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*BATTLING THE INCURSION
OF FALSE TEACHING*

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Concerning Doctrinal Scandals, Battling the Incursion of False Teaching

BY

That singularly faithful and wise Servant of Jesus Christ, Mr. James Durham, late Minister of the Gospel in Glasgow, Who being dead (by this) yet speaketh: And published by John Carstairs, one of the Ministers in Glasgow.

Matthew 18:7. Woe unto the world because of Offences: for it must needs be that Offences come: but woe to that man by whom the Offence cometh.

1 Corinthians 10:32. Give none Offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God.

Psalm 119:165. Great peace have all they which love thy Law: and nothing shall offend them.

Edinburgh, Printed by Christopher Higgins, in Harts Close, opposite the Tron-Church, 1659.

CHAPTER I.

Expediency of Handling Matters of Error

Although some discussion has touched upon practical scandals (to call them that), there has been little or no discussion at all regarding doctrinal scandals and what may be required concerning them.

It is true that these cases are so diverse and challenging that there can hardly be anything specifically addressed about them. However, what has been said can, for the most part, proportionately apply to them. Considering that this place focuses directly on doctrinal scandals and that the circumstances of these times demand some consideration of them, to prevent what has been previously stated from being entirely inadequate in this regard, it will not be irrelevant to elaborate on it a bit further, even though this tractate has already become longer than initially intended.

In pursuing this, we can: 1. Examine some general doctrines. 2. Explore general questions. 3. Discuss the various duties required for specific cases and remedies. 4. Highlight the necessity of orderly judicial procedures here concerning these scandals, as well as in relation to the previously mentioned practical scandals.

Regarding doctrines, we find that: 1. Error propagated by those tainted with it is no less scandalous and should be no less condemned than gross misconduct. It is equally prone to cause stumbling and disrupt the spiritual growth and well-being of God's people as any scandalous behavior. This is confirmed by the consequences of error, as it leads to the destruction of the soul (2 Peter 2:1), swift damnation (2 Peter 2:1), undermines the faith of many (2 Timothy 2:18), distorts Scripture to the detriment of individuals (2 Peter 3:16), and deceives many (Matthew 24). For this reason, it is also referred to as damnable and pernicious in 2 Peter 2, highlighting its truly stumbling nature.

2. This becomes evident when we consider the titles that the Holy Spirit usually bestows upon those who promote corrupt doctrine in Scripture. No titles carry greater indignation and abomination than those given to such individuals. They are referred to as dogs, evil workers (Philippians 3:2), wolves (Matthew 7:15), grievous wolves (Acts 20), deceitful workers, ministers of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:13), deceivers, and liars (Revelation 2). They are described as evil men and seducers who progressively worsen (2 Timothy 3:13).

3. Additionally, consider the numerous threats and woes issued against them in Scripture (Matthew 23) and the many warnings given to ministers to guard against them (Acts 20). There are clear instructions for their censure (Titus 3:10), and specific examples of censuring them are recorded in Scripture (as will be shown later). Christ commends such action where it is present and reproves its absence (as seen in the second and third chapters of Revelation). All of these factors unmistakably demonstrate how incredibly scandalous the propagation of corrupt doctrine is. In Revelation 2:6, the Lord explicitly states

that He hates it, making it undeniably loathsome and abominable.

4. Reflect on the many warnings people have to avoid such individuals, considering their offensive nature (Romans 16:17, Acts 20, Philippians 3:1-2, 2 John 10). This clearly underscores their scandalousness.
5. Examine the nature of error more closely.
 1. It contradicts God's truth and, therefore, is a lie, just as scandalous practices oppose God's holiness. God's truth and veracity are no less essential attributes than His holiness.
 2. It not only involves lying but also attributes falsehoods to the Most High by falsely claiming, "Thus says the Lord," when He has said no such thing but the opposite.
 3. It teaches others to lie more forcefully and shamelessly than any practice can.
 4. Its origin lies with the devil, who has been a liar from the beginning and is its father (John 8:44). Those who spread corrupt doctrine have a special influence in upholding and advancing his kingdom.
 5. Error is a product of the flesh, just like murder, adultery, and witchcraft. Since it is listed alongside these sins by the Apostle (Galatians 5:19-20), it is unquestionably scandalous.
6. The effects of error provide evidence for its scandalous nature.
 1. It corrupts the "vines" (Song of Solomon 2:15), harming purity where it exists.
 2. It disrupts government and order, causing confusion.
 3. It disrupts unity, causing contention, strife, and a harmful atmosphere of "biting and devouring one another" (Galatians 5:15).
 4. Ultimately, it destroys souls and spreads more rapidly, dangerously, and extensively than other practical scandals. The Church has never been as damaged, and as many souls have never been destroyed by any scandalous practice as

they have been by the propagation of corrupt doctrine. Whether we consider scandal as something that causes others to stumble, weakens confidence, disrupts peace, troubles minds, or tarnishes the reputation of God's ways, it is clear that such errors are still to be considered scandalous. Nothing more effectively prompts criticism of religion than these errors, as seen in 2 Peter 2. All of this makes it evident that gross error is not merely a sin but a highly scandalous sin of the grossest nature.

CHAPTER II.

Regarding the Propagation of Error; God's Displeasure at Allowing It, and the Discouragement of Even Good Men in Restraining It.

In addition to this, there are three things worth considering, which we have reason to observe and explore to some extent, based on this and other Epistles, before we present any specific questions.

The first concerns the spread and increase of Error, particularly unreasonable and absurd Errors, even in the early days of the Church. The second relates to the Lord's abhorrence of it, to the extent that even tolerating those who spread it is displeasing to Him, both in His Angels and Churches. This disapproval remains even when those involved are otherwise commendable for their individual conduct, as seen in Pergamos. Furthermore, their refusal to tolerate it is praiseworthy, even when their own inward condition is not entirely commendable, as can be observed in Ephesus. The third

point is how there may be a lack of zeal in restraining Error, even among individuals who are not the worst.

Regarding the first point, can it be considered anything less than remarkable that delusion reached such a high degree so quickly? This is deeply troubling for several reasons: 1. It involves a grossly absurd error, such as that of the Nicolaitans, which goes against common sense. 2. It spreads and grows among various individuals and churches, as demonstrated in church history and implied in these Epistles. 3. It spreads not only among heathens but also within the Church, among Christ's servants who are misled by it, indicating that even some prominent figures were led astray. 4. This occurred during the Church's purest times, with some of the Apostles, at least John, still alive when it was disseminated. 5. It was propagated by relatively insignificant figures compared to others, including a woman who claimed to be a prophetess and some individuals who called themselves Apostles and proclaimed new revelations. These individuals might have been considered insane rather than revered. 6. This took place despite the testimony of faithful ministers within these churches, and in churches where there were witnesses of God abstaining from this evil. However, others followed this error, receiving and honoring these deceivers more than faithful pastors. 7. It happened in places where there was both knowledge and authority to refute them. Both of these factors can be inferred from the trial of those in Ephesus. Additionally, John wrote to refute them on behalf of the Lord Himself, and despite the irrefutability of his teachings, their adherence to error persisted for many years. 8. John or another Apostle had been instrumental in converting them from Paganism to Christianity. Nevertheless, they could not be reclaimed from a grievous error in Christianity once they were ensnared by it. Although it is undeniable that their authority and arguments carried less weight with them after they became Christians, what could be

more compelling for their conviction and reformation than these considerations? This was often the case for Paul as well, who initially found it easier to work with people when they were heathens compared to when they became Christians and were influenced by false teachings or corrupt teachers, as evident in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians.

This demonstrates several points:

1. The irrationality and influence of a deceiving spirit that becomes unconvincible once people embrace their chosen path, deceiving others and themselves. As Peter states in 2 Peter 3:16, they twist Scripture to their own destruction. They do this by corrupting what appears more obscure first and then shaping other Scriptures to align with their notions, which they have inferred from the former. They first construct ideas from obscure passages and subsequently adjust the clearer Scriptures to fit these ideas. However, the opposite approach is safer. When the ignorant and unstable consider themselves the sole experts in God's mysteries and regard straightforward truths and duties as beneath them, it is no surprise that they become so ensnared. Consequently, they may become skilled at distorting even the plainest Scriptures (as implied in 2 Peter 3:16) in ways that serve their own destruction, preventing them from being convinced and put to shame.
2. We can observe that it is challenging to lead misled people away from error, which might explain why 2 Timothy 2:25 emphasizes that perhaps only one in a hundred might attain repentance. The Lord uses this as a deterrent from evil. Paradoxically, the more severe the error, the more unreasonable and obstinate people often become in defending it. This is because there is a judicial

aspect to their stubbornness, a divine stroke that leads them into such foolishness. It is hard to believe that they would fall into such errors without being smitten by God. When afflicted in this way, no reasoning can sway them, as the plague remains upon them. Is there any error as absurd as worshipping stocks and stones? It defies common sense that people would burn one part, fashion common tools from another, and make a deity out of a third part, bowing down to worship it, as the Prophet Isaiah questions in Isaiah 44:19. Upon reflection, this absurdity might be traced back to God's judgment, as mentioned in verse 18: "For he has shut their eyes that they cannot see, and their hearts that they cannot understand."

3. The irrationality of this spirit in people would not be surprising in any of the aforementioned respects. Even if no one could silence them and they believed they were triumphant in introducing unheard-of interpretations of Scripture, it would not be astonishing. The more they engage in such interpretations, the more it serves as a form of divine judgment upon them. Likewise, the more followers they gather and the more they are tolerated by others, the more it contributes to their own destruction. People should keep their distance from such infectious ideas. No one can predict the depths of depravity they might reach once they have taken hold of a fickle and unstable soul, driven by the spirit of error. If God has given them over to this due to their desire for it and rejection of the truth, they may commit the most horrendous acts without shame or remorse. Observers would recognize God's justice in such judgments and learn to hold Him in greater reverence and fear.

The second point becomes evident from this: if error is such an evil that contradicts both God's holiness and truth, and if it jeopardizes

so many souls (for no plague has destroyed the visible Church or led as many souls to hell as error has), then tolerating it must be detestable to God, who loves His Church.

3. The devil reproaches Ordinances and the Word more through this means than any other, by perverting them to the opposite purpose, as if he could outdo the Lord with His own tools (which is abhorrent to mention) and manipulate His own methods, turning His own weapons against Him. Allowing this is turning a blind eye to his scheme.
4. The devil can seduce Christ's Servants most effectively through this means, as evident in the Epistle to Thyatira. Can such a danger approach Christ without Him being displeased by what strengthens their snares?
5. Allowing this places the devil on equal footing with Christ in some respect, provoking His jealousy. By granting the devil the freedom to spread lies alongside Truth, and with there being many lies compared to one Truth, this opens more doors for him than the Gospel has.
6. This diminishes the value of the Truth, Ordinances, and even Religion itself. When all these are tolerated, it essentially proclaims indifference towards these things, which reflects poorly on the jealous God. In His Word, He emphasizes distinctions and expresses strong disapproval of indifference.
7. This brings significant confusion to the Church. 1. If these errors and corrupt teachers prevail, they lead souls astray and destroy them. Should this be taken lightly? 2. If they do not prevail, they still oppose, afflict, and offend those whom the Lord cares for, becoming a snare and burden to them.

8. Tolerance either regards error as insignificant, implying no harm, and thus has no regard for the truth, or it regards the destruction of souls as insignificant, both of which are abominable.
9. Error not only violates God's Law but also teaches others to do the same. Allowing it means supporting teachers who promote Transgression and Rebellion against the Lord.

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he third thing worth noting is that, although zeal in a Minister, especially against error, is highly commendable, there are often instances of fainting, even among Ministers who are not the worst. In this case, the Angel is reprov'd for sparing the Nicolaitans or for being weak and ineffective in addressing them in a ministerial capacity. On the contrary, Antipas is commended for his faithfulness, and the Angel of Ephesus is praised for not giving in to weariness when carrying out this task. The Lord has combined faithfulness and wisdom in His stewards, and when they are equally demonstrated, they are highly commendable. However, in the assessment, only one is mentioned: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," not to excuse the other, but to emphasize the necessity and excellence of faithfulness. Ministers must be reminded to uphold their freedom and faithfulness, whether in taking on or pursuing this charge, which will undoubtedly pose many challenges that could lead to fainting if not boldly confronted with the strength of the Lord.

We can highlight several reasons for this fainting:

1. Concerning the timing: there are times when it's difficult to know what to say, and the prudent may choose to keep silent.

However, this pretext can sometimes lead to excessive fainting when the Lord calls for faithfulness.

2. It may stem from a person's awareness of their own weaknesses and inadequacies for the task. This seems to be the case with Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1 when one's own self or self-perception becomes the rule by which they proceed.
3. It may result from the message one is called to deliver. Sharp messages can be heavy and burdensome, causing individuals to hesitate, especially considering that these Messengers are often not well-received. Additionally, there are usually many who try to undermine those who faithfully deliver such messages.
4. It can also arise from the varied temperaments of listeners. Some may react negatively to reproof, like swine turning against those who reprove them, as seen with Micaiah and Ahab in 2 Kings 22. Some may have itching ears and not tolerate convicting doctrine and faithfulness, potentially leading to separation from those who faithfully reprove. Many who are affectionate may also be hasty and unable to handle plain speaking, making it difficult to be faithful to them.
5. Fainting can stem from a lack of trust in God, doubting the fulfillment of His promises and the support in His work. When individuals see the task as impossible in their own eyes, they may give up entirely.
6. Fainting may also result from anticipated consequences, either believing that there will be no fruit from the effort or fearing that some inconvenience will arise. Moses may have experienced the first when he said, "Israel will not listen to me," and "What will Pharaoh do?" Lastly, the fear of inconvenience often leads to a decision that it is not a duty at all when flesh and blood are allowed to assess duty based on anticipated inconveniences. In this case, the Angel may have feared disturbing the Church or the potential for schisms to follow. The Lord's threat to "fight

against them with the sword of His mouth" implies this concern, as a carnal attempt to prevent inconvenience often accelerates the very thing that is feared. Other reasons for fainting may exist but are not acceptable before God.

Chapter III:

God's People and Gross Delusions

From these doctrines, several questions may arise, and firstly, can any of the People of God be led astray by such abominable errors in doctrine? We shall respond with the following assertions.

Assert. 1. There is no error, no matter how gross materially, that believers cannot fall into. While they have a promise that error will not entirely separate them from Christ, nor will they ultimately be led astray by it, they are still susceptible to temptation, including the temptation to embrace heresy. There is no promise that guarantees believers absolute immunity from heresy, just as there is none for murder or adultery, which, like heresy, are sinful acts of the flesh. This is wisely ordained by the Lord to prevent believers from becoming complacent and secure in the face of such temptations. Furthermore, it is a matter of experience that grace does not exempt believers from errors in judgment. For instance, Solomon, though he may not have personally engaged in idolatry, displayed a dangerous inclination towards it, as suggested by the Scriptural accounts about him. Additionally, in the churches of Corinth, Galatia, and others, some were drawn away from the Truth after their conversion,

indicating that not only unregenerate individuals but also believers may be affected. It is even possible, if not probable, that some individuals referred to as the Lord's Servants who were seduced in the Church of Thyatira were not in a state of unregeneracy.

Assert. 2. Although we cannot confidently say that it is impossible, we believe it is rarer for a believer to fall into gross errors and continue in them for an extended period to be considered a heretic, compared to other scandalous practices. This is supported by several reasons:

1. The Scriptures mention this less frequently than other sins committed by believers, which are more frequently recorded.
2. Special promises exist for preserving the elect from being deceived by false christs and false teachers. While these promises may not hold universally in all instances, they extend to some extent, even to the temptation of heresy. This is likely based on the following considerations:
 1. Becoming ensnared in heresy does not typically result from a sudden, overwhelming temptation, as is often the case with gross practices. Instead, it involves deliberate choices that are less common among believers, making it less likely to be considered a sin of weakness. Therefore, Scripture portrays false teachers of corrupt doctrine as abominable, serving their own interests rather than the Lord Christ, as enemies of the cross of Christ, and as ministers of Satan. These titles and similar ones do not align with the nature of believers' weaknesses. Hence, it is our belief that it is less common for believers to actively promote corrupt doctrine.
 2. The term "heretic" implies self-condemnation, as it requires a rejection of admonitions, which does not align well with the nature of a believer.

3. This leads to the conclusion that Scripture speaks of repentance from and recovery from corrupt doctrine as rare and uncertain occurrences. For instance, the Apostle Paul expresses concern in Galatians 4:10 that his labour may have been in vain, and in 2 Timothy 2:25, he introduces a conditional "If perhaps God may grant them repentance" when referring to those who oppose themselves. No such "perhaps" is attached to other sins, indicating that recovery from heresy may be more challenging and, therefore, believers must be specially preserved from it, at least typically.
4. This reinforces the previous point: heresy is a significant spiritual affliction, often a consequence not of past sins of weakness but of rejecting the love of the Truth, along with hypocrisy, pride, and presumption. While the Lord is not limited from chastening His own with this affliction, experience from Scripture and the nature of the affliction suggest that it is not the usual mark or rod of His children. When it does occur, it may signify spiritual pride, self-seeking, complacency, spiritual immaturity, ignorance, conceit, lack of spiritual exercise, or other similar factors. Furthermore, when believers do fall into heresy, we do not readily find in Scripture that they take a leading role in promoting and advancing the cause of error.

Assert. 3. When a believer falls into such an evil, the Lord often chastises them. This chastisement may manifest through more severe outward transgressions, a stern method of restoration, or by shrouding them under a cloud without clear signs of recovery, as seen in the case of Solomon. Although his sin is fully recorded, the Scripture remains silent about his recovery, while remnants of his idolatry are noted to persist into the days of Hezekiah. There is

limited Scriptural evidence of recovery for those who have been led astray, despite charitable judgment being extended to some. The Lord orchestrates this partly as a form of discipline and partly as a warning to others. It serves to instill fear and caution, especially among believers, lest they fall into heresy. Recovery is not easy, and even the spiritual may be tempted, as mentioned in Galatians 6:1.

Assert. 4. Those who propagate error most frequently target individuals with some profession of religion, more so than those who do not bear such a name. While the dissemination of gross error may not lead many truly godly individuals astray or ultimately affect them, it often presents the most searching trial to them and proves highly effective against many unrepentant professing Christians.

