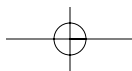
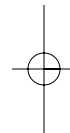
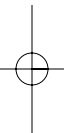


Manual of Church Discipline

REV. ELEAZER SAVAGE



Rev. Eleazer Savage was born in Middletown, Conn., July 28, 1800; entered Hamilton in 1820; was ordained in Rochester in 1824; was pastor in several other communities in New York, in which he baptized more than 400 souls; published a valuable work on Church Discipline. Mr. Savage was a very useful minister, and an honored and faithful servant of Jesus; one of his daughters is the wife of the able president of the Rochester Theological Seminary.

—William Cathcart, 1881

CHURCH DISCIPLINE,

IN TWO PARTS,¹

FORMATIVE & CORRECTIVE;

IN WHICH IS DEVELOPED

THE TRUE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

“A Christian is the highest style of man.”

“He that winneth souls is wise.”

“It must needs be that offences come.”

“By mercy and truth, iniquity is purged.”

BY REV. ELEAZER SAVAGE

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

SECOND THOUSAND.

SHELDON & COMPANY, NEW YORK.
GOULD & LINCOLN, BOSTON; G. S. BLANCHARD, CINCINNATI;
CHURCH & GOODMAN, CHICAGO.
1863.

¹Editor's Note: Only the second part of this work is here reprinted.

PREFACE.

Two editions of Four Thousand copies of “The Manual of Church Discipline,” upon “offences” and their treatment—which now constitutes the Second Part of this work—have been published and sold. A re-publication of that work, is now called for, alike by the wants of the Churches, and the wishes of those best acquainted with its merits.

It has been thought best to enlarge the work, by prefixing a *Part upon Formative Church Discipline*; a subject truly *first*, both in the order of nature, and importance; and were Formative Church Discipline, closely studied, and well understood in its intrinsic nature and vast importance; and vigorously carried forward in the Churches, we fully believe, that there would be far fewer offences occurring; and so far less Corrective Church Discipline, required. The First Part of this work will be of great value to all classes of Religious Teachers; as clearly showing them the *nature* of the work they have in hand, in forming men to the true Christian Character, by the culture of depraved mind, with inspired truth. And as showing, also, that it is the intelligent, earnest, laborious, prayerful Teacher, alone, that succeeds in his work; and attains unto “the honor that comes from God only.” Such success and such honor were reward enough, for doing the highest work of human hands, in the best possible manner.

And, if this little Volume shall shed any such new light upon the subject of Religious Teaching, as shall induce and ensure the greater efficiency of Teachers, through their own thorough personal culture, its very highest end will have been gained.

The Second Part of this work, will be found, we think, by all Church Members, to contain instructions of vital interest to them. For certainly, the *peace* of the Church of Christ, as flowing from her purity; and as opposed to “bitter envying and strife; to wars and fightings,” is manifestly a paramount interest. And yet, what spiritual interest beside, is so greatly exposed and so frequently assailed, as the peace of the Christian brotherhood? There are a thousand *forms* of “offence” to disturb it; and twice as many *forms of treating* those offences which disturb it more.

It is a matter of most serious question, whether the difficulties of the Church do not arise more, by nine-tenths, from the *wrong manner* of treating offences, than from the offences themselves.

And there are two very obvious reasons of this fact. One is, disciplinary measures, as they exist, are more frequently the offspring of *passion*, than principle. Passion fixes its own end; which is to punish, instead of restore. It makes its own law, instead of leading to the inspired one, made and provided for the case. And passion thus legislates, and executes, and works mischief because it has never been subdued to the obedience of Christ, by the application of revealed light to the understanding and heart, by the Holy Spirit. Another reason is, there has been almost *nothing written* on the sub-

ject of Church Discipline, to scripturally instruct Church members, as to the *different kinds* of offences, by which they and the cause may be injured; and the *proper methods* of treating them.

It has appeared to the writer, that no interest, so great as the peace of the Church; that no interest, so much exposed as this, both by offences and their improper treatment, has been so much overlooked and left so unprovided for, by the appointed feeders of the sheep and lambs. We have volume upon volume, treating upon well nigh every doctrine and duty of revealed religion besides; but how little have we written upon this subject.

In the Second Part of this work we have attempted the *classification of offences*, and the *specification of the rule* for the treatment of each class. Each class has its distinctive feature and its absolute rule. Such exceptions to the classification as would naturally arise, are noticed, accurately defined, and provided for. Still, defects, and even errors, will doubtless be detected. It were no easy task, perhaps an impracticable one, amidst offences of an endless variety of type, to do more than to deal in a few general principles and rules. And then we have studied simplicity and brevity, in strict imitation of the Master and his inspired servants, on this subject; that the mind might not be greatly burdened with many things; but deeply impressed with a few, which should serve to hold it amidst the greatest provocations and the sharpest trials, to the certain exercise of brotherly love; to the accurate estimate of wrongs; to the careful consideration of evidence; to the due respect for inspired law; and to the truest regard for the honor of God.

CONTENTS OF PART II.

CHAPTER I.

Theme painful. Apology for treating it. Definitions. Classification of “offences;” minor, private, personal, public, and insufferable. General remarks, justifying the classification 485

CHAPTER II.

First class of offences: Minor. Levity, irritability, loquacity, forwardness, backwardness, littleness, smaller defects in sentiment and practice. Why properly considered offences. The reasons for forbearance. The rule of treatment. Cautionary rule. Exception to the rule of forbearance 487

CHAPTER III.

Second class of offences: Private. What? Example. Rule of treatment. Reason on which the rule is based. Consequences of neglecting it 490

CHAPTER IV.

Third class of offences: Personal. What? Three preparatory steps. Determine the amount of wrong. Ascertain the amount of evidence. See whether the offence would exclude, if persisted in 492

The 18th of Matthew contains the rule for personal offences. Explanation of it. Three steps of labor. First step includes visitation, conviction, reproof, and secrecy. Caution. Second step of labor. Business of this step, same nature as First; includes same parts of service; visitation, conviction, reproof, advice; with corresponding manner, and same end. Second step of labor involves a trial. Idea of a trial of vast importance. The “one or two” are witnesses, advisors and brethren, in general. Hints to them. Witnesses before the Church also. Third step of labor. Proper manner of taking it. Duty of Moderator in the case. Exclusion by unanimous vote 493

Course in case Church is divided. Counsellors. Ordinary Councils objectionable. Church, highest tribunal 501

Particular case of personal offence in 6th chapter of 1 Cor. A pecuniary difficulty. Sueing at the law forbidden. Rule, laid down for the treatment of the case. Agreement of this rule with that in the 18th chapter of Matthew. A case in which the rule cannot operate. What course then?	501
Exception made to the use of the rule in Matthew 18th, where the personal offence is notorious. The exception groundless. Reasons.	503

CHAPTER V.

Fourth Class of offences: Public. Distinction between public personal offences, and public offences. Examples.	504
Cases of public offence in the Epistles, with their methods of treatment. Case in Rom. 16. Heresy. Its rule of treatment	505
Number of cases of public offence in 5th chapter of 1 Cor. Fornication. Covetousness. Railing. Drunkenness. Extortion. When railing and extortion are personal offences, and when, public. Rule of treatment prescribed for these cases.	506
Case of public offence in the 3d chapter of 2d Thess. Indolence; and meddling with the affairs of others. Rule of treatment, prescribed for the case.	509
Church Covenant, a beautiful summary of Christian duty. Covenant-breaking, a general name for various public offences. Neglect of duties arising from Church relation. Offence with the Church and non-submission to majority. Leaving place at the Table of the Lord because some member has injured us. Reckless failures to meet contracts. Desecration of the Lord's day. Backbiting, etc.	510
General rule for the treatment of public offences. Its import. Its harmony with the particular rules, appended to the particular cases of public offence in the Epistles. Rule cannot operate if the offender be absent. Course of the Church in such case. Course if he refuse to appear before the Church.	514
Public confessions	515
Adaptation of rule in 18th of Matthew, for the correction of many public offences.	516

CHAPTER VI.

Fifth class of offences: Insufferable. Cases of notorious and complicated wickedness. High civil offences and capital crimes. Forgery. Perjury
 Grand larceny. Absconding in debt. Habitual licentiousness murder.
 Treason. Rule for such case. Exclude 517
 Objection in case of penitence. Objection considered. 518

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Offences unavoidable. Each kind should be leaned and remembered in its distinctive feature and rule of treatment by every church member.
 The importance of the strictest, practical adherence to the laws of Discipline, and the spirit of those laws, beyond all estimation 520

CHAPTER I. CLASSIFICATION OF OFFENCES

The simple announcement of this subject, may awaken in many hearts a degree of *pain*; because, it is at once seen, as necessarily involving the consideration and the correction of the *sins* of professing Christians. We feel a pungent sympathy with all who may be the subjects of such an emotion; and we would have avoided the occasion of these painful exercises, could we in faithfulness to our high trust, have done so. Our present situation awakens a lively fellow-feeling with the physician. He has portions of professional duty exceedingly painful and trying. Nevertheless, he may not shrink from them through the twinges of delicate feeling, or the gushings of rising sympathy. Nor may the ministers of religion. To treat on the imperfections and sins of Christian professors, and the methods of correcting them, is to imitate the Oracles of God. The Bible takes things as they are; and so must we. It proceeds, in its instructions of every form, upon the principle, that the best men in the Church, *may fall* by sin; and that the mere professor and hypocrite *will fall*; that “offences must needs come;” because, remaining and prevailing depravity will induce them; and, therefore, that certain rules of procedure—certain methods of treatment, would be indispensable, in all such cases. The precept, therefore, is provided against the time and the occasion for its employment—against the “coming of offences.”

And the sole design of this work, is to bring out that provision. It is not to make new laws of Discipline; but to explain old ones. It is not to be understood ourselves, independent of the Lord; but to have the Master of the house understood, independent of all men; when he speaks, describing the “*offence*;” and specifying the *rule* for its treatment.

Corrective Church Discipline is “*the right treatment of offending members*.” That is, the application of right principles, in a right spirit, to their wrong conduct. An offending member is one, who has transgressed some law of Christ’s kingdom; for, “where there is no law, there is no transgression”—no “*offence*.” Offences, as to their magnitude, are to be estimated by the importance of the law violated. Hence, as there are different laws of Christ’s kingdom—laws having different degrees of value and importance, just as there are different laws in a State; so there are different kinds of offences—offences of various magnitude; and, of course, requiring different treatment.

The consideration, therefore, of the *nature and kinds* of “*offences*,” with their *proper methods of treatment*, must constitute the theme of that volume, which professes to treat Corrective Church Discipline, in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

There are Five Kinds of offences, namely, *minor*, the smaller offences; such as should be borne;—*private*, or such as cannot be proved;—

personal, as when one brother injures another in his person, reputation, or property, and there is proof of the fact; *public*, or such as equally injure all the members, and for which all require an equal satisfaction; and *insufferable*, that is, offences of such enormity as require the immediate and positive removal of the member from the body, for the honor of the cause.

Before entering upon the particular examination of these different kinds of offences, with the rule of treatment required by each, we wish to make a few general remarks, anticipating some exceptions to the classification of offences which we have made; and showing the reasons on which it is based.

