

On External Worship, as Public

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A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 1

OF THE NATURE OF A GOSPEL CHURCH, THE SEAT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

Having treated of the object of worship, and distinguished worship into internal and external; and having considered internal worship as it lies in the exercise of various graces; I now proceed to consider external worship, both public and private: and first public worship; and as public worship is carried on socially in a church state, I shall begin with considering the nature of a gospel church, the seat of it. The word "church" has various significations, which it may be proper to take notice of, in order to settle the true sense of it, as now to be discoursed of.

1. First, some take it for a place of worship, and call such a place by that name; but wrongly, at least very improperly: it is a remarkable saying of one of the ancients, even of the second century, "Not the place, but the congregation of the elect, I call the church[1]." Indeed, any place of worship was formerly called an house of God; so the place where Jacob and his family worshipped, having built an altar for God, was called Bethel or the house of God (Gen. 35:1), so the tabernacle of Moses is called, the house of God in Shiloh (Judg. 18:31), and the temple built by Solomon, the house of the Lord (1 King 6:1, 2, 37). But neither of them are ever called a church. The papists, indeed, call an edifice built for religious worship, a church; and so do some Protestants; I might add, some dissenting Protestants too; who call going to a place of public worship, going to church; though with great impropriety. It must be owned, that some of the ancient fathers used the word in this metonymical and improper sense, for the place where the church met for worship: and some passages of scripture are pleaded for this use of it; which yet do not seem to be plain and sufficient: not Acts 19:37 for the word *ιεροσυλους*, should not be rendered "robbers of churches," but "robbers of temples;" and design not edifices built for Christian worship; but the temples of the heathens, as that of Diana, at Ephesus: but what may seem more plausible and pertinent, are some passages in 1 Corinthians 11:18, 20, 22. "When ye come together in the church I hear," &c. which is thought to be after explained; "When ye come together into one place:--have ye not houses to eat and drink in? or despise ye the church of God?" All this, indeed, supposes a place to meet in; though rather not the place, but the assembly that met in it, is called the church; and their coming together in the church may intend no other than some of the members coming and meeting together with the rest of the church; and *επι το αυτο*, which we render "into one place," may design, not the unity of the place, but the unanimity of the people in it: nor is

the opposition between their own houses and the place of meeting; and this is only mentioned to show that it would have been much more suitable and decent in them to have eat and drank in their own houses, than in the presence of the assembly and church of God, which was to their scandal, reproach, and contempt; for not the place, but the people that met in it, were properly the object of contempt: however, it is certain, that there are numerous places of scripture which cannot be understood of any material edifice or building; whether of stone, brick, or wood[2]; as when it is said, "tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church," (Acts 11:22) it would be absurd to understand it in such a sense; and so many others.

2. Secondly, the word *ἐκκλησία*, always used for "church," signifies an "assembly" called and met together[3], and sometimes it is used for an assembly, whether lawfully or unlawfully convened; so the people who got together, upon the uproar made by the craftsmen at Ephesus, is called, "a confused assembly," and suggested to be an unlawful one; since the town clerk told them the matter should be determined in "a lawful assembly;" and when he had thus spoken, "dismissed the assembly" (Acts 19:32, 39, 41) in which passages the same word is used which commonly is for a "church;" and which may be considered either as a general, or as a particular assembly of persons.

2a. First, as a general assembly, called, "The general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven," (Heb. 12:23) and which include all the elect of God, that have been, are, or shall be in the world; and who will form the pure, holy, and undefiled Jerusalem church state, in which none will be but those who are written in the Lamb's book of life; and this consists of the redeemed of the Lamb, and is the "church" which Christ has "purchased" with his blood; and who make up his spouse, the "church" he has "loved," and given himself for, to wash, and cleanse, and present to himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle; this is the "body," the church, of which Christ is the "head;" and in which he is the sole officer, being Prophet, Priest, and King of it; it being, not the seat of human government, as a particular church is: and this church is but "one," though particular churches are many: to this may be applied the words of Christ; "My dove, my undefiled, is but one," (Song 6:9) and this is what sometimes is called by divines, the "invisible" church; not but that the whole number of God's elect is visible to him, and known by him; "The Lord knows them that are his;" and the election of particular persons may be known by themselves, by the grace be stowed upon them; and, in a judgment of charity, may be concluded of others, that they are the chosen of God, and written in the book of life: but all the particular persons, and the number of them, were never yet seen and known; John had a sight of them in a visionary way, and they will be all really and actually seen, when the new Jerusalem shall descend from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband; which will be at the second coming of Christ, and not before; till that time comes, this church will be invisible. It is sometimes distinguished into the church "triumphant and militant," the whole family named of God in heaven and earth. The church triumphant consists of the saints in glory, whom Christ has taken to himself, to be with him where he is; and this is continually increasing. The church militant consists of persons in the present state, which is said to be, "as an army with banners," (Song 6:4) this is made up of such who become volunteers in the day of

Christ's power; who put on the whole armour of God, and fight the good fight of faith; and in this state it will continue to the end of the world.

There is another sense in which the church may be said to be "catholic," or "general," as it may consist of such in any age, and in each of the parts of the world, who have true faith in Christ, and hold to him the head, and are baptized by one Spirit into one body; have one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all, and are called in one hope of their calling: and this takes in, not only such who make a visible profession of Christ: but all such who are truly partakers of his grace; though they have not made an open profession of him in a formal manner; and this is the church which Polycarp called, "the whole catholic church throughout the world"[4]: and Irenaeus[5], "The church scattered throughout the whole world to the ends of the earth:" and Origen[6], "The church of God under heaven:" and this is the church built on Christ the rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail; such a church Christ has always had and will have; and which may be, when there is no visible congregated church, or a particular church gathered according to gospel order; and of this the apostle seems to speak, when he says, "Unto him be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). But,

2b. Secondly, the church may be considered as a particular assembly of saints meeting together in one place for religious worship. Such was the first church at Jerusalem, which is called, the "whole church," that met together in one place at the same time (Acts 1:14, 15, 2:1, 4:32, 15:22), and the church at Antioch, convened by the apostles, to whom they rehearsed what God had done with them (Acts 14:27), and these churches, in after times, continued to meet in one place; the whole church of Jerusalem, at the destruction of the city, removed to Pella, a town beyond Jordan, which was sufficient to receive the Christians that belonged to it[7]; and two hundred and fifty years after Christ the church at Antioch met in one house[8]. And so the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 14:23, 5:4), and the church of the disciples at Troas, who came together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7), of these there were many in one province; as the churches of Judea, besides that at Jerusalem, and the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2, 23), and the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:4), and the churches of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1), the church at Cenchrea, a port of Corinth, and distinct from the church there, as were all these churches distinct from one another; so that he that was of one church, was not of another; as Epaphras is said to be "one of you," of the church at Colosse, a peculiar member and minister of that church, and not of another (Col. 4:12). And this is the church the nature of which is to be treated of; and may be considered "essentially," as to the matter and form of it; and "organically," as to its order and power or as a body corporate, having its proper officers.

2b1. "Essentially" considered, as to its matter and form, of which it consists.

2b1a. First, as to the matter of it, both as to quantity and quality. As to number, Tertullian[9] thought that three persons were sufficient to constitute a church; which may seem to be confirmed by Matthew 18:20 "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," &c. who may be sufficient to meet and pray together, and edify one another; but a

judicial process in a church way, in case of offence, as directed to in some preceding verses, seems to require more; seeing, if the offending and offended parties cannot compromise things among themselves, one or two more are to be taken, which if two make four; if reconciliation cannot be made, the matter must be brought before the church, which must consist of a greater number than the parties before concerned; and which it should seem cannot be less than six more, and in all ten; which was the number of a congregation with the Jews[10]: and a church organically considered, or as having proper officers, seems to require more; the church at Ephesus was begun with twelve men, or thereabout (Acts 19:7), yet a church should consist of no more than can meet together in one place, where all may hear, and all may be edified; and if it should be so increased that this cannot be, then it should be divided into lesser communities; as an hive of bees, when too many, swarms; and which seems to be the case of the church at Jerusalem; which, upon the departure of those who were converted at Pentecost, and on the scattering of the church by persecution, formed several churches in Judea, and accounts for the early mention of them. But not to dwell on this, the quality of the materials of a gospel church more especially deserves attention. In general, it may be observed, that all such who are of immoral lives and conversations, and of unsound principles, as to the doctrines of the gospel, are not proper persons to be members of a gospel church; no unclean persons, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, have, or should have, any inheritance, part or portion in the kingdom of God, as that may signify, as it sometimes does, a gospel church state; and though there may be such secretly, who creep in unawares, yet when discovered are to be excluded; and such persons, therefore, who are to be put away from a church, as wicked men, and such as walk disorderly, are to be withdrawn from, and such as have imbibed false doctrines, are to be rejected; then most certainly such are not knowingly to be admitted into the original constitution of a church of Christ, or be at first received into the fellowship of one. The persons who are fit materials of a visible gospel church, are described,

2b1a1. As regenerate persons; "Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit," of the grace of the Spirit of God, "he cannot enter," of right he ought not to enter, and, if known, ought not to be allowed to enter, "into the kingdom of God," into a gospel church state; none but such who are begotten again to a lively hope of the heavenly inheritance, and who, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word and ordinances, that they may grow thereby, having tasted that the Lord is gracious; or, in other words, of whom it is "meet to think," and, in a judgment of charity and discretion, to hope and conclude that God hath begun a "good work" in them; such were the members of the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:6, 7).

2b1a2. As called ones; a church is a congregation of such who are called out from among others, by the grace of God; both the Hebrew and Greek words קהלה and εκκλησια, signify an assembly of persons called and convened together; so the members of the church at Rome are styled, "the called of Jesus Christ," (Rom. 1:6) such who are called out of the world, and from fellowship with the men of it, "into the fellowship of Jesus Christ": such who are proper materials of a gospel church, are such who are called out of a state of bondage to sin, Satan, and the law, into the liberty of the gospel; and out of

darkness into marvellous light; and are called with an holy calling, and called to be saints, not merely by the external ministry of the word, to outward holiness of life and conversation, who are never effectually called by the grace of God, nor have any appearance of it, and so unfit to be members of churches; for,

2b1a3. Such are not only called to be saints, but in and by the effectual calling become really saints, at least are judged to be so, by a charitable discretion of them; so the members of the churches at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse, are described as "saints," and "sanctified" persons, and as "holy temples," built for habitations of an holy God; hence they are called "churches of the saints," because they consist of such; and Christ, who is King and head of the church, is called "King of saints" (1 Cor. 14:33; Rev. 15:3).

2b1a4. They are described as the "faithful in Christ Jesus," or believers in him: so in the article of the church of England a church is defined, "A congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered." For only faithful men, or believers in Christ, can have fellowship with the saints in a church state; and none but such can have communion with Christ; for he dwells in the hearts of men by faith, and they live by faith upon him: and only such have a right to the ordinances of Christ, and can receive benefit by them; unless they believe with all the heart, they have no right to baptism; and unless they have faith in Christ, they cannot discern the Lord's body in the supper; nor is the gospel preached of any profit to them, not being mixed with faith; so that they are on all accounts unfit for church membership; and hence we read, that those who were joined to the first church at Jerusalem were believers (Acts 4:14, see Acts 2:41, 47). Hence,

2b1a5. Those that were added to the church at Jerusalem are said to be, "such as should be saved;" as all those who believe and are baptized, shall be saved; according to Mark 16:16. And besides, these were added by the Lord himself, as well as to him, and therefore should be saved by him with an everlasting salvation: and such who are admitted to church fellowship, should be such, who, in a judgment of charity or in charitable discretion, may be hoped, that they are the chosen of God, the redeemed of Christ, are called, sanctified, and justified, and so shall be everlastingly saved.

2b1a6. They should be persons of some competent knowledge of divine and spiritual things, and of judging of them; who have not only knowledge of themselves, and of their lost estate by nature, and of the way of salvation by Christ; but who have some degree of knowledge of God in his nature, perfections, and works; and of Christ, in his Person as the Son of God; of his proper Deity; of his incarnation; of his offices, as Prophet, Priest, and King; of justification by his righteousness; pardon by his blood; satisfaction by his sacrifice; and of his prevalent intercession: and also of the Spirit of God: his person, offices, and operations; and of the important truths of the gospel, and doctrines of grace; or how otherwise should the church be "the pillar and ground of truth?"

2b1a7. The materials of a gospel church should be men of holy lives and conversations; holiness both of heart and life becomes the house of God, and those who are of it; none should have a place in it but such (see Ps. 15:1, 2, 24:3, 4).

2b1a8. Such who are admitted into fellowship with a particular church of Christ, should be truly baptized in water, that is, by immersion, upon a profession of their faith; so the three thousand penitents, after they had gladly received the word, were baptized; and then, and not before, were added to the church: so the first church at Samaria consisted of men and women baptized by Philip, they believing what he said concerning the kingdom of God: and Lydia, and her household, and the jailor and his, being baptized upon their faith, laid the foundation of the church at Philippi: and the church at Corinth was begun with persons who, hearing the word, believed, and were baptized; and the church at Ephesus was first formed by some disciples baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:41, 8:12, 16:15, 33, 18:8, 19:5), so the members of the churches at Rome, Galatia, and Colosse, were baptized persons (Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12). But,

2b1a9. Not their infants with them; who were neither baptized nor admitted to membership in the churches; no one instance of either can be produced in scripture: they are not members by birth[11]; for "that which is born of the flesh, is flesh," carnal and corrupt, and unfit for church fellowship: nor do they become such by the faith of their parents; for even their faith does not make them themselves church members, without a profession of it, and giving up themselves to a church, and received by it into it: men must be believers before they are baptized; and they must be baptized before they become members; and they cannot be members till they make application to a church, and are admitted into it. Infants, as they are born, are not fit for membership, being unregenerate, unholy, and impure by their first birth, and must be born again ere they are fit for the kingdom of God, or a gospel church state; their federal holiness, talked of, is a mere chimera, and is unsupported by 1 Corinthians 7:14, they are not capable of understanding and of answering questions put unto them; nor of giving up themselves to a church; nor of consent and agreement to walk with it, the nature of which they are unacquainted with, and of what belongs to a member of it, either as to duty or privilege; nor are they capable of answering the ends of church communion, the mutual edification of members and the glory of God: and such who plead for their membership make a poor business of it; not treating them as members, neither by admitting them to the ordinance of the supper, nor by watching over them, reprovng, admonishing, and laying them under censures, when grown up, and require them, were they members.

2b1b. Secondly, a particular church may be considered as to the "form" of it; which lies in mutual consent and agreement, in their covenant and confederation with each other.

2b1b1. There must be an union, a coalition of a certain number of persons to form a church state, one cannot make a church; and these must be united, as the similies of a tabernacle, temple, house, body, and a flock of sheep, to which a church is sometimes compared, show; the tabernacle was made with ten curtains, typical of the church of God; but one curtain did not make a tabernacle, nor all the ten singly and separately taken; but there were certain loops and taches, with which they were coupled together; and being

thus joined, they composed the tabernacle. Song the temple of Solomon, which was another type of the gospel church: and which was made of great and costly stones; these stones, not as in the quarry, nor even when hewed and squared, lying singly by themselves, made the temple, until they were put and cemented together, and the headstone brought in and laid on: thus truly gracious souls, though they are by grace separated from the common quarry of mankind, and are hewn by the Spirit of God, and by the ministry of the word, and are fit materials for the church of God, yet do not constitute one, until "fitly framed together," and so grow unto an holy temple of the Lord. A church is called the house of God, a spiritual house, built up of lively stones, living saints; but these, be they ever so lively and living, they do not form a church, unless they are builded together, "for an habitation of God". A church of Christ is often compared to an human body; which is not one member, but many; and these not as separate, but members one of another; who are "fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth": and sometimes it is called a flock, the flock of God; and though a little flock, yet one sheep does not make a flock, nor two or three straggling ones; but a number of them collected together, feeding in one pasture, under the care of a shepherd.

2b1b2. This union of saints in a church state, is signified by their being "joined" and as it were glued together[12] (see Acts 5:13 9:26); it is an upon of spirits so close, as if they were but one spirit; so the members of the first Christian church were "of one heart and one soul," being "knit together in love;" and it becomes members to endeavour to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Acts 4:32; Col. 2:2; Eph. 4:3).

2b1b3. This union between them is made by voluntary consent and agreement; a Christian society, or a church of Christ, is like all civil societies, founded on agreement and by consent; thus it is with societies from the highest to the lowest; kingdoms and states were originally formed on this plan; everybody corporate, as a city, is founded on the same plan; in which there are privileges to be enjoyed, and duties to be performed; and no man has a right to the one, without consenting to the other: and in lower societies, no man can be admitted into them, nor receive any benefit from them, unless he assents to the rules and articles on which the society is founded. All civil relations, except the natural relation of parents and children, which arises from the law of nature, are by consent and covenant; as that of magistrates and subjects, and of masters and servants, and of husband and wife; which latter, as it is by compact and agreement, may serve to illustrate the relation between a church and its members added to it, and the manner in which they be, by consent (see Isa. 62:5).

2b1b4. As the original constitution of churches is by consent and confederation, so the admission of new members to them, is upon the same footing: the primitive churches in the times of the apostles, "first gave their own selves to the Lord," as a body, agreeing and promising to walk in all his commandments and ordinances, and be obedient to his laws, as King of saints; "and to us," the apostles, pastors, guides, and governors, to be taught, fed, guided, and directed by them, according to the word of God; and to one another also, "by the will of God," engaging to do whatever in them lay, to promote each other's edification and the glory of God: and so all such who were added to them, it was done by mutual consent, as it always should be; as no man is to be forced into a church,

or by any compulsory methods brought into it, so neither can he force himself into one; he has no right to come into a church, and depart from it when he pleases; both the one and the other, his coming into it and departure from it, must be with consent: a man may propose himself to be a member of a church, but it is at the option of the church whether they will receive him; so Saul assayed to join himself to the disciples, that is, he proposed to be a member with them, but they at first refused him, fearing he was not a true disciple, because of his former conduct; but when they had a testimony of him from Barnabas, and perceived that he was a partaker of the grace of God, and was sound in the faith of Christ, they admitted him, and he was with them going out and coming in: and it is but reasonable a church should be satisfied in these points, as to the persons received into their communion; not only by a testimony their becoming lives, but by giving an account of what God has done for their souls, and a reason of the hope that is in them; as well as by expressing their agreement with them in their articles of faith.