This encompasses two aspects:

1. The temptation to error often has a greater impact on professing Christians, causing them to stumble more than other gross sins do. They may resist other sins but succumb to the allure of heresy.
2. It also includes the fact that the temptation of error tends to target those who hold a prominent religious profession more than others who do not carry such a designation. For instance, the Nicolaitans, false apostles, and the prophetess Jezebel did not teach or deceive heathens but rather the Church of Christ and those whom He called His Servants (Revelation 2:20). This category encompasses even those who openly presented themselves as Christ's Servants. Furthermore, it is evident that this error was more successful among Christians than heathens, and its promoters were more determined to corrupt the Church than to leave heathens unaffected. This pattern is observable in other churches as well. For example, the Corinthian church was

renowned for its spiritual gifts, yet false apostles caused significant divisions and opposition to the Apostle Paul, likely capitalizing on the church's giftedness and prominence to advance their agenda. Similarly, the churches of Galatia warmly received the Gospel, but they were quickly swayed and bewitched by false teachers and their temptations. It seems that the devil seized the opportunity to target them promptly, while they were still in their early stages of faith, more than other places or churches that did not display such hopeful beginnings. This reflects a daily experience where there are fewer attempts to tempt people to error where profanity prevails compared to places where the Gospel has been welcomed and fruitful. The devil seems to focus this temptation more intensely and cunningly against the latter group. Several reasons contribute to this:

3. The devil's primary animosity is directed towards the latter group, and he desires their downfall the most.
4. He has other temptations that are more appealing to profane individuals, so he does not vigorously employ this tactic against them as long as they remain under his influence.
5. Those with a religious form, although weak in knowledge, are more susceptible to the temptation of error. Profane individuals do not care as much about the distinction between truth and error, but a soul with some conscience seeks truth and debates it, desiring clarity. When they are not strong enough to resolve these debates themselves, they are easily led astray, much like the naive women mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:6-7, who were constantly learning but unable to come to a knowledge of the truth.
6. Gross temptations to profanity, which may lead others astray, do not appeal as strongly to this group. Therefore, the devil tempts

them with error under the guise of truth or a new, stricter, and holier way. Often, this tactic prevails when others fail.

7. It is more advantageous for error and makes it more acceptable to have the endorsement of someone with a reputation, knowledge, or piety. Many people look to those who advocate for a particular belief and what individuals of influence think about it rather than critically evaluating the belief itself. Consequently, the devil promotes this tactic as a primary means of leading many astray. Throughout history, it has been a common strategy to lure individuals into error by associating it with reputedly godly individuals. This approach has been evident in the histories of groups like the Novatians and Donatists, who called themselves the pure and holy Church of Martyrs, opposing the Orthodox Church, which they deemed carnal. By adopting such titles, they were able to ensnare many. 6. Additionally, this strategy diverts the attention of those who appear to be honest from self-examination and repentance. If the devil cannot lead them into error, he may engage them in disputes about the truth, aiming to distort their convictions before they are firmly established. He keeps them occupied with peripheral matters while he plans to deceive them or at least to trouble and weary them with endless questions and debates that are beyond their reach and possibly beyond their station.

CHAPTER IV.

How gross delusions can reach such heights, as they often do.

It can also be questioned how such absurd errors can escalate to such extremes and prevail against the Church, or in what way the devil, through corrupt teachers, deceives Professors.

There are some reasons that are more general, and others more specific and practical for consideration. To better understand the devil's tactics and not be ignorant of his devices, we shall focus primarily on these, categorizing them into three main factors. 1. The Lord's providential, just, holy, and often hidden way of punishing human ingratitude. 2. There are certain aspects of the devil's approach to temptation. 3. The condition of churches and individuals experiencing a spiritual disorder should be taken into account. When these three factors are combined, it becomes less surprising that the grossest and most absurd errors can gain prevalence. Regarding the first factor, the Lord plays a governing role in such a scheme. This serves partly as a test for His own people, as heresies must exist (1 Corinthians 11:19), and partly as a punishment for a generation of ungrateful hypocrites who do not embrace the truth with love, as stated in 2 Thessalonians 2. In both cases, the Lord is to be glorified, whether through His grace, justice, or both. In this context, the more absurd the error is, the better it accomplishes His purpose and appears to be more like a judgment. This is evident when comparing passages such as Isaiah 44:18-19, Romans 1:21, 25, 28, etc., and 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, which not only address the most gross spiritual abominations but also highlight the Lord's judicial intervention in such matters.

If one were to inquire about the specific manner in which the Lord is involved in this plague, or how He can be said to send it, the answer is not the main focus here. To elucidate this reason, we can establish these principles:

1. There are spiritual plagues with which God justly punishes people's ingratitude and other sins, just as there are external and physical plagues. The passages cited, such as Isaiah 44:18, 19, Romans 1:21, 2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11, and the chapters in Revelation 7, 8, and 9, confirm this. It should be noted that most often, gross practices like adultery, murder, and various forms of uncleanness are punishments for the abuse of natural understanding, as seen in Romans 1:21, 25, 28. However, being given over to strong delusion and believing lies is a plague that typically follows the abuse of the Gospel's light, as evidenced in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10. This may explain why gross scandals and practices are more prevalent where the Gospel is absent or less powerful, while error is more widespread where the Gospel has been or is clearer. However, it's a general trend and not an absolute rule, as other contributing factors may come into play.
2. We assert that the Lord is equally just, holy, and pure when punishing people with such plagues as He is when using other forms of judgment or correction. There is nothing in this that contradicts His absolute purity and holiness. For several reasons: 1. He doesn't punish anyone with this plague who hasn't justly deserved it due to their previous misuse of light and other transgressions. 2. He doesn't instill maliciousness in their hearts or increase what already exists, but rather justly permits what is there to manifest and utilizes it for His just purposes. 3. He doesn't compel them to follow this path but allows them to choose it willingly, exercising their free will for the glory of His justice. 4. He doesn't turn a blind eye to or condone the sinful actions of any instrument but genuinely detests them and will punish them severely. Thus, the same action can be attributed differently: in the first respect, it is ascribed to humanity alone, and in the last, to God's governing providence. God can bring

good out of evil since nothing is so evil that He cannot derive some good from it and make it serve His purposes. Otherwise, the Almighty and all-wise God would never allow it to occur.

3. While the Lord is not and cannot be an accomplice to this delusion in its sinful aspect (as this is impossible given His infinite and blessed perfection), He does play a just role in the overall design, which significantly strengthens the delusion. There are several aspects to consider: 1. He may justly grant the devil the opportunity to intensify his temptations at one time or toward one person more than at another time or toward another person, as seen in the case of Job. 2. He may endow individuals with good gifts and justly permit them to employ these gifts to promote error. This has often been a powerful instrument for Satan's agenda throughout history, with great scholars and individuals of keen intellect opposing the truth and distorting Scripture. This is just as justifiable in God's eyes as granting strength and power to those He employs for temporal judgments, who may also be held accountable for their misuse of these abilities. Hence, 2 Thessalonians 2:2 mentions not only the written or spoken word but also a spirit or gift in an outstanding degree, referred to as "all deceivableness" in verse 10. No doubt, those who called themselves apostles in 2 Corinthians 11:13 and considered Paul's gifts weak compared to theirs possessed extraordinary gifts. Sometimes, the Lord may allow a false prophet to foretell future events or have an extraordinary gift, even when His purpose is to test the people's loyalty to Him (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). Promoters of error may be equipped with the ability to reason, ask questions, manipulate arguments and Scripture passages, preach effectively, and pray eloquently with a great deal of persuasion. They may even perform what appear to be signs and wonders (as previously

mentioned). However, the Lord's purpose is to test and try the people, as evident in 2 Peter 3:16. These individuals may twist or distort Scripture to their own destruction, as described in this passage. While they may lack learning and stability themselves (and perhaps discourage others from pursuing education), they possess the skill to distort Scriptures and create new interpretations, often to the amazement of others. The consequence of this is their own destruction. In many cases, it would have been better for them and others if they had never possessed such a gift. 3. The Lord may also empower the devil, in a sense, to carry out this design by providing him with instruments, giving him time, opportunities, and occasions to tempt, and permitting him to succeed in many ways. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Satan is said to exercise power and perform lying wonders. The devil can achieve much when it is said that he influenced Judas to betray his master, even though Judas was endowed with gifts and welcomed into Christ's company by Jesus Himself. All of this served the devil's and the Pharisees' agenda of betraying the Lord, ultimately leading to their own destruction.

4. In such cases, the Lord justly deprives individuals whom He intends to afflict with delusion of the means that could be helpful in discerning and resisting it. For instance: 1. He may remove all external restraints that typically prevent corrupt teachers from openly and openly spreading their errors, allowing them to multiply and openly pursue their agenda through His providence. This is akin to removing the protective hedge, as mentioned in Isaiah 5, and letting the winds blow, as in Revelation 7, which often facilitates the onset of this delusional judgment. 2. He may take away primary sources of guidance and enlightenment that help keep people on the right

path. Or if these sources persist, He may permit jealousy, division, and other factors to weaken their weight and authority in the eyes of certain individuals. For instance, Ahab's jealousy towards Micaiah provided an opportunity for the devil to make the lies of false prophets more appealing to him. 3. The Lord may withdraw the light that individuals have (including some common spiritual gifts) and, by doing so, make them more susceptible to temptation, even though they may believe themselves to be wiser and more understanding than before. This is akin to what the Apostle called the Galatians when they fell from the initial light they had, describing them as foolish and bewitched (Galatians 3:1, 2). 4. He may remove common convictions of the Spirit and the rebukes of a natural conscience, allowing individuals to continue in their delusion without any internal challenges. In fact, they may believe they are doing God's service in their deluded state (as seen in John 16:2). This is comparable to searing the conscience with a hot iron, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:2, causing it to follow seductive spirits. In these cases, we observe that the most baseless and groundless confidence often accompanies the gravest errors, as described in Isaiah 44:9 to 20. In Galatians 5:8, this confidence is referred to as a persuasion in terms of its confidence, which does not originate from God. Moreover, the Lord may justly deprive individuals not only of common gifts but even of ordinary reason and judgment. This deprivation may lead them, at least in the pursuit of their errors, to become absurd and irrational, incapable of appreciating the weight of a rational argument or being convinced of their own folly. They may disregard all notions of credibility, honesty, good manners, and other qualities valued in civil society. Sometimes, they may disregard their own interests, possessions, or even their own well-being, as seen in the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18 and

many others in Antichrist's domain. The Apostle refers to these individuals as unreasonable or absurd and beastly, as if they lacked reason. This is also a characteristic of delusion and part of God's judgment, as evident from Isaiah 44. The Lord, in response to the abuse of light, may withhold reason from individuals, much like what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. This allows the most absurd temptations access to them, even when other paths may appear reasonable, and it drives them forward eagerly, without resistance or objection.

5. When individuals, in God's justice, are thus deprived and are faced with the temptation that He has allowed to be unleashed upon them, the Lord, in His providence, may arrange various circumstances that can be exploited to further this judgment. For example: 1. He may arrange for a specific individual to encounter a particular temptation, live in a particular place, or associate with specific acquaintances. 2. He may time a temptation to occur when there are no external restraints, and He may, in His wisdom, orchestrate circumstances in a way that provides numerous opportunities for stumbling among those who profess the truth. This can happen due to scandals in practice, divisions, and other disorders, causing the way of truth to be discredited by many. 3. He may align such temptations with individuals who are ignorant and unskilled, making them more likely to hinder rather than assist in resolving doubts. These are just a few examples of the ways in which the wise and just Lord may order events in His providence, setting traps and stumbling blocks for proud, secure hypocrites who may stumble and fall due to their corruption. Sometimes, even the ordinances themselves, including the Word, Sacraments, and Discipline, may be stumbled upon more readily through individuals' corruptions than if they were not present. In this sense, when

the Lord rebukes unfaithful prophets and priests (Jeremiah 6:14) and the people's refusal to listen to His faithful prophets (verse 17), despite maintaining the form of religion (verse 20), He threatens to set stumbling blocks before them upon which they will fall (verse 21). All of these, and many more aspects, trusted to the Lord's just providence, often exert significant influence due to human corruption, making delusion more successful.

6. In addition to these factors, the Lord judicially hands over proud and corrupt individuals to the influence of such temptations. It's as if the devil is launching a strong gust of wind to win over specific persons, and the Lord, acting as a just judge, condemns them to be subjected to these temptations, as part of the execution of His justice. In this sense, it is said that He "gives them up." This defection, as a form of punishment, is judicially permitted and ordered by Him. He willingly and intentionally sentences certain individuals to be handed over to such temptations due to their past sins. On the other hand, those whom He does not so sentence are not similarly carried away by the same temptation.

Furthermore, the Lord, who possesses extraordinary wisdom and whose ways and judgments are beyond human comprehension, may have numerous other extraordinary and incomprehensible methods for carrying out this judgment. If all His judgments are already profound, His spiritual judgments are even more so. It is on the basis of this understanding, particularly when considering the Lord's just conclusion that all are under sin and unbelief, as well as the rejection of the Jews, that the Apostle exclaims, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out?" Therefore, we shall not

delve deeper into this matter. However, from what has been explained, we can deduce that the Lord plays a just role in overseeing such delusions. It is also evident that these delusions, when guided to act as instruments of His justice, cannot help but be potent and effective. This should cause individuals to tremble even more, as the opening of avenues for the influx of delusion is no less a manifestation of God's judgment and no less fearsome than the sending of the Sword or Pestilence, or the unleashing of a deluge upon the earth. If people were to view it in this light and be deeply affected by it, it might have the potential to be significantly curtailed.

Chapter V:

Identifying Error as a Judicial Stroke

Here, it may be asked, 1. How can we recognize error as a judgment or judicial act? And, 2. For what reason does the Lord typically send such a judgment?

We cannot delve into every possible question, but regarding the first, we can say the following: 1. There is no error or delusion that cannot be regarded as punitive and judicial, either concerning the individuals who fall into it and propagate it or concerning others who might become infected by it (even if it serves as a trial for some). This is because the blindness of the mind was a consequence of the first sin and follows not only as a sin but as a punishment for all the descendants of Adam's house. Therefore, in a sense, all subsequent sins can be seen as punishments for the first sin, particularly when it

comes to error. 2. In addition to this general consideration, error is often the punishment for specific sins, and in some cases, it is more judicial and penal than in others. This can be discerned through certain characteristics: 1. When the error is inherently absurd and unreasonable, as were the delusions of the Nicolaitans. In such cases, God's judgment is evident because these errors cannot reasonably be seen as a natural consequence or stemming from common human frailty. 2. When those propagating the error are, in terms of their conduct, abilities, position, or profession, somehow prominent, as explained earlier, because it appears that the temptation has been armed by the Lord for a purpose. 3. When the error occurs at a specific time and under certain circumstances, as described. These things do not happen by chance but are directed by providence. 4. When the error erupts forcefully and perhaps leads astray individuals who were not suspected to be susceptible to such temptation. This is similar to when, metaphorically speaking, the Dragon with his cunning deceives some who thought themselves immune to such temptations. 5. The gifts and abilities of those promoting the error can also be indicative of its judicial nature. Just as the Lord equips His ministers with gifts and diligence for the work of spreading the Gospel, when He has a judgment to enact and the devil seeks to promote delusion, the instruments are similarly prepared. These instruments display zeal, quickness, nimbleness in raising doubts, distorting Scripture, and more. They exhibit patience in enduring, boldness and confidence in attempting, and some degree of success, as seen in the case of the false prophets against Micaiah (1 Kings 22) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29). When corrupt instruments are prepared through such means, it is likely that the Lord has a purpose for them that they themselves do not perceive. 6. It is judicial-like when the error arises following a period when people possessed the truth but were unfruitful under it. This is especially true if there has been a tendency among the people to

eagerly seek out novelties and engage in unnecessary and contentious debates about lesser truths. When a greater delusion comes, it may appear judicial in nature, serving as a consequence of their prior instability. This can be likened to giving people over to heap up teachers who cater to their itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3). This is also a way of giving people teachers according to their own desires, resulting in a situation where people resemble their priests, which is often a divine threat. In the past, when the people began to err in the wilderness regarding the Second Commandment, they were given over to worship the host of heaven and to err concerning the First Commandment, as mentioned in Acts 7:41. 7. It becomes evident that the error is judicial when it causes harm, either through corrupting the truth, sowing discord, or exacerbating divisions, which are consequences of the first four trumpets that bring spiritual plagues in Revelation 8. These and similar characteristics can sufficiently demonstrate that the Lord is displaying His anger through error.

To the second question, we can provide the following answers: 1. We assert that such a plague is not the result of common minor transgressions or sins of human weakness. 2. It does not typically stem from ingratitude for and misuse of common blessings. 3. It is not usually a punishment for gross sins of the flesh, but rather a consequence of them. 1. It follows the abuse of spiritual blessings, such as neglecting the light of Gospel truth, disregarding convictions, suppressing self-reproach, breaking promises made for further Reformation, and similar behaviours. This can be inferred from 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10. 2. It follows spiritual sins like spiritual pride, complacency, hypocrisy, and formality, where the outward form is maintained without the inner substance. It involves having truth without genuine love for it, as mentioned earlier and elsewhere. 3. Some specific attitudes and behaviours can particularly invite this

plague. These include an itching desire for novelty that begins to despise the simplicity of truth. A hasty and selective attitude that cannot tolerate sound doctrine unless it is presented in a certain way, especially when it rebukes their own faults. These traits are referred to in 2 Timothy 4:3. 3. A sense of proud self-conceit, described by the Apostle in 2 Timothy 3:4, where individuals become self-centered, boastful, and so on. Such people are readily susceptible to these temptations. 4. Little regard for faithful ministers who preach the truth can invite this plague, leading to the fulfilment of the threat in Ezekiel 20, where people receive pastors according to their own desires but with judgments that are not good. This is also warned against by the Lord in John 5:43, where He states, "I have come in my Father's Name, and ye have not received me; if another shall come in his own name, him will ye receive." 5. It may result from frivolity and instability, where people recklessly seek out temptations beyond their capacity to withstand. The Lord may justly afflict them with their own sins, such as reading corrupt books, listening to corrupt preachers, associating with corrupt individuals, and similar actions that the Lord has commanded to avoid. These actions not only prove to be snares in God's righteous judgment but also provide deserving reasons for being given up to the delusion they expose themselves to by going without God's guidance, even if they initially had no positive inclination towards that path, and perhaps the opposite. For instance, if someone, against God's command, ventures close to the door of an adulterous woman's house, they may be given up to fall into her snare and enter, even if that was not their original intention, as implied in Proverbs 5:8 and 6:26-28. In this context, it is stated in Proverbs 22:14 that those abhorred by the Lord will fall into the pit. 6. A contentious and questioning disposition can often lead to this unfortunate outcome. When not all truths are embraced, and people begin to challenge even minor truths, it can escalate into a more significant delusion. This is because every truth is valuable,

and when individuals become insensitive to minor truths (if any can be called such), it is just for God to deprive them of all truths, just as minor sins in practice, when tolerated, can lead to more severe transgressions. In this way, the visible Church, during the early Christian era, veered away from the truth and became preoccupied with ceremonies and unnecessary debates. This eventually brought about the delusion of Antichrist. There are also instances of ignorance concerning fundamental truths due to negligence, a lack of love for and delight in the Word and Ordinances, a failure to grieve over the falls and failings of others when they succumb to snares, and numerous other behaviours that could be mentioned, but we will not dwell on them further.

Now, let's proceed to the second topic we set out to discuss: how corrupt teachers advance their agenda and the means Satan employs through them to lead astray vulnerable souls, causing them to question the truths of God and embrace the most absurd delusions. Although we cannot fathom all of Satan's cunning and schemes, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 4:14, we should not remain ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). We will draw insights from Scripture to help us defend against these tactics. To understand his methods better, we can consider: 1. The instruments he chooses. 2. The approach he takes in tempting through them. 3. The means he employs and the common themes from which he derives his arguments. 4. How these tactics are executed.

