Jesus Christ for the government of His church are not,

*First. Civil and Political.* There is no grant of such power bestowed upon church rulers in the Word of God. But, on the contrary, it is expressly interdicted: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion," &c. (*Mt 20:25,26*), but "neither as being lords over God's heritage" (*1Pe 5:3*). But it is,

*Second. Spiritual and Ministerial.* The government of the church is purely *moral*, or *spiritual*. This will clearly appear when we consider,

*Its source and author*, which is Christ, the "quickenings Spirit" (*1Co 15:40*; see also *Mt 16:19 18:15-20*).

*Its subjects*, which are men "born of the Spirit," and built up a spiritual house for God (*Joh 3:6 Eph 2:22*).

*Its matter or parts*, which are divine doctrine, divine ordinances, divine order and discipline (*Ro 1:16 1Co 11:23-29 Mt 18:15-20 2Co 2:6*).

Again, all church power bestowed by Christ for the government of the church is *ministerial*. It is ministerial in opposition to that which is magisterial, legislative, and lordly.

Church officers have no legislative authority bestowed upon them. They have no right to make laws, but only to announce and execute the law and order of Christ's house. God is the only who can legislate for His church. "There is one lawgiver" (*Jas 4:12*). A judge in a court, or a magistrate in a city, has no power to make any new law; his business is only to explain and apply in general the laws that are made, according to the best of his understanding. So ministers in the church are not lords, or sovereigns, in Christ's [94] kingdom. They, in their highest character, can be supposed to be set up as judges to explain His laws, and to apply them to rising occasions, and show men how to do all things decently and orderly.

When our Savior gave commission to His disciples, or His Apostles, to preach the gospel to all nations, it was in this manner: "Teaching them to observe all things" (not whatsoever you, or they, shall command, but) "whatsoever I have commanded you" (*Mt 28:20*). And what a strange medley of superstitious and ridiculous fooleries would be introduced into the church of God if the elders, or rulers, of every church, and in every age, might invent a new scheme of laws and ceremonies at their own pleasure and impose them upon their fellow Christians, The people, then, would soon be priest-ridden, even unto death. But all the *rule*, or *power of government*, which is granted to elders of a Christian church is *ministerial*. That is, a *derived power*, and it merely gives the right of administering, or executing, the *laws of God*. This will further appear when we consider wherein the rule and government seems to consist chiefly in these things, viz.:

"In going before the people, and leading the several parts of their worship, and becoming their example in every duty. In teaching them the principles and rules of their religion, the knowledge, profession, and practice of those doctrines and duties, that worship and order, which reason and natural religion dictate and which *Christ* Himself has revealed, superadded, and established in His word. It consists in exhorting, and persuading, and charging the hearers with solemnity, in the name and authority of *Christ*, to comply therewith; in instructing the people how to apply those general principles and rules to particular cases and occurrences, and giving them their best advice. It consists in presiding in their assemblies for worship, or otherwise; in examining and admitting applicants for church membership; in watching over the flock, in guarding them against errors and dangers. It consists in conducting the moral discipline of the church; in admonishing, and [95] warning, and reproving, with all gravity and authority, those who neglect or oppose any of the rules, ordinances, and commandments of *Christ*, in expelling from the church the scandalous, and in receiving again the truly penitent."

Now, if in these things, agreeably to the Word of God, the government of the church principally consists, then the nature of it is, as we have stated, not *carnal* and *civil*, but *spiritual* and *ministerial*. Consequently, it extends not to the right or power of exercising any extrinsic jurisdiction, nor to the right of legislating for the

church. It is the business of church elders to govern, rule, and preside over those churches "over which the Holy Ghost hath made [them] overseers" [Ac 20:28]. And the great system of rules, or laws, by which they are to exercise and dispense her government is not a human system of rules and regulations, but the Bible--the true Word of God--the only authorized constitution of the true church of God. "The church, being founded upon *revelation alone*, ought to be wholly regulated by the *measuring reed*, and the *line* of God's Word" (Eph 2:20 Eze 43:11,12 Heb 8:5 Re 11:1 21:15).