2b1b5. Something of this kind may be observed in all religious societies, from the beginning, that they were by agreement and confederation; so the first religious societies in families, and under the patriarchal dispensation, it was by the agreement of families, and the common consent of them, that they met and joined together for public worship, to call on the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26), so the Jewish church, though national in some sense, yet was constituted by confederation; God prescribed to them laws in the wilderness, and they covenanted and consented to obey them (Ex. 24:7), he avouched them to be his people, and they avouched him to be their God; and then, and not before, were they called a "church," (Acts 7:38) and so the gospel church was spoken of in prophecy, as what should be constituted and increased by agreement and covenant (Isa. 44:5, 56:6, 7; Jer. 50:5), all which agrees with New Testament language; from whence it appears to be fact, that it was by consent and agreement that the first churches were formed, as before observed, and not otherwise; and nothing else but mutual consent, can make a man a church member: not faith it, the heart for that cannot be known until a man declares and professes it; nor a bare profession of faith, which, though necessary to membership, does not declare a man a member of one church more than of another, nor entitle more to one than to another; unless he gives up himself to a church, and professes his desire to walk with it in a subjection to the gospel of Christ: nor baptism, though a prerequisite to church fellowship, does not make a man a member of a church, as it did not the eunuch: nor hearing the word; for men ignorant and unbelievers may come into an assembly and hear the word (1 Cor. 14:24), yea, persons may hear the word aright, have faith, and profess it, and be baptized, and yet not be church members; it is only mutual consent that makes them such: persons must propose themselves to a church, and give up themselves to it, to walk in it, in an observance of the ordinances of Christ, and duties of religion; and the church must voluntarily receive them in the Lord. And,

2b1b6. Such a mutual agreement is but reasonable; for how should "two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) and unless persons voluntarily give up themselves to a church and its pastor, they can exercise no power over them, in a church way; they have nothing to do with them that are without, they have no concern with the watch and care of them; nor are they entitled thereunto, unless they "submit themselves to one another in the fear of God;" they have no power to reprove, admonish, and censure them in a church

way; nor can the pastor exercise any pastoral authority over them, except by agreement they consent to yield to it; nor can they expect he should watch over their souls as he that must give an account, having no charge of them by any act of theirs. Now,

2b1b7. It is this confederacy, consent, and agreement, that is the formal cause of a church; it is this which not only distinguishes a church from the world, and from all professors that walk at large, the one being within and the other without, but from all other particular churches; so the church at Cenchrea was not the same with the church at Corinth, though but at a little distance from it, because it consisted of persons who had given up themselves to it, and not to the church at Corinth; and so were members of the one and not of the other; "one of you," as Onesimus and Epaphras were of the church at Colosse, and not of another (Col. 4:9, 12). From all which it follows,

2b1b8. That a church of Christ is not parochial, or men do not become church members by habitation in a parish; for Turks and Jews may dwell in the same parish: nor is it diocesan; for we never read of more churches under one bishop or pastor, though there may have been, where churches were large, more bishops or pastors in one church (Phil. 1:1), nor provincial, for we read of churches in one province; as of the churches of Judea, and of Galatia, and of Macedonia: nor national; nay, so far from it, that we not only read of more churches in a nation, but even of churches in houses (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 1:2), nor presbyterian; for 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 (Acts 14:23). But a particular visible gospel church is congregational; and even the church of England, which is national itself, defines a "visible church to be a congregation of faithful men;" and, indeed, the national church of the Jews was in some sense congregational; it is sometimes called the "congregation," (Lev. 4:13-15) they were a people separated from other nations, and peculiarly holy to the Lord; they met in one place, called, "the tabernacle of the congregation," and offered their sacrifices at one altar (Lev. 1:3, 4, 17:4, 5), and three times in the year all their males appeared together at Jerusalem; and besides, as Lightfoot[13] observes, there were stationary men at Jerusalem, who were representatives of the whole congregation, and were at the sacrifices for them: the synagogues also, though not of divine institution, were countenanced by the Lord, and bore a very great resemblance to congregational societies; and is the word which answers to "congregation" in the Septuagint version, and is used for a Christian assembly in the New Testament (James 2:2), to which may be added, that such congregations and assemblies as gospel churches be, are prophesied of as what should be in gospel times (see Eccl. 12:11; Isa. 4:5). A church of saints thus essentially constituted, as to matter and form, have a power in this state to admit and reject members, as all societies have; and also to choose their own officers; which, when done, they come a complete organized church, as to order power; of which more hereafter.

ENDNOTES:

[1] ou ton topon, alla to ayroisma twn eklektwn ekklhsian kalw, Clement. Alexandr. Stromat. l. 7. p. 715.

[2] "Ecclesia est verum templum Dei, quod non in parietibus est, sed in corde et fide hominum qui credunt in eum et vocantur fideles," Lactant. de vera sap, l. 4. c. 13.

[3] "Ecclesia, ut omnes norunt, Graeca vox est, quae apud nos coetum, concionem, congregationem----que significat hujusmodi erant particulares dictae ecclesiae, ut Laodicaea," &c. Aonii Palearii Testimonium, c. 10. p. 321.

[4] Apud Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 4. c. 15.

[5] Adv. Haeres. l. 1. c. 2, and 3.

[6] Apud Euseb. l. 6. c. 25.

[7] Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 3. c. 5.

[8] Ib. l. 7. c. 30.

[9] Deut. Baptismo, c. 6.

[10] Misn. Sanhedrin, c. 1. s. 6.

[11] "Fiunt, non nascuntur Christiani," Tertullian. Apologet. c. 18.

[12] κολλασθαι αυτοις, "proprie notat glutine coadunare, &c. metaphorice designat arctiorem conjunctionem, &c. quia quae glutine coadunata sunt, arcte conjuncta sunt, tenaciterque adhaerent, ut non facile queant separari," Stockius in voce.

[13] Temple-service, ch. 7. s. 3.

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 2

OF THE DUTIES OF THE MEMBER OF A CHURCH TO EACH OTHER

A church thus confederated and united by consent and agreement, there are various duties incumbent on its members; which, both for their own comfort, credit, and edification, and for the glory of God, it is highly necessary to observe. As,

1. First, and which is a principal one, to love one another; "Owe no man anything, but to love one another," is an apostolical advice, and good advice; this is a debt which every man owes to another, and should be always paying, especially Christians and members of churches (Rom. 13:8, 12:10).

1a. This is the great law of Christ, as King in his church, his royal commandment, which he enjoins on all his subjects, and frequently repeats (John 13:34, 15:12, 17).

1b. The example of Christ should influence and engage unto it (John 13:34, 15:12, 1 John 3:16).

1c. The relations that members of churches stand in to each other oblige to love; being fellow citizens of the same family, are brethren to each other, and make one fraternity, or "brotherhood," which they should "love," (1 Peter 2:17, 3:8) and are members one of another (1 Cor. 12:13, 25-27).

1d. Mutual love is an evidence of being the disciples of Christ (John 13:35).

1e. It is this which makes communion in a church state delightful and comfortable, as well as honourable; "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" it is as pleasing and refreshing as the fragrant oil poured on Aaron's head, and as the dew that fell on mount Hermon (Ps. 133:1-3), when, on the contrary, nothing is more uncomfortable and dishonourable, as well as nothing is more pernicious and ruinous to a church state, than want of love (Gal. 5:15).

This love of members one to another ought to be "fervent," and it should be "unfeigned," and without dissimulation (1 Peter 4:8, 1:22), and it should be universal, love to all the saints, weaker as well as stronger, poor as well as rich (Eph. 1:15)[1].

2. Secondly, it is incumbent on church members, as much as in them lies, to endeavour to "keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;" to press to which the apostle uses various arguments in Ephesians 4:3-6.

2a. Care should be taken to promote and preserve unity, of affection; so as to be of "one heart, and of one soul, having the same love," as the apostle advises to (Phil. 2:9). But this falls in much with the first duty, before inculcated.

2b. There should be, as much as may be, an unity of mind and judgment in the doctrines of the gospel; being, as the apostle in the above place directs, "of one accord and of one mind;" or as he elsewhere says, that "all speak the same thing;" and that they "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," or otherwise there is danger of schism, divisions, and contentions (1 Cor. 1:10, 11).

2c. And which is much the same an "unity of faith;" for there is but one faith (Eph. 4:5, 13), one doctrine of faith, or scheme and system of divine truths to be believed; and church members should "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27_).

2d. There should be a zealous concern for unity of worship, and that nothing be introduced into it contrary to the pattern showed and directed to in the word of God; and that they "serve the Lord with one consent, and with one mind, and with one mouth glorify God," (Zeph. 3:9; Rom. 15:6) and to prevent discord in affection, judgment, and worship, and to secure peace, all strife should be avoided, and even checked at the beginning of it; the advice of the wise man is good (Prov. 17:14), and equally good is the advice of the apostle, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory" (Phil. 2:3). Proud and contentious men, who seek to promote strife and division, are not to be encouraged in Christian communities (1 Cor. 11:16), the peace of a church is to be laboured after by its members, and by all means to be pursued; the comfort of saints in fellowship with each other is a strong argument for peace and unity (Phil. 2:1, 2), and above all, as saints would be desirous of having the price of God with them, they should be concerned to "be of one mind, and live in peace;" and then may they expect, and not otherwise, that "the God of love and peace shall be with them" (2 Cor. 13:11).

3. Thirdly, it is the duty of members of churches to sympathize with each other in all conditions and circumstances they come into (Rom. 12:15), and upon this their membership with one another cannot but have a considerable influence (1 Cor. 12:26), this sympathy should be with respect to things outward and temporal; any calamity, affliction, and distress, of whatsoever kind; they "that are in bonds," especially for the sake of religion, should be remembered as "bound with them," as if in the same circumstances, and should pity and relieve them as much as may be; and "them which suffer adversity" in body, family, or estate, "as being themselves in the body," and liable to the same adversities (Heb. 12:3), and therefore should visit, comfort, and assist them; so Job's three friends, when they heard of his afflictions in his person, family, and substance, though they lived at a distance from him, by appointment met together, "to come, to mourn with him, and to comfort him," (Job 2:11) and much more should

members of churches act such a part to one another. Likewise when in inward trouble and distress of soul, through the hidings of God's face, the temptations of Satan, the weakness of grace, and the strength of corruptions; it becomes fellow members to "comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, and bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ," which is the law of love and sympathy (1 Thess. 5:14; Gal. 6:2), and the sympathy of God with his people in their afflictions, and also of Christ, who is "touched with the feeling of the infirmities" of his people, should direct to such a temper and carriage (Isa. 63:9; Heb. 4:15).

4. Fourthly, it is the duty of church members to communicate to each other in such circumstances.

4a. In outward things, to such as are in want of them (Rom. 12:13; Gal. 6:10), hence in the times of the apostles, the churches had orders to make collections on the first day of the week for the poor saints, that thereby they might be relieved who were in necessitous circumstances (1 Cor. 16:1, 2), brotherly love demands such a conduct in church members to their brethren in distress; for, "how dwelleth the love of God in" such, who, having a portion of worldly things, shut up their bowels of compassion from their brethren in need? (1 John 3:17) besides, to communicate to such persons is well pleasing in the sight of God, and will be taken notice of in the great day of account when forgotten by the saints (Heb. 13:16; Matthew 25:40).

4b. It is their duty to communicate in spiritual things, to mutual comfort and edification; to speak often one to another about divine things; to impart spiritual experiences, and to declare to each other what God has done for their souls; to communicate spiritual light and knowledge in the mysteries of grace; and according to the gift one has received, be it more or less, to minister it to one another, and to build up one another in their most holy faith, by Christian conference and praying together; and through the word dwelling richly in them, to teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; and care should be taken that no communication proceeds out of the mouth but what is for edification, and ministers grace to the hearers.

5. Fifthly, it is the duty of church members to watch over one another; that they do not indulge to sinful lusts and pleasures, and make provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof; and so bring a reproach on the good ways of God, and the doctrines of Christ; and to warn them that are unruly, or err from the rule of the word, and recover them from any evil way they seem to be going into; as also to watch over them, lest they receive any notion contrary to the gospel of Christ; for not only pastors of churches are to watch over them for this purpose, but members of churches are to look "diligently," or act the part of a bishop or overseer in some respect^[2], "lest any man fail of the grace of God," or fall from the doctrine of grace, (Heb. 12:15) they should not suffer sin to lie upon a brother; but rebuke and admonish him for it, according to the gospel rule, first alone, and then, if such rebuke succeeds not, to do it with, and before others; and such rebukes and admonitions should be in love, and with much tenderness, as well as faithfulness; for such only are like to be kindly received, and to be successful; such that are fallen,

whether into immorality or error, should be endeavoured to be restored by those who are spiritual, in the spirit of meekness (Lev. 19:17; Ps. 141:5; Gal. 6:1).

6. Sixthly, it is incumbent on members of churches to bear with one another; the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak; and to bear one another's burdens, and to forbear with each other, and not bear hard on one another, considering the patience, forbearance, and longsuffering of God to them; and it becomes them to forgive one another, as Christ, and God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them; and especially when repentance is declared and discovered, then forgiveness should be extended, not only to seven times, but to seventy times seven; for if we forgive not, neither will our heavenly Father forgive our trespasses (Rom. 15:1; Gal. 6:2; Col. 3:12; Matthew 18:21, 22; Mark 11:26).

7. Seventhly, it is the duty of members of churches to pray for one another; as they have all one common Father, who is attentive to their supplications, and is able and willing to help them in their times of need, they are directed to address him in this manner, saying, "Our Father, which art in heaven;" and are thereby instructed to pray for others as for themselves, to whom he stands in the same relation as to themselves, even for all saints, as the apostle intimates, (Eph. 6:18 and especially for such who are in the same church state; and particularly when they are in any distress, inward or outward; and not for ministers of the gospel only; though members should never be forgetful of their own pastors, who are set over them in the Lord, that they may be fitted for their work, be assisted in it, and be made useful to their souls; but for each of the members of the church, that they may have their various wants supplied; that they may grow in grace and spiritual knowledge; be kept faithful, and preserved blameless, to the coming of Christ; it becomes them in general to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and in particular for the hill of Zion, to which they belong, that peace may be within its walls, and prosperity in its dwellings.

8. Eighthly, it becomes church members to separate themselves from the men of the world, and not touch persons and things which are defiling; they are in a church state, which is as a "garden inclosed;" they are a separate people, and should dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations or the people of a vain and carnal world; they are called out of the world, and therefore should not be unequally yoked with the men of it; with men unrighteous, ignorant, lawless, disobedient, dead, and profane sinners, with whom they can have no profitable communion; and, indeed, from all such in their own societies who walk disorderly they are directed to withdraw themselves.

8a. In conversation they are to abstain from sinful men; not that they are to have no commerce nor correspondence with them in civil things, for then, as the apostle says, they "must needs go out of the world;" but that they are not to join with them in their sinful practices, but bear a testimony against them; they are not to walk, as other Gentiles do, in the vanity of their minds; nor to walk with them in the same paths of sin and folly; nor to keep up any intimate and familiar converse with them; knowing, that "evil communications corrupt good manners".

8b. Nor should they keep company with erroneous persons, with men of unsound principles; for such, who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the gospel of Christ, are to be avoided, and their conversation shunned; and such who cavil at, and consent not unto the wholesome words of Christ, and the doctrine according to godliness, are to be withdrawn from; and such who have imbibed heretical notions, repugnant to the sacred Trinity, and to the person of Christ, and the grace of the Spirit, are to be rejected; and such who bring not the doctrine of Christ with them, are not to be bid Godspeed, nor received into the houses of God's people (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 3:10; 2 John 1:10, 11).

9. Ninthly, church members should be constant in assembling together for religious worship; it is remarked of the members of the first Christian church, to their honour, that they "continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayer," (Acts 2:42) that is, they constantly attended on hearing the doctrines of the apostles, which they gladly received and persevered in; and kept up their communion with them and one another, and were not missing at the Lord's Supper, and at times of public prayer; though in after times, an evil manner, a bad custom prevailed among some of those Christian Hebrews; as to "forsake the assembling of themselves together," which the apostle takes notice of to their dishonour (Heb. 10:25), a custom of bad consequence, both to communities and particular persons; for what one may do, every one may do, and in course public worship cease, and churches break up; and such a practice is very prejudicial and harmful to individuals; it is not known what may be lost by missing an opportunity or an ordinance; and what trouble and distress of soul may follow upon it, as the case of Thomas shows, who was not with the rest of the disciples when Christ first appeared to them; it is dangerous to indulge to an indifference to, and to any degree of neglect of the service of God in his house; the evil may grow, and at last issue in apostasy, as in the stony ground hearers.

10. Tenthly, there should be no respect of persons among members of churches in their assemblies, and when met together on church affairs, with regard to rich or poor, greater or lesser gifts; there should be no overbearing, no browbeating, nor any supercilious airs used; no affectation of superiority one over another, they being on an equal footing, in the same relation to one another, abating the difference of offices (Matthew 20:26, 27) all the strife should be "in honour to prefer one another;" and such who are highest, with respect to spiritual gifts or worldly riches, should "condescend to men of low estates" (Rom. 12:10, 16).

11. Eleventhly, it behooves them to strive together for the faith of the gospel, and earnestly to contend for it; and not part with any of the truths of Christ and doctrines of grace; and should be careful to keep the ordinances as they were delivered, and not suffer any innovation in them, neither as to the matter and substance of them, nor as to the manner in which they are to be observed; and they should walk in them all with great unanimity and constancy, and should stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, and not be entangled with any yoke of bondage, nor suffer any human inventions and unwarranted practices to be imposed upon them.

12. Twelfthly, it becomes them to be examples to each other in a holy walk and conversation, and in an observance of all the duties of religion. Holiness becomes the house of God, and the members in it; their light should shine both in the church and in the world, that others beholding their good works, may imitate them, and glorify God: they that name the name of Christ, and profess to be his, should depart from all iniquity, doctrinal and practical; they should be concerned to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, and show out of a good conversation their works with meekness of wisdom; they should endeavour to fill up in a becoming manner all stations and relations in life, civil or economical, in the world and family; as of magistrates and subjects, of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants; as well as in the church, as pastors, deacons, and private members, and be careful to perform all duties relative to them; that so their fellow members may not be grieved nor stumbled; nor the good ways of God be evil spoken of; nor the name of God, and his doctrine, be blasphemed; nor any occasion given to the adversary to speak reproachfully; and by a strict attention to these several duties of religion, they will show that they behave themselves in the house of God as they ought to do.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Of this see more in Book 1. ch. 9.

[2] episkopuntev.

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 3

OF THE OFFICERS OF A CHURCH, PARTICULARLY PASTORS

Having treated of a church, as "essentially" considered, with respect to its matter and form, I shall now proceed to consider it,

2. "Organically," or as an organized church, a corporate body, having its proper officers. In the first churches there were officers both extraordinary and ordinary; the extraordinary officers were apostles, prophets, and evangelists.

2a. "Apostles," (1 Cor. 12:28). These had the "first" and chief place in the church, and the signs of the apostles were found with them: they had their call and mission from Christ, and were not of men, nor by men, but by Jesus Christ; and as they had their mission and commission immediately from Christ, so their doctrine; they neither received it from men, nor were taught it, but had it by the revelation of Christ; they were infallibly guided into all truth by the inspiration of the Spirit, and had the power of working miracles, in confirmation of all this; they went out by authority everywhere, preaching the gospel, to the conversion of multitudes; and were the first planters of churches, which others watered; they were not limited to any particular church, but had the care of, and presided in all the churches wherever they came. This office is now ceased, the apostles have no successors in it: not such who are called lord bishops; for as the apostles had not their pompous titles, nor their grandeur, nor their wealth, so neither have these lordly bishops their gifts, power, and authority; they have neither mission nor commission, nor work similar to theirs.

2b. There were set in the churches, "secondarily, prophets," (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11) who had extraordinary gifts for explaining the word of God; for instruction and confirmation in the truths of it; and had the gift of tongues, to preach in them to all nations; such were in the church at Antioch, and such were Silas and Judas (Acts 13:1, 15:22), and who also had the gift of foretelling future events; as Agabus, and others, who were of great use to the churches in those times (Acts 11:28, 21:10). This office is also no more; only the ordinary gift of interpreting the scriptures is sometimes called "prophesying," and those who have it "prophets".

2c. "Evangelists". This name is sometimes given to the writers of the four gospels; two of which were apostles, Matthew and John; the other two, evangelists, Mark and Luke: evangelists were companions of the apostles in their travels, assistants to them in their work, and who were sent by them here and there, with messages from them to the

churches, where they had been, and to finish what they had begun; for which purpose they were sometimes left in certain places; but not to reside and continue there. This office is now extinct; only that every truly gospel preacher may be called an evangelist, or evangelizer. The ordinary officers of the church are pastors and deacons, and these only; though antichrist has introduced a rabble of other officers, the scripture knows nothing of.

1. Pastors: these are shepherds under Christ, the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls; who take the care of the flock, and feed it, as their name signifies; such were promised to be given under the gospel dispensation; and such Christ has given to his churches (Jer. 3:15; Eph. 4:11), and still gives; to whom he says, as he did to Peter, "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep," (John 21:15, 16). Who,

1a. Are the same with "teachers," according to Ephesians 4:11 "Some pastors and teachers;" not "some pastors" and "some teachers," as if they were different; but "and teachers," the *καί* or and, being exegetical, explaining what is meant by pastors, even such who are teachers, to instruct in the knowledge of divine things; which is the pastor's work, to feed men with knowledge and understanding: and it may be observed, that in 1 Corinthians 12:28 where each of the officers of the church are enumerated, mention is made of "teachers," but "pastors" omitted, because they are the same; for they are not to be distinguished with respect to the place where they perform their work, as if the office of pastors was in the church, the flock they are to feed; but teachers or doctors in the school; whereas, it is certain, that a teacher is an officer in the church, as well as pastor (1 Cor. 12:28), nor are they to be distinguished as two distinct officers in the church, because of the subject of their ministry; the one, the pastor attending to exhortation, to things practical, and the teacher to things doctrinal, asserting, explaining, and defending the doctrines of the gospel, and refuting errors; since both belong to one and the same: if these were distinct, it should seem rather that teachers design gifted brethren, called to minister the word, but not to office power; and are only assistants to pastors in preaching, but not in the administration of the ordinances; yet it is pretty plain, that those who have a commission to teach, have also a commission to baptize, and to attend to whatsoever Christ has commanded; yea, it may be observed, that even extraordinary officers are called "teachers;" as apostles and prophets (Acts 13:1; 1 Tim. 2:7).