CHAPTER VI

The Methods and Means Satan Uses to Spread Error Among People

1. Satan does not directly carry out this scheme himself, nor does he employ just any instrument for it. Instead, he has special agents designated for this purpose, as the Apostle mentions in 2 Corinthians 11:15. While he has many subjects, he also has distinct ministers appointed for this specific task, much like our blessed Lord Jesus has ministers specially ordained for His Kingdom. Regarding this, we can observe:
 1. He selects some individuals more prominently involved in advancing this agenda, who, by travelling extensively and diligently, can further his plan. These individuals can be likened to false apostles, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:13, and those referred to in the book of Revelation 2 and 3. We can also find examples in the Acts of individuals who travelled from one place to another, such as from Jerusalem to Antioch in Acts 15, with the purpose of spreading their erroneous teachings, similar to how the Apostles travelled to preach the truth.
 2. He has specific instruments preaching in particular regions, essentially acting as his ministers within designated boundaries, as mentioned in the cited passage.
 3. In addition to these, he employs subtle agents who may not openly reveal themselves but instead infiltrate households. It is common for him to use women for such purposes, as seen with Jezebel the prophetess in the Church of Thyatira in Revelation 2, and similarly in early heresies like the Montanists. This is because such individuals are often passionate about their causes and have the capacity to deceive and lead astray, which others may find challenging. It also appears that Satan sometimes endows them with the ability to speak in a manner that amazes others.
 4. Regardless of whom he employs, these individuals are somehow equipped for the specific tasks they are assigned, although the methods they use

to carry out their missions may vary, as observed through experience.

2. In the approach he takes, we can discern the following progression: 1. He employs every means to discredit and vilify the Ministers of truth, either by denouncing the institution of ministry altogether or by equating all individuals as ministers, which is essentially the same as the former. This tactic can be seen in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, as described in Numbers 16, which is later applied to corrupt teachers in Jude 11. Alternatively, if this strategy fails, Satan attempts to tarnish the reputation of those in ministry positions. We can observe this happening even to the Apostle Paul, as false teachers in Corinth and Galatia spread slander against him. The rationale behind this strategy is twofold: 1. Ministers are appointed and endowed with gifts by Jesus Christ to safeguard the Church from being swayed by corrupt doctrines through the cunning of deceitful individuals, as mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-14. To achieve his goals more easily, Satan seeks to cast doubt on the watchmen and render them ineffective. 2. Teachers of the truth and corrupt teachers cannot both gain the affection of the people simultaneously, and a teacher is unlikely to hold sway without the affection of their audience. Therefore, Satan employs every possible means to discredit the true ministers, as by excluding them, he can create an opening for his own agents. This situation can be likened to two suitors vying for the same bride's affection; they cannot both have it. To illustrate this point, consider the Apostle's words in Galatians 4:17: "They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them." Given the extent of access that the devil gains for destruction once ministers are held in contempt, it is no wonder that he starts by removing this obstacle from his

path. Since he repeatedly attempted this against the great Apostle Paul, it should not be surprising that he seeks to defame others as well.

If we inquire about how Satan carries out this scheme, we can observe several specific methods:

1. While he doesn't openly challenge the concept of ministry in general, he stirs up doubts about the legitimacy of certain individuals and whether they are duly ordained ministers. This was evident when Paul's apostleship was questioned because he had not physically been with the Lord. Consequently, in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians, Paul had to extensively defend his calling and apostleship, even providing evidence like a commission and its seal, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3. The reason for this questioning is evident in 2 Corinthians 13:3: "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me."
2. Satan seeks to discredit the gifts of ministers by portraying their messages as ordinary, their expressions as plain, and their conduct as base and contemptible. This can be seen in the case of the great Apostle Paul himself in 2 Corinthians 10:1 and 11:6, where he was called "rude in speech."
3. Such discrediting often involves comparing them unfavorably to the eloquent and spiritually captivating speeches of corrupt teachers, which some consider as profound mysteries and refer to as "depths," as mentioned in Revelation 2:24. Although the Lord calls them "depths of Satan," those who propagate them may not see them as such. Sometimes, incomprehensible nonsense is admired while plain truths and duties are despised.

4. Corrupt teachers often boast of their revelations and spiritual achievements as if they surpass those of the Ministers of Christ. This leads to comparisons, as seen in 2 Corinthians 11:12, where Paul had to measure his own revelations and unique experiences against theirs.

5. They attempt to paint Ministers of Christ as greedy, self-seeking, and worldly due to receiving wages for preaching the gospel, portraying them as exploiting the people. This accusation was frequently directed at the Apostle Paul and addressed by him in these same Epistles to the Corinthians.

6. When evidence is lacking, they raise suspicions about the ministers' cunning and covert dealings, insinuating that they are always seeking personal gain. This was answered by the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 12:16-17.

7. Regardless of a minister's demeanor, they scrutinize and criticize it. If a minister is meek and approachable in interactions, they label them as carnal and friends of sinners, similar to accusations against our blessed Lord. If a minister is strict in addressing faults or avoids certain company, they are branded as intolerant and devilishly proud, much like John was accused. If a minister accepts remuneration or gifts, they are deemed greedy and covetous, but if they refuse, it is construed as a lack of love and respect, similar to what was said about Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:10-11.

8. Ministers are often accused of pride, self-exaltation, and disdain for the people. Corrupt teachers frequently claim to defend the people's liberty and privileges against what they perceive as tyrannical encroachments by ministers. This accusation was employed by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against Aaron and continued in the early church, as mentioned in Jude 11.

9. They work to make the people suspicious of the minister's love for them, portraying any rebuke or correction as bitterness or railing. The Apostle addressed this issue in Galatians 4:16: "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"

10. Ministers are commonly charged with being fickle and changeable, which is used to diminish their credibility. It is alleged that they change their positions from one year to the next, even though such changes may be driven by considerations of edification. This accusation was levelled at Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:17 to undermine the weight of his words. Similarly, this tactic may be employed against other ministers. To further this agenda, any personal faults of a minister are not overlooked but exaggerated. Even if these faults occurred in their youth before their conversion or entry into the ministry, they are not forgotten if they can be used to tarnish the sacred calling. To prevent this, ministers are required to have a good reputation, even among those outside the church. It is likely that false apostles did not hesitate to remind Paul of his past life and persecution.

11. Differences in opinions and divisions among ministers are frequently exploited for this purpose, even when they are merely superficial. For instance, false teachers accused Paul of preaching a different doctrine from the Jerusalem apostles, leading Paul to explain the agreement between their teachings, as seen in the Epistle to the Galatians. Josephus noted that Ahab's false prophets opposed Elijah's prophecy that dogs would lick Ahab's blood at Jezreel by contrasting it with Micaiah's prophecy that Ahab would die at Ramoth-gilead. Similarly, they tried to undermine Zedekiah's resolve by contrasting Ezekiel's prophecy that he wouldn't see Babylon with Jeremiah's prophecy that he would be carried there. Although there was no real difference, this illustrates how they eagerly exacerbated

any apparent disagreements among God's servants, which should caution ministers to avoid such situations. Secondly, while they may not initially deny fundamental truths outright, they gradually lead many to: 1. Reject certain less fundamental truths concerning government, communion in the ordinances, and similar matters.

12. Encourage separation in practice from the fellowship of others under the guise of greater purity and spirituality. This is hinted at in Jude 19, which mentions those who "separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit," though they may have pretended otherwise. In the early heresies, such as those of the Novatians and Donatists, this separation initially aimed to avoid the impurity of mixed communion.

13. Criticise the language used by orthodox believers and promote a new form of expression. Hence, the apostle commended holding fast to the form of sound words in 2 Timothy 1:13. These corrupt teachers were said to use grandiose but empty language, Jude 16, which carried more weight than the previously used expressions. For example, the Arians refused to accept the term "consubstantial" (in Greek, "ὁμοούσιος") and necessitated a council to resolve the issue. Subsequently, they questioned the truth itself, arguing that it was too confident to make determinations. They raised doubts, saying, "It's not clear; much can be said against it," and similar objections. Under the pretext of doubt, they aimed to instill uncertainties in others, making them more receptive to their own resolutions.

14. Present absurd consequences that supposedly follow from these truths. This tactic was used against doctrines like Providence, Election and Reprobation, and others. For instance, the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty and justification by free grace was accused of suggesting that men might do evil to achieve good results,

render the Law void, or encourage sin because grace abounds, as seen in the second, third, and sixth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans.

15. Diminish people's hatred and zeal against errors and absurd opinions to either gain some level of toleration for them or, at the very least, prevent harsh judgments. Achieving toleration, even if not direct approval of error, is a significant victory. This practice was condemned in the Church of Thyatira, where the officers allowed Jezebel to teach and Christ's servants listened to her. Similar tendencies were observed in Corinth, prompting the apostle to advise against growing cold towards error, even if one is not tainted by it, as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:33. This is the basis on which gross heretics, both old and recent, such as Socinians, Arminians, members of the Family of Love, and others, have advocated for liberty in propagating doubtful aspects of core Gospel truths and tolerance in matters of doctrine, among other principles that serve their purposes.

16. Foster affection and esteem for those who hold erroneous beliefs, making it easier for them to interact and share their views. This is achieved through various means, such as praising their quickness and nimbleness, portraying them as grave, austere, and holy, or using flattery, apparent sympathy, and affection. The lying prophet was called "the tail" for using such tactics. In some cases, they achieve this by reproaching honest and faithful ministers, possibly identifying some genuine shortcomings among them. This is often pleasing to the carnal tendencies of the general populace, as seen in the previously mentioned instances. Lastly, once this affection and esteem are established, it becomes easier to introduce the most extreme doctrines and delusions that would have been rejected initially. This gradual progression led to the height of Antichrist's

delusion. Using similar steps, some who initially separated from the Novatians and Donatists ended up embracing extreme delusions, such as the Circumcellians and Anthropomorphists.

3. The means and arguments employed to advance this delusion should be noted, which include the following or similar tactics.
4. The conduct and behaviour of those who support the delusion are made to appear plausible, fair, and commendable, so that there is no suspicion of the devil's influence in their work. They are said to be transformed into ministers of Christ, as seen with the Pharisees who engaged in long prayers and austere living to gain respect for their traditions. The devil's design would be thwarted if he did not appear as an angel of light. There is often a deceptive show of zeal, patience, and suffering in those promoting the delusion, as evident in 2 Corinthians 11:23. In practice, it is often observed that even the most extreme heretics in doctrine display a great pretence of holiness before others, at least for a considerable time.
5. It is beneficial for this purpose to have individuals with church authority who bear the title of officers involved, so that they do not come across as ministers of Satan but rather as ministers of Christ, as stated in 2 Corinthians 11:23. If they cannot produce an ordinary call, they readily disavow such claims while asserting a divine calling to preach Christ and His Gospel. This can be seen in the actions of false teachers of old who referred to themselves as apostles and prophetesses, suggesting that they possessed an extraordinary calling from God to pave the way for their delusions.
6. They pursue their objectives under the guise of promoting higher levels of holiness and spirituality, living in a more

humble manner and achieving greater spiritual heights than others. Some outwardly reject all forms of pride and showing respect to others, but as the Apostle says in Colossians 2:18, it is a form of voluntary humility that involves meddling in things they have not seen, all the while undermining common and straightforward truths.

7. Another tactic is to please the ears and desires of individuals with grandiose words, new concepts, and lengthy discourses of nonsense delivered with great confidence. As the Apostle says in 1 Timothy 1:7, they do not know what they are talking about or affirming. However, such discourses are often perceived as sublime mysteries by the ignorant and those who reject simple truths.
8. They use the pretext of good intentions and benefits for those they speak to. As stated in Romans 16:18, "by good words and fair speeches they deceive the simple." They pretend to wish well for their souls and express pity for their blindness and peril, which allows them to enter their homes and win their affections, as mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:6, leading simple individuals into captivity. This pretext was used by the serpent to deceive Eve initially, promising an advantage if she listened to him, and this approach continues to be employed by corrupt teachers, as seen in 2 Corinthians 11:3.
9. At times, they feign greater strictness, especially concerning external matters. In the past, some added the observance of Moses' Law to the Gospel, presenting it as a more perfect and rigorous path. This has led to the introduction of numerous traditions in the Church.

10. They claim to offer more Christian liberty and freedom from the bondage of various ordinances. They argue that believers should not be constrained to attend sermons, observe Sabbaths, pray, praise, and similar practices, which they consider mere forms and burdens for saints, incompatible with the freedom and spirituality that mature believers should possess. In doing so, both the deceivers and those deceived are promised liberty, but they end up becoming servants to corruption.
11. There is a strong emphasis on claiming to know the mind of Christ and confidently citing the writings of His apostles in a seemingly convincing manner. For instance, 2 Thessalonians 2:2 mentions the Spirit, Word, and Letter as proceeding from Paul, even though Paul himself disavows interpretations that were imposed on him.
12. They often appeal to the authority of men and pit these authorities against those who oppose their errors. The Pharisees cited Moses, and the Nicolaitans referred to Nicolas. It is likely that the false apostles from Jerusalem opposed the authority of other apostles to that of Paul, suggesting that they preached the same message in Jerusalem. Frequently, the weaknesses of prominent individuals are exploited and used as arguments against the truth.
10. Many are incited to raise questions and contentious issues (as the Pharisees often did by sending their agents to Christ) in order to gain some advantage, ensnaring those who stand for the truth.
11. At times, he utilises human reason and discredits anything that appears contrary to it. This was the basis for the denial of the resurrection by the Sadducees and some Corinthians, as

mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. Likewise, the Socinians and others continue to challenge even the most fundamental truths of the Gospel on these grounds. Conversely, some disavow all use of reason, learning, or prudence, leading to them being described as unreasonable in 2 Thessalonians 3, and as brute beasts in 2 Peter 2 and Jude 10.

12. They make every effort to win the favour of civil authorities and to portray ministers, especially those who zealously oppose them, as detestable and suspicious to these authorities. Achieving this has a dual advantage for their cause, as it strengthens it while weakening the truth. We can observe this strategy in the actions of false prophets of old (1 Kings 22, Jeremiah 26, Amos 7), the attempts of the scribes and Pharisees to incite the Romans against Christ and His apostles, and the efforts of Arians and other heretics. Antichrist's emissaries have consistently sought to incite civil authorities against faithful ministers, depicting them as highly unpopular figures. They employ various means to accomplish this:
13. They claim to be more submissive to the magistrates and accuse faithful ministers of disrespecting their authority, a strategy they know pleases magistrates. Thus, the faithfulness of honest ministers is falsely characterised as disobedience and hatred, while the flattery of those opposing them is portrayed as respect and obedience.
14. They accuse faithful ministers of being factious troublemakers who sow sedition, disrupt the peace, and continually agitate the people, impeding their plans and undermining the authority of magistrates. This accusation can be seen in Acts 24:5.

15. They spread baseless slanders against them, accusing them of gross wrongdoing. For instance, Athanasius and others were charged by the Arians with murder and adultery, with some purported evidence presented. Even Constantine was told that Athanasius had interfered in civil matters, which undermined his authority, by prohibiting the export of grain from Egypt.
16. They appeal to magistrates from church judicatories and assert the absolute authority of magistrates in ecclesiastical matters. Heretics have often used this pretext to shield themselves until magistrates turned against them, at which point they cast magistrates aside as well, as seen in the practices of the Socinians and Arminians.
17. They portray faithful ministers as intolerable due to their straightforward warnings, suggesting that such ministers should not be endured as they openly challenge authority, weakening the credibility of those who claim to respect it. This tactic is evident in the representation of Amos by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, in Amos 7:10, and in the frequent portrayal of Jeremiah by false prophets in his time.
18. They depict faithful ministers as unwarrantedly asserting a form of infallibility and thereby diminishing others. They do so audaciously, attempting to discredit faithful ministers as insignificant individuals unworthy of trust, as seen in the cited cases (1 Kings 22 and Jeremiah 28). Often, their insinuations and flatteries effectively advance their designs. Augustine accused the Donatists of using the phrase "quoniam apud nos solum justitia habet locum" (because among us alone does justice prevail) in their dealings with Julian, even when they knew he had apostatized (Epist. 48).

The last aspect of this is the manner in which this scheme is executed by such corrupt teachers, which may not be uniform for all but can be discerned through various characteristics.

1. It is carried out covertly and subtly; they enter with insinuations, appearing quite different from their true nature.
2. They employ hypocrisy; as mentioned in 1 Timothy 4, they speak falsehoods while pretending to be religious and friends of both religion and truth.
3. Sometimes it is done with great intensity, as if forcefully knocking at the hearts of their audience. This is achieved through the use of grandiose words, absolute threats, confident assertions, and fervent delivery, creating a sense of strength and power. It is likened to a flood in Revelation 12 and referred to as strong delusion in 2 Thessalonians 2.
4. They pursue this with unwavering diligence, leaving no stone unturned.
5. They adopt a guise of apparent simplicity, zeal, and sincerity, often making professions in that regard, as evidenced in the earlier examples and in Galatians 4:17.
6. They do so with great boldness, as seen in their willingness to endure suffering or hazard for their beliefs, even to the point of facing physical harm or death. They may maintain their stance during illness and on their deathbeds, as exemplified by Jezebel and her followers in Revelation 2:21-22.
7. They display confidence in their own judgments and belittle others.

8. They assert things with certainty, not hesitating to speak ill of private individuals, officers, and ordinances, as seen in 2 Peter 2:10.

By considering these characteristics, we can begin to understand how delusion gains strength and prevalence in relation to those who propagate this corrupt doctrine.

Now, let's turn our attention to a third aspect: the role of the people in promoting this delusion. We can identify three factors contributing to this:

1. The people's past sinful behaviour, which can strengthen delusion when it serves as a just consequence for their previous transgressions. However, we have already discussed these sins.
2. The people's current disposition, or rather, their disposition at the time, can significantly influence their susceptibility to temptation. Factors contributing to this include:
 - Light-mindedness and instability in adhering to the truth, referred to as "unstable souls" in 2 Peter 2:14.
 - A tendency to seek novelty and dislike simple doctrine, as mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:3.
 - An excessive readiness to believe spirits without proper discernment, as exemplified in the Galatian church's quick acceptance of another gospel (Galatians 1:6, 3:1).
 - A sense of carnal security that neglects conscience, as well as prideful and self-willed individuals, as noted in 2 Peter 2:10. This state makes them more susceptible to temptation.
3. People often contribute to their own downfall by:

- Engaging in unnecessary and familiar conversations with such individuals.
- Attending their sermons or teachings.
- Purchasing or reading their books.
- Engaging in debates, entertaining their doubts and arguments, advocating for their views, and avoiding means that could help them return to the truth. This is often accompanied by prejudice against those attempting to lead them back.

These actions often fulfil the prophecy that "the prophets teach lies, and my people love to have it so." When all these factors are combined, it should come as no surprise that great delusion can prevail. We have elaborated on these points not only to confirm the truth but also to provide a concise overview of the strategies employed by the devil through cunning deceivers.