However, there are many who think differently, and they seem to be of the opinion that the *Bible alone* is no sufficient *rule* for the government of the church. Hence they hold church councils, synods, conferences, &c., and make ecclesiastical creeds and books of government and discipline, and impose them on the consciences of their brethren and fellows saints. And they would gladly persuade everybody, if they could, to think that the statute books of their forefathers, or their own sectarian inventions, are absolutely necessary to secure the peace and union of the church, not to say the salvation of the soul. For it is said by one of the most reputable writers of our age that no church can be secure, either of purity or peace, for a single year; nay, no church can effectually guard against the highest degree of corruption and strife without some test of truth, explicitly agreed upon and adopted by her in her ecclesiastical capacity; something capable of being referred to when most needed, which not only this or that private member supposes to [96] have been received, but to which the church *as such* has agreed to adhere as a bond of union. In other words, a church in order to maintain "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and love must have a creed, a written creed, to which she has formally given her assent, and to a conformity to which her ministrations are pledged (see Miller's *Lecture on the Utility of Creeds*). Others again, speaking the like perverse things, will tell us you have no human discipline, and you must have a discipline or you cannot prosper, you cannot stand, you cannot keep religion, &c., &c. Thus have "grievous wolves" entered in among the disciples of Jesus, "not sparing the flock" of God [Ac 20:29], but making havoc with with the authoritative doctrines and commandment of men.

Thus have "men arisen, speaking perverse things." And for what? Why, sometimes merely "to draw away disciples after them" [Ac 20:30].

It requires but little thought or reflection, however, to discover that these mistaken partisans are under the influence of a great error. And if they did but seriously consider how much their groundless assertions reflect upon the infinite wisdom of the great Head and Founder of the church, they would feel ashamed and would forever cease to play off those proselyting games on their fellow Christians. Look at the terrible consequences to which the practical principle of these men directly and inevitably leads. To say that these legalized standards are "indispensably necessary for maintaining the unity and purity of visible church, to guard her effectually against the highest degree of corruption and strife, to enable men *to keep religion*, and to ensure their eternal salvation," &c., is, in effect, to say that the Bible is imperfect and insufficient for the attainment of these unspeakably great and important ends. And moreover, that all the Christians in the Apostolic age (for there were no such human inventions then); yea, and all those in subsequent ages, previous to the existence of these human creeds and books of discipline, have lost their religion, died in their sins and sunk to hell. These are some of the melancholy conclusions to which the [97] heresy, or erroneous principle, of these men most inevitably leads. Who, then, can believe them? And who would if he could? I neither can nor will believe such strange and pernicious inventions of fallible men. I verily do believe that the church of Christ prospered just as much, yea, more, and that Christians got to heaven just as well, yea, better, before human standards were set up, or these sectarian fences were built, than since their erection. And if the children of God will only walk carefully by, and stand fast in, the "perfect law of liberty wherewith Christ hath made [them] free" [Jas 1:25], they shall not only find it possible, but highly honorable and pleasant, to get to heaven without wearing any sectarian yoke of bondage. And this will be their distinguished privilege as long as the mediatorial reign of the Son of God shall last.

I proceed to show,

#### IV. The Ends or Purposes of Ecclesiastical Government.

These are such as the following:

*First.* To guard the members of the church against *hurtful collision*. If all Christians were what they ought to be, there would be no jarring interest and hurtful collisions to be feared; but as long as so many imperfections and moral infirmities are found among them it cannot be expected to be seen otherwise. However, one end of the institution of government is to guard against this evil.

*Second.* To preserve due *order* and *decorum* is another great end contemplated by church government. God is a God of order; and, therefore, He has ordained *order* and *decency* in all the churches of the saints. But without government things will run into disorder and confusion; hence, to preserve *regularity* and *order* there must needs be government.