1b. These pastors and teachers are the same with "bishops," or overseers, whose business it is to feed the flock, they have the episcopacy or oversight of, which is the work pastors are to do; which office of a bishop is a good work; and is the only office in the church distinct from that of deacon,(1 Tim. 3:1, 8; Phil. 1:1).

1c. And these bishops are the same with "elders"[1]; when the apostle Paul had called together at Miletus the elders of the church at Ephesus, he addressed them as "overseers," *ἐπισκοπους*, "bishops," (Acts 20:17, 28) and when he 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. plainly suggesting, that an elder and a bishop are the same (Titus 1:5-7) and the apostle Peter exhorts the "elders," to "feed

the flock of God, taking the oversight," επισκοπος, acting the part of a bishop, or performing the office of one (1 Peter 5:1, 2).

1d. These pastors, teachers, bishops, and elders, are called rulers, guides, and governors. A pastor, or shepherd, is the governor and guide of his flock; a teacher, and a ruling elder are the same (1 Tim. 5:17). One qualification of a bishop is, that he know how to rule his own house; or how shall he take care of the church of God, to rule that well, which is a considerable branch of his office? (1 Tim. 3:1, 4, 5) these, indeed, are not to lord it over God's heritage, or rule according to their own wills, in an arbitrary manner; but according to the laws of Christ, as King of saints; and then they are to be respected and obeyed; "Remember them that have the rule over you, and obey them;" for they are over the churches in the Lord, and under him as the great Lawgiver in his house; and though they are described as such who have the rule over churches, and are guides to them (Heb. 13:7, 17) yet they are the churches servants, for Jesus's sake (2 Cor. 4:5).

1e. These are sometimes called the angels of the churches; so the pastors, elders, bishops, or overseers of the seven churches of Asia, are called the angels of the seven churches; and the pastor, elder, bishop, or overseer of the church at Ephesus, the angel of the church at Ephesus (Rev. 1:20, 2:1), so called because of their office, being sent of God, and employed by him in carrying messages of grace to the churches, and publishing the good tidings of salvation.

1f. They are said to be "ministers of Christ," or his "under rowers," as the word υπηρετας signifies (1 Cor. 4:1), the church is the ship or boat, which they work; Christ is the pilot, who is at the helm, under whom, and by whose direction, they row; and the oars they row with are the word, ordinances, and discipline they administer. And in the same place,

1g. They are called, "Stewards of the mysteries of God;" and sometimes, "Good stewards of the manifold Grace of God;" that is, of the more sublime truths of the gospel, and the various doctrines of divine grace (1 Peter 4:10) so a bishop or elder is called a "steward of God," (Titus 1:7) a steward in his house or family, to give to everyone in it their portion of meat in due season: and which office requires wisdom and faithfulness, to execute it aright (Luke 12:42; 1 Cor. 4:2). Concerning these persons may be observed,

2. The qualifications of them for their office; which, as it is a "good office," the necessary qualifications should be found in those who are put into it, and which the apostle directs to (1 Tim. 3:1; &c). Some of which,

2a. Respect the internal and spiritual character and accomplishments of a bishop or elder. As,

2a1. He must not be a novice; which does not mean a young man; for such an one was Timothy himself, to whom the apostle writes, who was more than an ordinary officer, even an evangelist; hence he says, "Let no man despise thy youth," (1 Tim. 4:12) but the word νεοφυτος, translated "novice," signifies, "one newly planted"[2], that is, in the

church of God; there must be time, after such a plant is planted, to observe whether it has taken good root, and how it grows and thrives, and, whether a plant of Christ's heavenly Father's planting. A bishop or elder should be first of some standing in the church, before he is called to such an office, that his gifts, grace, and conduct may be known, "lest being lifted up with pride," elated with the high station he is advanced to, and with the gifts he is supposed to have, "he fall into the condemnation of the devil;" fall by pride as he did, and under the same sentence, and be degraded from his office.

2a2. He must have a competency of knowledge and understanding in divine things; for a pastor is to feed men with knowledge and understanding; and therefore must have a good share of it himself, that so he may be "able to teach others also," (2 Tim. 2:2) this is a principal part of his work, to teach and instruct men in the knowledge of evangelical truths; in which he should be assiduous; "He that teacheth, on teaching," (Rom. 12:7) and for this he must have a ministerial gift; which is not natural parts, nor human learning, nor grace in common with other Christians; which, though all needful and useful, yet neither of them separately, nor all together, will qualify a man to be a public teacher of the word. He must have a special and peculiar gift from Christ; such as he received at his ascension, and gives to men, to ordinary ministers of the word; and it was according to the measure of such a gift, though a large one, the apostle Paul himself was made a minister of the gospel, and to such a gift he ascribes his being one (Eph. 3:7, 8, 4:7, 8).

2a3. He must not only be able to teach, but he must be "apt to teach;" which aptitude lies in a good degree of elocution, and a free utterance of speech; for it is of little avail what is a man's capacity, what the thoughts of his mind, and what stock of knowledge he has, unless he can clothe his ideas with proper words to convey the understanding of them to others; the royal preacher "sought to find out acceptable words;" such as were suitable to express his meaning, and to give delight and pleasure, as well as yield profit to them that heard him; and especially the taught words of the Holy Ghost are to be made use of. Apollos was an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, well versed in them, and which greatly improved his gift of elocution; a good textuary makes a good preacher; a free and ready utterance is necessary; such an one is like the scribe and householder (Matthew 13:52). The apostle Paul himself desired the Ephesians to pray for him, "that utterance might be given him," (Eph. 6:19).

2b. There are other qualifications of a bishop or pastor, which respect his domestic character. He must be "the husband of one wife": this does not oblige a bishop or elder to be a married man; nor restrain from a second marriage after the decease of his wife; only that he should have but one wife at a time. Polygamy having been much in use among Jews and Gentiles, the first Christians were not easily brought off of that practice; however, the apostle thought fit to enjoin that a bishop or pastor should not practise it, that he might not set an example of it, which might serve to countenance and continue it; there were some peculiar laws respecting the marriage of the high priest among the Jews, and by which it seems he was to have but one wife (Lev. 21:13, 14), and much the same laws are directed to for priests or ministers of the word, under the gospel dispensation (Ezek. 44:22) also a bishop or elder must be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity," or reverence of him; obedient to his

commands, and who behave respectably to him; and especially he should be careful to lay his commands upon them to keep the ways of the Lord, and to restrain them from vices, and severely reprove them for them; in which good old Eli was deficient, and therefore blamed and corrected for it: the apostle gives a good and strong reason why a bishop or elder should have this qualification; "For," says he, "if a man know not how to rule his own house," or family, "how shall he take care of the house of God?"

2c. There are other qualifications, which respect his personal character, conduct, and behaviour. As,

2c1. That he must be "blameless" in his conversation. Song the priest under the law were to have no blemish on them, nor any natural defect in them (Lev. 21:17-23), though they were men encompassed with moral infirmities. And this rule, respecting a bishop or pastor of a church, does not imply that he must be perfect and without sin, only that he should not be guilty of any scandalous sin, and especially should not live in any known sin; otherwise there is no man, not the best of men, without sin; no, not in the highest office; the prophets of the Old Testament, and the apostles of the New, were men of like passions with others.

2c2. Such an one must be "of good behaviour, and must have a good report with them that are without;" he should have a good report of all men, as Demetrius had; not only of the church and its members, of those that are within, to whom he is to be "an example in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity," (1 Tim. 4:12) but of those without the church, the men of the world; that the ministry be not blamed and had in contempt, the ways of God, and doctrines of Christ, evil spoken of, and the ministers usefulness to the souls of men hindered.

2c3. He must not be given to any vice; "Not given to wine," that is, to excessive drinking of it; otherwise it is no more criminal to drink that than to drink water; and Timothy is advised by the apostle to refrain from drinking water, and to make use of wine for his health's sake (1 Tim. 5:23), or given to quarrels; he must be "no striker," neither with his fist nor with his tongue; no calumniator, no "brawler," not litigious and contentious; but "patient," and bear all reproaches, indignities, and insults; "not greedy of, nor given to filthy lucre," should not enter on his work and take upon him such an office, with a lucrative view; nor be "covetous," but "given to hospitality;" not insatiably desirous of wealth and riches, and making use of any unlawful way to obtain them; but should, according to his abilities, be liberal in relieving the poor and necessitous; and in entertaining Christian strangers and travellers, when well recommended; and by all this set a good example to others; and for which he should be supplied by the church to whom he ministers.

2c4. A bishop, elder, or pastor, should be "vigilant;" watch over himself and his flock, and take heed to both: to himself; to his doctrine, that it be sound, pure, and incorrupt, and according to the word of God; and to his conversation, that it be as becomes the gospel of Christ; to his flock, to feed them with wholesome food, to lead and direct them to good pastures, and to preserve them from wolves, from false teachers, that lie in wait

to deceive; he is to watch for the souls of men, for their spiritual good and welfare, as one that must give an account with joy, and not with grief; and he should be "sober" and modest, wise and prudent, and "think soberly of himself," (Rom. 12:3). I proceed to consider,

3. How any come into such an office, and are instated into it.

3a. First, there must be a call to the ministry of the word, both inward and outward, previous to this office; no man, under the law, "took to himself the honour" of the priest's office, but he that was "called of God, as was Aaron," (Heb. 5:4, 5) nor ought any man to take upon him the office of a prophet, or minister of the word, without a call; there were some in the times of Jeremiah complained of by the Lord, who were not sent nor spoken to by him; and yet "prophesied" (Jer. 23:21).

3a1. An internal call; which lies in gifts bestowed, and in the furniture of a man's mind, and in the disposition of it to make use of them in the service of God; for God never calls a man to any service but he gives him abilities for it; which, when a man is sensible of, and is satisfied God has bestowed a gift upon him, he cannot be easy to wrap up his talent in a napkin, but is desirous of making use of it in a public manner; not by a mere impulse, through vanity of mind, and with ambitious views, and sordid ends; but from a principle of love to the souls of men, and to the glory of God; this is the internal call, of which a man's gifts are an evidence to himself and others.

3a2. The outward call is not immediately by Christ, as the twelve disciples were called, and sent forth by him to preach the gospel; and particularly, as the apostle Paul was called to be an apostle; not of men, neither by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, but mediately by the church; it being by some means or another made known to the church, that such an one is thought to have a gift for public usefulness, the church calls him to exercise it before them, and submit it to their examination and trial; and having sufficiently tried it, and being satisfied of it, the church calls and sends him forth in the name of Christ, to preach the gospel, where he may be directed in providence to do it; and being thus called and sent forth, he is eligible to the office of a pastor of a church who shall think fit to choose him.

3b. Secondly, the procedure of instating him into the office of a pastor, or the ordination of him, is in this manner.

3b1. He must be a member of a church, to whom he is to be ordained as a pastor. Song an extraordinary officer, an apostle, was chosen and ordained to be one, in the room of Judas, from among the disciples who had accompanied Christ and his apostles from the baptism of John; and so inferior officers, deacons, were selected out of the church, and appointed to that office (Acts 1:21-23, 6:3, 5), so Epaphras, a faithful minister of Christ for the church at Colosse, is said to be "one of you," a member of that church (Col. 1:7, 4:12) one that is not a member of the church, cannot be a pastor of it.

3b2. His qualifications, such as before observed, must be known by the members of a church, and must be proved and approved of by them; yea, they must be satisfied that he has gifts for "their" edification; for a man may have gifts for the edification of one church, which are not for the edification of another; and this should be known, previous to their choice and call of him.

3b3. After sufficient trial and due consideration of his gifts, to satisfaction, and after seeking the Lord by prayer, for everything is sanctified by the word of God and prayer, the church proceeds to the choice and call of him to be their pastor; for every church has a right and power to choose its own officers, pastors, and deacons.

3b4. This choice and call being signified to him, he taking proper time, and seeking the Lord also, accepts thereof, and shows a readiness and willingness to take the "oversight" of them (1 Peter 5:2), for there must be a mutual consent and agreement in this affair.

3b5. To the public instating of him into his office, it is necessary there should be a recognition and repetition both of the church's choice and call of him, and of his acceptance of it, for the confirmation thereof, and for the satisfaction of ministers, and churches in communion; who meet to see their order, and to assist, especially the former, by prayer for them, and by giving a word of exhortation to them, if desired.

3b6. As every civil society has a right to choose, appoint, and ordain their own officers; as all cities and towns corporate, their mayors or provosts, aldermen, burgesses, &c. so churches, which are religious societies, have a right to choose and ordain their own officers, and which are ordained, αυτοις, "for them," and for them "only;" that is, for each particular church, and not another (Acts 14:23).

3b7. The election and call of them, with their acceptance, is ordination. The essence of ordination lies in the voluntary choice and call of the people, and in the voluntary acceptance of that call by the person chosen and called; for this affair must be by mutual consent and agreement, which joins them together as pastor and people. And this is done among themselves; and public ordination, so called, is no other than a declaration of that. Election and ordination are spoken of as the same; the latter is expressed and explained by the former. It is said of Christ, that he "ordained twelve," (Mark 3:14) that is, he chose them to the office of apostleship, as he himself explains it (John 6:70; see Acts 1:2). Paul and Barnabas are said to "ordain elders in every church," (Acts 14:23) or to choose them[3]; that is, they gave orders and directions to every church, as to the choice of elders over them; for sometimes persons are said to do that which they give orders and directions for doing, as Moses and Solomon, with respect to building the tabernacle and temple, though done by others; and Moses particularly is said to choose the judges (Ex. 18:25), the choice being made under his direction and guidance. The word that is used in Acts 14:23 is translated chosen, 2 Corinthians 8:19, where the apostle speaks of a brother, χειροτουηθεις, "who was chosen of the churches to travel with us;" and is so rendered when ascribed to God (Acts 10:41).

3b8. This choice and ordination in primitive times, was made two ways[4]; by casting lots and by giving votes, signified by stretching out of hands. Matthias was chosen and ordained to be an apostle in the room of Judas, by casting lots; that being an extraordinary office, required an immediate interposition of the divine Being; a lot being nothing more nor less than an appeal to God for the, decision of an affair. But ordinary officers, as elders and pastors of churches, were chosen and ordained by the votes of the people, expressed by stretching out their hands; thus it is said of the apostles (Acts 14:23) "When they had ordained them elders in every church," χειροτονησαντες, by taking the suffrages and votes of the members of the churches, shown by the stretching out of their hands, as the word signifies[5]; and which they directed them to, and upon it declared the elders duly elected and ordained. Song Clemens Romanus, who lived at the latter end of the apostolic age, says[6], the apostles appointed proper persons to the office of the ministry, "with the consent or choice of the whole church;" and this practice continued to the third century; in which century Cyprian[7] was chosen bishop of Carthage, by the suffrage of the people; and so he says[8] was Cornelius, bishop of Rome, in the same age; as was Fabianus, before him[9]: the council of Nice, in the beginning of the fourth century, in their synodical epistle[10], to the churches in Egypt, ordered, that when any were removed by death, their places should be filled up by others, provided they were worthy, and such as the people chose; the bishop of Alexandria agreeing to and confirming the choice: in the same century Martin was chosen bishop of Tours, by a vast concourse of the people[11]: indeed, the council at Laodicea, Can. XIII. in this century, ordered, that from thenceforward the people should not be allowed to choose their own ministers; which shows it had been practised before: yea, after, in the "fifth" century, Austin, in his old age, recommended to the people Eradius[12], to be his successor; which they showed their approbation of by their loud and repeated acclamations[13]. But,

3b9. Though there was χειροτονια, "a stretching out of the hands;" yet there was no χειροθεσια, "imposition of hands," used at the ordination; neither of extraordinary officers, as apostles; nor of ordinary pastors or elders of churches, in the times of Christ and his apostles.

3b9a. Christ ordained the twelve apostles himself; but we read not a word of his laying his hands upon them, when he ordained them; nor on the seventy disciples, when he appointed them, and sent them forth into every city. Matthias was chosen and ordained an apostle in the room of Judas, upon a lot being cast by the church, which fell upon him; and upon counting the lots he was numbered, συγκατεψηφισθη, "chosen," or by the number of lots declared to be chosen, and so took his place, and was reckoned with the apostles; but no mention is made of any hands being laid on him (see Acts 1:22-26).

3b9b. The apostles are said to "ordain elders in every church," not by laying their hands upon them, but by taking the votes of the people, on the stretching out of their hands; when they declared the elders duly elected and ordained, as before observed. The apostle Paul directed Titus (Titus 1:5), to "ordain elders in every city;" that is, in such sort and manner as he and Barnabas had done in the above instance; but gave him no orders and instructions to lay hands upon them; which he would not have omitted, had it been material, and so essential to ordination as some make it to be: and if he was to ordain

elders by the laying on of his hands, then not by the hands of a presbytery, since he was a single person; and if this was to be done by him as a bishop, which some say he was, though the subscription of the epistle to him not being genuine, which asserts it, is no proof of it, it would justify ordination by a diocesan bishop.

3b9c. No instance can be given of hands being laid on any ordinary minister, pastor or elder, at his ordination; nor, indeed, of hands being laid on any, upon whatsoever account, but by extraordinary persons; nor by them upon any ministers, but extraordinary ones; and even then not at and for the ordination of them. The instance in Acts 13:1-3 is no proof of laying on of hands at the ordination of a pastor or elder of a church; Paul and Barnabas were extraordinary persons, apostolical men, and were never ordained pastors or elders to any particular church; nor is there the least hint given of any such ordination of them at that time; nor was this the first time of the separation of them to the sacred office of the ministry: they had been in it, and had exercised it long before, and in as public a manner as afterwards: and what they were now separated to was some peculiar and extraordinary work and service[14] the Holy Ghost had for them to do in foreign parts, whither they travelled; and the persons who were directed by him to separate them to it, were extraordinary ones also; and their, prayers for them, with the rite of imposition of hands, seem only to express their good wishes for a prosperous success in their work[15]: and it may be observed, that this rite was used, not "at," but "after" the separation of them to the work and service into which they were appointed, and after fasting and prayer for them: this was the last act done, just when upon their departure; for so it is said, "And when they had fasted and prayed," και επιθεντες τας χειρας αυτοις, "then putting hands upon them, they sent them away," or dismissed them with this token, or sign of their good wishes for them. The apostle Paul, indeed, speaks of the hands of the presbytery being laid upon Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14), but it should be observed, that Timothy was an extraordinary officer in the church, an evangelist, and was not chosen or ordained a pastor of any particular church; nor did he reside in anyone place for any length of time; the subscription of the "second" epistle to him being not to be depended upon as genuine, no more than of that to Titus[16]; and therefore he can be no instance of imposition of hands at the ordination of any ordinary, elder, or pastor of a church; and who the presbytery were who laid hands on him, be it upon what account it may, they must be extraordinary persons through whose hands an extraordinary gift was conveyed: we are sure the apostle Paul was one, since he expressly speaks of a gift which Timothy had "by the putting on of his hands;" and it can scarcely be thought that any other should join with herein but an apostolical man; very probably Silas (see Acts 16:1, 19). However, upon the whole, it appears to be an extraordinary affair transacted by extraordinary persons, on an extraordinary one, and by it an extraordinary gift was conveyed; which no man of modesty will assume to himself a power of conveying: And let it be observed, it was not an "office," but a "gift," which was conveyed this way (see 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

3b9d. The hands of ministers being now empty, and they having no gifts to convey through the use of this rite, of course it ought to cease, and should; it not appearing to have been used but by extraordinary persons on any account; upon which, at least for the most part, if not always, extraordinary things followed.