Chapter VII:

Duties in the Face of Errors and Delusions

Now, we must consider what duty entails when delusion, to a greater or lesser extent, prevails or is highly likely to prevail. It is undeniable that a response is required and necessary when the danger is so significant. Moreover, it's evident that an extraordinary response is needed because the problem is more than ordinary. Therefore, the remedy must be proportionate and timely. As stated in Galatians 5:9, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," and experience shows that

such problems corrode and corrupt like gangrene (2 Timothy 2:17). The challenge lies in determining the appropriate course of action, which calls for not only piety, zeal, and conscience but also prudence and intelligence.

The answer to this question applies to three categories of individuals: 1. Church officers, especially ministers. 2. Magistrates. 3. Private individuals. However, before we provide a definitive response, we will: 1. Identify what is not the required remedy. 2. Outline what is called for but insufficient. 3. Explain what appears to be the sufficient response.

Starting with the first point, two extremes must be avoided, which we will present in two assertions.

Assertion 1: An absolute and unrestricted tolerance of all errors and their advocates is not the appropriate remedy required in such a situation regarding these evils. This should be evident, even if we only consider what is contained in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. 1. In the commendation of the angel of Ephesus (Revelation 2:2), it is noted that he could not tolerate or endure those who were evil, namely, the false apostles. Therefore, endurance cannot be the duty, as Christ commends the opposite. 2. Pergamos is reprovved (Revelation 2:14) because they allowed individuals among them to hold the doctrine of Balaam. 3. The letter to Thyatira (Revelation 2:20) explicitly states: "I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel to teach and seduce My servants." This is abundantly clear. It is noteworthy that this lack of tolerance is commended in Ephesus, where things in their particular condition are not entirely right, while the other churches are rebuked for neglecting this aspect, even when their specific conditions are correct. This demonstrates that the Lord

favours zeal against such scandals and abhors tolerance of them. This point is reinforced by what was previously stated in the doctrine section and the practices documented in the scriptures, both through examples and commands related to this issue. Further clarification will be provided in the positive part of this guidance.

Despite any human prudence and reluctance to confront individuals in such a condition in any other way than absolute tolerance, at least concerning these conditions as such, it is evident that this is not God's ordained course of action or the remedy appointed by Him. Therefore, there is no promise of His blessing upon it, although sometimes the Lord, who is absolutely sovereign, may, without the use of any means, suppress and limit a flood of error, even when people are guilty of tolerance. However, the outcome should not be attributed to sinful tolerance but to God's gracious condescension.

Assertion 2: On the other hand, we maintain that an indiscriminate, inflexible, uniform pursuit of everything deemed an error, or of every individual tainted to some extent, is not the appropriate remedy or duty required in such a situation. Just as not all errors or individuals are the same, the same approach should not be consistently applied because what may be beneficial in one instance could be detrimental in another. Hence, prudent distinctions must be made regarding practical scandals and individuals tainted by different scandals or temperaments. Men must act in a manner most likely to achieve the ultimate goal, which should always be edification. Therefore, no absolute rule can be universally applied to cover all cases and individuals, as previously mentioned. Even the Apostles themselves differentiated between individuals and scandals, depending on the circumstances. Sometimes they exercised excommunication, as seen in the cases of Hymenaeus and Philetus; at other times, they provided doctrinal instruction, as Paul did with the church members

in Corinth and Galatia. Some were issued threats, but not excommunication, as in the case of false teachers in these churches. In some situations, a single Apostle did not make the final decision doctrinally, but a synod was convened judicially and authoritatively to address the matter, as in Acts 15.

The reasons behind these distinctions are as follows:

1. The errors of Hymenaeus and Philetus were inherently severe, as they undermined the faith and were obstinately and blasphemously upheld.
 2. Paul provided instruction and reasoning with the people of Corinth rather than resorting to the strictest censure. This was because they were not the seducers but had been led astray by others. They could not be considered obstinate but might have sinned out of weakness. Therefore, gentler and milder means were employed to bring them back.
 3. The Corinthians constituted a large congregation, so excommunication or expulsion could not be expected to achieve its intended purpose.
 4. They were currently in a state of turmoil, questioning the authority of the Apostles. Thus, Paul sought their re-acknowledgement to ensure that both his words and disciplinary measures would carry weight. Had he imposed severe penalties during their unrest, they may have further distanced themselves from submission. These examples illustrate the nature of the scandal or error and the appropriate responses.
3. He threatens the corrupt teachers with cutting them off because they were leaders and seducers, deserving more severe treatment

than those who were possibly intoxicated with the same errors. However, despite the threat, he refrains from immediate action, not out of respect for the corrupt teachers or tolerance for their errors, but out of consideration for the poor seduced people. Paul withheld judgment, even when the means were ready to punish all disobedience. He did so because these people, having a prejudice against him and being under the influence of these teachers, might have been more inclined to cleave to them and abandon Paul in their distressed state. This would have been more detrimental to them. Therefore, he sought to first have their obedience demonstrated. In doing so, he not only spared the people but also these corrupt teachers for a time, all for the purpose of edifying the people, as can be inferred from 2 Corinthians 10:6 and 2 Corinthians 12:19.

Finally, I mentioned that sometimes Synods or Councils are convened, as seen in Acts 15. This is not the case in other situations for several reasons. Firstly, in this particular case, the error was new and likely garnered respect from many within the Church. Therefore, a Council of Officers was convened to make a decision, which is not necessary once that decision has been made. Ministers are responsible for doctrinally and disciplinarily upholding the decision, as we see Paul doing in his letters to the Romans and Galatians regarding the conclusion of the previous Synod. Secondly, this Synod was not convened due to a lack of understanding (as any of the Apostles, in their capacity, were infallibly inspired to make decisions and had previously addressed the issue in their teachings). Rather, it was convened to lend greater weight to the decision and serve as a precedent for future cases. Thirdly, the spreading error affected not just one location but many Churches, and numerous Believers were likely at risk of being affected by it. Therefore, a substantial remedy was required. Lastly, there was a need for both doctrinal guidance and practical directions on how to conduct oneself during such

times, so as to avoid falling into the trap of error on one hand and causing offense on the other, as evident from the decrees of that Synod. Therefore, in cases of great and common concern like this, individuals should not only fulfil their duties within their roles but also collaborate, whether judicially or extrajudicially, as circumstances dictate, to deliberate and consult on matters of such significant importance. Since the Church is one entity, a single misstep may endanger the whole, and negligence in one part or position may permit enemies to infiltrate and wreak havoc. Hence, in certain instances, mutual cooperation is necessary, although a formal meeting is not required at all times. No one should suspend their immediate duty if such a meeting cannot be arranged. This explanation highlights the need to differentiate between errors, individuals, and situations.

Chapter VIII

Forbearance of Certain Errors

If the question arises about how to make this distinction or how to determine when it is permissible to exercise some forbearance without guilt and when it is not, we must acknowledge that it is indeed a challenging task. We will not attempt to provide an exhaustive or definitive answer for specific cases. However, we believe that considering these general distinctions will be helpful, and their application is necessary in this matter.

We should differentiate between certain errors and scandals based on their severity and clarity. Some errors, as Peter labels them in 2 Peter 2:1-2, are pernicious and damnable. These errors directly oppose the essential truths of the Word of God, involve gross practices, and endanger the souls of those who hold them. They are not mere weaknesses but reflect underlying principles. Many errors and practices fall into this category. On the other hand, there are errors that oppose the truth but are not inherently destructive to the foundational beliefs of faith. These errors may appeal to many true Saints, and individuals who hold them can still approach God and enter Heaven, even if they maintain these beliefs until their passing. Numerous issues debated among orthodox Divines fall into this second category. While everything has elements of truth or falsehood, not all errors are equally critical or significant. Examples of the first kind of error include attempts by false apostles to introduce the practice of the ceremonial Law alongside Christ for justification and the blending of moral and ceremonial works, as observed in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians. As for the second category, consider debates over dietary restrictions and similar matters, as mentioned in Romans 14 and the Corinthians' Epistles. There should be no tolerance for errors of the first kind, and the Lord condemns them. In the Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians, Paul vehemently opposes and reproves these errors, even when his message is poorly received, and people are inclined to view him as an enemy for speaking the truth, as seen in Galatians 4. He does not withhold his criticism because even a small amount of such errors can infect the entire community and undermine the effectiveness of his ministry among them. Concerning errors of the second kind, moderation is necessary, and Ministers are not always obligated to provide doctrinal or judicial rebukes or censure. It is not always necessary for Ministers to insist on convincing everyone who holds beliefs contrary to the truth, especially when the matter is non-

fundamental or does not directly and clearly impact matters of faith or corrupt morals. Censuring such matters is even less necessary. The Epistles do not primarily address these issues. As we can see in Romans 14 and the Corinthians' Epistles, during debates about dietary restrictions and the consumption of food sacrificed to idols, Paul emphasises forbearance rather than delving deeply into these issues. He does not rigidly bind individuals to one side or the other, as long as their actions do not disrupt unity and charity. Therefore, while there are matters for which Paul offers no tolerance and provides authoritative decisions, there are other issues among the Saints in these Epistles that he seeks to reconcile and encourages mutual forbearance instead of delivering definitive judgments. You can find examples of this approach in Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8, Philippians 2, and other passages.

There are certain truths and practices that are evident and can be solidly demonstrated by the light of the Word to an impartial and unbiased searcher. There are also contrary errors and scandals that are immediately apparent, and perhaps even to a natural conscience, as being such. So, even if individuals attempt to twist things and argue as Hymenaeus and Philetus did in 2 Tim. 2:17, claiming that there is no future resurrection because the Scripture speaks of a spiritual resurrection that has already occurred in believers, the truth can still be demonstrated by sound Scriptural arguments to those of ordinary understanding. Some things may be truths, and while it is possible for some individuals to deduce them from Scripture through various consequences, they may not be equally clear to many. This is why even learned and godly individuals may differ in their understanding of certain truths. The Lord allows these differences to exist to restrain human pride and emphasise the importance of humility and sobriety. This can apply even to less significant matters. The Apostle refers to these as "doubtful disputations" in Romans 14:1

because they are issues in which there is not enough clarity to settle the minds of ordinary people or to definitively refute the contrary claims of adversaries. Examples of such matters include genealogies and other topics mentioned by Paul in 1 Tim. 1:4, which he describes as "endless" because there is no firm foundation to build upon, and one question generates another. As a result, the principles needed to clarify these matters are themselves subjects of dispute. Even those who are prominent in their understanding only know in part, so expecting universal agreement in such matters is challenging. In this regard, we assert that greater decisiveness is required in the first category of truths than in the second. While some forbearance is necessary in the second category, following the practice of the Apostles in Scripture, it is also a matter of necessity. However, we must be cautious not to show partiality towards truths, whether evident or disputable, as individuals often tend to do. It is better to evaluate these truths based on the common consensus of the godly and learned throughout history, even if differences have existed, as long as there has been moderation in these disagreements. This evaluation should not rely solely on a particular age or time when a certain point might have been more intensely debated than at other times. Instead, it should be a broader assessment, especially when the arguments on either side lack the kind of clarity present in the arguments for other truths that are fully articulated in Scripture and have been widely agreed upon by godly and learned individuals throughout the ages.

We should also distinguish between errors and their consequences or the practices that result from them. While some errors may be tolerated in themselves, their consequences should not be tolerated. Moreover, the necessity to address these consequences may vary from one church or time to another, as the results of schism, faction, division, etc., can sometimes follow even from minor errors. Since

these consequences are always detrimental to edification, they should never be absolutely tolerated, even if they arise from the slightest basis. For instance, saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or regarding one preacher as better than another may seem inconsequential. Yet when these divisions begin to tear the church apart and create factions in Corinth, they should not be tolerated but should be rebuked. In the previous example of dietary differences, the Apostle always condemns the offence and schism that arises from it, even though he does not definitively prescribe particular practices or issue censures for the beliefs themselves. Similarly, one might believe that observing the first day of the week is not mandated by divine law, and this belief might be tolerated. However, if one were to actively promote changing this practice or refuse to observe it, causing offence to others, such behaviour would be intolerable. The same applies to differences and errors regarding church government, such as the Episcopal and Congregational models. In themselves, these differences may be tolerated in individuals where they are not propagated to the point of causing others to stumble or drawing them away. But if these differences are actively pressed in practice, leading to division within a church and elevating them above the true form of church government established by the Word, then they should not be tolerated. In such cases, the truth needs to be defended, and obstacles to edification, resulting from the division or distraction of the church, should be removed. The need to address these issues may be greater at one time than at another, as certain offences can trigger schism and disrupt order and unity in one church or during one period more than in another. This is why we see, in Acts 15, certain measures introduced in the decree to prevent schism and scandal, while the doctrine of the abolition of the ceremonial Law was less clear. Some things were tolerated among the Gentiles but not among the Jews for a time, such as circumcision and all the ceremonial practices of the Law, which the Jews observed

for a period. Experience and reason confirm this approach, as reflected in Paul's statement, "To the Jews I became as a Jew, and I became all things to all men, etc." This does not imply duplicity or compromise on essential matters, but rather a flexible approach to lawful matters based on the specific circumstances of those being addressed. This flexibility applies to both individuals and churches.

We would distinguish between things and persons. Sometimes it will be appropriate to censure a fault or error in persons, as Paul did with the Corinthians and Galatians, yet it may not be suitable to censure the persons themselves. He indeed reprov'd these individuals but refrained from taking further action, fearing that by doing so, he might cause more harm through subsequent divisions than he had cured through his reproach. Likewise, individuals should be distinguished, some merely err, while others teach others to do so, and in that respect, they become Heretics and Schismatics. If this were their personal opinion alone, it could not be imputed to them. The latter cannot claim the forbearance that should be shown to the former. Additionally, a distinction should be made in the manner of forbearance. It is one thing to entirely forbear someone infected with error and spreading it; it is another to forbear them only in terms of censure or in a certain degree. Some matters may be more gently censured but not entirely overlooked. A minister may reprove a fault and a person doctrinally while refraining from exercising Discipline and Censure, as seen when Paul reprov'd false teachers in Corinth but delayed taking action, or when he expressed a desire for some to be cut off in Galatia but did not carry it out. This approach is not primarily concerned with the persons of these teachers but with the Church and the multitude of their followers. Hasty censures might have stumbled them more than edified them, which goes against the primary purpose of all Ordinances. Therefore, Paul first sought to recover them, bring them back under his authority, and then exercise

the appropriate discipline once their obedience became evident (2 Cor. 10:6). This approach was adopted to prevent those devoted to these teachers from siding with them against Paul's authority, which would have been more detrimental to both them and the Church than edifying. Ministers should consider such considerations and exercise Christian prudence to determine when to speak and when to be silent, when to censure and when to forbear. However, they must always be vigilant to ensure that grounds for forbearance, sometimes necessary for the Church's edification, do not become excuses for lukewarmness, coldness, and cowardice in matters of God. It is essential to examine the source of moderation and whether the heart is still filled with holy indignation against these errors. Similarly, true zeal should be directed towards edification, ensuring that the duty of exercising Discipline, which is acceptable to God and beneficial to the Church, is not rejected because it appears to originate from personal motives and proves more harmful than edifying. Some instances of this have led to criticism of this Ordinance of Jesus Christ, particularly by those constantly seeking opportunities to discredit it. In conclusion, a single, impartial, and prudent approach must be taken to promote edification and ensure accountability to Jesus Christ in their trust, with a focus on what contributes most to edification.

However, if what is expressed is blasphemous and undermines the foundations of faith, it does not fall within this debate, as evident in Paul's dealing with Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20). In such cases, zeal for the Majesty of God and love for the salvation of souls, which constitute the essence of the two great commandments of the Law, do not allow for forbearance. If it corrupts or tarnishes the Church, making her a reproach to the profane, it should not be tolerated. If the things reflect poorly on the Ordinances of Christ and, consequently, on Christ Himself, they should not be overlooked. If

such matters jeopardize the public beauty, order, and government of the Church, without which there is no maintenance of the visible Church's integrity, they should not be tolerated. If they undermine the unity and love that should exist within the Church, which must be preserved with everything that may disrupt it removed, they should not be tolerated. If they become offensive and scandalous by causing the ways of the Lord to be spoken ill of, grieving the godly, or infecting others, they should not be the object of forbearance, unless certain circumstances concur, in which case it cannot accurately be called forbearance. By considering these and other factors, it can be determined when an error should be tolerated and when it should not, taking into account the nature of the error, the person holding it, and the condition of the Church and its people, who may be edified or harmed by the act of forbearing or censuring such a person.

What is necessary but not sufficient will become evident when we consider what is required. For what falls short of what is required must be lacking and insufficient. It is necessary that individuals not only keep themselves free but also use admonition and exhortation to reclaim those who have fallen. Yet these measures are not sufficient if there is no public means in place. Even if there were public authoritative preaching and the use of the key of Doctrine, that alone would not suffice if there were no censuring through discipline and the exercise of the key of Jurisdiction. In some cases, every form of censure will not be sufficient unless it is applied to the fullest extent. Christ did not grant that key to His Church in vain concerning all her scandals, and individuals are not absolved until they have fulfilled their responsibilities in their roles. More will be discussed on this matter later.

Chapter IX:

Church-Officers' Duties in Addressing Spreading Error

We now turn our attention to the specific duties of Church officers, especially Ministers, in this regard. We can consider these duties in four aspects:

1. There are certain expectations from the Minister in relation to God.
2. Expectations regarding the Minister himself.
3. Expectations concerning the flock and people who may not be tainted but are under the temptation.
4. Expectations concerning those who are ensnared, especially the promoters of these errors.

The first two aspects are closely intertwined, so we will discuss them together.

1. When such a temptation begins to affect or endanger the infection of a particular flock or many together (for the peril of one is the peril of many in such a case, as it is often said), the Minister should first look to God as the great overseer, even in these adverse situations within the Church. He should consider if things are in good order between God and himself, particularly concerning his Ministry. Such an infection in a flock represents a significant challenge for a Minister because its spread threatens to undermine the unity of that Church and harm his Ministry, as seen in Revelation 2, where it is warned against the Angel of Ephesus. This situation never arises without carrying

with it a spirit of bitterness and various challenges, frustrations, and vexations for the Minister. Therefore, he should approach God in a composed and sober manner, recognising that these events do not occur by chance or solely as a result of the errors of some misguided individuals. Instead, he should acknowledge that there is a higher divine hand at work. Without this perspective, the Minister cannot properly respond to such a dispensation. This realisation should humble the Minister and make him earnest in seeking God's guidance, fearing that God may be chastising him due to the sins of the people. Paul expressed this concern when addressing the schisms and contentious debates in Corinth (2 Cor. 12:20-21). He feared that when he came, his God would humble him among them, interpreting their misconduct as a cause for his own humiliation. It is important to note that the Lord is not necessarily most displeased with the Minister or the flock that experiences such challenges; rather, it serves as an opportunity for humility and self-reflection.

2. When the Minister is composed to acknowledge God's role in the matter, he should not only seek divine guidance and revere God's providence without becoming anxious but also engage in self-reflection. He should contemplate his past conduct, particularly in his Ministry, to ascertain if he might be held accountable before God for exerting a sinful influence on his people's disorders and misbehaviours. In this regard, he should consider the following four aspects:
 - Firstly, he should examine if he is in good standing with God concerning his own personal state and condition. He should reflect on whether he exhibited the required tenderness and vigilance at the time when such issues

arose. While things may have been in order, as in Job's case (Job 3:26), it is prudent to examine this aspect, as complacency and negligence can lead to the oversight of past shortcomings.