*Third.* To secure the common weal in our social worship and transactions is another grand design of church government. The peace, harmony, and prosperity of the church will thereby be greatly promoted. It has a most happy tendency also to facilitate the [98] conversion of sinners and to promote the general revival of religion. But,

*Fourth.* To glorify and honor God is the great ultimate end or design of all government, or the exercise of church power.

Thus, then, I have briefly considered the subject of ecclesiastical government. Much more might easily be said on a subject so interesting and so highly important, but I shall conclude this chapter by adding a few remarks taken from the learned Dr. Watts' *Rational Foundation of a Christian Church*.

"The principles on which Christian churches are built and governed are so plain, so natural and easy, and so much the same with those which give rise, vigor, and stability to all the well-founded societies in the world, that one would think there could not be such a matter of debate and controversy among Christians upon these subjects as we have unhappily found."

All that I have said relative to the formation and government of Christian churches is built on the internal reasons and relations of things, as well as on the Word of God.

And with churches thus constituted and governed there are several great and important advantages connected, such as these:

*First.* This scheme is perfectly consistent with every form and kind of civil government, whether it be a kingdom, a senate, or a republic. For it does not mingle itself with the interests of this world, nor assume to itself any civil or coercive power, so it can make no head against the governors of the country, for its power is of another kind, and reaches but to one single society of Christians; nor are they combined by any law of Christ in such multitudes, under one common, visible head, as to make themselves dangerous to any state. Whatsoever hath been done in the world by men professing Christianity, in a way of resistance to lawful governors, or rebellions against them, hath never been done by them as churches of Christ, formed upon the model I have laid down.

*Second.* This form of a Christian church allows to all its members the most perfect liberty of men and Christians. It is [99] inconsistent with persecution for conscience sake, for it leave all civil rewards and preferments, penalties and punishments, to kingdoms and states, and to the governors of this world. It pretends to no power over conscience to compel men to obedience; no prisons, no axes, fire, nor sword. Its elders, or

rulers, have no power to command anything but what is found in the Bible and what reason and common prudence will dictate.

*Third.* Miscarriages in the government or conduct of such a church as I have described are less dangerous for Christianity, because they affect but one single church. Those ecclesiastical governments which include vast numbers and multitudes combined under one or more spiritual heads or rulers, if there be any misrule or confusion of it, and sometimes shakes, or destroys, whole nations. But if a government which is included within one single church be ever so much divided by contentions, and fall into the greatest confusion, the mischief is not of so large an extent, nor can it have so fatal and dreadful consequences. If the church itself should be actually dissolved, the particular members of it may depart and join themselves to other churches within the reach or neighborhood, and walk with them in a religious and peaceful fellowship.

Upon the whole, whensoever it shall appear that any other form or mode of church government is more happily suited to the edification and peace of Christians, to the preservation of Christian liberty, and to secure the spiritual honors which belong to *Christ* in His churches, and at the same time appears to have more countenance from the New Testament than this, I shall be glad to relinquish this set of sentiments, and with pleasure exchange it for a better. That is certainly the best form and order of a Christian church whereby truth, peace, and holiness may be most happily promoted and secured. [100]

## CHAPTER IX. CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

---

In the examination of this subject I shall endeavor to show,

**I. The import and necessity of discipline.**

**II. The persons by whom discipline is to be exercised.**

**III. The persons against whom it is to be executed.**

**IV. The different acts or steps of discipline, and the manner it is to be conducted.**

**V. The intentions or ends of discipline. And**

**VI. The motives to a faithful performance of it.**

### **I. The Import and Necessity of Discipline.**

Discipline primarily signifies *correction* (*Job 36:10*). But the term is used by modern writers in various acceptations.

It is sometimes used to signify the whole order of a church, or a denomination.

Again, it is used to denote any human system of church rules and regulations. These different uses of the word, however, are not what is meant by Christian discipline, or the discipline I am now about to investigate. The discipline here under consideration simply means the execution or enforcement of the laws of Christ's house against offenders; or, in other words, it denotes the exercise of that spiritual power by which unworthy members of the church are censured, or expelled, as the case may require.

Its necessity grows out of our moral infirmities.