3b9e. To say that this rite is now used at the ordination of a pastor to point him out to the assembly, is exceeding trifling: the church needs it not, having before chosen and called him, and he having accepted their call in a more private way: and it is needless to others met together publicly to observe the order of the procedure; since usually the members of the church are desired to recognize their choice and call of their pastor, and he is desired to renew his acceptance, and frequently he makes a confession of his faith; and after all this, to use this rite to point him out to the people, is such a piece of weakness for which no excuse can be made.

Should it be urged, that imposition of hands was used at the ordination of deacons, and then why not at the ordination of elders or pastors of churches, which is an higher office? It may be answered, that the church, as directed, chose out from among them seven men, so and so qualified (Acts 6:1-7), in which choice the essence of ordination lay; whom they presented to the apostles, who, approving their choice, confirmed it, and "constituted" and settled them in their office, as they proposed (Acts 6:3), and the rite of imposition of hands was used after this, and even after prayer for them; for it is said, "When they had prayed," not while they were praying, as the custom is now, "they laid their hands on them;" which, done for what end soever, was done by extraordinary persons, the apostles, and it may be for extraordinary service; and so no rule to ordinary ministers in the ordination of persons to an ordinary office; and it may be, it was done by way of benediction, wishing them happiness and success in their office, for which this rite was used among the Jews, and for the confirmation of this office, it not being the immediate institution of Christ, but of the apostles[17]: and the use of it seems to be temporary, since we have no other instance of it on such an account; nor any injunction of it, nor any direction for it; nor is it made mention of by the apostle, when he treats of the office of deacons, their qualifications, the proving and instalment of them into their office, and their use of it (1 Tim. 3:10), nor does it appear that there was afterwards any ordination of deacons, by imposition of hands, until the fourth century, when church offices and church officers were both magnified and multiplied. Besides, if the seven persons spoken of in Acts 6:1-6 were "extraordinarily" and "pro tempore" appointed to take care of the poor, and of the widows in the first church at Jerusalem, and particularly of the Grecian widows in it, to answer their present exigency; and were different from the ordinary deacons of the churches, afterwards spoken of in Paul's epistles, which is the sense of Vitringa[18] who observes, that these men are never called "deacons," only described by their number the "Seven," as in Acts 21:8 that their work was not similar to that of ordinary deacons, their "ministration" being not monthly, nor weekly, but daily, and of an extraordinary kind; for they succeeded the apostles in the care of the secular affairs of the church; they had all the estates, and the whole substance of the community, which was made one common stock in their hands, to dispose of to them as they needed; which was a very extraordinary and uncommon piece of service; though their destination was more peculiar to the care of the Grecian widows; and these seven men appear by their names to be all of them Greeks, or Jewish proselytes from the Greeks, as one of them most certainly was; and had it not been for the murmuring of the Greeks, no such appointment would have been made; nor does it appear that they continued in their office, but when this was over, it ceased; and some of them, at least, were afterwards employed in other ministerial services, and elsewhere: now if this was the case, which is not easy to

be disproved, we have no scripture instance of the imposition of hands at the ordination of ordinary deacons; nor any instruction and direction for it. I go on to consider,

4. The work of such persons, who are instated into the office of pastors of churches.

4a. First, the chief and principal of their work is to feed the church of God committed to their care; they have the name of pastors, "a pascendo," from feeding; Christ the chief Shepherd and Bishop of souls, feeds his flock like a shepherd; and so it is the business of all under shepherds to feed their respective flocks (1 Peter 5:2).

4a1. First, whom they are to feed.

4a1a. Not dogs that worry the flock; but the flock itself. The "childrens' bread," that which is fit and suitable food for them, is not to be taken and "cast to dogs;" that which is holy is not to be given to them; the holy word of God, its precious truths and promises, do not belong to them; nor are the holy ordinances to be administered to them; "without are dogs," they are without the church, out of the flock, and so do not belong to the care and feeding of the pastors or shepherds.

4a1b. Nor swine; such who for the impurity of their hearts and lives, wallowing in the filth of sin, are comparable to these creatures; and which are creatures that never look upwards, but downwards to the earth, and so fit emblems of those who mind earth and earthly things, and feed on them. The prodigal was sent by the citizen of the country, the legal preacher, to whom he joined himself, into his fields to feed swine; but pastors of churches are not swineherds, but shepherds.

4a1c. Nor the world's goats; the Lord judges and distinguishes between cattle and cattle, the sheep and the goats; though these are sometimes folded together, he threatens to punish the goats, which will be done at the second coming of Christ, when he will divide the sheep from the goats, and set the one on his right hand and the other on his left; when the latter shall go into everlasting punishment, and the former into life eternal.

4a1d. They are Christ's sheep and lambs, that pastors of churches are to feed, according to the directions given by Christ to Peter; "Feed my sheep, feed my lambs," (John 21:15-17) such whom Christ has an interest and property in, through the Father's gift of them to him, and through his laying down his life for them (John 10:15, 29), and which is an argument why pastors should be careful and diligent to feed them, because they are Christ's; "My lambs, my sheep;" both are to be fed; the tender lambs, otherwise newborn babes, little children, as well as the grown sheep, otherwise young men and fathers. Christ, the great Shepherd, has set an example of diligence and tenderness (Isa. 40:11). So that,

4a1e. All the flock, the whole flock, is to be taken heed unto, and taken care of by pastors and shepherds, "over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers, or bishops;" and for which reason they should be careful of them; and another follows, "to feed the church

of God, which he has purchased with his own blood;" and therefore of great value and great care should be taken of it to feed it.

4a2. Secondly, what they are to feed the church or flock of God with?

4a2a. Not with chaff and husks, or what is comparable to them (Jer. 23:28), chaff is light, has no substance in it, and yields no nourishment, and is not fit for food; as bread made of wheat is, and denotes the solid and substantial doctrines of the gospel, with which the souls of men are to be fed. Husks are food for swine, but not for sheep; the externals of religion satisfy some minds, but not truly gracious souls, they cannot live upon these.

4a2b. Pastors of churches are to feed their flocks with such food as is suitable to lambs and sheep; milk is for tender lambs, for newborn babes, who desire the sincere milk of the word. Milk designs the more plain and easy truths of the gospel, which are suited to tender minds; strong meat, the more sublime doctrines of it, fitter for those of full age, more grown Christians, who have a better exercise of their spiritual senses, and can discern things that differ (1 Peter 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:14).

4a2c. Sound doctrine, salutary truths, the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus, are what pastors are to teach and feed souls with; these are nourishing, when unsound doctrines, the unwholesome words of false teachers, eat as do a canker.

4a2d. The word of God in general, and especially the gospel part of it, is food for souls, and is esteemed by them more than their necessary food; being that to their souls, what the richest and choicest food is to their bodies; they find it and eat it, and it is the joy and rejoicing of their hearts; it is sweeter to their taste than the honey or the honeycomb.

4a2e. Pastors are promised and given to the churches, to feed them "with knowledge and understanding," (Jer. 3:15) which may denote both the matter they are to feed them with, and the manner in which they are to do it.

4a2e1. The matter or things they are to feed souls with, are things worthy to be known; not trifling things, matters of curiosity, and of no importance, which are vain and unprofitable, and serve to gender strife, and tend not to godly edification: not philosophy and vain deceit, or science falsely so called; nor mere human knowledge, or knowledge of natural things; but divine knowledge, knowledge of divine things; which, though a minister cannot give; he may teach and instruct; for it is the Lord that gives understanding in all things; it is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation who leads men into the knowledge of Christ; and it is the Son of God himself who gives men an understanding to know him that is true; yet ministers are instruments of bringing men into an acquaintance with divine things, and of their improvement in the knowledge of them; the light of divine truths shines in their hearts, that they may be able to communicate, in a ministerial way, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God," of the glory of his divine perfections, displayed "in the face or person," and in the work and office "of Jesus Christ". Their work is to preach Christ, and him crucified; and they determine to know, that is, to make known, none but him, as the Saviour of lost sinners; and they are the

servants of the most high God, which show unto men the way of salvation by Christ; and direct souls to him, who inquire, What shall we do to be saved? yea, they may be said "to give knowledge of salvation," as John the Baptist is said to do, being instruments of conveying the knowledge of it to men; so likewise they feed men with the knowledge and understanding of gospel truths; as they have knowledge of the mysteries of Christ themselves, they impart it to others; as they have freely received, they freely give, and keep back nothing that may be profitable, but declare the whole counsel of God; and such knowledge is food to the mind as bread is to the body.

4a2e2. This phrase, "With knowledge and understanding," may signify the manner in which pastors are to feed the souls of men, wisely and prudently; which they do when, as wise and faithful stewards, they give to everyone their portion of meat in due season, and feed them in proportion to their age and capacity; give milk to babes, and meat to strong men.

4a3. Thirdly, by what means they are to feed and do feed the churches of Christ, over which they are set.

4a3a. By the ministry of the word, or by the preaching of the gospel; which is the means appointed of God for the gathering in his elect ones, for the perfecting the number of them in conversion, and for the edification of the body, the church, and all its members; for their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, and of all divine things: an unpreaching pastor, bishop, or elder, is a contradiction in terms; and such are like those described by the prophet as blind and ignorant watchmen, dumb dogs that cannot bark, shepherds that cannot understand; who everyone look for their gain from their quarter, though they do not the duty of their office. But,

4a3a1. Such feed the flock, who do their work aright; give themselves up to the ministry of the word, neglect all other services, at least as much as may be, that they may not be entangled with them, and be diverted by them, from their grand employment; to which they have devoted themselves, for the glory of God and the good of souls. Such give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine; and meditate on these things, and give themselves wholly to them, that their profiting may appear to all, and their usefulness to many.

4a3a2. They addict themselves to the study of the sacred scriptures more particularly; and endeavour to bring forth from thence things new and old, which may be for the use of edifying; they study to show themselves approved of God, skilful workmen, who need not be ashamed of their ministrations, rightly dividing the word, which will not fail of feeding, more or less, the souls of men; as they have the word of God, the knowledge and experience of it, they are faithful to dispense it as stewards of the mysteries of God; of whom it is required, that they be both faithful and wise.

4a3a3. They are assiduous and constant in this work; they, as the apostles of Christ, give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word; do not preach a sermon only now and then, but preach the word constantly, and are instant in season and out of

season; and take every opportunity of feeding and of doing good to the souls of men; they are constant and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that their labour is not in vain in the Lord.

4a3a4. They not only give themselves up to this work, and are studious and constant in it, but labour therein; they are not loiterers, but labourers in the Lord's vineyard; and are labourers together with him, and are approved by him; and their labours are blessed and succeeded among men, and they receive honour from them, of which they are worthy (1 Tim. 5:17).

4a3a5. They are careful to preach the pure and whole gospel of Christ; they study a consistence in their ministry, that it be not yea and nay, and contradict itself; they are not of them who corrupt the word with human doctrines and the inventions of men; but speak it with all sincerity, renouncing all arts of dishonesty, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; keeping back no part of divine truths, but declaring the whole of what is revealed in the word of God, so far as they have knowledge of it; and such are more or less blessed for the feeding the flock and church of God.

4a3b. Pastors of churches feed souls by the administration of ordinances; these are the goodness and fatness of the house of God, with which the saints are richly fed, and abundantly filled and satisfied; these are the provisions of Zion, which the Lord blesses; these are breasts of consolation, out of which gracious souls suck, and are delighted and refreshed; these are green pastures, into which the shepherds of Israel lead their flocks and feed them.

4a3c. This act of feeding includes the whole work, and every part of the work of a shepherd or pastor to his flock, doing all good offices to them, and all the service they can for them; such as seeking the lost sheep, bringing again that which was driven away, binding up that which was broken, and strengthening the sick (Ezek. 34:16), preserving them from the lion and the bear, and from grievous wolves, false teachers, who will not spare the flock; watching over them even in the night seasons, when needful; watching for their souls, the good and welfare of them, as those who must give an account of them; being diligent to know the state of the flock, and ready to administer all relief to them in their power, by comforting the feeble minded, and supporting the weak.

4a3d. A concern for the spiritual good of the flock the pastor has the care of, appears by his constant, fervent, and earnest prayers for it; for this is one part of the work they give themselves up unto, along with the ministry of the word, namely, prayer; particularly for those to whom they minister, that the word preached by them might be blessed unto them, and be food for their souls; thus we find the apostle Paul, in all his epistles, makes mention of his prayers for all the churches, and the members of them, he having the care of all the churches on him.

4a3e. Pastors may feed the souls of men under their care, not only by their public ministrations, but by their private visits, counsels, instructions, and conversation; so the apostle Paul taught from house to house as well as publicly (Acts 20:20).

4a3f. To all which, love to Christ and to his people is requisite; such only who have a true affection for both, will naturally care for the good of immortal souls, will be willing to spend and be spent for them, and to bear the reproach, and go through the fatigue and trouble which attend such service; hence said Christ to Peter, once, twice, and thrice, "Lovest thou me?" and at each answer given to the question, enjoined him to feed his lambs and his sheep; suggesting, that only such who loved him were proper persons to take the care of them.

4b. Secondly, another part of the work of pastors, is to rule the church they take the oversight of; the same word in the Greek language which signifies to feed, signifies to rule also (see Matthew 2:6); and kings are sometimes called shepherds; as Cyrus and others; so Agamemnon, in Homer[19], is called, ποιμεν λαων, "the shepherd of the people". The church of Christ is a kingdom; it is frequently called so in the New Testament; Christ is King of it, set as King of Zion by his divine Father, and is owned as King of saints by his church and people; and ministers of the word, and pastors of churches, are "over them in the Lord;" they are under Christ, and subject to him, but are over the churches by his appointment; hence they are represented as guides, governors, and rulers, as before observed; and obedience to them is required; "Obey them that have the rule over you," (Heb. 13:17). And their pre-eminence in the church appears,

4b1. In giving the lead in divine worship, they go before the congregation in acts of divine service, in public prayer and thanksgiving, and in the ministry of the word (Rev. 4:9, 10, 5:14), and this they do in an authoritative way; they are the mouth of the people to God, and present their prayers and thanksgivings as representing them; and they are the mouth of God to the people, and speak in his name, and are ambassadors in Christ's stead.

4b2. In presiding at church meetings; where they have the conducting of all affairs with order and decency, directing in all acts of discipline, according to the word of God; putting up the votes of the church, giving admonitions, and passing censures, as they may be necessary, by the agreement and consent of the church.

4b3. In receiving and rejecting members; the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the gospel church, as usually understood, are committed to them, to open and shut the doors of the church according to its direction; for though the power of admission and rejection of members is originally in the church, it is executively in the pastors, in the name of the church.

4b4. In taking care of the whole discipline of the church of God, that it is observed, and that the rules respecting it are put into execution; which they are to explain, enforce, and see that they are attended to; they are to show to the house, the church of God, "the form of the house, and the fashion of it;" the nature of it, as to matter, form, power, and order; "and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof;" the rules respecting the reception of members, and the excommunication of them; "and all the ordinances, and all the laws thereof," even everything Christ has commanded and appointed to be observed (Ezek. 43:10, 11). Now the rule and government of pastors of churches is not to be

exercised in an arbitrary way; they are not to rule with force and cruelty, as the shepherds of Israel are complained of; they are not to lord it over God's heritage; they have not dominion over their faith, nor the command of their practice at their wills; they cannot oblige them to receive a doctrine, nor to follow a practice, that is of their own or of human invention: but they are to govern according to the word of God, and the laws and rules which Christ, as King and Head of the church, has given: and when they rule according to these, they may be said to rule well, and should be respected and obeyed, and counted worthy of honour. And this ruling, as well as feeding, should be with knowledge and understanding, in a wise, prudent, and discreet manner; as David, who fed the people of Israel according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with the skilfulness of his hands. I proceed to answer,

5. Some queries relative to the office of pastors.

5a. First, Whether a pastor of one church can officiate as such in another church; or whether he can administer the Lord's Supper, which is a pastoral act, in and to a church of which he is no pastor. I answer, he cannot; that is, it is not lawful for him to do it. As well may it be asked, Whether the lord mayor of London, whose power as such may be thought to be as extensive as any other mayor whatever, can exercise his power, in any branch of his office, in the jurisdiction of the mayor of York or of Bristol, or any other: no officer in a corporation can exercise his office in another corporation; this holds good of every officer in it, from the highest to the lowest. A church of Christ is a body corporate, in a spiritual sense; and its officers can only act as such within it, and within no other. For,

5a1. A man can never act as a pastor, where he is not so much as a member; a man must be a member of a church before he can be a pastor of it, as we have seen. Epaphras, the minister and pastor of the church at Colosse, the apostle Paul, writing to them says, "Who is one of you," that is, one of their society, a member of theirs (Col. 4:12). But where a man is not a member of such a society, he is not one of them; he cannot act as pastor among them, nay he cannot put forth any act or operation, or join in any act as a private member may, and much less act as a pastor; for membership is the foundation, not only of every office, but of every act and operation in a church. "All members," the apostle says, "have not the same office," (Rom. 12:4) but let the office be what it may, they must be members that have it, and they only; they have not all the same function or ministry; as they were not all apostles who were in the primitive churches, so not all pastors, and all deacons, who were in them, and in succeeding churches; yet all who are pastors or deacons, must or should be members; and members have not all the same act or action, and operation, as the word may be rendered[20], in an office way; though there are some acts indeed which are common to all members, yet they are such which only belong to members, and which pastors of other churches cannot act and exercise, as private members may and do: for instance, they have no vote or suffrage in other churches for the admission of a member, or for the exclusion of any; or in the choice and call of any officer, pastor or deacon: and if they cannot act, or cannot exercise an act, a private member can; then surely they can never act as a pastor, where they have not the power and privilege of a private member!

5a2. As one that is not a member of a church cannot be an officer in it, as a pastor of another church cannot be; then he has no office relation to it, nor has he any office power in it, and therefore cannot exercise in it any act of office power; and, in consequence, cannot administer the Lord's Supper in it, which is an act of office power.

5a3, As well may he exercise other branches of his pastoral office as this; as well may he be a ruling elder in other churches, and preside at their church meetings, and exercise every part of discipline, and the power of the keys, as by some called, and let in and shut out, receive and exclude members, give admonitions, lay on censures, and take them off, as a pastor, in the name of the church; and if he can act as a pastor in two churches, he may in ten, and twenty, and more, and so become a diocesan bishop; yea, an universal bishop or pastor, as the pope at Rome pretends to be; and popery stopped not until it came to that, to establish an universal pastor; and to which such an antichristian practice leads and paves the way: and it is an affectation in some to be thought of more moment and importance than they are; and to grasp at power and authority, and to appear in a character and figure which do not belong to them, if not something else; which tempts them to give into such an unwarrantable practice. For,

5a4. Should it be asked, as it may be reasonably asked, by what authority they do this thing? who or what gives them this authority? What answer can be returned? will they say they have their authority from Christ? this must be had, either immediately from him, as the apostles had for what they did; and then they must be called upon to work miracles in confirmation of it, as they did: or from the word of God and Christ; and then it lies upon them to give proof of it from thence. Neither can a pastor derive his authority froth his own church, of which he is properly pastor; nor from the other, to whom, at their request, he administers the ordinance; neither the consent of the one, nor the desire of the other, can give him sufficient authority so to act: as for his own church, they invested him with office power over themselves, and not over others; further they could not and cannot go: and as for the other church, that has no power to call in the elder or pastor of another church so to act; and if they have no power to call him, he can have no authority to act, as not from his own church, so neither from that: nor will the communion of churches warrant it; for communion of churches does not enlarge the office power of a pastor, limited by the word of God to his own congregation only; this no more subjects the officers of one church to another, than it subjects the particular members of one church to another; in either of which cases there would be nothing but confusion and disorder; one church, by virtue of the communion of churches, might as well censure and cast out the members of another church; as the pastor of one church, by virtue of such communion, act as an officer in another church. Neither his grace nor his gifts can authorize him so to act; for then one that is no officer, only a private brother, might do it; nor will his being an ordained minister in one church give him authority so to act in another church; for elders are only ordained to particular churches, and not to others; the elders ordained by the apostles in every church where such ordinations were, were αυτοις, "for them," and not others (Acts 14:23). Epaphras was a faithful minister "for you," for the church at Colosse; not for another church (Col. 1:7), the elders of Ephesus were ordered to feed all the flock over which the Holy Ghost made them overseers; but not all the flocks over which they were not overseers: so other elders are directed to feed the flock that was

among them, not flocks (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), the angel of the church at Ephesus was not angel of the church at Smyrna, and so vice versa: ordination fixes a man to a particular church or congregation: and does not make him an universal pastor, which he must be, if there was no boundary to his office. And therefore,

5a5. Such who take upon them to act in such a manner may be truly called, "busybodies in other mens' matters," (1 Peter 4:15) the word there translated, "a busybody," is *αλλοτριεπισκοπος*[21], a bishop, in another parish or diocese, which were originally the same, or a pastor in a church, which is not his own; and truly describes such a person we are speaking of, who meddles with a business he has nothing to do with.

