

THE GLORY OF A TRUE CHURCH

— BENJAMIN KEACH —



CROWDEDSHIP

THE
GLORY
OF A
TRUE CHURCH

AND ITS DISCIPLINE DISPLAYED, WHEREIN A
TRUE GOSPEL-CHURCH IS DESCRIBED, TOGETHER
WITH THE POWER OF THE KEYS, AND WHO ARE
TO BE LET IN, AND WHO TO BE SHUT OUT.

BY BENJAMIN KEACH

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TO THE READER

To the baptized churches, particularly to that under my care.

My Brethren,

Every house or building consists both of matter and form, and so does the church of Christ, or house of the living God. The matter or materials with which it is built are “lively stones,” converted persons. Also, the matter and form must be according to the rule and pattern showed in the mount (I mean Christ’s institution) and in the apostolic churches’ constitution, and not after men’s inventions.

Because the typical church of the Jews was national and took in their carnal seed (as such), therefore some men [expect to find] the same matter and form under the gospel. But though a church be rightly built in both these respects—of fit matter and right form—yet without a regular and orderly discipline it will soon lose its beauty and be polluted.

It is true, many reverend divines of the congregational way have written most excellently upon the subject of church discipline, but the books are so voluminous that the poor cannot purchase them, and many others have not time or learning enough to improve them to their profit. As I can gather, our brethren the Baptists have not written on this subject by itself.

Therefore, our members and one of our pastors have earnestly asked me to write a small and plain tract concerning the rule and the discipline of a gospel church, so that all men may not only know our faith but see our order in this case also. True, this (though plain)

is quite short, but perhaps it may provoke some other person to do it more fully. Certainly, ignorance of the rules of discipline causes no small trouble and disorders in our Churches; and if this may be a prevention, or prove profitable to any, let God have the glory, and I have my End:

Who am Yours

Benjamin Keach

August 18, 1697.

1. TRUE AND ORDERLY GOSPEL CHURCH



efore there can be any orderly discipline among a Christian assembly, they must be orderly and regularly constituted into a Church-state, according to the institution of Christ in the Gospel.

1. A Church of Christ, according to the gospel-institution, is a congregation of godly Christians, who as a stated-assembly (being first baptized upon the profession of faith) do by mutual agreement and consent give themselves up to the Lord, and one to another, according to the will of God; and do ordinarily meet together in one place, for the public service and worship of God; among whom the Word of God and sacraments are duly administered, according to Christ's institution.

2. The beauty and glory of which congregation doth consist in their being all converted persons, or lively stones; being by the Holy Spirit, united to Jesus Christ the precious Cornerstone, and only foundation of every Christian, as well as of every particular congregation, and of the whole Catholic Church.

3. That every person before they are admitted members, in such a Church so constituted, must declare to the Church (or to such with the pastor, that they shall appoint) what God has done for their souls, or their experiences of a saving work of grace upon their hearts; and also the Church should inquire after, and take full satisfaction concerning their holy lives, or good conversations.

And when admitted members, before the Church they must solemnly enter into a covenant, to walk in the fellowship of that particular congregation, and submit themselves to the care and discipline thereof, and to walk faithfully with God in all his holy

ordinances, and there to be fed and have communion, and worship God there, when the Church meets (if possible) and give themselves up to the watch and charge of the pastor and ministry thereof: the pastor then also signifying in the name of the Church their acceptance of each person, and endeavor to take the care of them, and to watch over them in the Lord, (the members being first satisfied to receive them, and to have communion with them.) And so the pastor to give them the right hand of fellowship of a Church, or Church organic.

A Church thus constituted ought forthwith to choose them a pastor, elder or elders, and deacons. We read of no other officers, or offices abiding in the Church. What kind of men they ought to be, and how qualified, is laid down by Paul to Timothy, and to Titus. Moreover, they are to take special care, that both bishops, overseers, or elders, as well as the deacons, have in some competent manner all those qualifications. And in a day of solemn prayer and fasting, after having elected them, (whether pastor, &c. or deacons) and they accepting the office, must be ordained with prayer, and laying on of hands of the eldership, being first proved, and found meet and fit persons for so sacred an office. Therefore, such are very disorderly churches who have no pastor or pastors ordained. They are acting not according to the rule of the Gospel, having something wanting.