Under some one of these *five heads*, we think, every offence may find what, on the whole, may be justly considered its proper place. Yet there are what might be regarded, at first view, apparent exceptions. For example, a *minor offence* may inflict, to some extent, a personal or a public injury; and therefore, be, in some sense, a personal or a public offence; and yet, because it is one of such nature, as to require us to act on the rule of forbearance, we place it under the distinct head of minor offences. Again; a *private offence* is a personal one, and might be said to be one class of personal offences; but the ground on which the distinction is based, is *the total lack of evidence* in the case; and, consequently, the requisition of a different rule of treatment. For, if there are two cases, in one of which there is no evidence, and in the other, proof, do not all see that necessity will give birth to different rules of treatment? In this first case, nothing can be done beyond private interviews. In other cases of personal offence, that is, where there is proof, investigation may be carried on to any desirable extent, because the means of conviction are in the possession of the injured brother. Hence, the ground of the distinction between private and personal offences, is the *lack* of evidence in the one case, and the *possession* of it in the other; and the *necessity* of treating them by different rules. Again; there might seem to be another exception in the case of certain personal offences which are *quite public*, and therefore nearly allied to public offences. But mark the ground of the distinction here. All real *public* offences, properly so called, equally injure all the members; but *public personal* offences do not equally injure all. All, by such an offence, may be injured, and all, because it is public, may require satisfaction; but is not one member, after all, injured more than all the other members taken together? And will he not, therefore, feel more sensibly; and by a natural necessity take hold of the work of correction? Moreover, the two cases require different *rules* of treatment. In all cases of public offence, the offender may be called upon by the church, if he be present, directly; or, if absent, in any kind, efficient manner, to give satisfaction. But in all cases of personal offence, there requires private interviews, with a view, if possible, to settle the matter of difference; and prevent its being brought to the church. The reasons of this position will appear in their proper place. Once more; a case of *insufferable* offence, that is, one which requires immediate exclusion, may

be personal or public; and yet, because it is an offence of so high an order, as to demand prompt excommunication, it receives the appellation of *insufferable*. For example, *forgery*. An offence of this kind may be to the special injury of a brother, and therefore, be personal. It may be against a man of the world, thus equally injuring all the members, and therefore, be a public offence; and yet, is properly denominated *insufferable*, because the rules specially applicable in other cases, are at once superseded, and the only true rule—the *ascertainment of the fact*, is promptly acted upon; and his excision is made, at once, as far as it can go, to wipe out the deep crimson stain upon the reputation of the church and the cause.

It will be perceived, then, that the grand reason for the classification of all offences under the preceding five heads, lies in the *nature and necessarily different treatment* of offences. Offences are almost endlessly various in their aspects; and yet, each offence, when duly considered in its attendant circumstances and degree, will readily suggest its own class, and thus fix its own rule. Every offence is, on the whole, *minor*, requiring gentle admonition and forbearance; or *private*, requiring private correction, but justifying no farther proceedings, for want of evidence; or strictly *personal*, requiring the employment of the three steps of labor, according to the 18th of Matthew, if the wrong be persisted in; or *public*, requiring the notice and public correction of the church; or *insufferable*, demanding prompt exclusion for the honor of Christianity among men.

Having made these remarks by way of justifying the foregoing classification of offences, we proceed to the particular examination of the different kinds of offences; and the rules prescribed for their treatment.

CHAPTER II. FIRST CLASS OF OFFENCES; MINOR.

To the first class of offences belong *minor* ones; the smaller offences; what are commonly called *imperfections* of Christians; such as should be borne.

For example, *Levity*, a light and trifling deportment, a want of becoming seriousness and stability. *Irritability*, the susceptibility of being easily exasperated; soon angry; habitually fretful. *Loquacity*, a propensity to talk too much; to speak imprudently. *Forwardness*, a tendency to overact; to go too far; to be obtrusive; to be the greatest. *Backwardness*, an inclination to fall upon the back-ground, to never come up to the line of duty; a shrinking from obligation and responsibility; a hanging, like a dead weight, upon the wheels of devotion and usefulness. *Littleness*, a disposition to stick and contend for one's own way in unimportant matters. It may be seen, also in thinking more of cents, than liberal men do, of dollars. And many other like features of character. To which may be added, many of the minor and ordinary defects in Christian sentiment and Christian practice.

Now there are three views to be taken of these infirmities of Christians: why they may *properly* be considered offences; the *reasons* for forbearance; and the *rule* of treatment.

1. Why they may *properly* be considered offences. They may be so considered, because, they are plain violations of the principles and precepts of the gospel. Here, gravity, meekness, slowness to speak, humbleness of mind, readiness to every good work, liberality, in a word, *amiability*, are directly opposed to levity, irritability, loquacity, forwardness, backwardness, littleness, in a word, *unloveliness* of character. So that, these imperfections cannot exist, without constant violations of some of the finest portions of Divine requirement. Of course, when they are seen in their fellow-members by good men, they will be, they must be, sources of lively regret; and it may be, under certain circumstances, of constant injury and suffering. Moreover, these traits of character are the more trying, because so difficult of correction. Seen in her members, they seem entailed upon the Church; and often become a living affliction to her. She sighs over repeated foibles and failures, and feels the keen anguish of an affectionate parent over an unlovely child. Still, they furnish the occasion for forbearance, as well as faithfulness.

2. We notice the *reasons* for the exercise of forbearance in such cases. In the first place, they may be *constitutional* infirmities. There is, doubtless, a very great difference in the original constitution of men; a difference, both in their mental and physical structure, as well as a difference arising from early habit and peculiar circumstances. We have numerous specimens of such difference, not only in the members of every church, but, the children of every family. We see and acknowledge the difference; and readily admit the impracticability of making the dissimilar members alike, because, the cause of the difference lies deep, having its seat in the texture of the mind—in the gristle and bone. Cecil says of Melancthon and Luther, that “Melancthon was like a snail with his couple of horns; he puts out his horns, and feels—and feels—and feels. But Luther dashes in saying his things; cuts everything to pieces; is like a case of instruments.” The difference was constitutional. And Paul has said, “Every man has his peculiar gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that;” a truth, which, whether it allude to differences in the elements of the constitution given, or in the degrees of grace imparted, equally challenges the kind consideration of our brother’s peculiarities.

Hence, the reason for forbearance is this, those unhappy traits which are constitutional; or the result of early habit and peculiar circumstances, are *exceedingly difficult*, if not *impossible*, of correction, whether the individual or the church undertake the labor. Besides, it costs some men, owing to peculiarity of constitution and habit, as much again to live Christian lives, as it does others. This consideration, alone, should induce large forbearance.

We often indulge in censoriousness, where we ought to exercise commiseration. Bold Peter condemns modest John.

Again; we should remember that there are some things, perhaps, that may be viewed in the light of *constitutional deficiencies*. Well, "that which is wanting, cannot be numbered." If one scholar in your school, were naturally duller than the rest, would you not rather help, than hurt him?"

All, perhaps, again, have their constitutional defects. We, ourselves, may have *our* imperfections, if not of the same kind, or so glaring and unhappy as those of others. And we are taught, while we attempt to correct others, to "consider ourselves, lest we also be tempted." If "in the same condemnation" to any extent, we do well to be lowly, rather than lifted up; sympathetic, instead of severe.

And, once more: this class of offences furnishes the *only occasion* for the exercise of forbearance. Forbearance is often enjoined as a duty. It signifies, to bear with another. But, of course, not in all cases. There are instances of high offence, where the exercise of forbearance would be a *sin*, a cringing meanness; on other and counter occasions, a *high virtue*, a generous magnanimity. And such, we conceive, are the occasions we have just had under consideration.

3. We proceed next to examine the *rule* of treatment.

First, we premise; always consider, when an offence of the SMALLER KIND has been committed, *whether it should be the subject of Christian forbearance, or discipline*. This is the first thing to be determined, although it may sometimes be difficult to say where forbearance should terminate, and discipline begin. If, in the light of the nature of Christian infirmities, and the reasons for bearing with them, you conclude it your duty to exercise forbearance in the case, then, the *rule* is at hand. It is very simple, and striking in its application, as simple. It is found in Romans, 15:1.

"We, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

We, then, that are strong; not *strong*, to knock down; but strong, to bear up; strong, to sustain burdens; strong, to receive a weak brother; strong enough, to go without meat, if it make him to be offended; strong, to please him for his good, to edification.

The rule, however, includes, not only sympathy, but *aid*; the free, faithful pointing out of defects, with the best method of overcoming them. The spirit of the rule forbids our suffering sin, or even infirmity upon a brother, provided we can aid him in working its riddance. The spirit of the rule is benevolence.

But perhaps you may determine the offence properly *disciplinable*, and not demanding forbearance. For, we believe there is one exception to the principle laid down. And, in concluding our remarks under this head, it is proper to say, that there are cases when members may be regarded, on the

whole, as Christians; and their repeated offences, as constitutional infirmities, or, at least, as infirmities rooted by education and riveted by habit and therefore, well nigh impossible of correction; and yet, they are so great dishonor to the cause, and so great grief to their brethren, as to require their removal from the church. In the case of many, we do know it extremely difficult for them to live so, as to do honor to the cause. In the case of a few, it seems utterly impossible. And when this fact is once ascertained, they should be removed, painful as exclusion in such case may be. It is a forcible remark of some one, that "it will be time enough to know some Christians, when they get to heaven." And why some want to be known as professors, when to be known is to be despised; why they wish membership in a church, when they cannot adorn it, is a problem we are utterly unable to solve on any principle, which would do honor to their understandings, or their hearts.

CHAPTER III. SECOND CLASS OF OFFENCES; PRIVATE.

To the second class of offences belong *private* ones, or such as *cannot be proved*.

We have already said that private offences are personal, in a sense, because they occur between two individuals; yet, because there is *no evidence* in the case to convict the offender of his wrong, we call it a *private* offence. For example; one brother takes the property of another, yet is seen by no person except the owner; and there is an entire absence of all circumstantial evidence.

Now the rule of treatment, in such case, is the *first part* of the whole rule for personal offences, given in the 18th chapter of Matthew.

"Go tell him his fault between thee and him alone;" or, in the corresponding direction of Solomon: "Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself, and discover not a secret to another." —Prov. 25:9.

Here the Saviour and Solomon are both seen, enjoining a *private measure* for the correction of a *private offence*. The sum of the rule is this: Go to your brother alone; seek satisfaction; seek the recovery of the property, and a confession to you of the theft. "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." If he shall say, "I took it; here it is; I am sorry;" thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear you, then mark this direction—mark it well!—REBUKE IN SECRET, AND LEAVE IT WITH GOD. You must not whisper it in any ear; much less publish and emblazon it to the world. The rule says: "Tell him his fault between *thee and him alone*," and "discover not a *secret* to another."

Now the *reason* on which the rule is based, is this; if the injured brother declare the wrong, he involves himself, because, he has not the proof in the

case which the Bible requires. Suppose, for example, he presume to go one step further, and take one or two more brethren with him, to labor the matter, (for witnesses, he has none to take.) In their presence the charge of theft is made and denied. The two attending members ask for proof; but there is none. And what can they do? They hold the two brethren in equal estimation. The word of the one, is as good as that of the other. They cannot decide, therefore, that the brother's charge of theft, however true, is sustained at all. But, on the other hand, they must become witnesses in a case *against him*, though he is perfectly innocent as to the truth of the charge. He cannot prove that the real offender has stolen; but the real offender can now prove that he is guilty of defamation. And, for example, the new trial proceeds, and he is found guilty by the testimony of the two brethren, before whom he made the unlawful exposure; and by his own admission of having charged his brother with theft, when he had no sufficient evidence of the fact to convict him before others. He is required to confess, or suffer exclusion. He cannot confess that he has lied; for he knows, before God, that he has told the truth. He is, therefore, excluded, for the church can act only on evidence. Her Lord has told her, that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established."—*2 Cor. 13:1*. And he, failing to meet the requirement, must unavoidably suffer.

Now, how much better it had been for him, having dealt faithfully with his offending brother *in private*, to have left the matter; and borne patiently the trial from which Providence had, as yet, furnished him no means of escape; rather than to suffer, in addition to the first trial, the loss of his place among the brethren, the loss of his reputation, besides all the trouble and dishonor, totally unavailing to him, he has brought upon the church. His first case was bad; the last, worse. Hence, in all cases of *private offence*, nothing can be done for their settlement, beyond *private interviews*.