It may be argued,

*First.* From the Word of God (see *Mt 18:15-20 Joh 20:21-23 1Co 5:7*).

*Second.* From the constant practice of both the Jewish and Christian churches. Discipline was observed by the Jews [101] (see *Joh 9:22 12:42*). It was also constantly exercised, or maintained, by the Apostles and first Christian churches (see *1Co 5:4,5,13 2Co 2:6 1Ti 1:19,20*).

*Third.* From the nature of the thing itself. For without discipline no society can subsist. The toleration of vice and scandal tend to the subversion, and not to the preservation, of the church, as some do vainly imagine. And discipline is the more necessary in the church because it is a spiritual society, which is not governed by force, or coercive power, as civil societies are. I go on to show,

### **II. The Persons by Whom Discipline Is to Be Exercised.**

The right and power of exercising the moral discipline of the church belong not to the *Pope* of Rome, nor to the *Patriarch* of Constantinople, nor to the *civil authorities*, nor to the *Bishops*, nor to the *brotherhood* or the whole church, but to the *presbytery*, or the elders, of each individual church. That Christ Himself has committed the exercise of discipline, and the government of the church, to the *eldership*, and to no one else, I have proved before ([see Chapter VIII](#)). And if elders only are invested with the right of administering discipline, then it is not lawful to transfer it to any other.

There are some things, however, which fall under the cognizance of the church in its collective capacity, such a mutual watch over one another, and what may be called private remonstrance, &c. These are duties, or acts of moral discipline, which properly belong to all the members of the church to perform; and it is upon the proper discharge of these duties that much of the peace and purity of a church depend. I proceed to point out,

### III. The Persons Against Whom It Is to Be Executed.

Discipline is not to be executed on those who are not members of the church, but against all church members who, by their impure faith or practice, render themselves unworthy of occupying a place in the church.

*First. Against heretics, or the erroneous.* By heretics or erroneous persons I mean those who manifestly depart from any of the leading principles of the gospel. [102]

Now, that such persons are proper subjects of Christian discipline, the passages I shall here quote will sufficiently prove.

"I would they were even cut off which trouble you" (*Ga 5:12*).

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (*2Ti 3:5*).

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (*Tit 3:10,11*).

"I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam; so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate" (*Re 2:14,15*).

"It has been asked by persons who disapprove of all the church proceedings, on account of differences in religious principles, who is to judge what is heresy? We answer, those who are to judge what is immorality in dealing with loose characters." There is a great variety of opinion as to what is immorality, as well as to what is heresy, or a departure from the faith of the gospel. Now, to suppose it impossible to judge what the one is does not merely preclude the possibility of judging the other; but it also charges the apostolic precepts in regard to this duty with impertinence.

"It has been further objected that censuring, or expelling a person on account of his religious sentiments invades the right of private judgment. The right of private judgment, while we claim no connection with the church, is an undoubted right. We may be Christians, infidels, or atheists, and none but God has any control over us; but if we desire, or claim, admission to a Christian church, or should we be in it already and claim a right to continue our situation, we must be subject to that authority which Christ has instituted for her general government." Now, it would be as easy to show that the officers of the church have to direct and oversee the faith of her members, as well as their practice. For errors in faith will lead to errors in practice, which, if persisted in, will doubtless lead men on to death and perdition. [103]

"But again, it is asked how the erroneous can be tried, condemned, and excluded from the church without some *creed* or *book of discipline*?" We reply, in the same manner that the apostolic churches, when no such human instrument existed, censured or expelled such individuals. To reply more directly to the question, the *presbytery*, which is the proper judicatory of the church, with the Bible for their *guide* and the *rule* of their procedure, must judge and determine such cases, as well as all other matters of discipline. And by a plurality of their votes it ought always to be decided what is *truth* or *error*, *morality* or *immorality*, according to *the Word of God*, and not according to *the doctrines* and *commandments of men*.