2. WORK OF A PASTOR, BISHOP, OR OVERSEER.



he work of a pastor is to preach the Word of Christ, or to feed the flock, and to administer all the ordinances of the Gospel which belong to his sacred office, and to

be faithful and laborious therein, studying to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needs not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. He is a steward of the mysteries of God, therefore ought to be a man of good understanding and experience, being sound in the faith, and one that is acquainted with the mysteries of the Gospel, because he is to feed the people with knowledge and understanding. He must be faithful and skillful to declare the mind of God, and diligent therein, also to preach in season and out of season; God having committed unto him the ministry of reconciliation, a most choice and sacred trust. What interest has God greater in the world which he has committed unto men than this? Moreover, he must make known the whole counsel of God to the people.

2. A Pastor is to visit his flock, to know their state, and to watch over them, to support the weak, and to strengthen the feeble-minded, and succor the tempted, and to reprove them that are unruly.

3. A Pastor is to pray for them at all times, and with them also when sent for, and desired, and as opportunity serves; and to sympathize with them in every state and condition, with all love and compassion.

4. And to show them in all respects, as near as he can, a good example in conversation, charity, faith, and purity; that his ministry may be the more acceptable to all, and the name of God be glorified, and religion delivered from reproach.

5. He must see he carries it to all with all impartiality, not preferring the rich above the poor, nor lord it over God's heritage,

nor assume any greater power than God has given him; but to show a humble and meek spirit, nay to be clothed with humility.

3. OFFICE AND WORK OF DEACONS.



he work of deacons is to serve tables, viz. to see to provide for the Lord's table, the minister's table, and the poor's table. (1) They should provide bread and wine for the Lord's table. (2) See that every member contributes to the maintenance of the ministry, according to their ability, and their own voluntary subscription or obligation. (3) That each member gives weekly to the poor, as God has blessed him. (4) Also visit the poor and know their condition as much as in them lies; that none, especially the aged widows, be neglected.

4. DUTY OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO PASTORS



irst, tis the duty of every member to pray for their pastor and teachers. Brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified. Again, saith Paul, praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ. Prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. They that neglect this duty seem not to care either for their minister, or their own souls, or whether sinners be converted, and the Church edified or not. They pray for their daily bread, and will they not pray to have the Bread of Life plentifully broken to them?

Motives to this: (1) Ministers work is great. Who is sufficient for these things? (2) The opposition is not small which is made against them. (3) God's loud call is (as well as ministers themselves) for the saints continual prayers and supplication for them. (4) Their weakness and temptations are many. (5) The increase and edification of the Church depends upon the success of their ministry. (6) If they fall or miscarry, God is greatly dishonored, and his ways and people reproached.

2. They ought to show a reverential estimation of them, being Christ's ambassadors, also called rulers, Angels, &c. They that honor them and receive them, honor and receive Jesus Christ. Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Again, he saith, "Let the elders that rule well, be accounted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in Word and doctrine," that is, as I conceive, such that are most laborious.

3. It is their duty to submit themselves unto them, that is, in all their exhortations, good counsels and reproofs; and when they call to any extraordinary duty, as prayer, fasting, or days of thanksgiving, if they see no just cause why such days should not be kept, they ought to obey their pastor or elder, as in other cases also. Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves.

4. It is their duty to take care to vindicate them from the unjust charges of evil men, or tongue of infamy, and not to take up a reproach against them by report nor to grieve their spirits or weaken their hands.

5. It is the duty of members to go to them when under trouble or temptations.

6. It is their duty to provide a comfortable maintenance for them and their families, suitable to their state and condition. Let him that is taught in the Word, communicate to him that teaches in all good things. Who goes to war at his own charge? Who plants a vineyard and eats not of the fruit thereof? Even so has the Lord ordained, that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? They should minister to them cheerfully with all readiness of mind. Ministers are not to ask for their bread but to receive it honorably. The ministers maintenance, though it is not by tithes, &c. as under the Law, yet they have now as just a right to a comfortable maintenance as they had then, the equity of the duty is the same. Our Savior, saith Dr. Owen, and the apostles plead it from grounds of equity and justice; and all kind of laws and rules of righteousness among men of all sorts calls for it.

