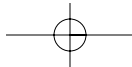
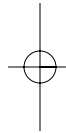
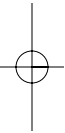
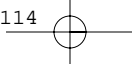


A Summary of Church Discipline

CHARLESTON ASSOCIATION



A
S U M M A R Y
OF
Church Discipline
SHEWING THE
QUALIFICATIONS AND DUTIES
OF THE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS

OF A
GOSPEL CHURCH
*BY THE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION IN
CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA*

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

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

C H A R L E S T O N
PRINTED BY DAVID BRUCE
MDCCLXXIV

CONTENTS

Preface • 117

I

Of a True and Orderly Gospel Church • 117

II

Of Church Officers • 119

III

Of Receiving Persons to Church Membership • 122

IV

Of the Duties Incumbent on Church Members • 125

V

Of Church Censures • 127

VI

Of Association of Churches • 131

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER I OF A TRUE AND ORDERLY GOSPEL CHURCH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER II OF CHURCH OFFICERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER III OF RECEIVING PERSONS TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV OF THE DUTIES INCUMBENT ON CHURCH MEMBERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER V OF CHURCH CENSURES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VI OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE END.