5a6. As well may a deacon of one church officiate as such in another, as a pastor of one church officiate in another; for they are both alike chosen by, and ordained to particular churches, and not to others.

5a7. No instance can be given of such a practice in the word of God; there may be instances of members of one church communicating with another church occasionally; so Phoebe, a member of the church at Cenchrea, was to be admitted to communicate with the church at Rome; but then partaking of an ordinance is a privilege arising from the communion of churches; and is only a kind of spiritual hospitality, giving a meal to a traveller; and that by a pastor discharging his office in his own proper place, in his own church: but the administration of an ordinance is an act of office power, which one church cannot give to another, nor a pastor exercise it in another church (Rom. 16:1, 2; see Acts 20:4-7). The instance of the apostle Paul's breaking bread to the disciples at Troas, supposing it to be understood of the ordinance of the supper, is no, proof and example of such a practice; since he was an apostle, and had the care of all the churches upon him, and could administer all ordinances unto them; but to urge and follow his example, is to usurp what is peculiar to apostles, and to confound ordinary and extraordinary ministers together as one; whereas, "Are all apostles?" They are not. Upon the whole, it may justly create a scruple in the minds of such who receive the ordinance in a church where the administrator is not a pastor: either such an one is not clear in it, or he is, that it is his duty to receive it from such hands: if he is not clear in it, but doubts, he is self-condemned; and be it, he is clear in it, he is culpable, since hereby he approves and abets the pastor's unlawful power to administer it, and encourages him in it, and draws upon himself the guilt of his unlawful administration, and of a compliance with an authority assumed by him, but not legally given[22].

5b. Secondly, another question may be put upon the former, Whether a brother, or private member of a church, may be deputed by the church to administer the ordinance of the Lord's Supper? This may seem to carry in it a better face than the former; since, though he is a non-officer, he is upon a par with a pastor of another church, who is no more an officer in such a church the brother belongs to than he is; and besides, he is a member of the church, which the pastor of another church is not. But the ordinance of the supper cannot be administered authoritatively but by an officer, since it is an act of office power, and must be administered in the name of Christ, by one as a substitute of him; and if the church may delegate and substitute others for the discharge of all ordinances whatsoever,

without elders or pastors, then it may "perfect the saints," and complete the "work of the ministry," without them; which is contrary to (Eph. 4:11, 12) and, as Dr. Owen[23] further observes, it would render the ministry only convenient, and not absolutely "necessary" to the church, which is contrary to the institution of it; and such a practice would tend to make a church content without a pastor, and careless and negligent of seeking after one when without one.

5c. Thirdly, another question is, Whether a pastor may move from one congregation to another? The answer is, if it is for worldly advantage, and he has a sufficient provision where he is, he ought not. There are some cases in which it may be lawful for him to move; as when it appears to be for the good of the interest of religion, and of the church of Christ in general; but this should not be without the consent of the church of which he is pastor; nor without the advice of other churches and ministers; and when a church, of which he is pastor, indulges immoralities, or has imbibed erroneous doctrines, from which they cannot be reclaimed; and if there are such divisions in the church as are not to be cured; and especially if the pastor has such a concern in them, that there is no probability of their being healed but by his removal; also when a competent provision is not made for him and his family, but they are not only exposed to want, but the gospel also to the reproach and contempt of the world.

5d. Fourthly, it may be asked, Whether on account of bodily weakness, or a decay of intellectual abilities, a pastor may resign his office, or be desired to desist from his work? the answer is, he may voluntarily lay down his office, with the consent of the church; or he may be desired to drop it, provided, if his case requires it, a provision is made for his temporal subsistence.

5e. Fifthly, if it is a question, whether a pastor of a church may be deposed from his office, and be cast out of the church for immorality or heresy, it may be answered in the affirmative; for he may be admonished and reproved for negligence in the discharge of his office, and be stirred up to it (Col. 4:17), a charge of sin may be brought against him, under proper witnesses, according to the rule (1 Tim. 5:19), an elder or pastor is a brother, and to be dealt with as such, according to Matthew 18:15. Indeed, if the sole power of excommunication lies in the pastor, he cannot be dealt with in such a manner; but that is not the case; it lies in the church, as will be seen hereafter; to which power a pastor of a church is equally subject as a private member.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Song Jerom, in his Comment. on I Tim. iii. 10. and on Titus. i. 5.

[2] "Novam plantam," Grotius; "Nuper baptizatum et ascriptum in numerum christianorum," Vatablus.

[3] χειροτονεῖν, "hic simpliciter vertamus per eligere, decernere, designare, ordinare per electionem," Vitringa de Synagog. vet. l. 3. par. 1. c. 14. p. 821.

[4] Of these two ways of choosing officers with the Jews, Philo, speaks, de Judice, p. 718. in initio.

[5] χειροτονησαντες, "per suffragia delegissent, creassent": so Beza, Erasmus, Vatablus, H. Stephanus. "ortum est hoc verbum ex Graeeorum consuetudine, qui porrectis manibus suffragia ferebant," Beza in Act. 14, 23.

[6] Ep. 1. ad Corinth. p. 100.

[7] Pontii vita Cyprian. p. 2. & Cyprian. ep. 40. p. 75. & ep. 55. p. 115, 116.

[8] Ib. ep. 52. p. 97. & ep. 67. p. 163.

[9] Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 6. c. 29.

[10] Apud Theodoret. Eccl. Hist. l. 1. c. 9.

[11] Vide Sulpicii Severi vit. Martin, p. 224.

[12] "Inter opera ejus," tom. 2. ep. 110.

[13] "Electionis formula de episcopis et praefectis ecclesiae per suffragia populi constituendis, ea semper mihi visa est optima, quam legimus apud Augustinum de creatione Eradii." Aonii Palearii Testimonium, c. 16. p. 367. This learned Italian was a glorious confessor and martyr of Jesus; who, for the noble witness he bore against popish innovations, and particularly against the popish inquisition; which he said was a sword drawn to cut the throats of learned men, (Vid. Lampe, Synops. Hist. Sacr. et Ecclesiastic. l. 2. c. 13. s. 29. p. 453.) was taken up at Milan, bound, and sent to Rome, where he was condemned to the flames, and was burnt alive, after he had made a bold confession of his faith, about the year 1566, some say 1570, under pope Pius V. The above Testimonium referred to was written by him, and designed to be sent to the emperor. The Christian kings and princes, and the presidents of a general council then deliberating, to be held at Trent; which, when written, was very worthy of their regard, and now to be read by every Protestant.

[14] "Imponuntur quidem manus etiam Paulo et Barnaba in ecclesia Antiochena, Spiritu sancto jubente; sed opus illud videtur plane extraordinarium, seu in ministerium illic singulare designatio; nec alterutrius eorum in presbyteratus facultatem ordinatio," Selden de Synedriis, l. 2. c. 7. s. 7.

[15] "Manus impositio; quid est enim aliud nisi oratio super hominem?" Augustin. contra Donatist. l. 3. c. 16.

[16] See Lord Brook's Discourse of the Nature of Episcopacy, p. 76, 77.

[17] "Meminisse autem diaconi debent, quoniam apostolos, id est, episcopos et praepositos dominus elegit: diaconos autem post ascensum domini in coelos, apostoli sibi constituerunt episcopatus sui et ecclesiae ministros," Cyprian, ep. 65. p. 158.

[18] Deut. Synagog. vet. l. 3. par 2. c. 5.

[19] Iliad. 2. v. 243, 254.

[20] την αὐτὴν πράξιν, "eundem actum, vel eandem actionem," Vatablus.

[21] "Qui fines alieni officii invadit," Gerhardus apud Stockium in voce.

[22] See more of this question in a little tract called "A Discussion of the Lawfulness of a Pastor's acting as an Officer in other Churches besides his own;" by Nathaniel Mather. London, printed 1698, which is sufficient to convince any of the unlawfulness of it, whose mind is open to conviction; and from whence I have borrowed many of the above hints.

[23] True nature of a Gospel Church, ch. 5. p. 94.

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 4

OF THE DUTIES OF MEMBERS OF CHURCHES TO THEIR PASTORS

As pastors of churches have a work to do, which is both honourable and useful; so there are duties incumbent on those who are under their care, with respect to them, for their work's sake. Though they are "nothing," with respect to God, to whom they owe all they have (1 Cor. 3:7), and with respect to the churches, they are theirs, for their use and service; yet they are not to be reckoned as nothing by them, and to be treated with contempt; "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ;" made such and put into the ministry by him, being furnished from him with gifts and graces for it, and as such, to be highly accounted of; and though they are not lords and masters in the family of God, yet they are stewards in it, the highest officers in the house of God; and therefore are to be accounted of as "stewards of the mysteries of God," having the secret and hidden things of God entrusted with them; the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, the sublime as well as plainer doctrines of the gospel, which they are to minister: and since it is given them of God to know them and make them known to others, they are worthy of respect on that account (1 Cor. 4:1). The various duties which members of churches are under obligation to perform to their respective ministers, pastors, and elders, will be considered farther as they lie in various passages of scripture.

1. First, in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13, "We beseech you brethren to know them," &c.

1a. First, it is the duty of church members to know their pastors; which is not to be understood of a bare knowledge of their persons; for it cannot be supposed, that there can be such a relation between pastors and members, and yet the members not know their pastors; the sheep know their shepherd and his voice.

1a1. To know them is to be acquainted with them; to make themselves and their cases known unto them; for sometimes to "know" signifies to make known; as in 1 Corinthians 2:2. Members of churches should freely converse with their pastors, and make known the state and condition of their souls; and especially when they have any matter of difficulty and cases of conscience to be resolved, or are in any soul trouble and distress; they should open their minds to them, and declare their case, that they may speak a word in season to them; for though their cases may sometimes be hit upon and reached in the general ministry of the word, yet this is owing to an extraordinary direction of providence, and cannot in common be expected by all; at least it cannot be assured of, unless persons unbosom themselves to their ministers, and tell them their case.

1a2. To know them is to acknowledge them as their ministers and pastors. Not to know is not to own and acknowledge; as in Luke 13:27. It is for members so to know their pastors, as to own them as such; as theirs in a peculiar sense, in which other ministers are not; as in a special relation to them, and under their particular care; and this acknowledgment of them should be testified by their submission to them in their ministerial services and pastoral acts; of which more hereafter.

1a3. To know them is to take notice of them, to show respect to them, to "hold such in reputation," as the apostle advises (Phil. 2:29), to give them the honour that is due unto them; not to know Christ, his ministers, and his people, is to despise them, and to treat them in a disrespectful manner (1 John 3:1; Luke 10:16).

1a4. To know them is to love them; for words of knowledge oftentimes connote love and affection (2 Tim. 2:19), and so the apostle explains this of members knowing their pastors, by esteeming them "very highly in love," (2 Tim. 2:13) such as the Galatians expressed to the apostle Paul, though they afterwards became cool and indifferent to him; yea, the reverse of their former love.

1a5. To know them is to show a concern for their comfort and welfare, their safety and protection (Ps. 142:4) people should be concerned for the safety of their minister in the discharge of his office; to protect him from the insolent attempts of wicked men, that he may be with them without fear, while he ministers to them; as the apostle exhorted the Corinthians, with respect to Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10), and they should be careful to preserve his credit and reputation, and defend his character from the false aspersions of men, and not surlier, even among themselves, anything to be whispered to his discredit, and to the hurt of his usefulness; nor any accusation to be brought in public against him, without sufficient evidence (1 Tim. 5:19).

Now the arguments and reasons made use of to enforce this duty are,

1a5a. Because such persons "laboured among them;" they were not non-residents, but were upon the spot where the people were, they had the care of; as the flock was among them they were to feed, so they were among the flock, resided in the midst of them, or near them; for where should pastors be, but with their flocks, to feed them they have the oversight of? (1 Peter 5:2) and faithful ministers are not only among their people, and continue with them, but they "labour" among them; they are not loiterers, slothful servants, who hide their talents in a napkin, and may be called idle shepherds, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber, who serve not the Lord Jesus, nor the souls of men, but their own bellies: but faithful ministers are labourers, labour in the word and doctrine, and so are worthy of double honour.

1a5b. Because they are "over" the churches to whom they minister; they are set in the first and most eminent place in the church, and have the rule over the members of it; and this superiority over them "is in the Lord," in things pertaining to his interest and glory; not in civil, but spiritual things; and though they are over the churches, yet under Christ

the Lord, as Head of the church and King of saints; and they are governors in and by his appointment, and therefore are to be regarded.

1a5c. They "admonish" the saints, with whom they are concerned, or "put them in mind," as the word signifies[1]; of their former experiences, which are delightful and refreshing, to them; and of the doctrines of the gospel they have been instructed in, and have received, and are food to their souls; and of the duties of religion, which are incumbent upon them, the observance of which makes for their peace and good, and for the glory of God: and they admonish, warn, rebuke, and reprove; they warn of approaching danger from their spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world; and rebuke and reprove for errors and immoralities they may fall into, for the recovery of them. On all which accounts they are deserving of respect.

1b. Secondly, it is the duty of church members not only to know their pastors; but "to esteem them very highly in love for their work sake," or "superabundantly"[2], as the word signifies; over and above common esteem and affection, and above common Christians, in honour preferring them to others; they are to think highly of them, and entertain a high opinion of them, of their grace, gifts, and abilities for their work; for if they think meanly, and entertain a contemptible opinion of them, their ministry is not likely to be of much use unto them: and they should speak very highly and very honourably of them; for if members of churches do not speak well of their own pastors, it can hardly be thought they should have much respect and esteem from others; and they should speak respectfully to them, with a becoming decency, considering the character they bear, and the high office they are in, in the church: and this esteem must be cordial and affectionate, it must be "in love;" not through fear, nor in dissimulation and hypocrisy, but in sincerity and truth; and that, "for their work sake," which is laborious, attended with weariness of body; and sometimes, through it, are "nigh unto" death, as Epaphroditus was (Phil. 2:30), and which also exposes to the reproach and contempt of the world. To which may be added, that it is, notwithstanding, a good work and honourable, and very beneficial to the souls of men; and therefore those employed in it, should be esteemed for the sake of it; for the work that they have done, in which they have been useful to men for conversion, or for comfort and edification; and forasmuch as they have continued in it, and may be more useful in their day and generation, both for the good of souls and the glory of God.

2. Secondly, other branches of the duty of members to their pastors are expressed in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 18.

2a. First, in Hebrews 13:7 "Remember them," &c.

2a1. They should remember them, be mindful of them at the throne of grace, as is after exhorted to; should remember the doctrines preached by them, and treasure them up in their minds; which may be of after use to them; these they should carefully retain in their memories, and not let them slip from them; they should remember to give them the honour and respect that is due unto them, and to make a suitable provision for the outward supply of life. The reasons enforcing this exhortation are, because they "have the

rule over them;" being appointed by Christ, the Head and King of the church, to govern them under him; not in a lordly manner, according to their own wills; but according to the laws and rules which Christ has given; and when they rule according to these, they rule well, and are worthy of double honour: the words may be rendered, who are "your guides or leaders"[3]. Now such are the ministers of the gospel; they are the happy instruments of guiding men into the understanding of the scriptures; and of leading, under a divine direction and blessing, into the truths of the gospel; and of pointing out to them the way of life, peace, and salvation by Christ; and of directing them into the paths of faith and holiness, and are examples to them, and therefore deserve to be remembered by them. And moreover, they are said to "have spoken to them the word of God," the scriptures, given by inspiration of God, which contain his mind and will, and the doctrines which declare his grace and favour to the sons of men; these they explain truly and faithfully, according to the best light and knowledge they have; and deliver out the doctrines of them with great freedom, boldness, and fidelity: and their memory, on these accounts, is and should be blessed to truly gracious souls.

2a2. Their "faith" is to be "followed," or imitated; either their faithfulness in the several parts of their ministrations; or the grace of faith, their strong exercise of it, and the fruits and effects of it; or their profession of faith they hold fast without wavering; or the doctrine of faith they preach, by embracing it, abiding by it, standing fast in it, and persevering therein to the end: the motive to it is, "considering the end of their conversation;" either the drift and scope of it, which, as in connection with the following verse, is Christ, his honour and glory, who is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever;" or the whole of their conduct in the discharge of the various duties of their office, and the manner of it; or else the issue of it in death; or the good end which, through the grace of God, they make; and which is to be considered for imitation and encouragement.

2b. Secondly, what is further observed in Hebrews 13:17 "Obey them that have the rule over you," &c. This respects duties to be performed to the same persons who are described as before, as their leaders, guides, and governors; to whom,

2b1. Obedience is to be yielded; "Obey them": which obedience, in members of churches, to their pastors, lies,

2b1a. In a due regard to the ministry of the word by them; which regard to it is seen in a diligent and constant attendance on it; for if their pastors are to be diligent and constant in their work, they are to be as diligent and constant in attending upon them in it; if ministers are to preach the word in season and out of season, or as often as they have opportunity for it, then members should as frequently assemble to hear it: they show their obedience to the word, and to ministers in dispensing it, by their receiving it in faith and love; which they do when they receive it, not as the word of man, but as of God and Christ when they mix it with faith as they hear it, and receive the love of it. Indeed, none are obliged to receive and obey their word or doctrine, than as it appears to be agreeable to the sacred scriptures, which are to be searched diligently, as our Lord directs, and as the noble Bereans did, to see whether these things be so or not; every spirit is not to be believed, but to be tried, whether of God or not; and, indeed, everything delivered by

pastors of churches is not binding on churches; nor are they obliged to receive it, but as it accords with the word of God.

2b1b. Obedience of members to their pastors lies in attendance on the ordinances of the gospel, as administered by them, and in joining with them constantly in the administration of them; not the ordinances of men; for they are not to be subject to ordinances of mens' invention, or which are after the commandments and doctrines of men; for then they would be the servants of men, auditor of Christ; but they are the ordinances of Christ, as they are faithfully administered by his servants, saints are to be subject to: the ministers of Christ are to teach all things Christ has commanded, and to urge the observance of them; and in this they are to be obeyed by those who are under their care, who, from a principle of love to Christ, should keep his commands, and constantly observe and attend his ordinances; but no farther are they obliged to follow their ministers, than as they are followers of Christ.

2b1c. Obedience of members of churches to their guides and governors, lies in regarding their admonitions, reproofs, and rebukes, whether in case of error or immorality, and whether in private or in public; and as their business is to admonish when needful, their admonitions should be well taken; as they are to speak, exhort, and rebuke with all authority, their authority should not be despised, but be submitted to: likewise their counsels and advice should be observed, and taken, and acted up to; especially if it appears to be founded on the word of God, and is consonant to it.