- Secondly, the Minister should reflect on his suitability for his calling, particularly in the context of his specific charge. Although God may have called him to both the Ministry and a particular charge, it is his responsibility to assess this and gain greater confidence in facing reproaches, as exemplified by Paul in his frequent mentions of this in his Epistles. In situations like this, a Minister may face challenges, and it is possible that factors such as expectations of ease, peaceful accommodation, or personal reputation in a particular place, along with the tractability of the congregation, may have influenced his decision more than others. Through such trials, the Lord teaches Ministers, especially at the beginning of their careers, to be guided primarily by the edification of the Church.
- Thirdly, a Minister should investigate if he has any sinful and contributory influence (to put it that way) in the occurrence of these problems among the people. It is undeniable that a Minister may also be affected when his people face challenges of this nature, as evident in the warning to the Angel of Ephesus in Revelation 2. Just as a Magistrate may be affected by a situation directly involving his people, as seen in David's case, who brought about the Pestilence (2 Sam. 24). This is because, firstly, the people themselves are not without guilt, so there is no injustice involved. Secondly, there exists a significant connection between the Minister and the people, so a rod upon one

undoubtedly affects both. Therefore, a Minister should examine whether he has been somewhat proud or vainglorious about his authority or the respect he receives from the congregation, their knowledge, orderly conduct, or reliance on the Ordinances. This is especially relevant if he has expressed such sentiments while neglecting to assess their spiritual condition and work towards its improvement. Similarly, he should assess whether he has been neglectful in praying for the congregation and their stability in the truth, or if he has failed in warning them or upholding the authority of the Ordinances and Ministry. Moreover, he should consider if he has been overly casual or trivial in his interactions with them. Conversely, if he has been zealous for God's honour when other congregations have faced challenges, or if he has shown empathy for fellow Ministers or borne the burden with them in such situations. Conversely, he should reflect on whether he has been careless or, possibly, proud because of his own freedom. These and similar sins should be examined because when present, the Minister can be seen as contributing to their sins in some way, as if he had collaborated with those who promote errors.

3. Additionally, the Minister should assess whether he has exerted any sinful influence in fostering such problems. He should consider if he has not been thorough and diligent in grounding the congregation in fundamental truths and explaining Gospel Doctrines, not only preaching duties and practical matters. He should also think about whether he has encouraged unnecessary curiosity by introducing various questions or allowing the congregation to pursue them. Moreover, he should contemplate whether he has treated certain errors, whether publicly or

privately, with levity or amusement. He should assess if he has made light of or spoken casually about the errors and failings of others in their presence. Furthermore, he should examine whether he has faithfully admonished and corrected initial deviations or if he has fed the congregation with empty notions and unsubstantial teachings, building upon the foundation with hay and straw. He should also consider whether he has earnestly revealed to them their guiltiness and led them to engage in Repentance for their corrupt inclinations, thereby emphasising qualities such as humility, fear, watchfulness, and diligence. This would enable them to pursue a more substantial work, with Christ enabling them to resist this temptation. These aspects should be evaluated because, in their presence, the Minister is not devoid of involvement in their sins, as if he had, to some extent, colluded with those who promote such errors.

3. Once this introspection is complete, the Minister should be deeply affected by his own guilt, and this will enhance his empathy for the people's condition. His first priority should be to work on his own restoration to good terms with God through Christ Jesus. Just as he confesses his own faults, he should also acknowledge the faults of the people. Even if they reproach and curse him, he should not cease to pray for them, remembering the scripture that says, "As for these sheep, Lord, what have they done?" Special communion with God is crucial, and he should rely on Him to be adequately equipped to handle such a challenging situation. As the responsibility becomes more burdensome, the Minister should recognise the need to seek God's assistance, specifically tailored to this situation. Ministers should understand that their abilities, gifts, or talents alone are insufficient for this task. If they cannot effectively communicate with someone who is not in such a disarray, how can they do so

when dealing with individuals who are already prejudiced and disturbed, unless the Lord intervenes? Ministers should approach each word they speak to such individuals with caution and humility, guarding against the risk of undermining the Lord's work and causing harm instead of edification. He should earnestly aim not only for exoneration but also for edification. To achieve this, he should begin by seeking success from God. He would be pleased if any means, even if they come from someone else's efforts, are provided and blessed for this purpose.

4. The Minister should now employ ordinary methods to prepare himself for identifying the errors that his people are guilty of so that he can convincingly address those who are stumbling and strengthen those who remain steadfast. He should invest time and effort in this, just as he would in preaching or studying common topics during trials, which merely tests a man's skills in a more indirect context. Yet, in this situation, it is particularly relevant. Therefore, he should first strive for a comprehensive understanding of the entire body of Divinity and the foundations of the Christian Religion. Since there is such a connection among truths, where one error can undermine many foundations, a Minister should be well-acquainted with the whole to confidently investigate and refute specific errors. A Minister who may have temporarily neglected such studies should not hesitate to return to them, as it is both his duty and there is no shame in acquiring knowledge that enhances his ability to fulfill his duties. Perhaps, among other reasons, this may serve to prompt Ministers to engage in more constant study and exploration of the fundamental truths of the Gospel. Secondly, like a wise physician, he should strive to understand the malady that has infected and troubled his people. This

includes identifying the errors they hold, the persuasive arguments they are presented with, the temptations they have faced, who has led them astray, and similar factors. Additionally, he should consider their natural disposition, whether they are quick-tempered or meek, proud or humble, their past conduct, abilities, associations, influential individuals, and those they hold in esteem. These details will enable him to better comprehend the situation and determine the appropriate remedy, either by addressing it himself or seeking assistance from others. Thirdly, he should work on equipping himself, especially in relation to the specific errors they have embraced. To achieve this, he should acquire suitable books, engage in conversations with knowledgeable individuals, and gather insights from Scripture and other sources. Through his diligent efforts, coupled with God's blessings, he will be able to speak confidently to himself about these matters and persuasively to others. It should be noted that the aforementioned order does not necessarily imply a strict chronological sequence in time. In some cases, a Minister may be required to proceed directly to more advanced steps or employ different means. However, this order reflects a logical progression and provides guidance on the approach to follow depending on the circumstances and opportunities available.

Furthermore, it is essential for Ministers, particularly at such times, to strive for unity among themselves and within their congregations. Often, division and deception go hand in hand, bolstering the deceivers, demeaning the truth, and diminishing the credibility and effectiveness of Ministers until unity is restored. Therefore, we can observe that in the churches of Corinth, Galatia, and Philippi, where deceivers were advancing their agendas and division was widespread, the Apostle placed special emphasis on restoring unity

during such times. This principle is also evident in the life of Basil the Great, a staunch opponent of the Arians. When he experienced a division with Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, he withdrew for the sake of the Church's peace. This situation provided an opportunity for Valens, the Arian Emperor, and other Arians to promote their heresy in Caesarea, which they could not effectively do while unity prevailed. To thwart this plan, Gregory Nazianzen advised Basil to return and reconcile with Eusebius as the only means to prevent the growth of heresy among the people. Following their reconciliation and their willingness to put aside their personal grievances for the greater good, the Church was firmly established, and the spread of the aforementioned heresy was effectively countered.

In the third place, we must consider a Minister's responsibilities in relation to the congregation as a whole. By extension, we can infer the level of seriousness, gravity, and diligence required from ruling elders as they collaborate with the Minister in such circumstances. Ruling elders are also expected to join him in the previous investigation and assessment of the congregation's conduct and in preparing themselves to be helpful during such times. Undoubtedly, a Minister is called upon to exhibit a level of seriousness, gravity, and diligence in his overall conduct and ministerial duties that exceeds the norm, as it is now crucial to have a testimony of sincerity, faithfulness, and love for the edification of the people in their own consciences. This can only be achieved through such exceptional conduct. In practice, we see that a decline into error often coincides with a diminishing regard for the Minister. Maintaining esteem for the Minister either prevents the fall or provides a greater opportunity for the recovery of those who have fallen. Therefore, Ministers should particularly focus on this aspect as a primary means of edifying the congregation. To achieve this, they should:

1. Scrutinize their actions to identify any potential sources of offense and make every effort to rectify them.
 2. Address unjust accusations that may have been leveled against them.
 3. Be mindful of the specific charges that are commonly brought against Ministers by corrupt individuals, such as pride, greed, self-interest, hypocrisy, and similar traits. During such times, Ministers should not only avoid these vices but also avoid any appearance of them. This aligns with the principle of becoming all things to all people, as exemplified by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9. In summary, a Minister should conduct themselves in such a way that every aspect of their ministry, family life, dietary choices, clothing, and so forth, can withstand the scrutiny of the most discerning and vigilant observers, even those who are most critical and exacting.
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2. There are specific aspects on which he should focus and strive to impress upon the people. Firstly, he should make them aware of the severity of error, the dangers it poses, and the cunning tactics employed by the devil in advancing such deception. Secondly, he should ensure that they receive instruction and clarity regarding the truths of the Gospel, especially in matters that are subjects of controversy. This will make the errors and their detrimental consequences as clear and repugnant as possible. Thirdly, it is crucial that they are not led away from the core duties of godliness by speculative matters. Instead, the focus should be on exploring fundamental doctrines and delivering powerful and persuasive applications of various kinds. This approach is evident in the guidance provided to Timothy and Titus, which emphasises avoiding engagement with fables and vain disputes while strongly advocating for convincing, encouraging, reproofing with authority, promoting

good works, and nurturing godliness. Fourthly, people should be urged through every means to avoid snares and the company of deceivers. This aligns with both the practice of our Lord and the practice of His Apostles. Although this duty may sometimes be misunderstood by people, it is the responsibility of Ministers to stress its importance, and they are specifically instructed to do so, as seen in 1 Timothy 4:11 and 6:13, when compared with the directives given in these Epistles. Finally, it may be appropriate during such times to provide written materials for elucidating the controversies, with specific individuals designated for this task. Seducers often disseminate their errors through written works, as seen in Jeremiah 29:25. Additionally, writing can be a means of instructing and edifying when verbal communication is not feasible. It also allows for addressing objections and providing answers before individuals become entrenched in certain opinions, which they might have hesitated to raise until they had fully embraced those opinions. This proactive approach can prevent individuals from becoming more resistant to the truth and less open to persuasion. The Apostles employed this method to refute significant errors in writing, just as they did through oral preaching.

3. Throughout these efforts, the Minister must pay close attention to his manner of conduct. It should be characterized by gravity, weightiness, seriousness, love, and every quality that can convince the people. Firstly, he should demonstrate his own seriousness and deep concern for this matter. Therefore, he should avoid using light-hearted or mocking expressions. Instead, the Minister should be affectionate and serious, like someone passionately desiring to see Christ formed in the hearts of the people, as described by Paul in Galatians 4:19. Secondly, he should strive to make the people fully aware of the severity of

error, endeavouring to make it as detestable and loathsome to them as any scandalous practice. To achieve this, Ministers should stimulate the people's zeal against such evils through serious, convincing, and affectionate expressions, rather than resorting to ridicule or mockery of principles or individuals. Holy Master Greenham wisely noted that making sin ridiculous when it should be made hateful is counterproductive. Thirdly, the Minister should aim to convince the people of his sincerity in seeking their well-being and his love for them, as well as his compassion for those who have been led astray. Therefore, he should avoid anything that might suggest he is personally offended or intends to defend his own reputation or vent bitterness against others. Such actions significantly diminish a Minister's effectiveness. The great Apostle Paul set an example by addressing such misunderstandings and expressing love and even attesting to the sincerity of his intentions, as seen frequently in his letters to the Corinthians and Galatians. Fourthly, the Minister should approach the opposition with affection, even towards the individuals who oppose him. Nothing is more detrimental than a Minister appearing as if he is driven by worldly passions and anger. Instead, tender treatment of individuals and their worldly circumstances can have a softening effect on them, as experience has shown. This approach aligns with the conduct expected of a Minister and should be maintained without compromising zeal and indignation against their errors or the pursuit of measures to censure and restrain them from spreading those errors.

It should be noted here:

1. That the guidance given earlier regarding a Minister's conduct in addressing practical scandals and their duties in a time of

widespread offences is also applicable here and in the following sections.

2. The duties outlined for Ministers can also be applied to Ruling Elders in accordance with their roles. Ruling Elders should be equally committed to preventing and addressing corrupt doctrines as well as other scandalous behaviours. They have a particular responsibility to ensure that the means used by the Minister carry weight among the people and to promote the Minister's credibility for that purpose.

Now, we move on to the fourth step of a Minister's duty concerning those who have embraced error (specifically, gross errors and delusions, as discussed in this discourse). We can consider it in four stages: discovery or investigation, conviction, admonition, and rejection.

In the context of discovery, just as the Apostle states about people in general in 1 Timothy 5:24 – "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment, and some men's follow after" – similarly, in this case, sometimes error becomes evident without the need for investigation. At other times, there may be concealed objections raised against truths that are not openly confessed but are privately murmured. Moreover, corrupt teachers may attempt to veil and conceal their doctrines or errors using various tactics, even as they seek to influence others with their delusions. Therefore, it is essential in such situations:

1. To examine the opinions held and propagated and to expose their absurdity and grossness. Many individuals may unwittingly uphold certain premises without realising the absurd conclusions that follow from them. Hence, it is appropriate to set aside the names and expressions used by

seducers and present the matter as it truly is, especially if it involves reviving some old absurdity under a new guise and pretext. This is how the Lord revealed the abominable doctrine of the Nicolaitans, by comparing and demonstrating its substantial identity with the practices of Balaam and Jezebel (Revelation 2:14, 15, 20). This approach is also employed by Peter in his second epistle (2 Peter 2) and by Jude, who likened corrupt teachers to figures like Balaam, Korah, and Dathan. This helps remove the veneer from old yet newly rebranded errors, making them appear as they truly are. Often, error is presented to people under a new guise, and many may accept it in this form while rejecting the same errors under their original names. This is a tactic used by the devil's cunning to make old errors seem like new revelations.

Furthermore, there is a need to disguise error under certain circumstances and alter its name. Indeed, it requires a certain level of spiritual skill to remove that disguise effectively. Secondly, it is necessary to identify those who are drawn to such opinions, so that we can determine who has been affected by them. This should be done with the aim of reclaiming individuals and addressing the issue before it escalates or becomes entrenched. Often, it is easier to cure someone at the beginning of their divergence from truth than later when the error has taken root. When errors become public, they can create a sense of commitment in the person holding them, making recovery more difficult as they may fear appearing weak, mistaken, or unstable. Additionally, private efforts by the Minister to identify and privately address those suspected of error are often more effective than engaging in public debates. This approach is suggested in Galatians 2:2 when Paul communicated the Gospel privately to those of reputation, lest he should have run in vain. Therefore, individuals suspected of error should not be rushed into the public

eye, and the public nature of their offence should be downplayed, allowing them a more graceful exit.

3. If there is an opportunity for someone to retreat from their error, they should be supported and encouraged, even if the initial signs of their change are not entirely satisfying. Every effort should be made to ensure their previous error is buried as if it had never existed, without the need for a public hearing, unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise. Error does not easily become a public scandal unless there is stubborn adherence to it or it poses an immediate stumbling block to others. Often, the reformation of the person can remove more stumbling blocks than their censure. Therefore, if a person is successfully reclaimed, there is little risk in avoiding public exposure of their error, except in cases where they have actively led others astray or when their actions have made their error publicly evident.
4. This discreet process of discovery before errors become public is necessary to prevent the defection of others. If it becomes clear that the individuals are not being reclaimed, they may still be marked as dangerous to prevent them from becoming snares to others. This is in line with the exhortation in Romans 16:17: "Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them." When a person is identified as tainted with error, all possible means should be used to convict them through discussions, reasoning, and other methods that serve the purpose. This requires a special qualification of a Minister, as mentioned in Titus 1:9, to be able to convince those who oppose sound doctrine. This step can be viewed from various perspectives:

5. It aims to directly persuade the person, and therefore private debates are essential. These debates should be conducted with meekness and patience, even if they encounter reproaches and resistance.
6. Even if there is little hope of persuading the person, such discussions are necessary to silence their objections and edify others, preventing them from being seduced. Often, these debates, when carried out judiciously, may not silence the person but can convince others of the absurdity of their errors and the unreasonableness of their stance. Experience has shown that such debates have often been instrumental in upholding the truth's credibility in the eyes of many others. This aligns with the duty mentioned in Titus 1:9, even when there is little hope of immediate success in persuading the seduced individuals.

Chapter X:

Necessity of Public Debates on Erroneous Points

If we consider the following questions: 1. Is a public debate necessary in all cases? 2. What constitutes conviction? 3. What should be done when individuals do not remain silent? 4. How should such debates be conducted?

We shall respond by presenting some assertions that address all these questions.

Assertion

1: We maintain that there are situations and cases where public debates should not be entirely avoided. We do not suggest that every individual must accept such a challenge, as this may lead to an injustice against the truth. (It is not always the most capable person who handles such matters best.) However, in general, public debates are necessary in cases like the following:

1. When errors appear to be new among the people.

2. When those promoting these errors become insolent, behaving as if they dare to expose their actions to the light.

3. When through tolerance and silence, people are at risk of forming opinions about these arrogant promoters and their beliefs. In such cases and similar ones, there is a degree of necessity for public debates, primarily for the edification of the Church, as can be seen in Titus 1:9, 10, 11. The Apostle mentions that there are many unruly and vain talkers (those who boast in vain of their ability to defend their opinions), and their mouths must be stopped to prevent them from deceiving others. This is the reason why Ministers should possess the skills to convince those who oppose, as sometimes the insolence and vanity of such individuals make it necessary. Based on this, we can observe that our Lord Himself, as well as Stephen and Paul, engaged in frequent disputes, even in Assemblies and Synagogues. However, this does not imply that every Minister must engage in disputes at all times, even in such cases. Sometimes it may be delegated to others, as long as truth is upheld and error is refuted; this can silence the gainsayer's objections, even if not everyone participates in the debate.

Assertion 2: However, there are cases where engaging in debates is neither necessary nor advisable. These include:

1. When it is known that the issues have been adequately refuted before, possibly in nearby locations and not long ago. Continually reopening debates under such circumstances could prevent the establishment of truth and distract from other essential duties.

2. When certain individuals purposefully seek to create chaos by instigating numerous debates and pursuing them irreverently, as if it were their trade or vocation. Responding to such individuals in kind would contribute to their guilt of taking God's name in vain and would serve personal preferences rather than the greater purpose of edification.

3. When individuals become irrational in their arguments, displaying unreasonable contradictions and blasphemy. In such cases, it may be necessary to abstain from debate or to terminate it indignantly and zealously for the glory of God. This is exemplified by the actions of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:45, 46.

4. When erroneous individuals are so grossly absurd that debating with them is unproductive, and they should instead be reprovved and rejected. In such situations, as seen in the letters of Revelation (Rev. 2, 3), there is no debate with the Nicolaitans, unlike Paul's approach in other cases. When absurdities are embraced, reasoned conviction becomes challenging, as individuals appear unreasonable.