Some, however, are not satisfied with this view of the treatment of private offences. They would feel justified in the *exposure of sin*; nay, would feel it their duty to make the exposure; and do believe that God would, in some way, vindicate them. But, we ask, can they reasonably expect that God will justify them before men, when they set aside his *law of evidence*? Has he not said, once and again, to the number of seven times, that "every word shall be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses?" If, then, this is God's way of establishing the guilt of offenders, who dare presume on a *new way* of exposure, without proof? Let all such pause and examine the statute: "*One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.*"—*Deut. 19:15*. "Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death, by the mouth of *witnesses.*"—*Num. 35:30*. "At the mouth of *two* witnesses, or at the mouth of *three* witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death, be put to death."—*Deut. 17:6*. "He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy,

under *two or three* witnesses.”—*Heb. 10:28*. “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before *two or three* witnesses.”—*1 Tim. 5:19*. “In the mouth of *two or three* witnesses shall every word be established.”—*2 Cor. 13:1*. “Take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of *two or three* witnesses every word shall be established.”—*Matt. 18:16*.

Next, listen to the counselings of the wise man on this subject: “Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself; discover not a secret to another, lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away!”—*Prov. 25:8–10*.

CHAPTER IV. THIRD CLASS OF OFFENCES; PERSONAL.

To the third class of offences belong *personal* ones. Personal offences are such *injuries*, of one brother by another, in person, reputation, or property, as *can be proved*. The case in the inspired statute is thus stated: “If thy brother shall trespass against thee.” The parties here, are *thy brother* and *thee*—two members of the same church. The offence is indicated by the term *trespass*, and means, either an abuse of thy person, an attack upon thy character, or a depredation upon thy property.

Now, in case of such trespass or offence, three things must be settled in your own mind, before you take a step, or say a word.

1. Determine the *real amount* of the wrong committed.

This, of course, may be less or more, and must be something. What it really is, should be accurately determined. It should not be magnified, nor diminished. There would be injustice done to him, or you, in either case. Were we now studying and teaching policy, and not principle, we would say, rather make the wrong too small, than too great. But we do not say this. Every thing right, and sacred, and fair, demands the wrong, the whole wrong, and nothing but the wrong.² This determined, then,

2. Ascertain what *certain proof* you have in the case. If you have no

²The wrong, whatever it is, in nature and name, you would do well, at this time, to reduce to *writing*. There are two reasons for this: 1. Sometimes a matter of difference is more *imaginary* than real; and looks much larger in the mind, than it would on paper. If you write it, therefore, you will, by necessity, think more closely upon it, and will be likely to reduce it, and make it as small as possible, and give it a right name. 2. The wrong thus reduced to writing, will be, so far, *ready for the church*, if it have ultimately to be presented there. We believe it is considerably common, and certainly a very business-like and safe way, for the injured brother to present to the church, *in writing*, a statement of the wrong done, with the testimony of witnesses, and a history of his course in the case. Such a paper, you perceive, contains *three* parts: 1. A statement of the injury received; 2. The testimony of the witnesses to prove it; and, 3. A history of the steps taken by the injured member, to gain his erring brother. *Now* is the time for you to begin this paper, by a statement of the wrong done, in the prayerful hope that you may never have occasion to finish it.

proof, the offence is a private one; and you have only to see your brother alone. If you have good and substantial proof to sustain all you prefer, you are so far ready for any extent, to which the labor may possibly proceed. But, if you have not proof, equal to your complaint, then you must reduce your complaint to your proof. You can cut down your charges, and now is the time to do it; but you cannot stretch your proof. This done,

3. See whether *the offence would exclude him* should the brother persist in his wrong. If he has injured you, even only in a small degree, it is your privilege and your duty to see him alone, and try to show him his wrong, and to obtain satisfaction for it. But it is an **INDISPENSABLE RULE**, *never make that a matter of discipline, and take not only the first and second, but the third steps of labor, which, if persisted in, would not exclude the offender*. Because, it would be alike an injury to your brother, and a mortification to you, to go through all the solemn formality of a regular course of labor, and, after all, be judged by the church, as having little or no cause of action. "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished."—*Prov. 22:3*.

These *three preparatory steps* taken, the next thing is your *rule*. This, for all cases of personal offence, properly so called, you have in Matt. 18:15–17.

"Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou has gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

We will first, explain this rule, in its simple, regular operation; and then, notice an *exception* which some make, touching its applicability to which those cases of personal offence, which have been quite publicly committed.

This rule involves *three steps of labor*, as they are commonly called.

The **FIRST STEP** is, "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him, alone."

This, in its simple meaning, maybe thus drawn out: *Go* to thy brother; visit him. Do not stay away, and lock up the disagreeable matter to sour in thy bosom, to fester in the flesh of thine heart. *Go*. Take the trouble to see him, and have a good understanding immediately effected with him, and thus gain thy brother. "No!" you say, "he has done all the wrong, and he ought to have all the trouble. It is not my duty to go after him. It cannot be, in the nature of the case. It is his duty to come to me, and when he gets here, to make a pretty humble confession too!" Stop, my brother; you are making a new rule. The Master has settled this matter. He has spoken, specifying the *case* and giving the *rule*. He has said "If thy brother trespass against thee." Is not this thy case? Well, then, the rule. He has also said, "Go and

tell him his fault.” Here is the case, and the rule for it. And then the *principle*, at the base of the rule. He has laid down the same principle for you, which he acted upon himself. He came to save you, though in all your sins. Now he commands you to go and save your brother, notwithstanding his. Moreover, he *cautions*: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones.” And he *reasons*: “How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine that went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” And it should not be your wish that one of them should perish. “Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise *rebuke*, and not suffer sin upon him.” You must visit him, then.

But, further; go and visit him, not only, but “tell him his fault.”

FIRST, *state the matter of grievance fairly and fully*. You have already determined what it is. Now state it. Neither magnify it through anger, nor diminish it through fear.

Then, SECOND, if he deny it, *convince him of his wrong*, by adducing your sources of proof; for so the word *tell* means. The original word is employed in several passages, where it is translated *convince*. For example, *Titus 1:9*: “Holding fast the faithful word, that ye may be able, by sound doctrine, to *convince* the gainsayers.” And again, *John 8:46*: “Which of you *convinceth* me of sin?” So that the direction, “tell him his fault,” means *convince him of his wrong*. And this is to be done by laying the wrong and the way you can prove it—the whole wrong and whole source of proof, so before him, that he will see just what he has now to meet, and just what he must meet again, if the labor proceed further.

And if your ground is right and well sustained, you can hardly fail of producing conviction on his mind. Then add to this, plain, but kind reproof, if necessary; another idea, included in the original word. Entreat, also, as well as convince and reprove. And whether you gain your brother or not, you have done your duty so far.

Next, let the interview be a *private one*, “between thee and him alone.”

Your business now is private reproof, not public reproach. Avoid, therefore, giving publicity to the matter of difference, far as you can. “A just man will not be willing to make of his brother a public example.” Besides, suppose you have spoken of his fault to others; and suppose, also, that your pursuit of the “astray sheep,” result in your returning with it on your rejoicing shoulder; suppose a free, friendly, faithful, private interview heal the difference; how unhappy, that you have dishonored yourself, and your brother, and the cause of religion, by publishing it!

And, again; the avoidance of publicity is not, by any means, the whole idea. The direction, “between thee and him alone,” is not only in the

strictest accordance with heavenly prudence, but natural policy. When we have business to do with men, we want to find them alone; and the more especially, if it be business of a delicate or difficult character. And so it should be in this case, even though the offence itself, be quite public. “Between *thee and him alone*.” Who could suggest a wiser policy than this of our Lord? Who dare presume to think of the suggestion? It is admirably natural, safe, and divine!

Then mark, with great care, the *three things* included in this FIRST step of labor. 1. Go and see your brother; 2. Convince him of his fault; and, 3. Do it in private. Do it all. Do it with a right spirit and with a right aim. Aim to “gain thy brother;” and do it in a spirit of meekness and love. Remember that much, perhaps every thing, depends on success here.

To this explanation of this part of the rule under examination, we add *one word of caution* in employing it. Do not, for a moment, entertain the false idea, that this first step of labor, was *primarily designed to prepare the way for future steps*. It is very true, that this step, having been faithfully taken; and having failed to “gain our brother,” does prepare the way for subsequent proceedings; but this was not its first design. It was primarily designed to *settle the difficulty and stop all further proceeding*. Let, then, this first great design of the step, be your design in taking it. Do not think of *future* steps with your offending brother. Be all absorbed with this one step, as though it were the only one, and the only hope. An almost uniform cause of failure here, is a want of thoroughness. Be thorough, then. Here, in all probability, you gain or lose your brother.

“But if he will not hear thee,” then take the SECOND STEP.

“Take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”

Here two questions very naturally arise in your mind. You ask, *who are the “one or two?”* And what is the *precise character* of this transaction?

Three remarks, we think, will satisfactorily answer these questions; and make the whole business of the second step of labor, plain to you and to those who may go with you.

1. The business of the first step, you recollect, was visitation, conviction, reproof, advice, entreaty; and all of it was done by you in the most retired manner possible, and with a view to gain your brother; the business of this step, is of the same nature, precisely; it includes the same parts of service, a corresponding manner, and the same end.

As before, so now, you must still aim to gain your brother. Now, also, you must visit him. Visit him with some others. Not many. “One or two more;” that is, one or two *more* than went on the first visit; one or two in addition to yourself. Before, you visited him alone; now, you need and must have some with you. And here is the number, “one or two.” Take these, and you will have all that will be necessary for every purpose—all the law allows. Take no more; and thus have an interview as near as possible, again,

“between thee and him alone.” If your brother’s wrong is known to you and the “one or two,” only; and you are all so wise as not to mention it to others; and so happy as to gain him, it will need to be known no further.

But you must visit him with one or two more, not only; but, as in the first step of labor *convince him of his wrong*. The same wrong, described in the same language. You must not change your ground, nor your language. It must be the same wrong which you defined and settled, before you commenced the labor; which you stated distinctly to him, at the time of your first visit; and which you now repeat. Your object, now, is *conviction*. But, if you waver, you can not fasten conviction on his mind. State the wrong, then, in the same language as before; and proceed, if necessary, to “establish every word” of it. This is to be done by the aid of the “one or two,” as “witnesses.” And hence you are directed to take them for this very purpose. “Take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.” Every word of your complaint is to be established, by adding the testimony of *one or two more*; that is, one or two *besides* yourself. You are a witness against your brother. But, by your testimony alone, his guilt could not be established before others. His contradiction would just balance your complaint. But, if you take “one, he, with yourself, would make “two;” and if you take “two,” they, with you, would make “three.” And thus, every word would be established by *two*, in the first case; and by, *three* in the second, just as the rule and the whole Bible require. The result of this increased and combined testimony would be, to *produce conviction* of his wrong, in the mind of your brother, if it is in your power to do it.

But, this does not finish the business of this step of labor. As in the first, you added reproof, and advice, and entreaty, to conviction; so, now, you must have your “one or two” *fellow laborers* do the same. “And if he shall neglect to hear them,” the second step of labor is at an end.

Having thus drawn out this step, in its simple process, we subjoin a remark, in the next place, showing its admirable *business character*, as well as its divine simplicity.