2b2. Another branch of the duty of church members to their pastors, is to "submit" themselves to them; that is, to the laws of Christ's house, as directed to and put into execution by them; and to their admonitions, reproofs, and censures, which are according to them; even though they may be not only public and before all, but sharp and severe, as the case may require. The reason given for such obedience and submission to them, is "because they watch for their souls;" not for the preservation of their bodies, and outward affairs; though if such who watch over these, to preserve them from hurt and damage in the night season, are to be regarded and valued, and obedience to be yielded to their alarms and directions, then much more those who watch for the good and welfare of immortal souls, which are of more worth than a world; their ministrations, in whatsoever way, are for comfort or edification, and are the instrumental means of saving souls: and what engages them to such watchfulness to preserve from error and heresy, from vice and immorality, is, that "they must give account;" to their own consciences, that they have discharged their work aright; to the church of God, to whom they are accountable if negligent; and especially to Christ, the Judge of all, to whom they must give an account of their ministry, and of the use of their talents, and of the souls put under their care, how they have discharged their duty towards them; and how such souls have behaved towards them under the ministry of the word and ordinances: and this they are desirous of doing "with joy, and not with grief;" either at the throne of grace, where they either rejoice or complain; or at the great day, when they will be witnesses either for or against those that have been committed to them; which latter would be "unprofitable" to them, and to the disadvantage of such who occasion grief and sorrow.

2c. Thirdly, another branch of duty in church members to their pastors, is suggested in Hebrews 13:18 "Pray for us," for us ministers; this is often inculcated in the sacred writings, as being of great moment and importance (see Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess. 3:1); and members of churches should be solicitous at the throne of grace for their ministers.

2c1. With respect to their private studies and preparation for their work; that they may be led to suitable subjects, and be furnished with suitable matter; that their understanding may be opened to understand the word; that they may be led into the depths and mysteries of the gospel; that their gifts may be increased; and that they may be diligent, industrious, and laborious in their work.

2c2. With respect to their public ministrations; that they may come forth richly fraught with gospel truths; that they may have freedom and utterance in the delivery of them; that they may speak them boldly, faithfully, and fully, as they ought to be spoken; and that their labours may be blessed to saints and sinners: and unless members of churches are observant of this their duty, they cannot expect the word will be blessed to them.

2c3. With respect to the world, and their conduct in it; that they may be kept from the evil of the world, that the ministry be not blamed; and from the temptations of Satan, who has a peculiar spite against them; and that they may be delivered from evil and unreasonable men, who, as much as can be, endeavour to discourage them, and hinder them in their work; and they should pray for them, that they may neither be intimidated by the frowns of the world, nor allured by the flatteries of it; and they should pray for their temporal good, for their bodily health, and for the sparing of their lives for farther usefulness, and for every thing needful for them. This part of duty is enforced with the following reason; "For we trust we have a good conscience," exercised in an upright discharge of the ministerial work; "in all things, willing to live honestly;" not only as men, but as ministers, faithfully dispensing the word of truth; the temptations to the contrary being many, prayer is desired by them.

3. Thirdly, the duty of church members to their pastors, is held forth in various passages, respecting their maintenance, or a provision for the subsistence of themselves and families; which is part of that double honour a ruling elder and a laborious minister is worthy of, since "the labourer is worthy of his reward," (1 Tim. 5:17, 18) and he that is taught in the word, and instructed by it to his comfort and edification, should "communicate to him that teacheth in all good things," temporal good things he stands in need of (Gal. 6:6). This duty the apostle urges and presses with a variety of arguments, in 1 Corinthians 9:7-14 he argues from the law of nature and nations, exemplified in the cases of soldiers, planters of vineyards, and keepers of flocks, who, by virtue of their calling and service, have a right to a livelihood; between whom, and ministers of the gospel, there is a resemblance: also he argues from the law of Moses, particularly the law respecting the ox, not to be muzzled when it treads out the corn; which he interprets of ministers of the word, and applies it to them: he argues the right of the maintenance of the ministers of the gospel from the justice and equity of the thing; that since they minister spiritual things, it is but reasonable they should receive temporal ones: he makes this

clear from the case of the priests and Levites under the legal dispensation, who ministering in holy things, had a provision made for them: and lastly, from the constitution and appointment of Christ himself, whose ordinance it is, that they that preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.

4. Fourthly, it is the duty of members of churches to adhere to their pastors, and abide by them in every condition and state, and in all cases and circumstances they come into; to support them under all their difficulties; to encourage them under all their discouragements; to sympathize with them in all their trials and troubles; to assist them all they can in their arduous work, against gainsayers, false teachers, and such as may rise up among themselves, speaking perverse things, and doing evil ones; the apostle Paul complains that all men forsook him in his troubles, and commends particularly Onesiphorus for his attachment to him and concern for him.

Now as there are duties belonging to the office of pastors, to be performed by them, and duties incumbent on members of churches towards them; on the performance of these mutual duties, the order, peace, good, and welfare of communities depend; and therefore should be strictly attended to, and religiously observed.

ENDNOTES:

[1] νουθετουντας

[2] υπερ εκ περισσου

[3] τμν ηγουμενων υμων

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 5

OF THE OFFICE OF DEACONS

The other officers in the gospel church are deacons; and the things to be treated of respecting this office, are the nature and original of it; the work to be performed by those who are appointed to it; their qualifications for it, and the encouragement to the diligent performance of it; with the duties of a church respecting them.

1. First, the nature and original of it: It is not a political, but an ecclesiastic office; sometimes, indeed, the word is used in a political sense, for the civil magistrate; who is said to be θεου διακονος, "the deacon of God;" we render it, the "minister of God," (Rom. 13:4) one appointed by him, and who serves under him, for the public good: but it is commonly used in an ecclesiastic sense; sometimes for extraordinary ministers, as apostles, whose ministry is called διακονια, a "deaconship," and is joined with apostleship (Acts 1:17, 25), and the apostle Paul calls himself and Apollos διακονοι, deacons or ministers, by whom ye believed (1 Cor. 3:6), and even our Lord Jesus Christ has this name and title, as the prophet of the church, and a preacher of the everlasting gospel; Now I say that Jesus Christ was a deacon or minister of the circumcision, or to the circumcised Jews (Rom. 15:8), not to take notice, that the ministry of angels is called διακονια, a deaconship (Heb. 1:14). To proceed, it is oftener given to ordinary preachers and ministers of the word; as to Tychicus, Epaphras, and others (Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7, 4:7), but elsewhere a deacon is spoken of as a distinct officer from either ministers extraordinary or ordinary; so the apostle speaks of the office of an elder, bishop, or overseer, and of the office of a deacon, as two distinct offices; and after he had given the qualifications of the one, he gives the qualifications of the other (1 Tim. 3:8-13), and the officers of the church at Philippi are distinguished into bishops and deacons (Phil. 1:1).

Now the original of the institution of this office we have an account of, as is commonly thought, in Acts 6:1-5 by which it seems to have been originally a branch of the ministerial office, as executed by the apostles; and, indeed, the whole of the ecclesiastic ministry was in their hands, the management of the secular, as well as of the spiritual affairs of the church: the first Christians, the members of the church at Jerusalem, sold their possessions, and had all things common, and parted them to all, as every man had need; and the apostles had the disposal and distribution of them; for they were brought and laid at their feet for that purpose (Acts 2:44, 45, 4:34-37, 5:2), this church becoming very numerous, which at first consisted of about an hundred and twenty, increased to some thousands; and their poor likewise increased; for the poor from the first had the gospel preached to them, and received it; and these were chosen, called, and brought into the church; and this being the case, there was a murmuring of the Grecians, of the Hellenistic Jews, who were born and lived in Greece; but coming to Jerusalem at the time

of Pentecost, were converted, and joined themselves to the church at Jerusalem: now a complaint was lodged by these against the Hebrews, who were natives of Judea, and particularly of Jerusalem, that their poor widows were neglected in the daily ministration, suggesting, there was some partiality used; that the widows of the natives of Jerusalem were more favoured than the widows of such who had lived in foreign parts; this greatly affected the apostles, and embarrassed them in the spiritual part of their ministry, in which they were hindered by their attention and application to the secular affairs of the church; and therefore called the church together, and thus argued with them; "It is not reason, that we should leave the word of God and serve tables;" as it is not proper that any ordinary minister of the word should be "entangled with the affairs of this life," if possible; that he may "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine and meditate upon them, and give himself wholly to them". Wherefore the apostles proposed to the church, thus called together, to look out and choose from among themselves seven men, of such qualifications they mentioned, to attend this service: and as for themselves, they would "give up themselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word;" and this proposal being acceptable to the people, they chose men so qualified, and presented them to the apostles for their approbation; and so they were installed into their office[1]. This seems to be the original of the institution of this office. By which it appears,

1a. That those who are chosen to this office must be members of the church, or they are not eligible; and that they are to be chosen by the vote and suffrage of the church; and their destination is only to that church to which they belong; they cannot officiate in another; nor have they any concern with the poor of another church; the collections of that church to whose peculiar service they are appointed, are to be received by them, and to be distributed to the members of that church, and of that only. Extraordinary collections from other churches, we may observe, were sent to the elders, to be disposed of by them (Acts 11:30). Wherefore,

1b. The apostles, though they gave up themselves more especially to prayer, and the ministry of the word, yet they did not divest themselves wholly of this service; (see Acts 12:25) and deacons now have a connection and concern with elders and pastors of churches in the discharge of their office; they are to acquaint them with the state of the church, and the cases of the poor, and to take their advice in any matters of moment and importance, and to be assisting to them in the outward affairs of the church, and may be what the apostle calls "helps," in 1 Corinthians 12:28 being helpful to the minister, church, and poor.

1c. 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[2]; but such a number are to be chosen, and may be increased, as the exigency of churches requires; and some have thought, that where a church is very small, a pastor may perform the whole work, with a little assistance from the church; but I cannot but be of opinion, that one deacon at least, if not two, are necessary to form an organized church.

1d. The objects of this office, are the poor of the church, which were in all churches in all ages; "The poor ye have always with you," (John 12:8) and to be taken care of; so that the

reason of its first institution continues, namely, to ease the ministers of the gospel from too much concern in the secular affairs of the church (Acts 6:2), and such officers were appointed not only in the first church at Jerusalem, though extraordinary ones, as some think, but in other churches of the Gentiles, at least ordinary ones; as at Philippi (Phil. 1:1), and the particular qualifications are given of these officers; which seem to be given as a direction to the churches in future ages for the choice of them (1 Tim. 3:8; &c).

2. Secondly, the work and business to be performed by them who are appointed to this office.

2a. Not to preach the gospel, and administer ordinances, as baptism and the Lord's Supper; and therefore ministerial qualifications are not required of them; Philip, indeed, one of the seven, did both preach and baptize (Acts 6:5, 8:5, 38), but then he did both by virtue of his office as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). In Tertullian's time deacons were allowed to baptize; he says, the first right belongs to the bishop, then to the presbyters, then to the deacons[3], but not without the authority of the bishop; but this appears to be an intire innovation.

2b. Nor is their work and business to rule in the church; we read of ruling elders, but never of ruling deacons; if they were, women might not be deaconesses, as Phebe was, for they are not to rule: deacons may and should be assisting to pastors or elders in the care of the church; as to watch over the walk and conversation of the members of the church, and to observe that they keep their places in it; and to exhort, admonish, and reprove, as they may find it necessary; and to visit the sick, and such that are in distress of any kind; and to report the state of the church to the elder or pastor; and to reconcile differences between one member and another, and to prepare matters to be laid before the church at church meetings, when needful.

2c. But their principal business is to "serve tables," which the apostles relinquished and gave up to the seven, at the first institution of them (Acts 6:2). As,

2c1. The Lord's table, as it is called (1 Cor. 10:21), that is, at the administration of the ordinance of the supper, their business is, to provide everything necessary for it; as the bread and the wine, and all kind of furniture needful on that occasion; and when the elements are blessed, and the bread broken, and wine poured out, and these given into their hands by the pastor or elder, they are to deliver out to the members; so in Justin Martyr's time, they that were called "deacons," he says, gave to everyone that were present, that they might partake of the bread and the wine, for which thanks were given by the president[4].

2c2. The minister's table; to take care that a proper provision is made for the subsistence of himself and family; that whereas Christ has ordained, that those who preach the gospel, should live of it, and that he that is taught in the word, should communicate to him that teacheth in all good things; the business of deacons is to see to it, that every member contributes according to his ability; and that there be an equality, that some are not eased and others burdened: and it lies upon them to collect what the members give,

for it is not proper the minister should collect for himself; this would be to prevent the design of the institution, which was, that those who are employed in the sacred office of the ministry of the word, should not be hindered in it. Besides, such a practice would not comport with the case and character of a minister, who would he obliged to receive what the people gave him, without making any remonstrance against it, as failing in their duty to him; and he might also be exposed to the charge of avarice; to which may be added, that a church would not be able to judge whether their pastor was sufficiently provided for or not.

2c3. The poor's table; it was an apostolical order given to the churches, that they should make a collection for the poor saints, on the first day of the week; and it seems as if it was designed to be every first day; to which everyone was to give, having laid by him a store for it, as God had prospered him (1 Cor. 16:1, 2), which collections, and those made at the Lord's Supper, are to be received by the deacons, with whatsoever gifts may come into their hands, and be distributed to the necessities of the saints; and they are, both by their own example, and by their exhortations, to stir up the members of churches to contribute liberally to the relief of the poor: and what they receive they are to communicate,

2c3a. Impartially, that is, as the apostle expresses it, "with simplicity," without partiality, and without favour and affection; showing no respect to persons, taking more notice of, and giving more liberally to one than to another, which was the original complaint in the first church, and made the office necessary; and therefore the deacon should be careful to avoid any cause of it: the principal rule he should go by is, to give as everyone needeth; to some more, and others less, as their case requires.

2c2b. This should be done with "cheerfulness," (Rom. 12:8) without any frowns in the countenance, and without any hard and rough words, which the tender minds of the poor, broken with distress, cannot well bear; when what is given cheerfully and pleasantly, does them double good; nor should they be upbraided with misconduct in former life, which may have brought them into low circumstances. God loves a cheerful giver, and he himself gives liberally, and upbraids not.

2c2c. This should be done with compassion and tenderness. The work of a deacon is expressed by his "showing mercy," (Rom. 12:8) and he should exercise it in a pitiful and merciful manner, as sympathizing with them in their poor and low circumstances; in imitation of the great High Priest of our profession, who is touched with the feeling of the infirmities of his people.

2c2d. This office should be executed with great faithfulness; deacons are the church's stewards, and are intrusted with the church's stock; and it is required of stewards, that they distribute with fidelity what is put into their hands, and for the uses for which it is given. The next thing to be inquired into,

3. Thirdly, are the qualifications of persons for such an office; some of which may be taken from Acts 6:3. As,

3a. That they are to be of "honest report;" of whom a testimony can be given of their honesty, integrity, and good conversation; who have a good report of them that are without, of all men, of the men of the world, and of them that are within; and who are well reported of by the brethren, by the members of other churches, especially by the members of the church to which they belong.

3b. "Full of the Holy Ghost," of his gifts and graces; though they may not be so eminently endowed with them as Stephen and Philip were, which is not to be expected; yet that they should appear to be partakers of the grace of the Spirit, and to have such gifts as to "comfort the feeble minded, support the weak," and speak a word in season to those who are in distress.

3c. Men of "wisdom;" for as they are stewards, wisdom, as well as faithfulness, is required of them; to give to everyone of the poor a portion of the church's monies, as they need; and to distinguish cases and circumstances requires wisdom; besides, persons in such an office are sometimes called upon to make up differences between member and member; which is often a difficult task, and calls for all the prudence a man is possessed of; and to these, or such as these, the apostle refers, when he says, "Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one, that shall be able to judge between his brethren," without going to law before unbelievers (1 Cor. 6:5, 6).

There are other qualifications of a deacon observed in 1 Timothy 3:8-12.

3d. As to his personal character; he must be "grave" in his speech and gesture, and not light, frothy, and vain; and not only modest, chaste, honest, and of good behaviour, but as the word, may signify also one that has some weight and influence, who is venerable^[5] and respectable, and has some degree of reverence and esteem with the people: "Not double tongued;" so as to express pity to the poor, yet show no concern to relieve them; and to say one thing to them, and another to the church and minister; or to say one thing to one member, and another to another, which may tend to alienate the affections of one from another. "Not given to much wine;" which, though lawful to be used, yet not to excess; which would both destroy his character in the church and in the world, and render him unfit for the business of his office. "Not greedy of filthy lucre," or covetous; such may be tempted to make a wrong application of the church's money; and besides, persons in such an office should be liberal themselves, according to their abilities, and set a good example to others; or otherwise they cannot, with a good grace, stir up others to liberality; which is one part of their office.

3e. Others concern his domestic character; he should be "the husband of one wife;" it is not necessary that he should be a married man; but if married, he should have but one wife, that is, at the same time; polygamy had been much in use among the Jews and Gentiles; and the first Christians were not soon and easily brought to the disuse of that practice; but the apostle, by divine inspiration, judged it necessary that no officer of a church, bishop or deacon, should have more wives than one; since it would serve to continue and encourage the practice, set an example of it, and expose to reproach and censure: the apostle adds, "Ruling their children and their own houses well;" both wife,

children, and servants; such ought to keep a good decorum in their families; or how else can it be expected that the affairs of the house of God, so far as they are concerned therein, should be dispatched with honour, faithfulness, and diligence. The apostle has also thought fit to give the qualifications of their wives, who must be grave in their speech, gesture, and dress; as well as modest, chaste, and of good deportment: "not slanderers, or accusers;" false accusers, acting the part of the devil, as the word signifies[6]; for such may do a great deal of mischief in the church, through their influence on their husbands: they must be "sober," temperate, not given to excessive drinking, which would be scandalous; "faithful in all things," respecting their husbands and family; and this is the rather mentioned, since otherwise they might have opportunities of embezzling the church's money, and which, in some cases, they might be intrusted with to dispose of to the poor, in the absence of their husbands.

3f. With respect to the spiritual and evangelical character of deacons, they should be such who "hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience;" are sound in the gospel, and the doctrines of it; for by "faith" is meant the gospel, the faith once delivered to the saints; and by the "mystery" of it, the more sublime and mysterious doctrines of the gospel, especially the doctrine of the Trinity; which, with the Jews, was commonly called, "the mystery of the faith;" and is the same the apostle calls, "the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," (Col. 2:2) such doctrines which relate to the distinction of Persons in the God head; the divine Sonship, proper Deity, and distinct personality of Christ; the Deity, personality and operations of the Spirit; the incarnation of Christ, and the union of the two natures in him; the resurrection of the dead; with others: these things deacons are to hold, with a conscience purified by the blood of Christ, and with a holy, becoming life and conversation: this qualification is necessary in them, that they may be able to instruct and establish others in the faith, and to confute the erroneous; for should their principles be bad, their influence on others might be pernicious and fatal. Now these must first be proved, and "then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless;" not that they are to exercise any part of this office first, that it might be known how capable they are of it; but that it should appear that they are men of the above characters and qualifications; are of some standing in the church, and are well known and approved of for their soundness in the faith and purity of conversation. There is but one sort of deacons of this kind mentioned in scripture; unless it can be thought there were women deacons, or "deaconesses;" and, indeed, Phebe is called *διακονος*, a "deacon," or "deaconess," of the church of Cenchrea; we render the word "servant," (Rom. 16:1) and some render the "wives" of deacons, "their women," (1 Tim. 3:11) and by them understand "deaconesses;" and if the same with the "widows," as some think, their qualifications, as to age, character, and conduct, are described (1 Tim. 5:9, 10) and it seems certain there were such in the second century, whether virgins or widows; such seem to be the two servant maids Pliny[7] speaks of, whom he examined on the rack, concerning the Christians, and by whom he says they were called "ministrae," mistresses, or deaconesses; and Clemens of Alexandria, in the "second" century, makes mention expressly of women deacons, as spoken of by the apostle in his epistle to Timothy[8]; so Jerom[9], in the fourth century, speaks of them as in the eastern churches; and, indeed, something of this kind seems not at all unnecessary, but of service and usefulness; as to attend at the baptism of women, and to visit the sisters of the church,

when sick, and to assist them. In the third century an officer was introduced, called a "subdeacon," an under deacon, who seems to have been an assistant to the deacon, when the churches became large, and their poor numerous, and the deacons required assistance; though it would have been much more proper to have increased their number of deacons; but as for that "meteor," as Dr. Owen[10] calls him, an "archdeacon," he was not heard of until the fourth or fifth centuries; and then not as the creature which now exists under that name.