5. When individuals deny fundamental principles, such as the authority or sufficiency of Scripture, or introduce new principles like inner lights, revelations, or enthusiasms. Similarly, when they blatantly and illogically distort and pervert Scripture, as mentioned by Peter regarding some who deny clear meanings

and invent ridiculous interpretations. In such cases, debate may not be feasible, not only because it risks blasphemy but also because there is no means to convince them, rendering the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, ineffective. For example, Hymenaeus and Alexander claimed that there was no future resurrection because it had already occurred. They distorted Scripture to support their argument. Such misuse of Scripture is so blatant that Paul did not engage in debate but pronounced judgment on these blasphemers and Scripture abusers. This category includes those who reject distinctions, consequences, and different meanings of words and phrases, which leads to Scriptural inconsistency, uncertainty, and absurdity—an approach that is blasphemous to contemplate.

Assertion 3: It should not be assumed that true conviction is achieved only when the opposing party falls silent. When the command is to "convince gainsayers," it does not necessarily imply that they will be silenced. Individuals with corrupt and unruly spirits, as described by the Apostle, may become increasingly resistant to the truth, much like how Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses (2 Tim. 3:8). They may even be considered reprobate concerning the faith. Sometimes, the more they are confronted and refuted, the louder they protest and refuse to yield to the convincing truth. We see this pattern in Acts 6:9, 10, 11 and Acts 13:45, 46. Even though Paul's opponents were unable to debate with him effectively, they rarely remained silent. Despite his successful arguments, they often continued to mutter and contradict. In such cases, Paul would sometimes break off the debate, symbolically shaking the dust off his feet against them when his arguments failed to achieve the desired outcome. This persistence in contradiction, coupled with attempts to distort Scripture to their detriment, can be seen as a form of divine punishment and judgment upon those who dare to oppose manifest

truth. It mirrors the resistance of the magicians who resisted Moses despite witnessing many miracles. If such patterns occurred in the past with Moses, Paul, and the other Apostles, it can be expected to continue today, as the spirit of Jannes and Jambres and the gainsaying of Korah are traits associated with such individuals according to Scripture.

If the question arises regarding what can be considered as conviction, and whether a person can be deemed convinced while still insisting on having the last word and confidently claiming victory, the answer is as follows: Conviction should not be narrowly confined to the acknowledgment or silence of the convinced party, as we have previously explained. Indeed, those who have been convinced may, in a sense, attempt to drown out others through an abundance of words and expressions filled with confidence, just as the Jews did to Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:46. Therefore, the precept in Titus 3:10, 11 states that the heretic who is to be rejected is described as both refusing admonition and being self-condemned. However, it cannot be claimed that he was silenced by these admonitions or refrained from expressing his errors. Thus, it is certain and supported by 2 Timothy 2:25 that the recovery of opponents, even after receiving sufficient and gentle instruction, is a rare occurrence. Therefore, conviction must be sought in something beyond mere acknowledgment or silence. To answer the question, "What is to be accounted as conviction?" we assert the following: 1. Conviction occurs when a person is sufficiently convinced, and the truth is clearly distinguished from error in such a way that their continued obstinacy cannot be attributed to weakness. Often, this obstinacy manifests itself through foolish, weightless, and unreasonable arguments or answers. In such cases, there can be no substantial response to satisfy a person's own reason or conscience if they were sober and rational. This is why the heretic is said to be self-

condemned in Titus 3:11. Not because their conscience condemns them for dissimulation—since they may still be under a delusion that prevents such self-condemnation—but because they are the cause of their own blindness. They willfully and maliciously reject and resist the offered light, making them responsible for their own damnation, which does not result from the neglect of others in failing to provide sufficient enlightenment.

2. Conviction can also be attributed when the truth is made clear to sober and serious individuals, even if some ignorant persons remain inexcusably ignorant despite having access to the same means of understanding as others with ordinary capacity. Although they may not comprehend the plain preaching, discourse, or doctrines, it can still be justly said that the light was sufficient to instruct them or that the Gospel was sufficient to convict them, considering that others have benefited from the same.

3. Conviction can also be recognised when individuals continue to speak without providing meaningful answers, resorting to absurd denials or assertions lacking any reasoning. This includes granting absurd consequences or asserting an absurdity greater than one they might wish to avoid. Additionally, it encompasses bitter personal attacks aimed at defaming others to strengthen their own position, as was done by false teachers against Paul among the Corinthians and Galatians, or by Libertines against Stephen by spreading calumnies and provoking others against him in Acts 6. Furthermore, when their responses or arguments lead to blasphemy against God, His Scriptures, or His ordinances, they can be considered sufficiently convinced, and their obstinacy can be seen as malicious. We can gather this understanding from various biblical passages, such as Acts 13:45, 46, where Paul and Barnabas ceased reasoning when confronted with willful contradictions and blasphemy. Acts 28:24, 25 also highlights the case of some Jews who were deemed sufficiently convinced, with their rejection of the word of God being attributed to judicial blindness. Additionally, Acts 17:32 indicates that when

individuals begin to mock fundamental aspects of religion or twist clear passages of Scripture with strange and absurd interpretations, they should no longer be debated with but considered abundantly convinced, despite their confident contradiction. Similar to the cases where public debate should not be entertained, these instances serve as evidence of sufficient conviction and self-condemnation of such individuals.

Assert. 4. When it becomes necessary to engage in such a debate, the management thereof demands a great deal of spiritual zeal and prudence. In addition to what is generally expected in the manner of all actions, certain things must be observed:

1. The debate should not be disorderly and chaotic, as irreverence towards the Name of God and the risk of bringing it into disrepute should be avoided. Therefore, order, reverence, and all that is necessary and suitable for this purpose should be ensured. Otherwise, such disorderly gatherings should be abandoned once entered into, as they dishonor the Name of God and do not befit the gravity that Ministers should maintain. This can be seen in Acts 13:45, 46 and Acts 19:30, 32, where lack of order impedes edification.
2. Individuals should reluctantly undertake such a task when called upon to do so, recognising the difficulty of the task, their own inadequacies, and the subtlety of the principal adversary they are dealing with. Therefore, it should not be undertaken based solely on gifts, abilities, or learning. The debate should not primarily rely on clever arguments, and the pursuit of personal advantage should not be the main focus. Instead, simple truth should be presented plainly, gravely, and zealously, with the aim of impacting the conscience of the party and the listeners. Just

as in preaching, the most intricate and erudite discourses do not always prove to be the most effective, in debates concerning conscience, straightforward presentation of truth, backed by the power to convict the conscience, often carries the clearest evidence. An illustrative account recorded by Ruffinus in Ecclesiastical History, Book 10, Chapter 3, serves as an example. At the Council of Nice, renowned scholars had gathered from various places, and some prominent philosophers also attended, one of whom engaged in frequent debates with the most eminent scholars. However, the scholars were unable to confine him because of his nimbleness in slipping away with various shifts when their arguments seemed most compelling. But God, demonstrating that His Kingdom is not merely based on words but on power, used a Confessor who was a man of great simplicity, knowing nothing but Christ Jesus and Him crucified. This Confessor, observing the philosopher's arrogance and boasting, requested permission to speak with him briefly. Others hesitated, aware of the man's simplicity and fearing that he might become a subject of ridicule among the clever debaters. Nevertheless, he persisted and began with a simple declaration: "Philosopher, in the Name of Jesus Christ, listen to these true statements." He went on to affirm the belief in one God who created Heaven and Earth, formed man from dust, gave him a Spirit, sent His Son born of a Virgin to deliver sinners from eternal death through His death, and granted eternal life through His Resurrection. He emphasized the expectation of Christ's return as the Judge of all. The Confessor then asked the philosopher if he believed these things. The philosopher, as if at a loss for contradiction, was astonished by the power of the message and could only acknowledge that it appeared to be true. The aged Confessor then invited the philosopher to follow him to the Church and receive the seal of this faith. Turning to his

companions and other listeners, the philosopher declared, "Listen, O learned men, when the argument was conducted with me using words, I countered with words. But when virtue proceeded from the mouth of this speaker, words could not resist power, and man could not resist God." He encouraged those who had experienced what he had to believe in Christ and follow the old man in whom God had spoken. This account from Ruffinus is worth noting as it underscores the significance of simplicity and the power of truth in debates concerning faith.

3. Clear principles and binding rules should be established to avoid the assertion of anything or the denial of everything without a basis.
4. Ministerial gravity and authority should be maintained to prevent the Ordinance from being disrespected. Ministers should use their reason, knowledge, authority, and ministerial commission from Christ to impact the conscience of those they engage with, as exemplified by Paul in his debates, even when his authority was questioned.

Chapter XI:

Admonition Process and Handling of Heretics

The third step is Admonition, which means that when convictions yield no success, Ministers should proceed with judicial and authoritative admonitions, as directed in Titus 3:10: "A man that is a

heretic reject, after the first and second admonition." This admonition does not aim to provide new reasons to inform the judgment, as that is presupposed to have been done already. However, it serves two additional purposes:

1. It carries weight in affecting the conscience of those who have resisted or suppressed the light of truth. With God's blessing, it can make previously disregarded light more seriously and impartially considered when delivered in His Name through admonition.
2. It serves as a warning, foretelling that something graver will follow if the rejection of the Truth persists. It acts as a caution for a specific fault before the impending consequences, with the hope that, by God's blessing, it may humble and soften the individual, prompting them to seek prevention from the impending consequences. Alternatively, if they remain stubborn, it makes them more inexcusable, providing a clearer path to proceed with rejection.

This admonition can be understood in three steps:

1. Private admonition: After the Minister has conferred with the individuals and found them guilty, he not only instructs them but also admonishes them in the Name and Authority of Jesus Christ, which carries more weight than a private person's admonition.
2. Judicial admonition by a Church judicatory: When the person is brought before them, the church judicatory interposes its authority to admonish the individual concerning the evil of their ways and the necessity of repentance, similar to the act misapplied by the Priests and Pharisees in Acts 4:5.

3. Public admonition before the congregation: If the previous steps fail to achieve the desired outcome, the infected party is solemnly and publicly admonished before the congregation. In this step:

- The individual's well-being is considered, and it is tested whether the combined admonition of officers and the congregation has an impact.
- It serves to protect the congregation from the influence of such evil.
- If it still does not succeed, it leaves the individual more inexcusable and convinces all of the justice and necessity of proceeding further, making the subsequent sentence more respected by all. This aligns with the admonition mentioned in Titus 3:10 and corresponds to the public rebuke referred to in 1 Timothy 5:20.

When conducting these admonitions, several considerations should be kept in mind:

1. Avoid undue haste unless the individual's readiness and diligence to infect others demand immediate action. In such cases, delay should not be tolerated.
2. All steps of admonition should be carried out in a manner befitting an ordinance of Christ, ensuring their weight is properly understood.
3. Distinguish between giving an admonition and engaging in a debate for a conference. There is no need to suspend an admonition if the person is absent, just as there is no need to suspend a warning or citation. Conversely, if individuals are present and oppose themselves, there is no necessity or

convenience in reentering a debate, as the present task is to authoritatively admonish those who have resisted sufficient conviction, leaving them to bear the weight of the admonition without renewing the debate.

The fourth step, which follows fruitless admonition, is rejection, as stated in Titus 3:10: "A man that is a heretic, reject." This rejection is equivalent to excommunication or delivering someone to Satan, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 1:20. Several key points are clear regarding this process:

1. A person continuing as a heretic may and should be rejected and excommunicated, just as for any other serious scandal. This is evident for several reasons:
 - The precept is straightforward in the cited verse: "A man that is a heretic, reject." This entails casting the individual out from church communion and refraining from further efforts for their edification. In effect, they are considered as heathen and publicans, as described in 1 Corinthians 5:13, involving a removal of a wicked person from the fellowship.
 - A clear example and precedent are provided in 1 Timothy 1:20.
 - Where this practice is followed, it is commanded, as seen in Ephesus (Revelation 2). Conversely, when corrupt teachers are tolerated in the church, it is strongly reprov'd, as seen in the letters to Pergamos and Thyatira.
 - The general grounds for scandal and the need for discipline, along with the reasons that justify its exercise in any case, apply here. Scandal is highly detrimental to the church, and discipline, including excommunication, is ordained to remedy the church's wounds and remove offenses. These

principles have been explained previously, making it evident that this sentence should be applied in such cases.

To further clarify this, several questions should be addressed:

1. What if the person is godly or regarded as such? The answer is as follows:

- While it is unlikely that a truly gracious person would become a minister of Satan (as discussed previously), even if such a case were to occur:
- If it is scandalous for a godly person, the same remedy should be employed for the benefit of the church.
- The example of Paul in Galatians 1:8-9 leaves no room for doubt. He unequivocally states that if anyone, including himself or even an angel from heaven, preaches another Gospel, they should be accursed. If no exceptions are made, Excommunication is not perceived as an ordinance of Christ, beneficial through His blessing for humbling and reclaiming a sinner.

2. What if the person is not a fixed member of any particular congregation but still influences others? The answer is as follows:

- This does not exempt them from censure for several reasons:
- They are a member of the Catholic Church, and thus, censure must reach them in some way.
- They could claim privileges in any particular congregation if they behaved as a member of the Church-catholic.
- The Church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 conducted a judicial trial and censured those who claimed to be apostles, even

though they were likely strangers and not members of that specific church.

- It is equally necessary for the edification of people in particular congregations and to guard against potential harm caused by wandering individuals. Therefore, either one congregation or many associated church judicatories may exercise censure. Alternatively, some public notation or mark can be placed on such individuals to warn others to avoid them, as indicated in Romans 16:17-18 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14, referring to busybodies and wanderers without a certain calling or station.

3. A question may arise: What if Magistrates do not cooperate in their role or, in certain cases, express displeasure with the issuance of such a Sentence? The answer is that this situation may demand greater prudence, zeal, and caution, but it should not hinder the progress. This is because:

- Excommunication is an ordinance established by Jesus Christ for the edification of His Church, similar to preaching and administering the sacraments.
- A similar question could have been raised in the early Christian era when Paul practiced excommunication, and the Lord Himself rebuked the lack of it (Revelation 2). At that time, there was no cooperation from civil authorities.
- In fact, in this case, it appears to be most necessary, and even staunch opponents of Church discipline acknowledge the Church's authority to issue such a Sentence.
- The significance of this Sentence is not contingent upon civil power but is derived from Christ's institution. Therefore, its importance should be emphasized regardless of civil authorities.

- Historical examples reveal that some early Christian Fathers were willing to risk martyrdom in this matter. When corrupt emperors prohibited them from excommunicating Arians and other heretics, they did it anyway. By designating successors before issuing the Sentence, they demonstrated their readiness to endure any consequences, some of which included immediate persecution.
4. It should be noted that while heretics are to be rejected, there are two important limitations to consider in Titus 3:9. First, it is not every person with doctrinal errors who should face such treatment; they must be heretics. This implies three aspects:
- The error maintained must be pernicious and destructive.
 - It must be actively propagated, leading to the harm of the Church by corrupting doctrine, disrupting order, fracturing unity, or damaging the Church in some other way.
 - There must be an obstinate persistence in these evils.

It is true that sometimes lesser errors, depending on their effects and other aggravating factors, can become intolerable and subject to this Sentence, similar to how lesser scandals in practice were discussed. However, we believe that this Sentence should primarily apply to more significant errors that go beyond mere weaknesses (which many godly, sober, and unprejudiced individuals may possess). Therefore, the determination of what qualifies should be based on the distinctions previously outlined.

2. Furthermore, this rejection should not be hasty but should follow after repeated and disregarded admonitions. Therefore, if a prior admonition is received and the Church is heard in the

matter, there should be no further action taken regarding this Sentence. This is because:

- The limitation is explicitly stated.
- The rationale is evident: If a lesser measure succeeds in recovering the individual and removing the offense from the Church, then there is no need for further action.

Chapter XII:

Effective Admonition and Its Outcomes

If the question arises, what should be considered a satisfactory and successful admonition, and how should individuals judge and act in relation to it? We would distinguish satisfaction or success in an admonition, which can be either complete or partial.

Full satisfaction is achieved when the individual is so thoroughly convinced of their wrongdoing that they not only refrain from expressing it and causing further offense but also completely renounce it. They should be genuinely remorseful and willing to edify others through a suitable acknowledgment.

On the other hand, we consider partial satisfaction or success when a complete transformation has not been attained, but it is not entirely in vain. For example:

1. A person may not completely renounce their errors but acknowledges the harm in expressing them and troubling the Church. They commit to abstain from causing such offense.

2. Another individual might be convinced of some of their gross errors and willing to renounce them but may still have reservations or doubts about others.

We would further differentiate those who provide partial satisfaction:

1. Some may appear sincere in their progress and professions, demonstrating a willingness to learn and be corrected.
2. Others may display insincerity, pretending to cooperate while actually waiting for an opportunity to return to their previous behavior.

Now, to apply these distinctions:

1. When full satisfaction is achieved, there is no question; further action should cease, and the individual can be readmitted to full communion in Church privileges.
2. In cases of partial success of the first kind, we believe it may warrant temporarily suspending any additional measures and allowing the individuals to remain under the Church's care as long as they remain consistent with their professions. However, they should not be granted unrestricted access to all Church privileges as if the scandal has been completely removed.
3. When partial satisfaction is of the second kind, involving mockery and insincerity, we recommend that it should not hinder the issuance of the Sentence, although it may prompt the Church judicatory to examine the evidence of this dissimulation temporarily. Nevertheless, it should not obstruct the implementation of the Sentence, as it could lead to further harm to the Church through the actions of the dissembler. In this context, the reasons against and the characteristics of

dissimulation that were discussed in relation to practical offenses should be considered.

4. If there appears to be no satisfaction at all, then after giving admonitions and the individual disregarding them, they should be rejected. Such a person is seen as infectious and unfit to have communion in the Church or benefit from any Church privileges or ordinances. They should be publicly declared excommunicated and cast out of Christ's visible Kingdom, essentially becoming an outlaw to it. This should be done with solemnity, gravity, empathy, and authority to emphasise that it is an ordinance of Christ and carries the weight of His authority and majesty in the eyes of all witnesses.

If the question is raised about whether any further duty is required from a Minister towards such a person after the Sentence is pronounced, we would respond as follows:

1. Since the individual is no longer under pastoral care as they are not a member of Christ's visible Church, at least in the sense that members fall under common and regular pastoral oversight, the Minister's role changes.
2. However, we believe that the Minister should continue to intercede with God on behalf of the individual, even in private, in the hope of their recovery from this situation. This is because they are now under the final stage of care, which can result in either life or death. Seeking God's blessing for this purpose is appropriate and reflects the caring nature of a Minister who desires a positive outcome.
3. Even if there is no direct access to the individual, the Minister should remain vigilant and seize any opportunity that may arise for their benefit. There should be a readiness to act when such opportunities present themselves.