2. The second step of labor involves a *trial*.

This is clear from the fact, that the “one or two” are represented as “*witnesses*.” Who are witnesses? Persons, who bear testimony in a case, pending between contending parties, in order that the truth of every word of a charge preferred, may be established. If, then, this is an interview for receiving the testimony of witnesses, with a view to present conviction, how clearly it is a *trial*. But are the “one or two” *witnesses*? Mark the language: “Take one or two more.” This points out the duty of the prosecuting brother. “That in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” This shows the *object* to be gained, by taking them along with himself, as *witnesses*. He, then, has the *true end* of this step; and the *right way* to gain it. But to gain this end, by the one or two, as witnesses, there

must be a *trial*—a proceeding which shall bring out the complaint; and the admission, or proof of its justice. Either an admission of the justice of the complaint by the offender; or its justice, established by the testimony of witnesses, make a trial of it, less or more. It is very true, that a formal and particular examination of the complaint, and of the evidence on which it rests, may not be necessary for the information of the parties, or the witnesses. The facts in the case, may all have been previously known, to each and to all of them. Still, is there not form to the interview? And what is it? Why, all having come together, the parties, and the witnesses, the offence is stated, by the injured brother. The offender pleads not guilty to the alledged charge. The “one or two” witness to the truth of “every word” of it. They know him to be guilty; and, therefore, testify to the fact; and advise him to give satisfaction. Now is there not *form* here? Indispensable form? All the form, too, and reality of a *regular trial*? Hence, the second step of labor, involves a trial.

Before leaving this point, we subjoin a word, upon the heavenly wisdom and the vast importance of this measure. A thorough trial, had in the second step of labor, and the church is saved much time, and spared much perplexity and reproach. Here, matters of difference among brethren in a retired manner, are carefully examined, rejected, settled, or well prepared for the church. No language can sufficiently express the importance of the idea of a trial; a regular trial, substantially, not only here, but in all steps of discipline. All discipline, as we now use the term, supposes “offences.” Offences suppose an offender, and one offended. These terms suppose, almost of course, the preferment of a complaint, by the offended, against the offender, before some tribunal. A complaint thus preferred, supposes witnesses to sustain it; and a decision upon the case, by said tribunal. And the whole supposes satisfaction rendered, or punishment inflicted. Now, in each of the three steps of labor, we have all these regular features of a trial. Even in the first, where the offended and the offender are “alone.” The injured brother is the complainant, the witnesses and the judge. He states the wrong done; and not only testifies to the fact, but mentions other sources of proof in the case, which he has. And if he fail to “gain his brother,” in this interview, he goes again, with “one or two more witnesses.” Here, again, the same process; the complaint, the testimony, the decision against the offender. And if all this is unavailing, the case and the result go next to the Church, the Supreme Court of Christ, to pass, with like regularity, under her solemn review; and to receive her final sanction.

How obvious, then, the idea of a *trial*, in every step of discipline; and how vastly important, that all of us take its deep impression upon our hearts, in order to prevent haste; and ensure regularity and safety in all our disciplinary doings.

3. The second step of labor, not only involves a trial; and makes the “one or two,” witnesses; but it also represents them as *advisors* in the case.

This is clearly implied in the language, which last mentions them. "If he shall *neglect to hear them*;" that is, refuse to hearken to, and obey *their* advice; as the original word means. This view places the "one or two," in a very important and responsible light. They are seen as *advisors* in the case; and, of course, as judges, as well as witnesses. For, advice supposes judgment, and judgment, knowledge. Their knowledge of the facts in the case, qualifies them to bear testimony, not only; but to form a sound judgment, and to give appropriate advice. And to all this service in the case, they are most evidently called.

Their advice may respect two things. They *first*, advise the offender to give satisfaction, fully and promptly. "If he neglect to hear them"—refuse to heed their advice; they, *second*, advise the injured brother, to "tell it unto the church."

And their advice may be called for *in another* case. Suppose wrong has been done, and that they were witnesses of it; but a wrong of such nature as could not result in exclusion, if carried to the church; and as requires the aggrieved brother to administer simple admonition; and then act on the rule of forbearance. In such case, they should advise him to relinquish the labor; and if it be a burden, to bear it.

This whole view carries, upon its face, the idea that the "one or two" are *brethren*—members of the same church with the parties, as a probable and a general thing; although others, might be the only "witnesses." Facts are in harmony with this construction. Injuries inflicted by one member on another, are commonly known to other members of the same church. And fellow members are generally "witnesses" and advisers, in cases of personal difficulty and discipline. And then, the rule places the "one or two" on an exact level with the injured brother and the church, as *advisers*. Mark the language.

"If he will not hear *thee*." "If he shall neglect to hear *them*." "If he neglect to hear the *church*." They, hence, are advisers in the case, as much as the prosecuting brother and the church are; and, therefore, need to be pious men; and doubtless are, generally, brethren.

Regarding the "one or two" as brethren, then; and their service, as highly important and responsible, we subjoin a few *hints* to such, calculated, if heeded, to insure success in their painful labors.

Such persons should be "full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom." Their service is highly, a spiritual one. "Ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." They should be men who fear God supremely; and who will feel an equal sympathy for their differing brethren, and the suffering cause; men, who are, and who will be felt to be, impartial men, by the trespassing brother; otherwise, he will not, of course "hear them." They should solemnly consider, that they are called upon to testify, judge, and advise in a case of difference between brethren; and that some, even

slight, defect in their temper, testimony, judgment, or advice, may turn the scales against success.

And as a successful termination, depends much upon a right beginning, it might be well for them, in every case, and as soon as convened, to inquire whether the *first step of labor has been duly taken*. Because, if it has not, they should not act in the case. The Saviour has placed the first step of labor, before the second; and so must the injured brother, if he will walk correctly. If, upon inquiry, then, they find it has not been taken; that it has been passed over, on any account, whatever, the parties should be left "alone," to make an attempt, at an amicable adjustment of their differences. But, if they find the first step of labor, declared on the one hand, and admitted on the other, to have been duly taken, the trial may lawfully proceed.

If, now, the questions return: Who are the "one or two?" And what is the precise character of this transaction?

We answer: The second step of labor is a trial; held in a retired manner; by an injured brother, attended by his witnesses; in order to convict an offender of his fault, and gain him.

And the "one or two" are witnesses, judges, and advisers, in the same sense, substantially, that the prosecuting brother is.

And they naturally become "witnesses," also, before the Church; provided the case is carried there. The knowledge they have gained from the trial, in addition to what they before possessed, highly qualifies them to bear an intelligent and hearty testimony, before the Church, to the guilt and desert of the offender; and, also, to the faithfulness of the injured member, in laboring to gain his brother. And to this service they would, of necessity, be called, upon the presentation of the case to that tribunal, by the prosecuting brother. Without their presence, and their testimony, he could not be sustained, either in his charge of wrong, or declaration of faithfulness in attempting to correct it.

"And if he shall neglect to hear them," take the **THIRD and LAST STEP** of labor. "Tell it unto the Church."

This is made the duty, the last duty, of the prosecuting brother in the case. "Tell it unto the Church." Now, mark the *proper manner*. Address the Moderator. Say to him, "I have a matter of personal difficulty to lay before the Church." Here stop. Do not state what it is. Call no names. If he understand his duty, he will ask *six questions*, principally to you; thus preparing the way for its proper admission.

1. Have you taken the first step of labor? You answer, "I have."
2. Have you taken the second step? "I have."
3. Did you, in this last step, have "one or two" with you, as "witnesses" and advisers; and are they present? "I had, and they are here. Brother B. and Mr. S."
4. Brother B. and Mr. S., are all these things so? "They are."

5. Have you notified the offending brother, that you should tell your grievance unto the Church today? "I have, and he is present."

6. Have you the complaint with the testimony of the witnesses, in writing. "I have."

These precautionary steps being thus taken, the Clerk reads the complaint, and the testimony of the witnesses. And the Moderator calls on brother B. and Mr. S. for their testimony, that this same complaint was preferred and examined, in a second step of labor; and that it was fully sustained according to this paper. They testify to this effect. And thus in the mouth of witnesses, again, every word of the complaint is established.

The case thus before the Church, the Moderator calls on the offender for *satisfaction*; or to show cause why he does not render it. His reply satisfies no one; except it be of his guilt. The brethren next, generally expostulate with him. But "he neglects to hear the Church."

His exclusion, by *unanimous vote*, next follows; and that, with the reasons of it, is accurately entered upon her blushing records. He is now to be regarded "as an heathen man and a publican;" that is, as the worst of men, in the estimation of a Jew. He should be furnished with a letter, containing the fact of his exclusion, with the reasons of it.

Or, suppose, the case, (and such a case there might be,) that some of the members of the Church are not *entirely satisfied* to exclude now. Suppose they wish a review of the case. This may be had.

Or, suppose again, that the Church are *seriously divided* in opinion, respecting the case. The importance of unanimity, would suggest moderation; and, as the next best measure, an invitation to some two, or three, or more, able and impartial ministers and brethren to attend the next church meeting, as *counsellors*, and *sit with the Church*; and hear the case; and aid to an amicable and unanimous decision. A course, we are frank to say, which we prefer, decidedly, before ordinary councils.

For, be it remembered, the sole power of decision upon all cases of Discipline, is in the Church. This is the divine constitution. Touching the ultimate reference of all matters, the direction is specific and final. "Tell it unto the church; but if he shall neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican!" This makes the *Church* the only proper judicatory, before which matters of difficulty can be brought; and the only proper court, wielding the power of ultimate decision.

In strict accordance with this view of the Saviour, is the direction of the Apostle to the Corinthian believers. He writes them as a Church; and as a Church, he directs them, "when gathered together to deliver their incestuous member unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh; to put away that wicked person."—*I Cor. 5*. In his second letter to this same Church, touching this same case, he expresses his judgment, that the punishment of the excluded member, inflicted by the majority, had been "sufficient," and

directs them to “forgive him and confirm their love to him;” that is, restore him. *2 Cor. 2*. So, in writing the Thessalonian Church, he recognises her power and her duty, in the discipline of “disorderly walkers.”—*2 Thess. 3*. Hence, the exclusion and the restoration of persons, lie with the Church, and of course, all the processes connected with them.

Still, there may be cases, in which the Church may need assistance. And when, on any account, she may be too weak to bring forth judgment, it may be as highly advisable, as it is admissable, for her to invite two or three or more *able and impartial ministers or brethren, to sit with her, hear and advise*. Then, no decision will, or ever can be spoken of, but that of the Church. These men do not *vote*; they *only advise the Church how to vote*. They aid her; but do not supersede her. They make her, and leave her, *all and in all*, just as her Maker and Master did.

In connection with this examination of personal offences, and the proper rule of treating them, it will be proper to consider that *particular case* of personal offence mentioned in the 6th chapter of 1 Corinthians, with the *rule* laid down for its treatment; and its admirable accordance, in principle, with the rule in the 18th chapter of Matthew, which we have just been considering.

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? If, then, ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge, who are least esteemed in the church. I speak to your shame! Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No! not one, that shall be able to judge between his brethren! But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.”

On the face of this paragraph, we may see *five things*:

1. That the difficulty among the Corinthian brethren was of a *pecuniary* character; about property; “things that pertain to this life.”

2. That they had recourse to the *law* to settle their matters of difference; and that before heathen judges, under pretence that their brethren were incompetent to judge. “But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers; before the unjust and not before the saints.”

3. That the holy Apostle *spurns this idea*, and argues their competence from the fact, that they shall “judge the world and angels.” “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we

shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? I speak to your shame! Is it so, that there is not a *wise man* among you? No! not one that shall be *able* to judge between his brethren?"

4. That he established a *rule*, which provides for the happy adjustment of all "matters" of pecuniary difference.

It is this: *Refer your matters of difference to your brethren*. Mark his language. "If, then, ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, *set them to judge which are least esteemed in the church*." That is, not those who are justly held in low estimation, in view of their intellectual and moral worth; but, brethren, who are now, in fact, as the original word simply means, *undervalued, neglected, and set at naught, by you*, notwithstanding they are "wise men"—men, "able to judge between their brethren." The rule, then, is, *leave all matters of pecuniary difference to wise and able brethren, instead of going to law*.