*Second. Against schismatics.* "Schism means a sin *against Christian* love, with reference to the deportment of men in and about the institutions of Christ and their communion in them." The Greek word *schisma* signifies a rupture, or division. This is the only notion of *schism* that is exemplified in the Scripture, the only evil condemned under that name. This will appear to any who shall, with heedfulness, read the Epistles of Paul the Apostle unto the Corinthians, wherein alone the nature of this evil is stated and exemplified. As *heresy* is a departing from the principles of the gospel, or some fundamental article of religion, so *schism* is a departing from the ordinances, or the external things of the gospel.

A *schismatic*, then, is not a person who dissents from any humanly invented *rules, articles, or canons* for the government and worship in any church, but one who departs from one or more of the institutions of Christ, and thereby causes unlawful divisions and dissensions in the church. The men are a kind of religious demagogues. And men of this stamp are described by the Apostle in the Epistle to the Romans: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrines which he have learned; and avoid them. For they are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (*Ro 16:17,18*). [104]

"There should be no schism in the body" (*1Co 12:25*).

According to this description schismatics may be known by three things:

1st. By their doctrine. It is contrary to that which has been learned of Christ.

2d. By their selfish pursuits. "They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly" [*Ro 16:18*].

3d. By their insinuating, whining pretenses of affectionate regard towards their partisans. "By good words and fair speeches [they] deceive the hearts of the simple" [*Ro 16:18*].

Now, all such persons as create divisions and offenses in the church, contrary to the doctrine of the Bible, we are commanded to *mark* and to *avoid*. This evidently supposes them to be seriously guilty, and consequently, they must be subjects of ecclesiastical discipline. But further, Christian discipline must be exercised,

*Third. Against immoral persons,* or such as are notoriously wicked in their lives. Accordingly we read,

"If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no, not to eat. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (*1Co 5:11,13*).

Thus we see that against all such as are openly immoral or depraved in their lives, such as sin wilfully and deliberately, discipline must be exercised, and they severally dealt with according to the nature, aggravation, and circumstances of their crimes.

Yet I would here observe, and it deserves maturely to be considered, that not every irregularity, fault, or imperfection ought to be made a subject of discipline. There are many things which are, or ought to be, subjects of Christian forbearance. "A subject of forbearance, however, must be one that may exist without being an occasion of dispute and wrangling in the church. It must also respect things which do not enter into the essence of God's *kingdom*, [105] the leading principles of which are 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' [*Ro 14:17*]. Moreover, it must be something which does not destroy 'the work of God,' or which is not inconsistent with the progress of vital religion in the church, or in our own soul.

"That which does not subvert the gospel of the kingdom, nor set aside the authority of the king, though it be an imperfection, is yet to be borne with."

There is, perhaps, in all the churches a description of men whose characters are far from being uniformly circumspect, and yet not sufficiently irregular to warrant their being separated from the church. Every offender ought to be dealt with according to the degree of his offense. It is necessary, therefore, always to distinguish between faults which are the consequence of ignorance, infirmity, or sudden temptation, and such as are the result of premeditation and habit. The former require a compassionate treatment; the latter, a greater portion of severity. "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (*Jude 1:22,23*).

#### **IV. The Different Acts, or Steps of Discipline, and the Manner in Which It Is to Be Conducted.**

There are two acts of church discipline, according to the Bible.

- 1st. *Admonition*; and
- 2d. *Exclusion*.

The first step which is to be taken in the course of church discipline is *admonition*.

This duty is to be done, first privately, and afterward in a public manner.

There is what may be called *private admonition*.

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (*Mt 18:15*). The ground of proceeding here, as stated by our Savior, is an actual and serious fault committed by one member of the church against another. It is a [106] *trespass*. If thy brother shall *sin* against thee, then, and in that case, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. And tell him for the purpose of *gaining*, winning over and restoring thy brother. In order to do this, speak to him in all the meekness and gentleness of the gospel (*Mt 18:15*).

"But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" (*Mt 18:16*).

This course seems to be prescribed for two reasons. One is that these persons may be witnesses of every thing which pertains to the existing state of the transaction. The other is that by their influence and counsels they may assist in convincing and *gaining* their trespassing brother.