4. Fourthly, the encouragement given to the diligent and faithful performance of the office of a deacon.

4a. Such "purchase," or get, "to themselves a good decree". The conjecture of Dr. Owen's[11] is very trifling, which I should not have expected from so great a man, as that it signifies a place of some eminence, a seat more highly raised up to sit in, in church assemblies; something like the chief seats in a Jewish synagogue: nor by it is meant a higher degree in his own office; for there are no degrees of higher and lower in the office of a deacon; no subdeacon nor archdeacon, as before observed: nor is it preparatory to an higher order: as of presbytery or eldership; since the office of a deacon lies chiefly in the management of temporal things; and not in study and meditation of spiritual things. In after times, in the third century, such a practice began to take place, as to go through all ecclesiastical offices, to the office of a bishop, as Cyprian[12] says Cornelius bishop of Rome did; and it is said to be ordered by Caius, bishop of the same place, in the same century, that the degrees to a bishopric, through which men should pass to it, were a door keeper, a reader, an exorcist, an acolyte, a subdeacon, a deacon, a presbyter, and then a bishop[13]; but this is all of mere human and antichristian appointment: nor is a greater degree in glory meant, which it is questionable whether there will be any; but rather an increase of gifts and graces is designed; which, under a divine blessing, may be attained, through a deacon's more intimate conversation with the pastor and the members of the church, and even the poor of it: though it seems chiefly to intend a good degree of honour in the faithful discharge of his office, from both minister, church, and poor.

4b. Such obtain "boldness in the faith;" in the exercise of faith at the throne of grace; and in asserting the doctrine of faith; and in vindicating their own character before men, as faithful men; and in reproof for immorality or error.

5. Fifthly, the duties belonging to a church and its members, to persons in such an office.

5a. To supply them with what is sufficient to relieve the wants of the poor; for they are not to supply them out of their own purses; but to distribute faithfully what is put into their hands by the church.

5b. They should be applied unto for direction and counsel in any, private matters, and especially which relate unto the church; since they are supposed to be men of wisdom, and capable of judging of things, with respect to particular persons, and between one member and another.

5c. They are to be esteemed highly for their work's sake; their office being a very useful one to the church, when diligently and faithfully performed.

5d. To be prayed for; for if we are to pray for all civil magistrates and officers, then certainly for all ecclesiastical officers; not only pastors of churches, but deacons also; that they may be supported under all discouragements and difficulties; and that they may be able to discharge their office with reputation and usefulness.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Of their ordination and instalment see chap. 3. book ii. p. 632, 633. See on topic 1229.

[2] Though the council at Neocaesarea ordered, that there should be seven deacons, according to the rule in Acts, Can. CIV. apud Magdeburg. cent. 4. col. 349. And in the Roman church there were seven, and no more; but in other churches the number was indifferent, or indeterminate, as the historian says, Sozomen. Eccl. Hist. l. 7. c. 19.

[3] Deut. Baptismo, c. 17.

[4] Apolog. 2. p. 97. vid. Cyprian. de Lapsis, p. 244.

[5] σεμνους.

[6] diabolouv.

[7] Ep. 1 10. ep. 97. vid. Pignorium de Servis, p. 109.

[8] Stromat l. 3. p. 448.

[9] Comment. in 1 Tim. iii. 11.

[10] True Nature of a Gospel Church, ch. 9. p. 184.

[11] Ibid. p. 187.

[12] Ep. 52. p. 96.

[13] Platinae vit. Pontif. p 34.

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 6

OF THE DISCIPLINE OF A CHURCH OF CHRIST

Though the light of nature, and the laws and rules of civil society, may be very assisting in the affair of church discipline; and may in many things serve to illustrate and confirm it; yet it does not stand upon human, but divine authority. By the light of nature it may be known, man being a sociable creature, that men may form themselves into societies for mutual good; that they have a right to make laws and rules binding on each other, which are not contrary to justice and truth; to admit such into their societies who have a right to dispose of themselves, and assent to the rules of the society, and to keep out or expel such who refuse to be subject to them; and to choose and appoint whom they think fit to preside over them, to see that their laws and rules are put into execution; with other things of like nature. But Christ is sole head, king, and lawgiver in his house and kingdom; and no man, nor set of men, have a power to set up a church society, but what is by direction and according to the rule of his word, and the pattern of his house; nor to make laws and rules, but what he has made; nor to appoint any other sort of officers in his house, but whom he has appointed and directed to, and described the qualifications of; to whom he gives gifts and abilities, office power and authority to rule under him in his church: nor are any to be admitted into it, nor excluded from it, but according to his directions and orders; hence Ezekiel, after he had described the gospel church in its purity, as it will be in the latter day, is ordered to “show the house to the house of Israel;” the form, fashion, laws, and ordinances of it, to be copied after, and observed by them (Ezek. 43:10, 11). Now whereas there are various passages of scripture, which are taken for rules of church discipline, which are misunderstood and misapplied, it will be proper to mark them, that none may be misled by them. As,

1. First, the words of our Lord to Peter, after he had made such a noble confession of his faith in him, as the Son of God; and Christ had declared, that upon that rock he professed faith in, he would build his church, against which the gates of hell should not prevail; he adds, “And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” &c. (Matthew 16:19) which are usually understood of the admission of members into a church, and the exclusion of them; and of laying on of censures, and of taking them off. But they have respect, not at all to discipline, but to doctrine. The keys have made a great noise and rattling in the world, and many contests have been raised about them; what they are, and the power of them, in whose hands they are lodged, and who has the right to the use and exercise of them; when, after all, they relate not to church discipline, but to gospel doctrine. By “the kingdom of heaven” is not meant, neither the church in heaven, nor the gospel church state on earth; nor do the keys signify any lordly power and domination in

it; which Christ never gave to Peter, nor to any of the apostles, and much less to ordinary ministers and elders of churches, who are not allowed to lord it over God's heritage; Christ keeps the key in his own hand, the key of the house of David: but the gospel itself is meant; hence we read of "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven;" that is, of the doctrines of the gospel: this kingdom of heaven was "shut up against men" in the Jewish world, through the wickedness or ignorance of the scribes and Pharisees, who took away the "key of knowledge" from the people (Matthew 23:13; Luke 11:52), and in the Gentile world, through the blindness, and ignorance, and want of divine revelation, they were left unto (Acts 17:30). Now a mission and commission to preach the gospel, and gifts and abilities for the same, are the keys by which the treasures of grace are unlocked, the stores of it opened and displayed, the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven explained, and clearly held forth to the view of others; now though these were given, not to Peter alone, but to all the apostles at the same time, yet Peter was the first who had the use and exercise of them; and with these he opened the "door of faith," that is, the gospel; first to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost, which was the first sermon after the commission was given, and proved the conversion of three thousand souls[1]: and he was the first who preached the gospel to the Gentiles, to Cornelius and his family, to which first ministration of his to them, both he and James have a respect in the synod at Jerusalem (Acts 15:7, 14), and that these keys, and the use of them, belonged to all the apostles, as well as to Peter, appears from hence, that to whomsoever the keys, and the use of them, belonged, the same had the power of binding and loosing conferred upon them; and that all the apostles had the latter, is manifest from Matthew 18:18 which words are also misunderstood of, and misapplied to binding men with censures laid upon them, till they repent, and of loosing them from them when they do; but the words are spoken, not of persons, but of things; it is not said, "whomsoever ye bind;" but, "whatsoever ye bind," &c. and signify no other than declarations of what is unlawful or lawful; of what is forbidden or free of use; in which sense the words "binding" and "loosing" are used in thousands of instances in Jewish writings; and our Lord expresses himself in a manner which the Jews thoroughly understood, and his apostles must; and his meaning is, that whatsoever they bound, prohibited, declared as unlawful to be used, was so, though before lawful; and whatsoever they loosed, declared to be lawful, and free of use, was so; though before the death of Christ, and their commission, was unlawful: thus for instance, they "bound," prohibited circumcision, and declared it unlawful; though it was of the fathers, and was enjoined Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their male seed, to the coming of the Messiah; but since his death, and their commission to preach the gospel, they declared it to be nothing at all, no more to be used and practised; yea, that it was pernicious and hurtful; that Christ profited them nothing who used it, and was of no effect to them (Gal. 5:1-4, 6, 6:15), they "bound," or forbid, the observance of days, and months, and times, and years, and declared them weak and beggarly elements, and that no man was to be judged or condemned for the disuse of them, though they had been, for ages past, used in the Jewish church; as the first day of the year, and of every month, the feasts of passover, pentecost, and tabernacles, the jubilee year, the sabbatical year, and the seventh day sabbath (Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16, 17). On the other hand, they "loosed," or declared lawful and free of use, civil correspondence between Jews and Gentiles; which before had been unlawful, at least according to the traditions of the Jews; and Peter was the first who had light into it, by the vision of the four footed beasts, which was given

him; for before he thought it was an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to come into or keep company with one of another nation; but by that vision God showed him that he was not to call any man common or unclean (see Acts 10:28, 11:2, 3, 18); and so they all afterwards understood, that under the gospel dispensation there was neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, nor male nor female; but they were all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28), likewise they “loosed,” or declared lawful and free of use, the eating of any sort of food, of which there was a distinction under the old law, and was bid; but now they saw, from the words of Christ (Matthew 15:11), and Peter, by the above vision; and Paul, by Christ, that there was nothing common and unclean of itself; and that the kingdom of God did not lie in meat and drink, but that every creature of God was good, and nothing to be refused, if received with thanksgiving (Rom. 14:14, 17; 1 Tim. 4:4). And this power of binding and loosing reached not only to practices, but to doctrines; for as the apostles were infallibly guided into all truth; whatever they bound or forbid, and declared as false doctrine, was so; and whatever they “loosed,” or declared to be truth, was so to be accounted; hence the anathema of the apostle Paul (Gal. 1:8). They had the whole counsel of God, the whole system of gospel truths made known to them; and which they have declared in their writings; and are to be observed as the rule of faith to the end of the world, being delivered under divine inspiration; of which our Lord’s breathing upon them after his resurrection, and their commission from him, was an emblem, when the following words were delivered by him, “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted to them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained,” (John 20:23) which respect not any discipline of the apostles in laying on, binding, and retaining censures on persons; and of loosing, remitting, and taking them off, according to their behaviour; but of the doctrine of remission of sins, preached by them: for this cannot be meant of remission of sins by them in an absolute and authoritative way; for none can forgive sins but God, and Christ, who is God; and who yet never gave any such power to his apostles; nor did they ever, assume this to themselves; this is the mark of who sits in the temple of God, and shows himself to be god, or to assume such a character, by taking upon him to dispense pardons and indulgences: but this is to be understood of the apostles, as ministerially and doctrinally preaching the forgiveness of sins; declaring, that such who repent of their sins, and believe in Christ, shall receive the remission of them; but that whoever do not repent of their sins, and do not believe in him, shall perish eternally, according to Mark 16:16 and by this doctrine of the apostles God and Christ will stand; and sooner or later will appear the validity, truth, and certainty of their declarations.

2. Secondly, there are various passages of scripture, which are thought to respect excommunication, or exclusion from church communion; which seem to have nothing to do with it, and are not to be considered as rules to proceed by, with respect unto it. As,

2a. First, the words in Matthew 18:17 “Let him, be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican;” which was no form of excommunication, neither with Jews nor with Christians. Not with Jews, for that with them was expressed by casting out of the synagogue, especially in the times of Christ: nor with Christians, with whom it was after signified by putting away wicked men from among them; between an excommunicated person, and an heathen man and publican, there was no agreement; for an heathen man

and a publican, however considered by the Jews, were very familiarly conversed with by Christ and his apostles; with whom they frequently eat and drank, and Christ is called a friend of such; whereas, with an excommunicate person it was not allowed to eat, nor indeed to have any familiar conversation with them, as little as possible. Moreover, the words are not a rule to the church, how that was to proceed towards a person who behaved in the manner described; for it is not said, “If he neglect to hear the church, let him be to the church as an heathen man and a publican;” but it is a rule to the offended person how he should behave to the offender, under such circumstances; “Let him be to thee,” &c. and the design of the whole is to justify the offended party, that when he has taken all the steps directed to; as to reprove the offending party privately, and then with two or more, who would be witnesses of his obstinacy, and then lay the whole affair before the church or congregation, which, with the Jews, never consisted of less than ten persons; so that he would be abundantly vindicated in behaving towards such a man as **חבר פחות** a worthless neighbour, as the Jews used to call such, and to look upon himself as freed from all brotherly and neighbourly offices towards him.

2b. Secondly, nor is excommunication expressed by the “delivery” of a man “to Satan;” for though that sometimes accompanied excommunication, yet they are very different and distinct things; the delivery of the incestuous person to Satan was the apostle’s own act and deed; “I verily,” says the apostle, “as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged,” or determined within myself, “already, concerning him that hath done this deed,” committed the incest before mentioned, “to deliver such an one unto Satan,” (1 Cor. 5:3, 5) for the fourth verse is to be read in a parenthesis, and the third and fifth connected together; which shows it to be a pure act of the apostle; as the like is elsewhere asserted by him, concerning Hymeneus and Alexander; “Whom,” says he, “I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme,” (1 Tim. 1:20) whereas, excommunication is called a punishment, or censure inflicted by many, on the incestuous person; whom the church at Corinth were directed to purge themselves from, and to put away from among them, that wicked person; by which the excommunication of him from them as a church is expressed (1 Cor. 5:7, 13; see 2 Cor. 2:6), as a distinct thing from the delivery of him to Satan; which was a miraculous action, as appears from 1 Corinthians 5:4 included in a parenthesis; “in the name of our Lord Jesus;” a way of speaking when a miracle being performed (see Acts 3:6); “when ye are gathered together,” not to perform this miraculous actions, but to be witnesses of it, and my spirit; for though in body he was absent from them, yet his spirit would be with them, to perform the miraculous operation; as the heart or spirit of Elisha was with Gehazi in a wonderful manner, when the man turned again to him from his chariot to meet him (2 King 5:26), the apostle adds, “with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,” to which all miraculous operations are to be ascribed, and so this; for it never was used, nor never ought to be, as a form of excommunication; it was not in the primitive churches; nay, it was cautioned against by the ancients, in one of their synods; nor never was, until excommunication was used as an engine of the church’s, or rather of the priest’s power to terrify and distress; this was only used in the apostles’ time and then ceased; it was the apostolic rod, with which they sometimes smote wicked persons with death, as Ananias and Sapphira were smitten by Peter; and Elymas the sorcerer with blindness, by the apostle Paul; and others with diseases of body, and with violent agitations of it, and with terrors of mind; and it is

remarkable that the words of the Lord concerning Job; “Behold, he is in thine hand,” are rendered in the Septuagint version, “Behold, I deliver him unto thee;” that is, to smite him with boils (Job 2:6), and such a corporal punishment, or temporal chastisement, cannot be reckoned a severity, as inflicted on the incestuous person; for excommunication was too mild a punishment for him, who had been guilty of a crime not to be named among the Gentiles; as to have his father’s wife! which was death, or cutting off by the hand of heaven, according to the law of Moses (Lev. 18:1-30), and so the blasphemy of Hymeneus and Alexander, by the same law, was deserving of death. It is commonly said, that this delivery of a man to Satan is only a redelivery of him into the kingdom of Satan, the world, out of which he was taken; and so is only a putting him “in statu quo;” but this is to allow the world to be the kingdom of Satan; whereas he has no true and proper right to it; it is only his by usurpation; the world is the Lord’s: nor is it fact, that when a man is received into a church, he is received out of the world; for it is supposed by the church, that he is previously called by the grace of God out of it; and is by faith a partaker of Christ, and of the blessings of his grace, and is a member of the invisible church; and very often so it is, that when a person is dealt with by a church for sin; which, for the honour of Christ and his gospel, they are obliged to do, yet at the same time they cannot but hope, that he is not a man of the world, but a partaker of the grace of God; and therefore do not account him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

2c. Thirdly, the passage in Titus 3:10 “A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject;” is usually thought, and so has been by myself, to be a rule for the ejection or casting out of church communion, a person so described; but not only the word used, is never used of excommunication, nor indeed any other word in the singular number; it is not said, “reject ye,” but “reject thou”[2]; and so is no direction to a church, but to a single person: now let Titus be who he may, an extraordinary person, an evangelist, as he seems to be, or a bishop of Crete, as the subscription of the epistle suggests, which is not to be depended upon, or an ordinary pastor and elder of a church, which is not probable; but be he what he may, an extraordinary or ordinary minister, he had no power nor right of himself to reject or eject any person from church communion; this would be to act the part of Diotrephes, who cast out the brethren, condemned by the apostle John; and the apostle Paul would never have advised Titus to act a part so unjustifiable; besides, could such a sense of the text be established, it would prove what the papists, prelates, and presbyterians produce it for, namely, that the power of excommunication lies in the hands of a bishop, or prelate, or presbyter, elder or pastor of a church, and not in the church itself; and it would not be easy to rescue such a proof out of their hands; whereas, not single persons, but churches, are always addressed and exhorted to perform the act of excommunication on persons deserving of it (see Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:7, 13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14). Nor were admonitions ever directed to be given to persons deserving of excommunication; in cases of private offences, admonitions were to be given; and so long as an affair lies between a person and a church, respecting either doctrine or practice, and is not known to the world and other churches, admonitions may be given and repeated as long as there are any hopes of good being done by them; but in case of atrocious public crimes, and notorious heresies, subversive of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, no time should be lost, or trifled away with admonitions; but for the honour of Christ, the credit of religion, and for the removal of the odium brought on

Christianity, such a person should be removed from communion at once; nay, even, as some think, though he may seem to have some sense of his evil, and repentance for it. We have but one instance of excommunication from a Christian church in the whole New Testament, and that is of the incestuous person; and we are sure he had no admonitions from the church before the apostle had heard of the affair; so far were they from it, that they were puffed up, when they should rather have mourned, that he that had done the deed might be taken away from them; and we are sure he had none afterwards, for the apostle immediately orders the excommunication of him. And though there are orders given to several of the churches, as before observed, for the excommunication of such and such persons, yet no directions given for the admonition of any of them, previous to their ejection: sometimes admonition is directed to be given after a person is withdrawn from, when it is not on account of any notorious crime, of a public and scandalous nature; but idleness, an unwillingness to work; and such an one cannot be looked upon as all enemy to Christ and his gospel, and may be admonished as one who had been a brother, and it may be hoped will be restored again (2 Thess. 3:14, 15). The case of Titus was a personal one, and respects a man he had been in connection with, or supposed to have been, and now fallen into heresy; when, having reprov'd him again and again, and endeavoured to convince him of his error, but to no purpose; he is then directed to have nothing more to say unto him or do with him, to have no society with him, nor admit him to a familiar conversation with him, lest he should be hardened in his error, and weak Christians should be stumbled. Much such advice is given by the apostle John to private Christians, not to receive such persons into their houses, nor wish them God speed (2 John 1:10).

But though the above passages are not proper and pertinent to church discipline; yet there are rules and directions which do belong to it, and are to be observed with respect unto it: and as I have considered the materials, the form and fashion of the house or church of God, both as essential and as organized; I shall now proceed to consider the rules of admission into it, or the comings in thereof, and the laws and ordinances to be observed by those who are in it, and the rules concerning the goings out of it, whether by dismissal or excommunication.

2d. First, the rules concerning the comings in, or admission of members into a gospel church.

2d1. The doors of it are not to be set wide open for anyone to come in at pleasure; porters were set at the gates of the house of the Lord, that no unclean person should enter in; and in Ezekiel's temple, a figure of the gospel church in the latter day, orders are given, that no stranger, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, should enter into the sanctuary of the Lord; no materials were admitted to be laid in Solomon's temple, but what were hewn and squared before brought thither.

2d2. Persons should voluntarily propose themselves to the church for communion with it; for this should be a free act of their own, and not by the force or persuasion of others; or they should be proposed by the minister or elder, with whom a previous conversation should be had, and an inquiry made of their experience and knowledge of divine things;

so Saul, when converted, “essayed to join himself to the disciples;” that is, he tried, he attempted, he proposed himself to them, to become a member of them, and to have communion with them, as one of them (Acts 9:26).