5. We see, also, that there is an *admirable accordance*, between the principle, laid down here by Paul; and that laid down by the Saviour in the 18th chapter of Matthew, for the settlement of personal difficulties.

We have defined personal offences to be injuries of a brother's person, reputation, or property. Here we have a case of the latter kind. The injury of a brother's property. Now, suppose a brother, thus injured, take the rule in the 18th chapter of Matthew for his guide. He first, makes a fair attempt to settle the matter "between himself and his brother alone." And this by the by, would be a natural way, in the case, whether a member of a church or not, if he meant to do right and avoid difficulty. But, not succeeding, instead of suing him at the law, he "takes one or two more;" "sets wise men;"—able to judge between their brethren, and, if possible, to testify, also; *precisely* as the Saviour and Paul have directed. They hear the charge. They witness to its truth; or hear it witnessed to. They judge the alledged offender guilty. They advise him to make reparation. He does so, and the matter is amicably settled. Or, suppose he refuse to give satisfaction. They advise the injured brother to lay the case before the Church. He does so, and the matter eventuates in the offender's exclusion; and in his exposure to prosecution, as another man.

Who now, but sees the Saviour, and his servant Paul, agreeing in their principles of discipline? And who, but must see, that the rule laid down by the Saviour, and thus sustained by the apostle, must operate most efficiently, and therefore properly in every case of personal offence, where there is proof?

But, we suppose again, while on the subject of suing at the law. Suppose a case of pecuniary injury, in which it is *impracticable for the law for personal offences to operate*. For example, a brother is on the point of removal; or is removing; is not only in debt, but is becoming an absconding debtor; or, is just putting his property out of his hands: then, and in that case, the question is, *What is it right to do?* Well, the Gospel allows no sue-

ing at the law; and let us remember, if we do sue, in any possible case, its operation should not be inconsistent with the public mind, the honor of the cause, the real good of the parties, and the strictest principles of justice and benevolence. We “speak this, not of commandment.”

We are now brought to consider the *exception*, which we promised to notice. It is this; that the rule in the 18th of Matthew is not necessary to be observed in those cases of personal offence which have been *quite publicly committed*.

On this exception, and the rule itself, we make two remarks.

1. We believe the rule in the 18th of Matthew is primarily and peculiarly applicable to all those cases of personal offence, which are but a *little known when first committed*. Because, the majority of personal offences, are of this character; and the right employment of this rule, was designed and is calculated, to heal budding difficulties in private; and avoid painful exposures of our erring brethren.

2. We also believe, that this rule is applicable to, and therefore, should be employed in, every case of personal offence, *however publicly committed and generally known*.

This opinion is founded upon the five following reasons:

1. The rule is plain, absolute, and *without exception*, as laid down by the master. “If thy brother trespass against thee; go and tell him his fault; take one or two more; tell it unto the church.” This is the rule for the case; the only rule; a rule without the exception in question. *Secrecy* does not qualify the transgression; but the *measure* for correcting it.

2. The rule cannot operate at all, beyond the first step, unless the offence be *public*; or at least, *known to some extent*. It must be known to witnesses, or there can be no trial; and there must be a trial, “that every word may be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses.”

Now, if *some degree* of publicity is the life of the rule, who will undertake to say that *much* destroys it.

3. The rule operates most efficiently in every case of personal offence, *however public*, and, on that account, aggravated it may be. The chief difference, in the two supposed cases, is, the one offence is more generally known, than the other; and, therefore, the greater for this reason; and consequently, the greater satisfaction is required. Now let the rule operate. The prosecuting brother requires, in the nature of the case, *a satisfaction ample as the injury to himself and the cause*. He is satisfied, when the public, as well as the personal reproach is wiped away. His demand is precisely what, that of the church and the public, is. Taking this rule, and going upon the principle, that all who have been witnesses of the wrong, must also be witnesses of the reparation, every man will, at last, be satisfied with the full confession, or the fearful excommunication of the offender.

4. The faithful employment of this rule ensures *universal approbation*, as well as absolute success, in all cases of personal offence, however

public. You employ this rule, and none will presume to fault you. You neglect it, and some will censure you. The one course is plain, the other, doubtful.

5. This rule will operate well, even in a *mixed case*. We mean, when the same “trespass” is both against a brother and the church. For example, should one brother slander another in church meeting. This would be a violation of the *order* of the church, and an *abuse* of the brother. Now, suppose the offender should be asked by the brother, or the church, either, to make satisfaction; and should refuse to do so. Of course, nothing could be done, at that time. But every one knows, that something must be done. He must be waited upon in some way. Now for the rule of procedure. Suppose you appoint a committee to wait upon him and report. This may answer. It may bring him to make satisfaction, both to the church and the injured brother, at the next church meeting. But, it is a rule of your own invention. And what is it better than the rule of Christ?

Now, see that operate, in this same case. The injured brother estimates the *whole offence*. He feels the *slander* personally; and the *disorder*, in common with others. He goes to his brother and when he is cool, and “alone;” tells him his fault; tries to convince him of his wrongs of disorder and slander. Does not succeed. “Takes one or two more,” (of course, acquainted with the case,) to expostulate with him. Fails again. Next, it comes to the church, where it began. The church do not ask proof of the offence; they witnessed it. They ask, has every thing been done to gain him? Now what committee could make a better report, than the injured brother and his “one or two” fellow laborers? Who does not see that while he *has done his own duty*, in correcting a personal injury; he has also served the church, in bringing an incorrigible public offender to her bar for punishment? And all in a most natural, inoffensive, and efficient way—his Lord’s own appointed way.

We, therefore, cannot see why the rule, in question, should not be employed in every case of personal offence, *however public*; although primarily and peculiarly applicable to cases less known.

CHAPTER V. FOURTH CLASS OF OFFENCES; PUBLIC.

To the fourth class of offences, belong *public* ones. A public offence is one which equally injures all the members of the church; and for which all require an equal satisfaction.

It may not be improper, in this place, to notice a distinction, we have before made; and which should be clearly seen, between *public personal* offences, and *public* offences, properly so called.

While, in a case of simple public offence, all the members are equally injured; the same is not true, in case of a personal offence, however publicly, it may have been committed. All may require satisfaction, in the latter case; but not as much as the injured brother.

Two examples will illustrate the distinction. Suppose a brother be guilty of *profane swearing publicly*. This would be a *public* offence, and would equally injure all the members. But suppose again, the same individual be guilty of *circulating false reports* against a member. This would be a public personal offence, injuring an individual more than all the members besides. In the former case, the case of profanity, he would not consider himself called upon, more than the other members were, to correct the offender. But in the latter case he would. The public offence, would arouse the Church; the personal one, the individual. Now all this is natural. So it is in State as well as Church. A breach of the public peace would be prosecuted in the name of the people. In a case of personal injury, the injured individual seeks redress in his own name and way.

Having thus defined public offences, we proceed to consider *some cases*, mentioned in the Apostolic Epistles, with the methods of treatment required. And, as what is very strongly marked, we notice, in the first place, "*heresy*."

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ; but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."—*Rom. 16*. "There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth; shall be evil spoken of."—*2 Pet. 2*. "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing; but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth; from such withdraw thyself."—*1 Tim. 6*. "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself."—*Tit. 3*. "And of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—*Acts. 20*. "Of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; who, concerning the truth, have erred, saying, the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."—*2 Tim. 2*.

What, now, is the precise character of the offence, mentioned in these passages? It is *heresy*. By which is meant, however, something more, than the term is generally supposed to mean. "An heretic," in the scriptural sense of the word, was a man *unsound in doctrine, and the leader of a faction, or*

head of a new sect. Hence, such men are said to be “subverted;” that is, overturned, as to their professed faith in the gospel. And “not to consent to the doctrine which is according to godliness;” to “bring in damnable heresies;” to “cause divisions contrary to the doctrine learned; and by good words and fair speeches to deceive the hearts of the simple;” and “to draw away disciples after them.”

The *grand characteristics* of an “heretic” are strictly four: unsoundness of sentiment, selfishness of aim, flattering pretensions, and successful generalship. The case, then is a plain, and not an uncommon one. For example, a brother becomes a Mormon, in sentiment. Of course he will preach his peculiar views; and, almost of course, if a man of ambition, tact, and influence, will succeed in seducing the artless and unsuspecting; and drawing them away with him. Such, now, is a case of *heresy*.

The case is a plain one, and the *treatment* required and to be employed, is equally plain. 1. “*Mark them which cause divisions. Mark them!* that is, eye their movements with waking jealousy and keenest vigilance. 2. Administer “*the first and second admonition;*” that is, plainly and with repetition, point out their errors; and faithfully exhort them to abandon them. 3. And finally, if they do not repent of the pernicious influence of their new sentiments and measures, *promptly exclude* them; as three directions in the case require. “*From such withdraw thyself.*” “*Avoid them.*” “*Reject a man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition.*”

In the 5th chapter of 1 Corinthians, we have grouped together a number of *public offences*. “But now I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard; or an extortioner; with such a one; no, not to eat.”

Let us briefly examine these cases:

First, “*fornication.*” That particular case of fornication, which is the principle subject of this chapter, was regarded by the holy apostle, as a case of incest, most notorious and aggravating; and which demanded immediate exclusion. It, therefore, falls under the head of *insufferable offences*; the last class of offences to be considered. But cases of *moral impurity*, far less aggravating, may occur; and may justly require moderation and labor, on the part of the church. Such are, therefore, properly *public offences*.

Immediately associated with this case, is *covetousness*. “If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator or *covetous.*” That is, a covetous person; one who, as the original word means, has an inordinate craving for gain; a “greediness for filthy lucre;” that is, an eagerness for dishonorable gain. And who, for the sake of gain, not only withholds; but defrauds, and perhaps, even steals. Covetousness is a sin of so common and so flagrant a character as to require to be very distinctly marked. It is a disease, (might we so liken it,) when far advanced and deeply sealed, which is attended with three very plain symptoms.

1. By a *groaning or grumbling about poverty*, amidst real and unconcealable wealth. The tongue, in this case, bears the marks of a very reddish falsity.

2. By an *entire absence of all warmth and sympathy* for the cause of religion in the region of the heart. This manifests itself by shiverings, and shuttings and lockings up of "the bowels of compassion;" and by a receding of the life-current, from the extremities, the moment you begin to take the hand, and feel for the pulsations of interest for the cause.

3. And by a *uniform muttering of complaints*, as well as excuses. This is one of its most prominent features.

Covetous men are not content with making refusals; they must utter *complaints*. They have a fault-finding spirit. Whatever the object, they must raise some objection. We have never known such men to do much good, for two reasons: They are so occupied with their money, they have not the time; and so in love with it, they have not the disposition. A man who is liberal with his money, is liberal with every thing else. These men are liberal with nothing, except complaints. If so, they must do hurt, rather than good, under a Christian profession. And if so, their guilt and their desert are alike obvious. The apostle often mentions this sin, and that, in connexions, showing its fearful enormity. "Be not not deceived; neither fornicators, nor thieves, nor *covetous*, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor *covetous man who is an idolater*, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Now, if the sin of covetousness is so utterly inconsistent with an admission into Heaven, is it not, also, plainly inconsistent with a standing in the Church? Most certainly it is. And hence its classification with fornication, and other like sins, is not only to show its marked moral deformity, but positive desert of severest punishment. Hence covetousness is a *public offence*, easily detected; and deserves and demands the notice of the Church; and prompt exclusion, if persisted in.