4. Therefore, it is essential to maintain a balance. While it is important to express displeasure towards the individual's actions or errors to deter others from following their example, there should still be evidence of respectful concern for the person. If necessary, assistance should be offered, especially in times of difficulty, while maintaining an appropriate distance that upholds the gravity of the Sentence for both the individual and others. By adopting this approach, misconceptions about Ministers and prejudices against their persons can be alleviated, and they can become more edifying influences. Some examples of this can be found in the life of Musculus, who showed great tenderness to individuals deeply ensnared in error, particularly when they were in distress and facing severe disapproval from authorities. God eventually blessed these efforts with their recovery. This approach highlights the compatibility of severity in government and tenderness in pastoral care. One of the drawbacks of excessive indulgence (which is indeed harmful to the poor souls it ensnares) is that it can make the Magistrate appear merciful and the zealous Minister appear cruel. Consequently, individuals become more inclined to go astray under the Magistrate's leniency.

Chapter XIII:

Magistrates' Role in Restraining Seducing Spirits

The second aspect we intend to address concerning this remedy is its relevance to Magistrates. We need to determine if there is a role

prescribed by the Word of God for them to fulfil in their positions to stem this tide and remove this plague. While we won't delve as deeply into this as the previous aspect, it's still worthwhile to provide some guidance. Perhaps it will come to the attention of a Magistrate who is eager to learn about their duty. We will present a couple of assertions on this matter:

Assert. 1. While God has not designated Magistrates, in their official capacity, as Church officers or entrusted them with the Ecclesiastic Government of His Church, He still permits and calls upon them to utilise their civil authority for the benefit of His Church in Ecclesiastic matters to some extent, just as they do in civil matters. Therefore, if a Magistrate fails to ensure the provision of Ministers for a community, their financial support, and other necessities essential for the existence of a Church, just as they provide officers and resources necessary for the State, they are negligent and unfaithful in their role. The Lord's intention in establishing societies and appointing Magistrates should be understood as serving the ultimate purpose of enabling people to glorify and enjoy Him. Magistrates should also adopt this as their ultimate goal in their official duties, striving to promote it among those they govern for their welfare. This principle is evident in all forms of government and states that the Lord directly organised. Magistrates had a specific responsibility to maintain the purity of His Ordinances and restrain those who corrupted them. This is expressed in the Moral Law, where Masters are not only responsible for ensuring their servants do not work on the Sabbath out of reverence for the Lord, but also for directing their work throughout the week for their own benefit. According to the rules of interpreting these commands, what belongs to a Master to do in his role, concerning those over whom he has authority based on his position, also applies to all Magistrates regarding those under their jurisdiction based on their positions.

When one example is provided, it encompasses all similar situations. Therefore, as the enforcement of the Sabbath's sanctity is the responsibility of superiors, so too are all other ordinances. It is also acknowledged that what is specified in one command concerning its scope should be understood in all. Thus, the obligation rests on superiors to ensure that inferiors adhere to God's ordinances in accordance with all the commands. Although there is no explicit expression in the second Table of the Law implying this, the duties are still presumed to apply to it, and it is a commonly accepted assertion that Magistrates have both Tables of the Law entrusted to their care. This has been thoroughly argued by many godly and learned individuals, and we need not dwell on it further. Magistrates readily accept their authority; the question at hand is determining what this authority entails.

Assert. 2. In the case of a pervasive delusion, it is not solely the duty of a Magistrate to focus on outward order, civil peace, and the avoidance of harm, allowing various dangerous errors and delusions to spread unchecked. They should not grant toleration to those who propagate these errors as they spread. There are several reasons for this stance:

1. Such errors are wicked actions, and those who propagate them are wrongdoers, causing significant harm to people (Gal. 5:20, 2 John 11). Magistrates are meant to be a deterrent to wrongdoers without limitation. I believe that if the sword is wielded in vain against them, their consciences will find no grounds for tranquillity on the Day of Judgment, as the Lord has not made any such distinctions in their commission.
2. Magistrates should zealously uphold the honour of their Superior, who is God, to prevent His name from being

blasphemed. Can individuals be tolerated without effectively granting them the liberty to blaspheme God's name, abuse His truth, reproach His ordinances, and take His name in vain as they please? Would any supreme Magistrate accept it if an inferior officer or a Magistrate from a town or province allowed such liberty to those under their jurisdiction regarding the supreme Magistrate? Is there any distance between the supreme and inferior Magistrate comparable to the vast gap between God's Majesty and the most supreme earthly power? What if God judged between Him and them based on their own actions, meting out to them as they have done to others?

3. Are Magistrates not supposed to seek the people's welfare? Is there any greater good than their spiritual well-being? Are there any greater enemies to that than seducers? Therefore, we believe that it is not in line with the purpose of their office and the objectives they should aim to achieve if Magistrates were to grant this liberty or turn a blind eye to individuals spreading errors that can destroy souls and actually undermine the structure of a visible Church to the extent that, if something were to pervade universally (as has happened with Popery and other gross errors and delusions in some parts of the world), there would be no visible Church within their domains. Indeed, it cannot be attributed to their vigilance if it were to occur otherwise. Moreover, such permissiveness can lead to the overthrow of ordinances and the establishment of abominations in their place, removing all forms of ministry, sacraments, discipline, and preaching, all under the pretext of conscience. Such delusions have occurred in the world, and if they were to spread throughout a nation due to the Magistrates' tolerance, with no remedy in sight, would it be satisfactory or comforting to a Magistrate (assuming they have a conscience) to see their

people in such a state? What if, under the pretext of conscience, the legitimacy of Magistracy as an ordinance of God were denied, and they were removed from office because the people considered it unlawful to obey them? It is likely that their conscience would affirm that, since they did not restrain others from undermining these ordinances, which are so crucial to God's honour and the good of souls, it would be just for God to permit them to be undermined as well, in an ordinance that directly concerns them. Indeed, it has not been uncommon for those who began by challenging Church ordinances to eventually challenge civil ordinances as well. Given that there is no clearer divine warrant for one than the other, this should not come as a surprise.

If it is argued that what has been discussed in the doctrine and in these passages, particularly Revelation 2, regarding the prevention of corrupt teachers from spreading their errors, pertains to Ministers and Church officials, and not to Magistrates, the following responses can be given:

1. If you are a Magistrate raising this objection, consider within your own heart whether that which is so displeasing in Ministers and Church officials, namely, tolerating corrupt individuals to propagate their errors, will be well-received and approved by Christ Jesus when He comes to judge regarding this matter. Will the great Judge use a different standard for Magistrates in that day? Or is it likely that, out of love for His Church, Christ will emphatically require Ministers not to allow false teachers but to restrain them according to their roles, preventing them from teaching and leading His servants astray, while, for the benefit of His Church, He would require Magistrates to tolerate and support the same?

2. Consider whether the grounds and reasons that compel this duty upon Ministers will not equivalently and proportionally apply to all individuals according to their roles. These grounds essentially revolve around love for God and love for the edification and salvation of others, which encapsulate the essence of fulfilling the moral Law.
3. Observe whether in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, or in historical accounts, the most commendable Magistrates were not those who zealously opposed corrupt teachers. In ancient times, fathers were not hesitant to discipline their own children (Deut. 13) and prevent them from teaching or leading others to dishonour God, risking the souls of those they influenced. Can it be argued that souls today are less precious, that error is less infectious and dangerous today, or that these matters concerning the glory of God and the edification or destruction of souls are less critical in the Gospel era than they were in the past?
4. Reflect on whether in the Book of Revelation, the toleration of Antichrist's deception is not portrayed as reprehensible. Conversely, the destruction of that beast and its prevention from corrupting the earth is depicted as a significant commendation for those who play a role in this. In Scripture, all deceivers and seducers are regarded as Antichrists, driven by the same spirit and pursuing the same agenda against the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Is there any reason to make distinctions where the Lord has not?
5. Consider whether it can be considered sincere zeal to permit the Name of God to be dishonoured when any slight against our own name deeply troubles us. Allowing this implies either an

indifference between truth and error, suggesting that the Lord is no more dishonoured in one than the other, which contradicts His own portrayal of Himself in Scripture and is unlikely to be pleaded on the Day of Judgment when He avenges Himself against such seducers. Alternatively, it implies that people should not take notice of what dishonours Him, even though many means are within their reach to prevent it. If, after serious reflection, one's conscience is not stirred to zeal for God, whose glory is at stake, for the salvation of many endangered souls, to avert the numerous offences that inevitably arise from such evils, and to prevent the manifold inconveniences, divisions, suspicions, ruptures, etc., that afflict families, congregations, cities, and nations, as well as the significant harm inflicted on the Commonwealth through the fragmentation of its members, the disqualification of many for public trust, the nurturing of diverse interests and conflicting principles within a single body, all of which undermine honest public endeavours – if, I say, by these considerations, one's zeal and conscience are not provoked, then what could possibly provoke them?

If it is suggested that it appears more in line with the Gospel and conducive to the advancement of Christ's Kingdom for Magistrates to allow individuals to follow their own convictions and be addressed by the preaching of the Gospel and its persuasive power, we should consider the following points:

1. Reflect on whether it seems Christian-like and compassionate for individuals to stand aside in the Lord's Cause and essentially let Him fend for Himself. It was once said of Baal, "If he be a god, let him plead for himself." But would a tender-hearted person think or speak so disrespectfully of the Majesty of God? God can and will plead for Himself, and His use of human

agents to defend His truth or restrain errors is not due to a lack of power. Instead, it is His good pleasure to involve Magistrates in this role (and thus honour them), just as He did with Gideon in a similar situation.

2. Consider whether it seems Christian-like to grant the devil equal access to pursue his designs alongside Jesus Christ in establishing his kingdom. Absolute toleration achieves this, and more, because there is only one Truth while there are many Errors. Each of these errors enjoys the same liberty and immunity, so to speak, as Truth, and they can confidently emerge into the open light without any civil restraint.
3. Consider the case of Antichrist. There is no error against which the Lord has more directly positioned Himself to combat with the sword of His mouth than Popery. Yet, no one would reasonably argue that Kings could justifiably permit its spread and preaching, infecting their people without imposing any civil restraint. Certainly, their aversion to the Whore and their efforts to make her desolate imply something different. Wherever genuine hatred of Error exists, there will be a more effective deployment of one's power and authority to restrain it.
4. We can add this consideration: Thus far, toleration of errors and a diversity of corrupt opinions have consistently been viewed and utilised as highly cunning means for undermining and destroying the Church. Julian, a skilful enemy of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, is noted for this. Having exhausted his cunning to devise ways to destroy the Church through deception, something his predecessors couldn't achieve through violence, he arrived at the strategy of not resorting to open persecution. Instead, he decided to grant liberty to all the differing Bishops and

Teachers, who were numerous and deeply divided in their beliefs, allowing them to follow their own paths and propagate their own opinions without any fear of restraint. He summoned them to convey this message, intending to encourage them further. The words he used, as recorded by Ammianus and cited by Lodovicus Molineus, page 560, were: "Ut consopitis civilibus discordiis, suae quisque Religioni serviret intrepidus," which essentially means that everyone, by avoiding civil disputes, should worship according to their own religion without constraint or fear. Does it seem likely that a strategy employed by a shrewd adversary of the Church would prove beneficial for the Church's wellbeing?

Our third assertion, then, is that Magistrates, in their positions, should prevent the infection of their subjects through corrupt teachings and should work to rescue them when they are ensnared. Therefore, they have a duty to restrain and hinder corrupt teachers from spreading their errors to lead others astray. We believe this assertion is evident from the previous two, as if Magistrates are permitted to employ their power for the Church's good and are not duty-bound to offer equal protection to Error and its proponents alongside Truth, it naturally follows that they should use their power to curtail Error's influence and, through such action, seek the welfare of their subjects by shielding them from this great evil.

Chapter XIV:

Magistrates' Powers and Duties in Doctrinal Matters

Explaining this and demonstrating what falls within the Magistrate's purview or how he should address it may be somewhat challenging. Before we provide an answer, we'd like to clarify a few points:

1. It is not our intention to suggest that Magistrates should rigorously and severely (let alone uniformly) take action against all individuals who, in their judgment, hold erroneous beliefs or differ from the truth. Such an approach is not required from Magistrates. Therefore, it's essential to keep in mind the distinctions made earlier and apply them accordingly. There is a significant difference between addressing an absurd error or acknowledging it as a matter of personal belief or conscience and addressing it as an external action that causes real harm, offence, or prejudice to others. In the latter case, the Magistrate is not imposing one's conscience on another's religious beliefs but rather safeguarding the public from the harm caused by those who spread such erroneous beliefs or tarnish the name of the Lord or His Church.
2. We are not discussing the Magistrate's duty to punish corrupt teachers with civil or capital penalties here (although we do not doubt that their authority extends to such actions in certain cases). We are certainly not referring to the harshest forms of punishment. While the truth regarding these matters is not the focus of our discussion here, our aim aligns with our assertion: to consider what is necessary to prevent the dissemination of corrupt doctrine and to protect or recover a people from it.
3. This does not grant Magistrates the authority to condemn and restrict whatever they perceive as error, or what others consider error. Just as Ministers are not justified in rejecting individuals they deem heretical but who are not actually heretics, so it is

here. The Magistrate's role is to restrain those who genuinely propagate error and rebel against the Lord.

Now, let us explore what may constitute the Magistrate's duty when seductive forces threaten the people under their care. We will also consider what is clearly within their power to do to prevent harm without delving into complex or contentious situations. Their duty can be examined from four perspectives, much like that of Ministers.

1. It should be considered in relation to God. Magistrates should fear the possibility of harm befalling their people, and by seeking divine guidance, they should strive to act in a way that aligns with God's will. If it is a privilege for Magistrates in the Christian Church to be regarded as nursing fathers (Isaiah 49:23), then it must bring them great honour, mercy, and satisfaction to see their people—the Church—thrive and flourish under their care. Accordingly, any adverse impact on the Church caused by unhealthy doctrines should greatly concern them. This expression in Isaiah reveals both the Magistrate's duty to nurture the Church tenderly and protect her from anything that may harm her, as well as the deep concern and responsibility that should stir within them when the Church faces potential harm.
2. Regarding themselves, Magistrates should consider whether any wrongdoing on their part has provoked the Lord to allow the emergence of such deceptive spirits. Just as Solomon's sins led to the division of the Kingdom, they might also be seen as contributing to idolatry and apostasy, much like Jeroboam and his departure from the truth. If their negligence in providing faithful Teachers, their tolerance of errors, or other actions make them accessories to these problems, they should take these

matters seriously. Jeroboam's decision to appoint the lowest of the people as Priests and his initial defection through his example, even though he did not entirely forsake the true God, paved the way for the people to later embrace Baal and other idols. Similarly, Solomon's complacency and worldly pursuits, despite not falling into gross idolatry himself, made him guilty of gross idolatry through his tolerance of it. If Magistrates earnestly introspect and acknowledge their negligence and carelessness in preventing such issues, they can make significant progress, clarify uncertainties, and find remedies for these problems.

3. Their duty can also be viewed in relation to others, where they may and should extend their efforts to prevent the spread of infection among those who are faithful. This can be achieved through various means:
 1. Leading by example, demonstrating zeal against falsehood, and rejecting the questioning and disputing of the truth. The example set by a Magistrate often carries significant weight, although it should not be considered coercion.
 2. Ensuring the presence of faithful and honest Ministers who can play a crucial role in strengthening the steadfast and mitigating harm.
 3. Providing support and recognition to those who are faithful, whether among Ministers or the general population. Such recognition often has a substantial impact on thwarting deceivers. For example, King Hezekiah spoke encouraging words to the Levites who taught the knowledge of the Lord, aiming to bolster their zeal and influence.

4. Employing suitable individuals to counteract seduction, assigning them to study controversies and refute errors to clarify the truth.
5. Striving, according to their role, to resolve and mitigate all minor disputes and conflicts among those who fundamentally stand for the truth. Petty quarrels and divisions among believers can provide fertile ground for error and must be addressed. Constantine, during the Council of Nice, diligently worked to resolve such differences, urging unity and cooperation among those defending the faith.

Indeed, when Ministers are divided over less significant and unproductive debates, as unfortunately occurs in the Christian reformed Church today, they inevitably have less strength, zeal, and vigilance to confront avowed enemies on matters of greater importance.

6. Magistrates may and should exercise their authority to prohibit the reception, listening to, or association with known and evident seducers. This is akin to issuing a directive to maintain a safe distance from a place or person suspected of carrying a contagious disease, as it is intended to prevent people from risking their own well-being. Such a restriction should not be seen as a violation of their legitimate freedom. Rather, it is an endorsement of a clear directive laid out in the Word of God. There is no risk of error in implementing such measures, especially when identifying specific individuals can be as discernible from the Scriptures as the duty itself.
7. They can and should lend their support and authority to ecclesiastical regulations, proposals, or methods that Church

judicatories or Officers may employ for this purpose in their respective areas. This should not be seen as an infringement on liberty, as it is no different from confirming the ordinance of preaching the Gospel through their authority.

8. Magistrates may and should safeguard the sanctity of the Church's ordinances and protect those who administer them from reproach. They have every right to censure such actions when they occur.
9. In times of confusion and uncertainty, a Magistrate may lead his people back to previously received truths and exercise his authority to achieve this goal, as exemplified by Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34:31-33.
10. Magistrates are permitted and obliged to eliminate false worship practices, prevent corrupt preaching, writings, or meetings for such purposes, and prohibit the administration of corrupted Sacraments or any ordinances that are not permitted. This aligns with Josiah's actions, where he made the people uphold the Covenant, removed all idolatrous worship, and encouraged them to serve the Lord through the proper observance of the Sabbath, offering sacrifices, and so on, as prescribed by the Lord. This was not an infringement on their liberty, but rather the preservation of their freedom from the abominable bondage of such evils. It was their duty to abstain from these practices and adhere to pure ordinances. The Magistrate may encourage people to keep ordinances and follow the rules because it only constrains them to the means through which religion operates and compels them, in a sense, to listen to God. However, it does not force them to submit to a religion. This pertains to external order, not inner conviction. A Magistrate should respect God's

glory and the people's well-being by using his authority to make them listen when God communicates through His ordinances. There is also a distinction between compelling a circumcised or baptized people to worship God in the purity of ordinances, as Josiah did, and compelling people to engage and be baptized when they were not previously engaged. Members of a church do not have the same liberty as others to abandon ordinances. This does not impose new religious obligations but rather urges them to uphold their existing commitments and fulfil them accordingly. Consequently, Church members have been subjected to many requirements and limitations, as seen in both the Old and New Testaments (see 2 Chronicles 15:13).

In the fourth place, there are also many actions within their authority concerning those who are seducers, deluders, or genuinely deluded, which could and should be utilised for the benefit of the Church. It's important to note that this does not involve civil or capital punishment for people's beliefs, nor does it entail imposing religion on consciences. These actions include:

1. Magistrates can and should prompt Ministers, Church-officers, and others to fulfill their duties (in case of negligence) in identifying, convincing, and addressing those who spread corrupt doctrines that may endanger others.
2. They have the right and duty to personally discourage such individuals and, by their authority, prohibit them from disseminating such harmful beliefs, even under penalties. This isn't about forcing them into a particular religious belief but rather preventing them from harming the consciences of others.
3. When individuals defy such prohibitions, Magistrates may and should impose penalties on them. By their authority, they can

render these individuals incapable of influencing others. This isn't a condemnation of their beliefs but rather a response to their disobedience and the harm they cause to others. It doesn't infringe on personal liberty, as true liberty doesn't involve the freedom to harm others.