There is also another step in the process of discipline, which may be called *public admonition*.

But, and "if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church" (*Mt 18:17*). That is, bring him before the proper tribunal of the church, and let them admonish him. It is also said, "Them that sin rebuke fore all, that others may also fear" (*1Ti 5:20*).

If, after he has been publicly admonished before the proper tribunal of the church, he neglects to listen to them also, that is, continues incorrigibly impenitent, then the second act of discipline must be executed against him, which is *exclusion*.

"Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (*Mt 18:17*). Let him be considered by you as one of the worst of men, and consequently as one that is utterly unfit to be a member of the church. "Therefore," says the Apostle, "put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (*1Co 5:13*). And this should be done in

every instance where any person sins so grossly against the plain rules of the gospel, or the laws of *God*, or *Christ*, as thereby to unchristianize himself, or forfeit his claims to the character of a Christian. [107]

But the sentence of exclusion is the severest act of punishment the church has any right, or power, to inflict upon delinquents. The formality and the severity with which the act of excommunication is exercised in the Greek and Romanish Churches, and even in some of the Protestant Churches, have no foundation in the Word of God. For, according to the Bible, the church merely has the power to disown such offending persons, to disclaim all Christian fellowship with them, by expelling them from the church and turning them into the world, which is the kingdom of *Satan*, till they show real signs of repentance and amendment of life. But they have no authority to hurt their lives, or to injure their property, or to inflict any corporal punishments whatever.

As it respects the manner in which the discipline ought to be exercised, I would remark that two things are to be observed and two are to be avoided.

*First.* Two things are to be observed, viz.: *A spirit of meekness*, and a *Christian firmness*.

Discipline ought to be exercised *in the spirit of meekness*, that is, with solemnity, tenderness, and affection.

Hence, says the Apostle, "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in *the spirit of meekness*." [Ga 6:1].

But at the same time, it is necessary in the exercise of discipline to maintain a degree of *firmness* becoming the Christian character and authority of the church.

"Exhort and rebuke with all authority" (*Tit 2:15*).

Again, there are at least two things which ought to be carefully avoided, viz.: a *false lenity* and an *unchristian severity*.

"There is often a party found in a church," says a learned and pious author, "who, under the name of tenderness, are for neglecting all wholesome discipline; or if this cannot be accomplished, for delaying it to the utmost. These persons are commonly the advocates for disorderly walkers, especially if they happen to be their particular friends or relatives. Such, for a time, was the spirit of [108] the Corinthians; but when they were brought to a proper sense of things, what *carefulness it wrought in them; yea, what clearing of themselves*."

"On the other hand, there is often another party found in the church who, in opposing the extreme of false tenderness, are in danger of falling into unfeeling severity. This spirit will make the worst of every thing, and lead men to convert the discipline of the church into weapons of private revenge. Now, the true medium between these extremes is a union of mercy and truth. Genuine mercy is combined with faithfulness, and genuine faithfulness with mercy, and this is the only spirit likely to *purge iniquity*. Connivance will produce indifference, and undue severity will arm the offender with prejudice, and so harden him in sin; but the love of God and of our brother's soul is adapted to answer every good end. If we love God like Levi, we shall know no man after the flesh, nor acknowledge our nearest kindred, but shall observe His word and keep His covenant. And if we love the soul of our brother, we shall say, 'He is fallen today, I will reprove him for his good; I may fall tomorrow, and then let him deal the same with me.' *Love* is the gravitating principle, and the grand secret of church discipline, and it will do more than all other things put together towards insuring success."

But I would mention, with respect to those church members who have been expelled from the church and still continue in a state of obstinacy and impenitence, that it is the duty of every member in the communion of the church to withdraw themselves from all such and have no Christian fellowship with them. "They may, it is true, continue their ordinary and necessary intercourse with them as men, in the concerns of this life; but there

must be no familiarity, or anything that is expressive of connivance at their conduct." Hence it is said, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2Th 3:6). "And if any man [109] obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2Th 3:14).