While on covetousness, we subjoin a word, upon the *true principle* of raising money, for the defrayment of Church expenses, as these home "gatherings," (strange to tell!) are among the occasions, for the development of this foul plague-spot of Zion. *Voluntary donations*, as in primitive and even olden times, should be made by each member, *according to his pecuniary ability*, for this purpose. (See *Lev. 5;7. 14;21. Ezra 2;69. Neh. 5;8. Acts 2;44-45. 4;32-37.11;29. 1 Cor. 16;2. 2 Cor. 8;11-14. 9;5-7.*) And when a member, in the judgment of the Church, does not do *his part*, he should be instructed in his duty, if ignorant; and encouraged to do his part fully; and if he refuse, he should be considered as *covetous*, and his covetousness as a *public offence*, and disciplinable.

Next, *railing*. "If any man that is called a brother, be a *railer*." That is, a loud, insulting reviler; one who uses opprobrious and abusive language in

speaking of his fellow-men; one from whose bitter lips is constantly rushing a torrent of censorious remark.

Next, *drunkenness*. "If any man that is called a brother, be a *drunkard*." That is, not one who may have been, accidentally though imprudently, overtaken by intoxication; and who may thus have committed a public offence; but strictly one who is "known, and read," and called, "of all men," a drunkard; one who *habitually* uses intoxicating drinks, so as to disguise himself less or more.

Next, *extortion*. "If any man that is called a brother, be an *extortioner*." This offence might seem to be nearly allied to covetousness; and so it is. Covetousness is the root; this, the fruit. One describes the feelings of the heart; the other, the acts of the life. Covetousness eagerly pants for gain; extortion, ravenously seizes it. The original term, means to be rapacious, and is applied to beasts of prey. Applied to men, it means those, who, like beasts of prey, will take all they can get; and that with just as little principle. It means those who oppress for gain; who not only dare, but delight, to take more than their due; who "defraud, and that their brethren." A remarkable case of the entire destitution, both of the integrity and the benevolence of the gospel.

It may be observed, in this place, and before noticing the rule here laid down for the treatment of these several offences; that although usually public offences, two of them, namely, *railing* and *extortion*, become *personal* when committed against a member in the same church with the offender. Then, and in that case, the rule for personal offences, should operate. The injured brother, instead of the Church, should take the laboring oar. But, when these offences are committed against persons out of the church, and in the society, we have no law, requiring such injured individual to correct our erring brother. The offence is a public one; and for his correction the Church is held responsible; and she must, by prompt action, show all whom it may concern, that she both understands her duty, and is ready to do it.

And the *rule* is before her. The same rule is laid down as equally applicable to each of the five public offences, here mentioned. "But now I have written unto you, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, *not to keep company with such an one; no, not to eat*." This rule, proceeding upon the principle that the offender is irreclaimable; and therefore, necessarily and promptly removed from the church; includes and enjoins *two things*, designed to regulate our conduct toward excluded persons, who are high offenders; and to add merited weight to the excinding blow.

1. *A strict avoidance of free and familiar intercourse*. "I have written unto you not to keep company with such an one." There should be friendly feeling towards such guilty and unhappy individual; but, after exclusion, he should be made to feel the amazing weight of the solemn sentence by

corresponding conduct, on the part of *every* member of the Church.³ To each and to all, he is to be as alien, as “an heathen man and a publican” to a Jew. 2. *A refusal to participate with him at social meals.* That is, to “dine or take tea” with him, as we should express it; “No, not to eat.” This cannot mean eating at the *Lord’s table*, because, in that case, the apostle would have said, “not keep company,” *much less*, partake with him at the Lord’s table. This would have been an ascending from the less to the greater; whereas he evidently descends from the greater to the less. “Not keep company; no, not to eat.” That is not *even* to eat. Nor can this signify the avoidance of *common family meals*, which might be quite as impossible, in point of fact, as inconsistent with certain scriptural relations and duties. But it may mean, and evidently does mean a refusal of all such social interchanges; such visitings and receiving visits; and such groupings around the social board as express a familiarity with, and a fellowship for, the party, our act of disfellowship to the contrary, notwithstanding.

The substance of the rule, then, as implied and expressed, is, *exclude such and shun them*, being offenders of high *degree*.

We have another and rather singular case of public offence, in the 3d chapter of Paul’s 2d letter to the Thessalonians:

“Now we command you, brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that *walketh disorderly*; for we hear that there are some which *walk among you disorderly, working not at all: but are busy-bodies*. Now them that are such, we command that with quietness they work and eat their own bread; and if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy; but admonish him as a brother.”

The whole offence seems to be, *indolence and meddling with the affairs of others*. The term “disorderly,” originally, was spoken of soldiers who desert their ranks; and means, to be neglectful of one’s own duties; to abandon recklessly one’s own proper place and labor; in the language of the text, to “work not at all;” to live on others. It describes a set of men who

³And we add, with *emphasis*; the solemn sentence should also be enforced, by a corresponding conduct, on the part of *every* member of *every* church. Excluded persons often seek an asylum in some neighboring sister church. And often they are kindly noticed; and thus encouraged to hope that “if they cannot live *there*, they can *here*.” Now, such conduct in a sister church, or in her pastor, or any of her members, is flagrant *injustice* towards all concerned. It is a setting aside of the most solemn decision and act of Christ’s own court. It is an instance of most palpable *disrespect* of a sister and an equal. It is a doing, in this respect, as we would not be done by. Moreover, it is such a nourishing and cherishing of the guilty one, as “a brother beloved,” as heals, at once and slightly, the wound of excision, which ought to be left, ulcerating and burning, for his purification. Instead of this course, if the excluded person have been wronged, (which may be the case; but which we should be slow to believe,) our sister church should be approached with respect, and confidence, and freedom; and desired to explain; and, perhaps, review the case with the aid of counsellors. A right church, rightly approached, would cheerfully do what was right in the premises.

were drones in God's hive; consuming the common stock; who were more willing to eat than earn their bread. And it may now forcibly apply to men who are *slack in domestic duties*—the duties of home; who “provide not for their own house.”

The first part of the offence, then, is *indolence*. The other term, *busy-bodies*, which indicates the other, counter and corresponding part of it, as employed in the Scriptures, was applied to a set of individuals, who were *uselessly employed*; and *particularly officious* in other men's matters; who were as busy in the concerns of others, as they ought to have been in their own; like flies, every where present, annoying and hateful; and who of course, were exceedingly obtrusive and unamiable characters.

Now for the rule of treatment.

1. “*Note that man.*” That is, point him out—expose him to all. Let him know that he is an object of the godly jealousy of the Church. “Exhort him, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness he work and eat his own bread,” and thus mind his own business. And if he do not reform:

2 “*Withdraw yourselves from him.*” That is, withdraw the band of fellowship from him—exclude him. “Now, we command you, brethren, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly; for we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all; but are busy-bodies.”

3. “*Have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.*” That is, be not familiar; treat such, coolly. Thus shame them; put them to the blush, for this is the object; that they may be ashamed; that is, of their conduct, and so reform.

4. “*Yet, count him not as an enemy; but admonish him as a brother.*” Count him not as an enemy. Do not let your dislike ripen into enmity. But admonish him as a brother. He may be a Christian, though so unlovely in character; and so undesirable in company. Therefore admonish him; point out his faults, as you may occasionally fall in with him; explain the reasons of your distance; and let him know, that, unless he reforms he must expect to be as unhappy in your presence, as you are in his.

In addition to these instances of public offence, contained in the Epistles, we include and mention several others, under the head of *Covenant-breaking*.

The Church Covenant contains a rich and beautiful summary of Christian duties; and contemplates the formation of every member to the highest excellence and loveliness of character. Every member, upon joining the Church, and signing this instrument, pledges himself to the performance of something like the following duties: 1. To control his temper; not to cherish revengeful anger. 2. To watch his conversation; avoiding jesting, evil speaking, and profanity. 3. To take heed to his company; not to associate with tavern-haunters, and the like men. 4. To study a peaceful, quiet, orderly deportment, at home and abroad, in the church and in the family.

5. To be just in all his pecuniary transactions with his fellow-men. 6. To be useful; to do good to all men. 7. To “remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.” 8. To maintain family worship. 9. To watch over his fellow-members for good. And, 10. To attend the meetings of the Church, for preaching, prayer, observance of the ordinances, and business.

Now, a failure to redeem all or any of these pledges, may be called, *Covenant-breaking*; and should be corrected as a *public offence*, except the failure injure some fellow member, in which case it would be a personal one.

We can scarcely forbear, in this place, it is so important to be plain upon this subject, to specify, quite distinctly, a *few cases* of Covenant-breaking and public offence; and especially, as they are so frequently occurring, and so commonly neglected.

1. *Simple neglect of the duties, arising from church relation.*

For example, a brother, habitually or frequently neglects the Sabbath worship, the stated and special meetings of the Church; and appears to be, and is, indifferent to the interests of the cause. He has broken his covenant, and is guilty of a *public offence*.

2. *Offence with the Church, and non-submission to majority.*

For example, a brother takes offence with the Church, for some of her acts; leaves his seat at the Lord’s table, and on the Sabbath; declares non-fellowship and non-submission; and thus trifles with the feelings of the members, and with his own standing. He also, has violated his covenant obligations in several particulars; and is guilty of a *public offence*, which is attended with some circumstances of high aggravation.

Some bring into the Church, from the very nursery, their furious tempers and habits of insubordination. They used to have their own way; they mean to have it still. They are ardent, ambitious, self-willed, and impatient of restraints and failures. And when they chance to be in the minority, they rebel, and factiously disturb the peace of the church or leave it. Such men are often great troublers of Israel. They are wrong, altogether wrong; their offence public, and severely disciplinable; *provided always*, that the Church has been open, deliberate, and fair, in canvassing and deciding the disputed question. In such case, each member has freely and fully expressed his views, and voted as he pleased. He can ask no more. He must submit, or suffer exclusion.

3. *Leaving our place at the table of the Lord, because some member has injured us.*

For example, a brother receives a real injury from another member, and feels so keenly tried, that he knows not how to commune with him; and so leaves his place, during the time of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. He has committed a two-fold offence; a *public* offence against the Church, by neglecting the ordinance which he covenanted to observe, without any such exception as he now makes; and a *personal* one against the brother

implicated, by such a method of exposure. We say exposure, because a faithful Pastor and Church will inquire after the reason of neglect. And they are entitled to the true reason. This given, and behold! the untimely exposure of the erring brother! Now, there was a right way to expose him, had he refused to give satisfaction in private interviews. The statute points it out; but alas! he has presumed to take this way to do it. Before the hour of communion, he was innocent; now, he is guilty of a two-fold offence, and exposed to a two-fold punishment. He must now, according to strict justice, confess to the Church and acknowledge to the brother; or suffer exclusion.

And we may further remark, this brother's mistake is a common one; one fearfully common. A mistake, which arises from a prevailing misapprehension of the *design* of the ordinance. It is supposed to be intended to express, primarily Christian union and fellowship; whereas, this is only incidental. The primary design was to "*remember*" *Christ*; and not each other. The eye and heart of each communicant, are on the crucified *one*; and not on his fellow. And suppose he love his Lord so intensely; and remember Him with such absorbing interest, as to forget all around him; what harm? The existence of union and fellowship, we do not deny; but they are not direct; they are circuitous and consequential. They are like the union and fellowship of distant members, through the medium of the body. The sacred stream runs, like the life-blood, from one extremity to the other; from member to member; but it is through the medium of the heart. So that, if we meet at all, and taste the sweets of Christian union, and Divine fellowship, at the table of the Lord, it is in Christ. And this, at best, is a *consequence* resulting from the primary design.