7. It is their duty to adhere to them and abide by them in all their trials and persecutions for the Word. You were not ashamed of me in my bonds, &c.

8. Dr. Owen adds another duty of the members to their pastor, viz. to agree to come together upon his appointment: When they were come, and had gathered the Church together, &c.

Question. Are there no ruling elders besides the pastor?

Answer. There might be such in the primitive apostolical Church, but we see no ground to believe it an abiding office to continue in the Church but was only temporary.

1. Because we have none of the qualifications of such elders mentioned, or how to be chosen.

2. Because we read not particularly what their work and business is, or how distinct from preaching elders; though we see not but the Church may (if she sees meet) choose some able and discreet brethren to be helps in government: We have the qualifications of bishops and deacons directly laid down, and how to be chosen, and their work declared, but of no other office or officers in the Church, but these only.

Question. May an elder of one Church if called, warrantably administer all ordinances to another?

Answer. No surely; for we find no warrant for any such practice, he being only ordained pastor or elder of that particular Church that chose him, &c. and has no right or authority to administer as an elder in any other where he is not so much as a member.

Question. May a Church call out a teacher that is no ordained elder to administer all ordinances to them?

Answer. You may as well ask, "May a Church act disorderly?" Why were ministers to be ordained if others unordained might warrantably do all their work? If therefore they have no person fitly qualified for that office, they must look out from abroad for one that is. Yet (as we say) necessity has no law. Provided therefore they cannot do either, it is better their teacher be called to do it, than that the Church should be without their food, and Church-ordinances neglected. Yet let all churches take care to organize themselves, and not through covetousness, or neglect of duty, rest incomplete churches, and so under sin. God is the God of order, and not of confusion in all the churches of the saints. And how severely did God deal of old with such that meddled with the

priests work and office, who were not of the priesthood, nor called by him to administer in holy things!

5. RECEPTION OF MEMBERS



Question. What is the order of receiving members into the Church, that were no members anywhere before?

Answer. 1. The person must give an account of his faith; and of the work of grace upon his soul before the Church; and also a strict enquiry must be made about his life and conversation. But, if through bashfulness the party cannot speak before the congregation, the elder and two or three more persons may receive an account of his or her faith and report it to the Church. But, if full satisfaction by the testimony of good and credible persons is not given of the party's life and conversation, he must be put by until satisfaction is obtained in that respect. Moreover, when the majority are satisfied, and yet one or two persons are not, the Church and elder will do well to wait a little time, and endeavor to satisfy such persons, especially if the reasons of their dissent seem weighty.

Question. What is to be done when a person offers himself for communion from a Church that is corrupt, or erroneous in principles?

Answer. (1) The Church ought to take an account of his faith in all fundamental points, and of the work of grace upon his heart. (2) And if satisfied, then to send also to that corrupt people, to know

whether they have anything or not against his life and conversation. If satisfied in both these respects, the Church may receive him.

Question. To whom is it members join themselves? Is it to the elder, or to the Church?

Answer. They are joined to the whole community of the Church, being incorporated as members thereof, and thereto abide, though the pastor be removed by death.

6. POWER OF THE KEYS WITH CHURCH

Discipline and Members Duties one to another.



First, we judge it necessary that a day monthly be appointed particularly for discipline, and not to manage such affairs on the Lord's Day, which should be spent in the public worship of God, of a different nature. Besides, such things may (on account of discipline) come before the Church which may not be expedient to be heard on the Lord's Day, lest it disturb the spirits of any members and hinder their meditation in the Word which they have newly heard. However, in small congregations perhaps a day in two or three months may be sufficient.

2. The power of the keys, or to receive in and shut out of the congregation, is committed unto the Church. The political power of Christ, saith Dr. Chauncy, is in the Church, whereby it is exercised in the name of Christ, having all lawful rule and government within itself, which he thus proves, viz.

- a. The Church essential is the first subject of the keys.