4. They can and should suppress books used to spread infection or harm to others. This includes prohibiting their printing, sale, distribution, or transportation, similar to stopping the trafficking of prohibited goods.
5. Magistrates can and should restrict the wandering and idle travels of suspicious individuals. They can require these individuals to report their necessary activities to authorities, which prevents potential harm during their journeys. They might also be issued passes. Magistrates can compel them to engage in lawful occupations and maintain diligence in their work. These measures are entirely consistent with good governance. Busybodies and wanderers who neglect their responsibilities often prove most harmful to the Church and serve as instruments of the devil.
6. They have the authority to restrain and censure all blasphemous and disrespectful expressions against the Majesty of God and His Ordinances. They can also address slander and bitterness against faithful Ministers or Professors who adhere to the truth. These actions are meant to address moral sins and do not infringe on the freedom of conscience. The pretext of following one's light and conscience cannot excuse such sins any more than the Nicolaitans' claims excused their adultery and other immoral acts.

7. Magistrates can and should use their authority to ensure that these individuals participate in conferences in an orderly and respectful manner, provide intelligent answers, undergo trials, and similar processes before Ecclesiastical Assemblies.
8. They may and should render such individuals incapable of holding public positions of trust and remove them from such roles. This is because these individuals cannot be trusted to use their power responsibly, and such positions are bestowed voluntarily as a mark of respect for those eminently qualified, benefiting the Commonwealth. It does not unjustly restrict their liberty as citizens. For instance, Queen Maachah was removed from her position of authority due to similar considerations (1 Kings 15:13, 2 Chronicles 15:16), and this was not an injustice.

In the aforementioned steps, our intention has not been to prescribe the utmost measures in such a case, but rather to outline what we believe cannot reasonably be denied by those with broad principles regarding this matter, as long as they do not descend into complete permissiveness.

If someone argues that it's enough for the Magistrate to maintain civil peace and restrain civil disturbances, we may consider the following points in response:

1. Restraining civil disturbances is not more than what Julian did, as the previously cited passage illustrates. Surely, those who rule for Christ should not view his example as a good model to follow.
2. This is something even non-believers do out of self-interest. Should Christian Magistrates not show respect for Christ rather

than just for themselves? Should they do no more for Christianity than heathens who do not even profess it?

3. Is it possible to separate the growth of delusions and various absurd errors from civil faction and discord? In our experience, have they ever been separate? We've seen that these differences made people carnal in Corinth and caused them to quarrel in Galatia, as mentioned in Galatians 5. They provoked debates, envy, contradictions, and more, as described in 2 Corinthians 12:20. Can such things coexist with the maintenance of civil peace? The disruption of civil peace arises from hatred, bitterness, alienation of minds, envy, contradictions, and the like. Do these not necessarily accompany debates and diverse opinions? It should not be assumed that such differences, resulting from a lack of understanding, can exist in individuals who are completely mortified and without corruption. Therefore, it can be expected that this corruption will manifest itself in such situations. The Apostle's progression in 2 Corinthians 12, beginning with debates and leading to tumults, illustrates this. Those familiar with the histories of earlier and more recent times will acknowledge this truth.
4. Almost everything mentioned in the previous points is necessary for the preservation and restoration of civil peace or the prevention and censure of disturbances. There can be no solid foundation for maintaining peace unless the sources of debates and tumults are addressed, and the underlying disorders are either cured and removed or restrained.
5. It's worth considering whether such a approach has ever benefited the Church, whose divisions and offenses have often reached their peak due to this approach, or whether it has

benefited those who were led astray. Not only were they tempted by it, but they were also allowed to harden themselves in it, as it didn't appear as gross to wise statesmen as some ministers might suggest.

6. Lastly, it's worth considering whether this approach has ever benefited the state in which it was allowed or the Magistrates who permitted it. Did it foster secret jealousies, heartburnings, divisions, and factions to such an extent that it posed a danger to the body, risking harm to the very source that bred it or potentially causing harm to those who nurtured it?

CHAPTER XV

Peoples' Responsibilities During the Spread of Errors

Now, we must discuss the duties of people who are members of the Church where such delusions are being spread. In addressing this, we shall follow almost the same method as in the previous chapter.

1. First and foremost, people should be deeply affected when confronted with such a dire situation, just as they would be upon hearing news of war, famine, or pestilence. In this context, the warning sounds like the proclamation of the angels in Revelation 8:13, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the angels that are to sound," even though these angels primarily forewarn of spiritual plagues and, in particular, delusions. This sense of seriousness would restrain vanity,

mockery, laughter, and arrogance. It would compel those who stand firm to be cautious lest they fall, especially when considering the judgment as a divine warning of God's anger and impending judgment. Without this attitude, there is little hope of benefiting from any other guidance.

2. People should be deeply moved by the fall or the risk of falling of anyone they hear about. They should feel zeal for God and sympathy for those affected. For this reason, they should humble themselves before God and seek to avert the spiritual plague, just as they would do in the face of war, famine, or pestilence.
3. People should examine their own relationship with God. They should assess whether their inward state is in good condition. If any guilt is found that might lead to or predispose them to such a plague, such as a lack of love for the truth, insufficient study of the knowledge of the truth, limited zeal against error, or a lack of sympathy for infected Churches at a distance, then they should acknowledge these shortcomings. This includes instances of laughter at such matters without any useful purpose, minimal prayer for others, or a reluctance to exhort or admonish others (which can help prevent unsteadiness). People should also consider whether they are making efforts, according to their positions, to ensure others receive proper instruction or have access to faithful, capable, and godly Ministers for this purpose. Conversely, they should guard against spiritual pride, self-conceit, stubbornness, and an attachment to their own wills and opinions. Prejudice against competent and faithful Teachers, along with a readiness to listen to anyone and everything, should be avoided. Such behaviours and attitudes should be

acknowledged and mourned as contributing factors to this spiritual plague.

4. People should strive to strengthen and solidify their understanding of essential Truths. They should practice unambiguous piety and avoid engaging in contentious debates over unnecessary matters. Recognizing that the enemy's cunning often involves engaging individuals in even the most trivial disputes, they should exercise caution. Such debates not only divert attention from more important matters and diminish fervency but also prepare the ground for more significant issues, as previously noted in the enemy's approach. Just as individuals are not immediately led to extreme profanity in corrupt practices but rather through gradual steps, the same applies to corrupt doctrines. Therefore, caution is required, even in discussing or questioning the least significant Truth, if any Truth can be considered minor.
5. If there is genuine doubt about something, people should seek information through prudent and sober means. This can be achieved by acquiring and reading a suitable book, as these often present more deliberate and comprehensive reasoning that can be carefully studied and digested, unlike transient discussions. Care must be taken to choose the right book, and judgments from sound and discerning individuals should guide this selection. Alternatively, when God provides the opportunity, such doubts may be addressed in a sober and Christian dialogue with others who possess the necessary expertise and integrity, particularly with Ministers. Ministers should neither avoid nor hastily misinterpret such discussions but should welcome them warmly and tenderly, lest individuals turn to consult others who may prove to be worthless physicians. In such discussions,

people should not randomly express their doubts in all company but should choose the appropriate time and company carefully to ensure seriousness. Doubts should not be raised for debate unless the individual can resolve them themselves or in the presence of those who can provide solutions.

6. People should make every effort to hold their Ministers and Guides in high regard and be diligent and reverent participants in all Ordinances, especially during such times. Ministers are indeed Guides, as stated in Hebrews 13:17. Ordinances are appointed to prevent people from being swayed, as mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, 12, 13, 14. The Bride is directed to stay close to the shepherds' tents to avoid wandering, as described in Song of Solomon 1:9. When the devil attempts to foster prejudice against Ministers and diminish the reputation of Ordinances, people should resist this and, to some extent, turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to any information regarding the faults of Ministers. This should be done not so much for the sake of the Ministers but for their own benefit. Therefore, the Apostle provides this reason for emphasizing obedience and submission to Ministers in Hebrews 13:17, as the lack of these virtues not only harms the Minister but is also unprofitable for the people themselves.
7. People should look to the path that faithful and profoundly godly individuals have followed to reach Heaven before them. This is akin to following the footsteps of the flock, as mentioned in Song of Solomon 1:9, and emulating the faith and patience of those who inherit the promises, as stated in Hebrews 6:12. It will become evident that such individuals are usually sober and serious, far removed from novelty, curiosity, or absurd opinions. One notable characteristic of the audacity and impudence often associated with new delusions is their general condemnation of

God's People, as if there were no path to Heaven except through their vain inventions. This can be a significant stumbling block to a tender soul, as it leads to the condemnation of the religion and practices of a multitude of witnesses.

8. When people hear others questioning things or expressing prejudice against Ministers, Ordinances, or established Truths, they should make an effort to address these concerns promptly. They should not fuel such sentiments by introducing new doubts, suspicions, or grounds for mistrust against Ministers or others. Instead, they should strive to resolve these issues wisely and gravely.
9. During such times, people should engage in Christian fellowship earnestly and with great seriousness. They should observe and consider one another, encouraging and provoking one another, as the Bible advises in Hebrews 10:24 and Hebrews 3:12, 13. They should be vigilant to prevent the development of an evil heart of unbelief among them and the hardening of anyone. The remedy for these issues is to exhort one another daily. There is no better time for Christian fellowship than during such periods, provided it is properly structured and managed. Christian fellowship should not be abandoned but should be conducted wisely, considering the individuals involved, the occasions on which it occurs, and the subject matter and duties emphasized. The primary focus should be on strengthening one another in truth, offering faithful admonishments when needed, and earnestly striving to maintain qualities such as repentance, humility, and self-denial. These and similar aspects are beneficial and edifying when pursued with seriousness, sincerity, faithfulness, tenderness, and a commitment to avoiding offence.

In relation to individuals who are infected or led astray, the responsibilities of the people can be considered in the following steps:

1. They should be affected by the fault of these individuals and pray for their recovery.
2. When the occasion arises, they should express their disapproval of the path these individuals are on.
3. Those who are known to play a role in promoting novel ideas should be actively avoided. This includes refraining from their company and fellowship, as Romans 16:17, 18 advises to beware of them.
4. People should not invite such individuals into their homes, give them greetings, or wish them well, as indicated in 3 John, verse 10. They should have no association with them, as mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 3:14. This duty is emphasised repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, Proverbs 19:27 warns, "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction [that causeth] to err from the words of knowledge." There are two reasons for this:
 1. Avoiding such individuals is essential for preserving the integrity of those who are faithful. It is challenging to walk on fire without getting burnt, as noted in Proverbs 7:27, 28, and the experience of many confirms this. Many would not have strayed if they had maintained distance from those who were defiled and infected. Listening to such instruction causes one to deviate from the path of understanding.

2. Avoiding such individuals is also useful in convincing them of their errors and making them ashamed. This is another reason why the Lord commands this. Additionally, it demonstrates respect for God and reverence towards Him. A sinner who acknowledges their corruption should stand in awe and avoid placing themselves in the path of temptation. God is jealous and will not tolerate people risking being led astray from Him. Humans are not free from corruption and are susceptible to corruption.

Some may believe that trying everything poses no danger, as it allows them to hold onto what is good, and they may suspect that Ministers press this point out of fear of losing their respect or from their own carnal passions. However, they should consider the following:

1. If our Lord Jesus and His Apostles restricted people from exercising certain liberties, especially when it comes to associating with and listening to certain individuals, there is a significant reason for this. The commands in this regard are explicitly and emphatically conveyed in the Word, as the cited passages clearly show.
2. Consider whether our Lord Jesus or the Apostles ever feared losing respect or their ability to defend against deceivers. Yet they themselves emphasised and commanded this to be impressed upon their followers.
3. Reflect on whether individuals like our Lord and the Apostles fostered carnal passions while urging people to avoid fellowship with those promoting erroneous beliefs. In fact, the Church history records that Apostle John, upon entering a bathhouse where the heretic Cerinthus was, left immediately, fearing spiritual harm by remaining under the same roof.

4. Consider whether the meaning of phrases such as "Prove all things" and "Try the spirits" obligates individuals to listen to every novelty. It is not possible for every person to investigate and test every error and opinion. People may not have the capacity to do so. Such an interpretation directly contradicts the letter and purpose of previous precepts that were given when the command to "prove all things" was also given. Therefore, it should be understood as agreeing with and emphasizing the need to test any doctrine against the Word of God, as the Bereans did in Acts 17. It does not grant permission to try everything, especially when it is grossly erroneous, without proper examination, although it does command not to accept anything without evidence.

Furthermore, a significant part of the people's duty is to cooperate in their respective roles to support and reinforce the appropriate actions and decisions required from Ministers in their positions. This includes:

1. Contributing to the extent possible to uncover and examine such individuals, providing clarity in the process.
2. Adding their testimony to the truth, thereby strengthening the means of conviction.
3. Expressing their disapproval of the person's stubbornness and acknowledging the justice and necessity of issuing further decisions against them.
4. Avoiding their company, refraining from familiarity, and using other means to show their disdain for the person's actions.
5. Adhering to the issued sentences and working in their capacity to make them weighty and effective on the individuals. This is done so that they may feel ashamed and be more likely to humble themselves and turn away from their erroneous ways.

People should avoid close association, especially with excommunicated individuals, that could diminish the impact of their sentence or prevent them from experiencing shame. This behaviour would be considered as disregarding Christ's ordinance and obstructing its intended results for a fellow believer. It could also subject individuals to censure for engaging in scandalous conduct.

CHAPTER XVI

Private Professors' Duties Towards Heretics who have been Excommunicated.

If it is asked, what further duties are expected of private individuals towards a person who has been excommunicated?

Answer: I believe the following things are required:

1. Abstinance from unnecessary social interactions, such as avoiding their company, refraining from visiting them, dining or supping with them, or engaging in familiar activities with them. This aligns with the guidance provided in 1 Corinthians 5. It is just as much the duty of the people to conduct themselves in a way that promotes their edification as it is the duty of the Ministers to instruct and pass sentences.
2. There should also be abstention from Christian fellowship. This means refraining from praying with them, reading or discussing spiritual matters (especially intentionally), or engaging in any activities associated with Christian communion. In this sense,

we cannot have fellowship with an excommunicated person as we do with other Christians. Likewise, in the first sense, we cannot associate with them as we might with other non-believers who, perhaps, are guilty of equally gross sins. The Word of the Lord makes this distinction explicit in 1 Corinthians 5.

3. Nevertheless, we can still offer prayers for them. Excommunication is not evidence that a person has committed the sin against the Holy Ghost or a sin unto death. If they are in need, their necessities should and must be met because they are human, and it is natural to assist those in need. They may also be helped against unjust violence or any personal danger they encounter. Additionally, as opportunities arise, people may offer serious words of admonition to them, among other things. These actions further the purpose and weight of the excommunication rather than weaken it.
4. Those who share natural relationships, such as husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, should continue to fulfil their respective duties because what nature binds, the Church does not dissolve.
5. People can engage in civil matters, such as paying or collecting debts, buying or selling, and participating in activities necessary for human interaction and society. Church discipline aims to humble and shame individuals by emphasising their sinfulness, but it does not seek to undo them or deprive them of their basic existence.
6. However, all these actions should be carried out in a manner that demonstrates both indignation at their erroneous ways while expressing tenderness towards their persons. They should

be conducted differently from interactions with others who are not under such a sentence to maintain respect for the excommunication while still showing respect to the individuals. Therefore, there should not be frequent engagement with such persons, nor should it involve familiarity, excessive conversation unrelated to the necessary business, laughter, or excessive cheerfulness, intimacy, or complacency as with others. In summary, the necessary tasks should be completed, and other interactions should be avoided. When the necessary tasks are completed, unless under exceptional circumstances, people should not eat or drink with them at the time or after the completion of their business. This is because it is not essential to their existence as human beings, and by refraining from such actions, the appropriate distance is maintained. This practical approach ensures that the weight of the excommunication is not diminished, and the individuals are not prejudiced in other necessary aspects of their lives. Every opportunity should be seized to advance their edification.

If what has been previously stated is considered, we believe there will be little need to add arguments to encourage both Ministers and others to be zealous in carrying out their respective duties. However, a few considerations may be taken into account and pondered for this purpose:

1. It's worth noting that hardly has any delusion, no matter how gross, ever infiltrated a Church and been tolerated for a time without carrying away many individuals and leading to a plethora of sins, offenses, reproaches, divisions, bitterness, and various troubles within the Church of Christ. A cursory examination of Church history will confirm this.

2. Consider that this spirit of delusion is specifically prophesied to gain great strength and resurgence in the latter days. It is stated in 1 Timothy 4:1, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith." Why is this mentioned so explicitly if not to provide a clear warning for people to fulfil their duties? Furthermore, 2 Timothy 3:1 declares, "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty." A holy and learned man has observed that in this verse, it refers to the last days, while in the previous verse, it mentions the last times, as if the former relates to a time closer to the end of the world. The former appears to pertain to the Popish superstitions and abominations, and the latter relates to the gross delusions that were to succeed under the pretext of godliness. Therefore, individuals should be all the more vigilant and zealous in these times, considering the distinct warning given.
3. The dreadful consequences of such ills should be considered. They do not merely result in harm to physical bodies or possessions but to souls. They involve not only sin but rebellion and even the teaching and promotion of rebellion against God. What else can stir up zeal for God or awaken love and sympathy for the souls of others if not this?
4. One should consider how often the zeal, diligence, and faithfulness of individuals in their respective roles (as previously described) have been incredibly effective in preventing and curbing the spread of such evils. In doing so, they have dried up the flood that could have otherwise overwhelmed the Church, as mentioned in Revelation 12. In Matthew 13, it is noted that such tares are sown and grow not while people are watchful and diligent but while they are asleep and neglectful of their duties

(verse 25). Diligence in the use of means brings the promised blessing that others cannot expect. Even if God's wrath has reached a certain point where He will not be entreated in a particular matter, a diligent person can expect to secure their own soul as a prize and remain steadfast in the midst of temptations.

5. It might serve as a provocation to humility and vigilance to consider how even great individuals have been led astray by the most vile delusions. The Church of Corinth abounded in extraordinary gifts, yet corrupt teachers still held sway over them. The Church of Galatia was exceptionally zealous and tender, yet they succumbed to a high degree of delusion, becoming bewitched by it (Galatians 3:1). Church history also attests that the most eminent individuals have fallen prey to base delusions. Even the great theologian Tertullian became significantly tainted by the delusions of the Montanists. Subsequent history has shown that the most outstanding of individuals are susceptible to defection, and even stars are often made to fall from heaven in the face of such storms.
6. It is also dreadful to consider how challenging it is to recover individuals from these delusions. Scripture and history rarely provide examples of a person recovering after succumbing to this kind of error. Occasionally, individuals who have denied Christ or supported idolatry out of fear exhibit great tenderness and remorse in acknowledging their failures and abandoning them. Such failures are often the result of surprise and infirmity. However, the recovery of a person who has knowingly embraced error and rejected convictions is an exceedingly rare occurrence. Additionally, the element of "perhaps" is added to their potential recovery (2 Timothy 2:23), a factor not readily found in any

other case. Moreover, such individuals often deteriorate further, with one delusion leading to another until they reach the pinnacle of absurdity.

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