2d3. In order to admission to communion, satisfaction must be given as to a work of grace upon the soul; when. Saul desired communion with the church, “they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple;” a real converted person, a true believer in Christ, because he had been so lately a persecutor of the saints; until it was declared to them, how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how boldly he had preached in his name; and then he was admitted, and was with them coming in and going out: and it is but fit and proper that such should give a reason of the hope that is in them, to the satisfaction of those with whom they desire to walk in fellowship; it was an early practice of the saints, to tell one another what God had done for their souls; the poor man whom Christ had dispossessed of a legion of devils, was bid to go home to his friends, and tell them how great things the Lord had done for him, and had had compassion on him; and this is best done by a man himself, than by the report of others; and better by a verbal declaration than by writing; for though the former may be made in a broken manner, yet it may best discover the true affection of the heart, and the savouriness of a man’s spirit, and tend more to knit and unite the hearts of the Lord’s people to him

2d4. The way of entrance into a church is by a profession of faith in Christ; for as with the heart man believes unto righteousness, so with the mouth confession is made unto salvation; the church is the sheepfold, and Christ is the door into it; and whoever climbs up another way than by faith in him, and profession of it, is a thief and a robber. The three thousand converts first professed repentance of their sins, faith in Christ for the remission of them, and their joyful reception of the gospel, and then were baptized and added to the church.

2d5. It is necessary that such who enter into a church state, should have knowledge of the truths of the gospel, and confess them, and not be ashamed of Christ, and his words, before men; their soundness in the doctrine of faith should be inquired into, and this be testified by their assent to the articles of faith held and maintained by the church; “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in,” (Isa. 26:1).

2d6. Allowances should be made for weaknesses and infirmities of men, both in their gracious experiences, and in their gospel light and knowledge; the day of small things is not to be despised; the bruised reed is not to be broken, nor the smoking flax to be quenched; the tender lambs are gathered into Christ’s arms, and carried in his bosom; the weak in faith are to be received, and not to doubtful disputations.

2d7. Testimony should be given of their becoming life and conversation; when the disciples demurred upon receiving Saul, because of his former conduct and behaviour, Barnabas informed them of the change that was in him, and that of a violent persecutor, he was become a bold and zealous preacher of the gospel, they gladly received him.

2d8. The reception of a member into church communion must be by mutual consent; the person received must give up him or herself to walk with the church in holy fellowship; and the church must readily receive such in the Lord; it must be a voluntary act on both sides; and if there is a pastor, the person must be received by him, in the name and with the consent of the church; and if not, by a brother appointed by the church for that purpose, the token of which is by giving the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:9). I proceed,

2e. Secondly, to consider the ordinances, laws, and rules to be kept and observed by those who are admitted into the church.

2e1. There are "ordinances" they are directed to the observation of. Show them "all the ordinances" of the house, that they may "do" them; so Christ ordered his disciples to teach those they baptized to observe all things whatsoever he commanded them. Besides the ordinance of baptism, which is preparatory to church communion, there are the ordinances of public prayer and praise, and the public ministry of the word, which are constantly to be attended on; and it is very unbecoming members of churches to forsake the assembling of themselves together for public worship: it is observed, to the honour of the primitive Christians, that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine," in a constant attendance on the ministration of it; and in holy "fellowship" with one another; and "in prayer," in public prayers put up to God by the minister, as the mouth of the church; and particularly in "breaking of bread," or in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, which is to be frequently administered; "As often as ye eat this bread," &c. which shows it is to be often done; and as often as it is, it should be attended on. But of these ordinances more hereafter, in their proper course.

2e2. There are also "the laws of" the house, which are to be shown to members of churches, and to be observed by them; Christ is Lawgiver in it, and his commands are to be kept from a principle of love to him, even all that he has commanded. There is the moral law, which is still in force, and binding upon Christians; for Christ came not to destroy it, but to fulfil it; and his people are "under the law to him", and should be obedient to it: such who are regardless of morality are not fit to be members of churches, and are not to be continued in them. There is likewise the law of Christ, which is the law of love, the new commandment Christ has given to his disciples, by the observance of which it is known that they are his disciples. There are, moreover, various duties to be performed by members of churches, mutually towards each other; they are to submit themselves to one another in the fear of the Lord; to have the same love one for another, both with respect to things temporal and spiritual, and to watch over one another in the Lord; but these, with other incumbent duties, have been treated of in a preceding chapter.

2e3. There are certain rules respecting private admonitions of church members, which deserve special regard; both such as are given by ministers and elders of churches, who have not only power of admonishing those they have the rule over, and of rebuking publicly and with authority; but also in a private manner, as they go from house to house, and as they see occasion for it; which private admonitions are not to be slighted; and also those given by members, who are to admonish and rebuke one another, in a private

manner, as there may be a necessity for it. The rule in Matthew 18:15-17 “If thy brother shall trespass against thee,” &c. is an excellent good one, and may be accommodated to all cases in difference between two persons; whether between one neighbour and another, or between one member of a church and another; the former seems to be the original foundation of this rule, for neighbour and brother are synonymous; the passage which the rule seems to have respect unto, and is the rise of it, is in Leviticus 19:17 “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour;” where a brother is explained by a neighbour: and when there is a difference between one neighbour and another, this rule should be observed; the neighbour offended, against whom the trespass is committed, and to whom the injury is done, is to go privately to the offender, lay the evil before him, and reprove him for it, in a gentle manner; if he pays a proper regard to it, takes the reproof kindly, acknowledges the offence, and declares repentance for it, it is all very well; he is to be forgiven, no mention hereafter is to be made of the matter; but if not, if he denies the fact, or extenuates or defends it, and shows no repentance, then the offended party is to take “one or two” neighbours, and lay the case before him in their presence, who will be witnesses of the charge, and of the proof of it, and join in the admonition; but if he still remains incorrigible, then it must be told to “the church,” *τη εκκλησια*, the same with *עדה* “the congregation,” which consisted at least of ten persons[3]; and when such a number were made acquainted with the whole affair, and the offender would make no acknowledgment, the offended person would be justified by all men, in treating him for the future as a worthless friend or neighbour, as the Jews used to call such an one, and take no more notice of him than of an heathen man and a publican. The rule also maybe accommodated to any difference between one member of a church and another; between a brother and a brother, who are in the same spiritual relation; and this rule must be observed in case of a private trespass only known to them, a secret fault which they are only privy to; and not a public sin, known to the whole church and to the world; for then another method must be taken: and it must be a “trespass,” a sin, that the offender is guilty of; yet not a sin of infirmity, common to human nature, and which all are encompassed with; a man is not to be made an offender for a word, a small trifling thing; and yet it must not be a very atrocious and public one, which requires more than admonition, even excommunication at once; such as was the sin of the incestuous person; but a sin of a lesser nature, yet a fault, and which gives just cause of offence; and in such a case the offended brother must give the offending one private reproof, tell him his fault, between themselves alone; and if he can bring him to an acknowledgment of his fault, and he declares his sorrow for it, then the brother is gained, is restored from the error he has been guilty of; and it is to be buried in oblivion, and no more said of it to anyone; but if not, he must take another brother or two with him, and admonish him again; and if he pays no regard to it, as strengthened by the conjunction of the brethren with him, then the direction is, “tell the church”: but what is meant by is not easy to say, whether the Jewish sanhedrin or Jewish synagogue; since at that time there was no congregational church in being, unless the twelve disciples may be so called; wherefore this can only at most respect a church in future time, when such a rule should take place; however, so far as it concerns a private admonition, it is clear and manifest, and deserves attention; for which reason only it is produced.

3. Thirdly, the next thing to be inquired into is what concerns “the goings out of” the house or church of God, and what may be meant by them. There are but two ways of going out of a church; either by a dismissal from it, or by an excommunication out of it. There are, indeed, letters of recommendation, which are wanting in some cases, though the apostle needed them not (2 Cor. 3:1), such as were given to Apollos (Acts 18:27) to Phebe (Rom. 16:1, 2), and to Marcus (Col. 4:10). But these do not give membership; only transient communion; the person recommended still remains a member from whence he is recommended; the design of such letters is only to certify, that the person whose name is mentioned in them, is a member in full communion with the church which recommends him, and may be safely admitted to transient communion with the church to which he is recommended: but such letters ought not to continue long; for if a person takes up his residence in a place where he is in providence brought, he should send for his dismissal, and be received upon it into full communion; a letter of dismissal, when approved of, and the person dismissed is received, he is in all respects a member, and then his membership ceases in the church by which he is dismissed, and not before: there are cases in which a man may desire his dismissal to another church; as distance of habitation, non-edification, and when a church is become corrupt in doctrine and practice, that he cannot conscientiously abide with them. The other way of going out of a church is excommunication, concerning which it will be necessary to consider various things.

3a. What excommunication is.

3a1. It is not a being reckoned as an heathen man and a publican; nor a delivery of one to Satan, as has been shown.

3a2. Nor does it affect the temporal estate and civil affairs of a man; it does not subject him to fines, imprisonment, or death; it does not interfere with the business of the civil magistrate; nor does it break in upon the natural and civil relations between man and wife, parents and children, masters and servants; nor forbid attendance on the external ministry of the word.

3a3. Nor does it admit of degrees; the Jews had three sorts of excommunication, which proceeded gradually^[4]; but there is but one among Christians. Some talk indeed of a lesser and a greater excommunication, but without any foundation from the word of God. Some think a suspension from the Lord’s table is in some cases necessary; when a case is dubious, and there is not time thoroughly to inquire into it, and yet offence and scandal arises upon it: a person, indeed, may be desired to abstain from the Lord’s table, and a man that seeks the peace of the church will consent to it; but he cannot be obliged to abstain; if he is obstinate and refractory, there is no other way but to expel him; for a man is either in communion with a church or he is not; there is no middle state; to withdraw from a disorderly person, or to withdraw and separate him from communion, are the same thing.

But though the above passages are not proper and pertinent to church discipline; yet there are rules and directions which do belong to it, and are to be observed with respect unto it: and as I have considered the materials, the form and fashion of the house or church of

God, both as essential and as organized; I shall now proceed to consider the rules of admission into it, or the comings in thereof, and the laws and ordinances to be observed by those who are in it, and the rules concerning the goings out of it, whether by dismissal or excommunication.

2d. First, the rules concerning the comings in, or admission of members into a gospel church.

2d1. The doors of it are not to be set wide open for anyone to come in at pleasure; porters were set at the gates of the house of the Lord, that no unclean person should enter in; and in Ezekiel's temple, a figure of the gospel church in the latter day, orders are given, that no stranger, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, should enter into the sanctuary of the Lord; no materials were admitted to be laid in Solomon's temple, but what were hewn and squared before brought thither.

2d2. Persons should voluntarily propose themselves to the church for communion with it; for this should be a free act of their own, and not by the force or persuasion of others; or they should be proposed by the minister or elder, with whom a previous conversation should be had, and an inquiry made of their experience and knowledge of divine things; so Saul, when converted, "essayed to join himself to the disciples;" that is, he tried, he attempted, he proposed himself to them, to become a member of them, and to have communion with them, as one of them (Acts 9:26).

2d3. In order to admission to communion, satisfaction must be given as to a work of grace upon the soul; when Saul desired communion with the church, "they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple;" a real converted person, a true believer in Christ, because he had been so lately a persecutor of the saints; until it was declared to them, how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how boldly he had preached in his name; and then he was admitted, and was with them coming in and going out: and it is but fit and proper that such should give a reason of the hope that is in them, to the satisfaction of those with whom they desire to walk in fellowship; it was an early practice of the saints, to tell one another what God had done for their souls; the poor man whom Christ had dispossessed of a legion of devils, was bid to go home to his friends, and tell them how great things the Lord had done for him, and had had compassion on him; and this is best done by a man himself, than by the report of others; and better by a verbal declaration than by writing; for though the former may be made in a broken manner, yet it may best discover the true affection of the heart, and the savouriness of a man's spirit, and tend more to knit and unite the hearts of the Lord's people to him

2d4. The way of entrance into a church is by a profession of faith in Christ; for as with the heart man believes unto righteousness, so with the mouth confession is made unto salvation; the church is the sheepfold, and Christ is the door into it; and whoever climbs up another way than by faith in him, and profession of it, is a thief and a robber. The three thousand converts first professed repentance of their sins, faith in Christ for the

remission of them, and their joyful reception of the gospel, and then were baptized and added to the church.

2d5. It is necessary that such who enter into a church state, should have knowledge of the truths of the gospel, and confess them, and not be ashamed of Christ, and his words, before men; their soundness in the doctrine of faith should be inquired into, and this be testified by their assent to the articles of faith held and maintained by the church; “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in,” (Isa. 26:1).

2d6. Allowances should be made for weaknesses and infirmities of men, both in their gracious experiences, and in their gospel light and knowledge; the day of small things is not to be despised; the bruised reed is not to be broken, nor the smoking flax to be quenched; the tender lambs are gathered into Christ’s arms, and carried in his bosom; the weak in faith are to be received, and not to doubtful disputations.

2d7. Testimony should be given of their becoming life and conversation; when the disciples demurred upon receiving Saul, because of his former conduct and behaviour, Barnabas informed them of the change that was in him, and that of a violent persecutor, he was become a bold and zealous preacher of the gospel, they gladly received him.

2d8. The reception of a member into church communion must be by mutual consent; the person received must give up him or herself to walk with the church in holy fellowship; and the church must readily receive such in the Lord; it must be a voluntary act on both sides; and if there is a pastor, the person must be received by him, in the name and with the consent of the church; and if not, by a brother appointed by the church for that purpose, the token of which is by giving the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:9). I proceed,

2e. Secondly, to consider the ordinances, laws, and rules to be kept and observed by those who are admitted into the church.

2e1. There are “ordinances” they are directed to the observation of. Show them “all the ordinances” of the house, that they may “do” them; so Christ ordered his disciples to teach those they baptized to observe all things whatsoever he commanded them. Besides the ordinance of baptism, which is preparatory to church communion, there are the ordinances of public prayer and praise, and the public ministry of the word, which are constantly to be attended on; and it is very unbecoming members of churches to forsake the assembling of themselves together for public worship: it is observed, to the honour of the primitive Christians, that “they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine,” in a constant attendance on the ministration of it; and in holy “fellowship” with one another; and “in prayer,” in public prayers put up to God by the minister, as the mouth of the church; and particularly in “breaking of bread,” or in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, which is to be frequently administered; “As often as ye eat this bread,” &c. which shows it is to be often done; and as often as it is, it should be attended on. But of these ordinances more hereafter, in their proper course.

3a4. Excommunication is no other than a removal of a man from the communion of the church, and from all privileges dependent upon it; it is a disfranchising him from all the immunities of a fellow citizen with the saints, and taking from him a place and a name in the house of God; for a church can take no more from him than what it first gave him.

3a5. This act is pressed by various phrases; as by avoiding familiar conversation with such; by not keeping company with them; and by not eating with them at the Lord's table; by purging out from them the old leaven; and by putting away the wicked from among them; by withdrawing from disorderly persons, and cutting them off from fellowship with them.

3b. Who they are that are to be excommunicated.

3b1. Such who are disturbers of the church's peace, who cause divisions and offences, who are litigious and quarrelsome (1 Cor. 11:16). Such who are troublers of God's Israel ought to be cut off from his people (Gal. 5:12).

3b2. Who do not keep their places in the church, do not attend when the church assembles together for religious worship, but forsake the assembling of themselves together, and in a sense forsake the church; whose places are empty, as David's was at supper time, and who do in a sort cut off themselves from the communion of the church (Jude 1:19).

3b3. All such who walk disorderly, as the above persons do, are irregular in their lives and conversations, guilty of immoralities, though it may be thought of a lesser kind, which they continue and indulge themselves in: as sloth and idleness, not working at all, busybodies, going from house to house, doing mischief, and living upon others; from such the apostle commands us to withdraw ourselves (2 Thess. 3:6, 11, 14).

3b4. All such who commit atrocious crimes, unrepented of, and continued in; as fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards, extortioners, &c. "with such" we are bid "not to eat," especially at the Lord's table; for such ought to have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God, that is, in the church of God (1 Cor. 5:11; Eph. 5:5).

3b5. All erroneous and heretical persons, who hold and propagate doctrines contrary to what has been learnt from the word of God, and in the churches of Christ; such are to be avoided and declined from (Rom. 16:17), all such who bring in "damnable heresies," as the apostle calls them; denying the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the Deity of Christ, &c. (2 Peter 2:1), who bring not with them, but oppose the doctrine of Christ, concerning his person and grace; these, as they are not to have a place in the private houses of the saints, ought to have none in the church of God; which is commended for not bearing them that are evil, either unsound in principle, or immoral in life (2 John 1:9-11; Rev. 2:2).

3c. By whom excommunication is to be performed.

3c1. Not by a member himself; no man has a right to cut off himself; such a man is a “felo de se;” as a man cannot come into a church without the consent of it; so neither can he go out of it, without its consent; for a man to depart of himself, is not standing fast in one spirit, but is a cowardly running away from a church; and to go without giving a reason, without asking leave, or desiring a dismissal, to say the least of it, is a rude and unmannerly way of departure; and such churches who receive such persons, do not as they would be done by: yea, such men are covenant breakers with a church, which is a great evil, and breakers up of churches, as much as in them lies; for what one member may do, others may; yea, if a member may leave a church at pleasure, a pastor may do the same: in a word, notwithstanding such departure, such persons may be proceeded against by direct excommunication; or, which amounts to much the same, should be declared by a vote of the church, non-members, and no longer under its watch and care; which is by some called indirect excommunication.

3c2. Nor is it to be performed by any single person of himself, whether an ordinary or an extraordinary minister; it never was done by an apostle, an evangelist, or any other one man; for it is a punishment inflicted by many.

3c3. Nor is it to be done by the elders of a church separately; much less by the elders of other churches; but by the elders of churches, with the consent of the members of them; for they have a right to do this previous to their having elders, and they have none, as to receive members, so to expel them; the power of it originally lies in the church; the authority of executing it lies in the elders, with the consent and by the order of the church; as the directions to the churches concerning this matter testify.

3d. What are the ends of excommunication.

3d1. The glory of God, which is the ultimate end of it; for as his name is dishonoured by the evil practices or principles of church members, so this is the most open and most effectual way of removing that dishonour that is brought upon it; this ought to be always the chief aim and the sincere view in the administration of it; though sometimes this is only pretence, and under the cover of it, churches gratify sinful passions and resentments; as the Jews of old, in a similar case (Isa. 66:5).

3d2. Another end is to purge the church, and preserve it from infection; a little leaven leavens the whole lump, and therefore the old leaven must be purged out, that a church may become a new lump; evil communications corrupt good manners, and therefore evil men must be put away from among the saints, (1 Cor. 5:7, 13) lepers were to be put out of the camp, that they might not infect others; and erroneous persons, whose words do eat as a canker, must be removed from the communion of churches.

3d3. A church of Christ is like a garden or vineyard, which, if not taken care of, and this ordinance of excommunication not made use of, will be like the vineyard of the slothful, over run with thorns and nettles and other weeds; but by means of this it is cleared of the weeds of immoralities, and the bitter roots of false doctrines are plucked up and eradicated, and withered branches are gathered and cast out.

3d4. The good of persons excommunicated is another end, and is sometimes effected by it, God blessing his own institution when rightly performed, which is for edification, and not destruction; for the saving of the souls of men; and who are hereby brought to shame and repentance for their sins, and an acknowledgment of them; when they are to be received again with all love and tenderness, and to be comforted, that they might not be swallowed up with over much sorrow (Jude 1:23; 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 Cor. 2:7.)

ENDNOTES:

[1] "Ipse clavem imbuit," Acts ii. 22. Tertullian. de Pudicitia, c. 21.

[2] paraitou.

[3] Vid. Rhenferd. observ. select. ad loc. Heb.. Nov. Test. inter ejus opera. p. 729, &c.

[4] Eliae Tisbi in voce ״נדר״.