- b. They must of necessity to their preservation, purge themselves from all pernicious members.
- c. They have power to organize themselves with officers. Yet I humbly conceive, I may add, that the concurrence of the presbytery is needful hereunto.
- d. If need be that they call an officer from without, or one of another Church, they must first admit him a member, that they may ordain their officer from among themselves.
- e. They have power to reject a scandalous pastor from office and membership.

This power of Christ is exerted as committed to them by the hands of the elder appointed by Christ, the due management whereof is in and with the Church to be his care and trust, as a steward, whereof he is accountable to Christ and the Church, not lording it over God's heritage. And that the power of the keys is in the Church, appears to me from Mat. 18. If he will not hear the Church, it is not said, if he will not hear the elder, or elders. As also that of the Apostle, in directing the Church to cast out the incestuous person, he doth not give this counsel to the elder or elders of the Church, but to the Church. So, he commands the Church to withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly. Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump.

7. CHURCH CENSURES



ow as to Church censures I understand but two besides suspension, namely: (1) withdrawing from a member that walks disorderly, and (2) casting out or

excommunicating such that are either guilty of notorious or scandalous crimes, of heresy, &c. or of contemning the authority of the Church.

Briefly to each of these.

1. Suspension is to be when a member falls under sin, and the Church wants time fully to hear the matter, and so cannot withdraw from him, or cast him out.

2. If any member walks disorderly, though not guilty of gross scandalous sins, he or she ought to be admonished as soon as it is taken notice of, and endeavors should be used to bring him to repentance: “For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.”

Such as meddle with matters that concern them not—it may be that instead of following their trade and business they go about from one member’s house to another telling or carrying tales and stories of this brother or of that brother or sister, which perhaps may be true or perhaps false, and may be too to the reproach or scandal of some member or members. If so, it is back-biting; and that is so notorious a crime that without repentance they shall not ascend God’s holy hill. Backbiting is diminishing our “neighbor’s good name, either by denying him his due praises, or by laying anything to his charge falsely, or without sufficient cause and evidence”; thus our annotators. But this of disorderly walking does not amount to such a crime, but evils not so notorious. *Now them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.* They must be admonished.

a. An admonition is a faithful endeavor to convict a person of a fault, both as to matter of fact and circumstance. This admonition must be given first, if it be private, by that brother that knows or has knowledge of the fault or evil of the person offending—whether the elder or member—for any private brother ought to admonish such with all care and faithfulness before he proceeds farther. But if it be public, the church ought to send for the offender, and the pastor must admonish him before all.

b. But if, after all due endeavors used, he is not reclaimed but continues as a disorderly person, the church must withdraw from him. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition he received of us.* This is not a delivering up to Satan, excommunicating or dismembering the person, for this sort are still to be owned as members, though disorderly ones. The church must *note* him so as not to have communion or company with him in that sense; *yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother; if any man obey not our word, note that man.* It appears that such who refuse to adhere to what the pastor commands and exhorts in the name of Christ are to be deemed disorderly persons, as such are who meet not with the church when assembled together to worship God, or neglect private or family prayer, or neglect their attendance on the Lord's Supper, or neglect to contribute to the necessary charges of the church, or suffer any evils unreproved in their children.

All such may be looked upon as disorderly walkers and ought to be proceeded against according to this rule, as well as in many like cases.

8. PRIVATE OFFENCES OF ONE BROTHER AGAINST ANOTHER



First, as touching private offences, the rule Mat. 18. is to be observed, only this by the way must be premised, viz. if but one brother or two have the knowledge of some members crime, yet if it be publicly known to the world, and the name of God be reproached, it being an immoral act, private brother is not to proceed with such an offender, according to Mat. 18. but forthwith to bring it to the Church, that the public scandal may be taken off.

2. But if it be a private offence or injury done to a brother or sister in particular, and not being a notorious scandalous sin, that brother must not mention it to one soul, either within, or without the Church, until he has proceeded according to the rule.