In the mean time, such excommunicated persons ought to be admonished as brethren, and every proper inducement held out to them to return again by repentance and reformation. And whenever they do return, ingenuously confessing their sins, acknowledging the justice of their punishment, imploring the forgiveness of God and a reunion to the family of God, and recommencing the Christian life with new amiableness and beauty, they should be received again to their forfeited privilege, or to the full communion of the church.

## V. The Intentions or Ends of Discipline.

*First.* The reformation or amendment of those who offend is one end for which church discipline is exercised. A wholesome discipline is a party of that *chastisement whereof all partake* (except they are bastards, and not sons), to the end that they "might be partakers of His holiness. For though now it seemeth not to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" [Heb 12:10,11]. But this is more directly declared by the Apostle: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a one unto Satan, *for the destruction of the flesh*, that the *spirit might be saved* in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1Co 5:4,5). Again, he says, "Hymeneus and Alexander I have delivered unto Satan, that *they may learn not to blaspheme*" (1Ti 1:20).

*Second.* Another end contemplated by the exercise of discipline is *the purity and reputation* of the church. Purity is one of the prominent attributes of the church. And within her hallowed pale none but the pure in heart and life have a right to be.

"The temple," or church of God, "is holy, which temple ye are" [1Co 3:17]. But the gangrene members, whose "mind and conscience are defiled" [Tit 1:15], and who are "abominable, and disobedient" [Tit 1:16], must be purged out as the "old [110] leaven" that the whole church may be a "new lump," pure and unleavened [1Co 5:7]. And when this is done, the church will sustain a fair and irreproachable reputation in the eyes of the world. Thus she will become a "crown of glory in the hand of Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of [her] God" [Isa 62:3]. Whereas experience abundantly testifies that wherever the exercise of Scriptural discipline is either perverted or neglected, and the *old leaven of wickedness* is not cast out, there will be "confusion and every evil work" [Jas 3:16]. How very important, then, is it to maintain a well-directed system of Christian discipline.

*Third.* The honor and glory of God is another intention of ecclesiastical discipline. God is *honored* when His commandments are observed. He is *glorified* when His perfections are displayed. This is done in every instance where the discipline of Christ's house is lawfully and faithfully executed against transgressors. And this should be the great and ultimate end of all our actions. This should be kept in view in every thing. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1Co 10:31).

## VI. The Motives to a Faithful Performance of Church Discipline.

The motives or considerations which ought to encourage Christian churches in the exercise of a proper and wholesome discipline are various and highly important. Several of these I shall here enumerate.

1st. *The evils arising from the neglect of discipline* should operate as a powerful inducement to a faithful performance of this duty.

The evils which result from the neglect of discipline experience has long since shown to be neither few nor small. The pernicious effects are not only felt and sustained by the unhappy delinquents themselves, but also by the whole church and the community at large. There are many churches in which *drunkards*, and *swearers*, the *erroneous and scandalous* of every description are tolerated, and no kind of discipline exercised. And wherever this is done, there we have a practical illustration of this truth, that great and [111] deplorable evils will result from the neglect of church discipline. Sinners will become bold in sin, saints will feel discouraged, and religion will rapidly decline.

2d. The general benefits and good effects produced by the administration of this system of order is another motive that ought to excite to the performance of it. There are no less than the reformation, the future usefulness and the salvation of a lapsed brother or sister; the purity, edification, and prosperity of the church; and the honor and glory of God, all which are highly important. And it may justly be said that "the free circulation of the blood and the proper discharge of all animal functions are not more necessary to the health of the body than good discipline is to the attainment of these important ends."

3d. The obligation of churches arising from the command of God to observe this duty is an additional motive to the exercise of discipline. If discipline is an institution of God, then Christian churches cannot neglect it with impunity; but they must, of course, be obliged to exercise it according to the divine commands. This I have testified before. Blessed, therefore, are they who read and keep those things which the divine Savior hath ordained in the churches. [112]