Be it remembered, therefore, by all, that, if we so magnify Christian union and communion with one another, as to eclipse communion with Christ; and so much remember our brother's sins, as to forget our Saviour's sufferings, we have fulfilled one law of our own; but broken two, of Christ's. He has given two distinct laws, for the two distinct cases. His law of Commemoration, and his law of Discipline. His law of Commemoration is; "This do ye, as often as ye do it, in remembrance of Me." His law of Discipline: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church." So that, if a brother refuse to fill his place at the table of the Lord, because another has injured him, he has broken his covenant in several particulars; and is guilty of a public offence, as well as a *personal* one.

4. *Reckless failures to meet contracts.*

We mean, particularly, the common, careless failures of some members, to pay their current debts, according to engagement. For example, a brother is in the habit of contracting debts, with the promise of paying them promptly at a specified time; but, in fact, without the prospect of doing so.

Or, to vary the case, if the time of payment is not specified, the debt is contracted with the common business understanding, that it shall be seasonably met, when he knows of no way he can do it. Or, to vary the case again, the debt is contracted, the time of payment either expressed or understood; and the means of payment are in the hands of the debtor; but a failure takes place, because he is as *slack* as he ought to be punctual.

Now, all these cases, and all similar cases of recklessness in business, which involves the interests of others, savor of *dishonesty*; and are so construed by the world. Such acts are personal offences, when committed by a brother in dealing with a fellow member; and *public*, when against another person, being a palpable violation of his covenant, in which he pledged himself to be “just in all his pecuniary transactions with his fellowship.”

5. *Desecration of the Lord's Day.*

There are multitudes of church members, on whom Sabbath restraints sit very lightly. They not only fail to come up to the standard of its requirements; but fail, also, to keep within the range of its prohibitions. Some engage in those kinds of business which compel them to work on this holy day of the Lord, less or more. Others travel or visit on this day; and, it would seem, deliberately make their arrangements to do so.

Such and similar instances of the desecration of this hallowed fraction of time, it should be well understood and deeply felt by every Christian, are utterly inconsistent with the high spiritual ends of the institution; and are, alike, an infraction of the Ten Commandments, the Gospel of Christ, and the Covenant of the Church; and, therefore, are *public* offences.

6. *The greatly prevalent and hateful sin of backbiting*; nearly allied to common *gossiping* and *tattling*.

Backbiting might seem to be near of kin to “railing,” mentioned by the apostle in 1 Cor. 5 and already noticed. And so it is. Railing and backbiting both consist in evil speaking; and the chief difference between them, lies in the manner of it. Railing is the loud, open, angry species of evil speaking; backbiting the low, secret, mischievous, mean sort of the same kind of business; as the structure and imagery of the term plainly indicate. The word, *backbiting*, means the act of secretly faulting one to another. Figuratively and etymologically taken the last part of it, *biting*, indicates the act, as malicious in its origin, and painful in effect; and the other and qualifying part of it, *back*, indicates meanness of motive and measure; a meanness and maliciousness that can inflict a stinging, secret injury, without cause. The maliciousness and the meanness of this sin, have scarcely a parallel in the gloomy catalogue of sins; and, certainly, have no alliance with common decency; much less, “pure and undefiled religion!” If a church member, then, be come a *backbiter*, he should be regarded as guilty of an offence both aggravating and intolerable; a *public* offence, being a violation of his covenant, in which he pledged himself to “watch his conversation, *avoiding evil speaking*, as well as jesting and profanity.”

It is an important rule, in estimating the *degrees* of offences, and the just measure of punishment due each; to distinguish, carefully, between faults which are the consequence of *sudden temptation*; and those which are the result of *premeditation and habit*. For example, a brother, overtaken by intoxication for the first time, accidentally or carelessly, presents a great contrast to one, whose inclination and habit render it quite certain, that he will overdrink, if exposed. The sin of Peter in once denying his Lord, was small in comparison with that of Solomon, who was habitually licentious and idolatrous.

On this point we have specific instruction. "Of some have compassion, *making a difference*, and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."—*Jude 22–23*.

The various species of public offences thus examined, we come next, to consider, *the general rule of treatment*.

This rule is found in 1 Tim. 5:20. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

That is, "them that sin" *before all*, "rebuke before all." Them that sin publicly, rebuke publicly. A public offence requires a public punishment; at least, a public correction. The punishment of public offences, in the church, like the punishment of all other offences, should be according to the varying degrees of criminality. This rule includes two of the *lesser degrees* of punishment, which gives it a universal applicability to public offences; an applicability to the smaller offences, by its milder punishment; and to the greater ones, by paving the way, for the severest penalties.

The term, "rebuke," signifies, 1. *To point out* plainly and convincingly, to them that sin publicly, *their offence in the presence of the Church*. And, 2. *To reprove* them, also, for it, in the same *public manner*.

This rule, then, contains the two ideas of *public statement* and *public reproof*. That the employment of this rule was designed as a public punishment, is plain from its expressed object. "*That others also may fear*; that is, that the rest of the members, witnessing the true manner of correcting public offences, *may fear* a similar, public and mortifying rebuke, for some public offence which they might commit; and so be admonished to watchfulness and prayer.

See Paul acting, in a certain case according to the letter and in the spirit of his own inspired rule; that a public offence might be publicly rebuked; and that its object might be secured. His brother Peter, on a certain occasion, had it "not walked uprightly"—had been guilty, of "dissimulation, and carrying others away with it." Paul "withstood him to the face, *before them all*, because he was to be blamed."—*Gal. 2*. "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

It should be particularly noticed, that this explanation of this rule for the treatment of public offences, *perfectly corresponds* with the import of those other directions, which we have noticed, in connection with the public offences, found in the Apostolic Epistles.

In the case of "*heretics*," it will be recollected that the Church, as a body, were to "mark them;" to administer "the first and second admonition," and then, "reject them." Here was a "rebuke before all;" a public statement and public reproof which led on to exclusion. A public punishment, for a public offence.

Again: in the case of "*fornicators, covetous members, railers, drunkards, and extortioners*," the Church were required openly to, shun their "company;" and to avoid all social interchanges with them. Such conduct in the Church towards any of her members, would require a full, open statement of the reasons on which it was based. But what would such statement be, short of a "rebuke before all?"

In the case, also, of "*disorderly walkers*," the same avoidance of familiarity is strictly enjoined, together with the duty of solemn and direct "admonition." A "rebuke before all."

All these directions, then, accompanying the particular but varying cases to which they are appended, so well agree in import with the rule under consideration; and then, this rule is so striking in its application to all cases of Covenant-breaking, that it may well be considered as the great *general rule* for the correction of public offences. This rule contains all that the majority of public offences require for their correction. That smaller portion of public offences, which are too great for this rule to fully punish, may be approached by this rule; and then finished with the particular directions, appended to the particular cases.

But as this rule cannot be employed, if the delinquent member is *absent*, something like the following, would, in general, be the proper course of procedure. The Church should cite him by the clerk, or, what is better, by an individual, volunteering his services, to attend the next church-meeting, and give satisfaction for his offence. The offence, if fully known, and time of meeting, should be distinctly stated to him. If he appear, the Minister, as the organ of the Church, having ascertained, or after ascertaining the precise amount of his wrong, should point it out to him, "before all;" and then admonish him, according as age and circumstances require. If he do not render satisfaction, he should be requested favorably to entertain the views the Church have of his offence and his duty; and to attend the next church meeting. If he appear and do not show penitence for his wrong, "the admonition" should be repeated; and if its repetition is alike unavailing, he should be promptly excluded.

And provided a public offender refuse to come before the Church, the work of examination and admonition, should be conducted by some member or members who may volunteer for the purpose; and who may possess, perhaps, some qualification which would encourage the hope of their success in the case; upon whose report, if unfavorable, exclusion should take place.

Before leaving the subject of public offences we want to make two remarks.

The first, upon *public confessions*. Some difference of opinion seems to have obtained respecting the *degree* of publicity which it is proper to give to confessions. But where is there room for but one opinion? Do not common sense and common justice demand that the reparation should be as *large* as the injury? Certainly. And so it most evidently ought to be. First, the repentance should be as deep, as the wound inflicted. Then, the confession *public*, as the fault was committed; or rather public, in a sense corresponding with its notoriety. All those persons who have heard of the offence, should hear the confession, or hear of it, as satisfactory. Be they one-half of the members of the Church or all of them: be they a part of the Church and congregation, or all of them. Honest, full confessions are a salve, exceedingly healing to the wounds unto which they are applied. The fact, that such confessions *touch the spot*, is an unanswerable argument in their favor. Indeed, they more than satisfy even the world. The man who has the integrity, the humility, and the manliness, to confess his wrong; and make full reparation, rises in the esteem of all, as he ought to do; and becomes the more beloved for his full, honest-hearted confession, in spite of the sin and the shame that produced it.

Example in the case of Mr. Henry Van Antwerp. He was overtaken by *intoxication* on a public occasion; but was no sooner sober, than he was sorry; and no sooner had the opportunity, in a corresponding public manner, to confess his sin, than he did it. His return was voluntary, hearty, and more than satisfactory. He wept, and the assembly all wept with him. And we all loved him the more, for this new evidence we had that he was a good man, though fallible.

If an offender shrink from confessing, so as to satisfy all concerned, it shows, in the general, that he is not right. A real penitent will be likely to confess too much, rather than too little. His eye is fixed upon the greatness of his sin; and he wonders how he can satisfy the people so easy; while another man wonders, why it takes so much to do it. And the people in their turn, wonder why he cannot see that a *scrimped confession* must beget a *scrimped fellowship!*

Let confessions, then, be ample. Let the standard of the Church be high, and right. Let her not suffer unconfessed sin upon her members; for in that case, they are dead, deforming branches, without fruit, or flowers, or even foliage. It is the sentence of inspiration: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy."

Our second remark respects the adaptation of the rule for personal offences, in the 18th of Matthew, for the *correction of many public offences*.

We could scarcely persuade ourselves to pass from the consideration of public offences, without just hinting how admirably this rule operates in reclaiming those guilty of this kind of offence. Although the rule, as we have seen is primarily applicable to cases of personal offence, yet, *here* its operation is most salutary; and its employment by an individual, in a

case, where he has no peculiar personal concern, is nobly demonstrative of his piety, brotherly love, and abiding concern for the honor of God. For example, a brother, on a public occasion, becomes intoxicated, quarrelsome, and profane. The sad day past, he feels guilty, ashamed and distant. The news flies. Brother A. hears of it, and goes immediately to see him. He finds him alone and lonely; and approaches him with usual kindness and freedom. The afflicting fact is all talked over, and confessed; and he leaves him with the full understanding, that he will embrace the first opportunity to confess his sin to the church and the world. A. is no sooner gone, than brother B., having heard the same painful news, calls on the same errand of mercy. And so with brother C. All three have the same errand, and the same motive; but have chanced to act, without intentional concert. The brother is overcome and won by kindness, and faithfulness; and saved. He comes before the church and congregation on the Lord's day, and gives ample satisfaction; and retires with the tender, forgiving love, and sympathy, and blessing of all.

If, now, in the true spirit of this rule, brethren were thus to act, in the large majority of cases of public offence, they would be as successful as brother A., B. and C. Wanderers would be reclaimed; the Church spared vast trouble; and the honor of pure and undefiled religion, secured. And how large the Scriptural encouragements to individual effort, in this quarter! "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he that converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins!"—*James 5*.

But suppose brother A.'s visit were unsuccessful; and that he despairs of success. Let him next, notify the erring brother of his wish and intention to call again, with "one or two more" brethren. And let him do it; and then if still unsuccessful, let him carry the case to the Church. Now, what could have been better, in the case, than this voluntary though thankless service, of brother A., aided by his fellow laborers; and guided by the ever-to-be-remembered 18th of Matthew!

CHAPTER VI. FIFTH CLASS OF OFFENCES, INSUFFERABLE.

Offences of the fifth and last class, are *insufferable* ones, or such as require *immediate exclusion* for the honor of the cause. Such are cases of notorious and complicated wickedness.

Now when we take into the account the fact, that Christians themselves are only partly sanctified; subject to the sallies of carnal passion, the seductions of the world, and the temptations of Satan: and another fact, that some, perhaps many in the church, are not Christians at all, but deceived or deceivers; and another fact, still, that the sacred enclosure, in these

degenerate days, is but feebly guarded, and the influx of the foolish with the wise, very great, we have reason to *expect* that sins of great enormity will be perpetrated by church members, even high civil offences and capital crimes. For example, perjury, forgery, grand larceny, absconding in debt, habitual licentiousness, murder, treason, and such like gross violations of moral, civil, and criminal law.

Now the *rule* given by Paul for one of these cases, namely: notorious and aggravating licentiousness, is found in 1 Cor. 5:13 and is the *true rule* for all of them.

“Put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

Hear the apostle, at large, on the *case* and its *treatment*. “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father’s wife. And ye have not mourned that he that hath done this deed, might be taken away from among you. For I, as present in spirit, have judged already concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such an one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, put away from among yourselves that wicked person.”

Hence the rule for such high offences, is, *exclude, without the ceremony of labor, upon the simple and certain ascertainment of the facts.*

The decision and the action, in all such cases, must be, as in case of a gangrene member which threatens the life of the body. Hasten amputation! For, be it remembered, *the honor of the cause*, bleeding at every pore in such case, is the great consideration. And this will demand prompt exclusion, as certainly in the world’s estimation, as that of the Church. All, with one voice, pronounce the offence *insufferable*; one that is not to be tolerated, “no, not for an hour.” Even strong manifestations of remorse or sorrow for the crime, must not shield from the stroke of separation. The rule is: “Put away from among you that wicked person.” This was the apostle’s own solemn inspired direction, in the case of the incestuous Corinthian, as we have seen. It was promptly obeyed; and the *results* were alike salutary upon the unhappy individual and the shame-stricken church.—2 Cor. 2.

Some may object to this view as being a course too summary, and as savoring of a spirit too uncompromising and too unforgiving, to accord to the genius of the gospel; and especially in case of *real penitence*. They may think that a transgression, however atrocious, if there be penitence in the case, should be forgiven; and the member *retained in the church*.

But it should always be remembered that there are two interests to be regarded, in every case of discipline, namely: the *honor* of God among men, and the *good* of the offender. On the one hand, those Scriptures which speak of telling offenders their faults in order to “gain” them; of “exhorting” them to obedience; of “admonishing” them; of “restoring” them; and

of “delivering them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” clearly show, that *their good* is to be one great consideration in their treatment. On the other hand, those passages which speak of the “name of God being profaned among the heathen,” by his people; of his “name being blasphemed among the Gentiles through them;” of the necessity of “having a good report of them without;” and of “letting our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven,” all show, with equal clearness, that regard in all our conduct, in the Church and elsewhere, is to be had to the *honor* of God, among those without the Christian community.

Now, in *one* given case, both these interests may be duly regarded and perfectly secured by the discipline, penitence, forgiveness, and *retention in the church*, of an offender. A large majority of public offences are of this class.

In a *second case*, both these interests may be secured by exclusion, far as they can be secured at all. Exclusion may alike clear the Church, honor God, and inflict a merited and salutary punishment upon an offender. The case of the ill-famed Corinthian was of this class.

In a *third case*, in which the offence is very great, abhorrent in its nature, and aggravating in its circumstances; is generally known and deeply felt; and in which the *penitence is real* to all appearance, but of course, lacking in that practical evidence of its genuineness, which, lies in the “forsaking” and the “fruit;” which full repentance includes; which time only can give, and which all the community seem to demand in order to satisfaction, exclusion, it must take place for the *honor* of God, as well as the *good* of the offender. And, be it remembered, the painful act, if penitence is not genuine, is just and called for in the case; and if it be genuine, will not injure the offender. He will feel that exclusion in his case, is not vindictive, but perfectly consistent with a spirit of benevolence and forgiveness, as well as justice. And, so far from being injured by it, even in feeling, will invite it for the cause’s sake. And, in his case, will be seen the truth of the Scripture: “Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation.” His sorrow will work out the practical demonstration of its genuineness—will work reformation, and ultimate restoration. And thus the awful extremity of exclusion, become the actual security of the two great interests in question: the *honor* of God among men, and the *good* of a fallen brother. A case of habitual licentiousness would be of this class.

In a *fourth case*, in which the offence is of an high order: perjury, forgery, grand larceny, murder, or treason, and so consigning the offender to the State Prison or the gallows; and in which there is every possible demonstration of *genuine penitence*, that tears, and confessions, and reparation can furnish, exclusion, of course, must take place at once, upon the ascertainment of the fact.

And, hence, the position that every offender, in case of *real penitence*

for his sin, *should be retained in the Church*, as well as forgiven, is as impracticable, in point of fact, as it is inconsistent with the universal sense of right.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

1. In the light of the subject of these pages, and as lying at the foundation of it, we have seen that *the best men in the Church MAY err; and that the worst men WILL err.*

Every thing in this world is stamped with imperfection. Here there is no perfect honor nor happiness; no perfect relations nor friends; no perfect Christians nor Churches. Sin with unhallowed footstep, advances along; and intrudes itself into every dear association on earth; separating very friends; breaking up the peace of home; and oft sundering, by its withering touch the hearts of Christians, though "linked together in many bonds." But, if there were any bounds to its progress, these, we should suppose, would be the confines of the church; if any barrier to its advance, the threshold of God's temple; if any *place* of its eternal exclusion, the *family* of Christ. But, even here, "offences must needs come."

2. *Each kind of offence should be learned and remembered, in its distinctive feature and rule of treatment.*

We have reduced all offences to five classes.

1. *Minor*; the smaller offences; such as should be borne. The distinctive feature of this class is, they are *infirmities, natural or acquired.* The *rule*: "We, then, that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

2. *Private*, or such as cannot be proved. The distinctive feature of this class, is, *a lack of evidence.* The *rule*: "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone;" or, "Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself, and discover not a secret to another."

3. *Personal*, as when one brother injures another in his person, reputation, or property, and there is proof of the fact. The distinctive feature of this class, is, *personal injury and proof of it.*

The *rule*: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

4. *Public*, or such as equally injure all the members of the church, and for which all require an equal satisfaction. The distinctive feature of this class, is, *equal injury of all, and equal satisfaction to all, the members.* The general *rule*: "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

5. *Insufferable.* The distinctive feature of this class is, *such enormity of*

offence as requires prompt exclusion for the honor of the cause. The rule, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Now this classification of offences, with the *distinctive feature* of each class; and the *rule of treatment* in each case, should be as familiar to every church member, as the multiplication table is, to every active arithmetician. To be able to class ever-occurring offences; and to select the rule of treatment, is a great and noble attainment. A good disciplinarian is a good physician. He can heal the difficulty. And why may not all become such?

Discipline is far less difficult of understanding, than we, at first, might suppose. The Saviour's provision for the correction of offences, has a most instructive simplicity. He knew that "offences must needs come;" and offences, too, of various type; and that they must be corrected. And yet, all that he himself has said, and all that his inspired servants have said, is embraced in a few, brief, simple sentences. The direction has meaning enough, for the tallest intellect; and plainness sufficient, for the weakest understanding. The *essence* of all divine principles and rules of discipline, is this. Now, your brother has done wrong. You must not suffer the sin to pass uncorrected. It would injure your brother, and hurt the cause. You must pity him and go and see him, and show him his fault. And if you do not succeed in helping him to see, and realize, and retrace his wrongs; then you must get one or two to go with you to see him; and to use their influence with him; and if still unsuccessful, you must bring his case to the Church. And if all your kindness and care and effort to save him prove unavailing; then you must, still kindly, but solemnly, and formally, and promptly, exclude him from the Church.

This, we repeat, is the *essence* of all divine principles and rules of Discipline. How plain! How easy of understanding! Why, then, are individuals and Churches so often whelmed in deepest difficulty, in correcting the wrongs of an offender? We answer; plainly, because simple, as are the principles of discipline; easy, as is the classification of offences; and plain, as are the methods of treatment, few have so *accurate knowledge of these things*, as to know what to do, in any given case. We fully believe that, in nine cases out of ten, for the want of such knowledge, the injured brother or Church has settled upon some improper course of procedure. And "Behold, how great matter a little fire kindleth!" Zion's sorest troubles have arisen, from the wrong *treatment* of offences, rather than from the offences themselves, simply considered. Let, then, all thoroughly acquaint themselves with this subject. Let each kind of offence be learned and remembered, in its distinctive feature, and rule of treatment. And we add, with emphasis, let it be done at the *right time*, when no case is on hand to bias the judgment, if possible. Discipline is generally studied, when we want the knowledge of it, rather than when we may want it.

3. *The importance of the strictest practical adherence to the laws of discipline, and the spirit of those laws, can scarcely be estimated.*

It is not enough, that these laws be understood; they must be employed in every required case, and that in their true healing spirit. The high and professed object of discipline, is the purity of the Church. In the language of Solomon, that "iniquity may be purged." But mark the grand specific: "mercy and truth." "By mercy and truth, iniquity is purged." This is the celestial combination—these the two simple but sovereign ingredients, in the Divine prescription. And whosoever the subject may be, whether a wise man or a fool, learned or ignorant, rich or poor, the prescription is the same. The provision knows no lurking favoritisms, no invidious partialities. It is "truth and mercy," for each and for all. "Truth" secures the certain application of the law; "mercy," its kind and right application. The one consults the honor of God; the other, the good of the offender. Truth, without mercy, would lead to an unfeeling and crushing severity; mercy, without truth, to a criminal and ruinous laxness. They must both operate, but not apart; they must both be employed, but always together. And the richest results will flow to the Church and to the world. Purity, peace, prosperity, and heavenly honor, will bless and adorn beloved Mount Zion, again, "the joy of the whole earth!" Her Discipline, like the skillful pruning process, will vastly improve the fairness and the flavor of her fruit as well as her general beauty, by the removal of what is straggling and redundant; and by the rearing up of those branches, which, by their position and erectness, constitute the entire growth, extremely fine in its proportions, and attractive in its aspects. She will be seen by all, to be no place for the concealment of crime; but like a fountain, with its repulsive power. In unbelieving eyes, she will "look forth as the morning fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

But results so rich and splendid, cannot exist, without the strictest adherence to the disciplinary laws of Christ's house; and the heavenly healing spirit of those laws.

Some Churches are so lax in Discipline, so indulgent with delinquent members, and even flagrant transgressors, because of property, or standing, or connexions, as to become a *very dunghill* in society, instead of being "the salt of the earth and the light of the world!" And, unless a redeeming spirit is soon enkindled, and burns with consuming strength, and visits with purifying influence, "Ichabod, the glory is departed," will be engraven, as with a pen of steel, upon the otherwise fair heritage of God! It is a day, of most alarming *irresponsibility* among the members of our churches! A day when the mass of professedly Christian men do too well nigh what is right in their own eyes!

Now, Discipline is Zion's salvation. It is the Lord Jehovah's appointed instrumentality, for the correction of offences, and she must wield it. We have said it was the application of right principles, in a right spirit, to the wrong conduct of offenders. We ask then, in conclusion: Are there not offenders among *you*? Shall the application be made, then, in *your* church,

among *your* members, in every required case? Beloved brethren, it must be made! The good of every delinquent, calls for it! The health of the Church, requires it! The honor of God, demands it! Preparation to meet the returning Master, urges it now! It must be done!

“Brethren, consider what we say, and the Lord give you understanding and *faithfulness* in all things.”