(a.) He must tell his brother his fault. *Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone; if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother.*

You must labor in love and all affections to convince him of his fault; but if he will not hear you,

(b.) You must take one or two more, but be sure they are discreet persons, and such that are most likely to gain upon him; and they with you are to labor with all wisdom to

bring him to the sense of his fault. 'Tis not just to speak to him, as if that were enough; no, no, but to take all due pains, and to strive to convince him, that so the matter may be issued, and the Church not troubled with it: *But if he will not hear you, take one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

3. But if he will not hear them after all due means and admonitions used, then it must be brought to the Church; and if he will not hear the Church, he must be cast out. The elder is to put the question, whether the offending brother be in their judgments incorrigible, and refuses to hear the Church; which passing in the affirmative by the vote of the congregation, or the majority of the brethren by the lifting up of their hands, or by their silence; the Pastor after calling upon God, and opening the nature of the offence, and the justness of their proceedings, in the name and by the authority of Christ, pronounces the sentence of excommunication to this effect.

That A. B. being guilty of great iniquity, and not manifesting unfeigned repentance, but refusing to hear the Church, I do in the Name, and by the authority of Christ committed unto me as Pastor of this his Church, pronounce and declare that he is to be, and is hereby excommunicated, excluded or cast out of the Congregation, and no longer to be owned a brother, or a Member of this Church; and this for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

And this we believe is the substance of that which the Apostle calls a delivering up to Satan, he being cast into the World, which is called the kingdom of Satan, where he rules and reigns.

The delivery unto Satan (saith Dr. Chauncy) signifies only the solemn exclusion of a person from the communion of the Church, the visible kingdom of Christ, and disenfranchising him, or divesting him of all visible right to Church privileges, casting him into the kingdom of the world, where the Prince of Darkness rules in the children of disobedience.

And this being done, he is to be esteemed to be no better than an heathen man, or publican, or as an evil person, and not to have so much as intimate civil communion withal.

9. SCANDALOUS PERSONS GUILTY OF GROSS ACTS OF IMMORALITY



If any member fall into any gross acts of sin, as swearing, lying, drunkenness, fornication, covetousness, extortion, or the like, and it is known and publicly spread abroad to the great scandal and reproach of religion, and of the holy name of God, his Church, and people; the said offender so charged, the Church must send one or two brethren to him to come before the congregation. If he will not come, but doth slight and contemn the authority of the Church, that will bring farther guilt upon him, for which offence he incurs the censure before mentioned. But if he does appear, his charge is to be laid before him, and the witnesses called; and after he has made his defense, and said all he has to say, and the congregation finds him guilty, then the same censure is to pass upon him, to the end he may be brought to unfeigned repentance, and the name of God cleared. And, some time must be taken to make it appear that he has true repentance, by the

reformation of his life and holy walking afterwards, before he be received again, and the censure of the Church in a solemn manner be taken off.

Dr. Chauncy puts this Question,

Question. How is a Church to proceed in case of open and notorious scandals?

The Answer is, 'the matter of Fact, as such, being beyond all question; the Church is to proceed immediately to censure, to vindicate the honor of Christ and his Church, and to manifest to the world their just indignation against such notorious offenders, and wait for a well-grounded and tried evidence of his true repentance under that ordinance of Christ which is appointed to that end.

Observe, It is the opinion of the Doctor, that though the person be penitent, yet because his sin is open and scandalous, he ought to be cast out to vindicate the honor of Christ and the Church, as part of his just punishment (that being one reason of the ordinance of excommunication) as well as to bring the person to thorough repentance; and we are of his mind. *Paul* takes no notice in the case of the *incestuous person* of his immediate repentance; or if he repent not, then, &c. But says he, *deliver such a one to Satan*, &c. Saith the Lord, *if her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp for seven days:* (speaking of *Miriam*) *and after that let her be received in again.*

10. DEALING WITH HERETICS AND BLASPHEMERS



s touching heretics or heresy, the same censure, when they are convicted, ought to pass against them. Heresy is commonly restrained to signify any perverse opinion or error in a fundamental point of religion, as to deny the being of God, or the deity of Christ, or his satisfaction, and justification alone by his righteousness, or to deny the resurrection of the body, or eternal judgment, or the like. Yet our annotators say, the Word signifies the same thing with schism and divisions; which if so, such that are guilty of schism or divisions in the Church, ought to be excommunicated also. Heresies are called damnable by the Apostle Peter; without repentance such cannot be saved, as bring in damnable heresies, denying the Lord that bought them.

Two things render a man a heretic according to the common signification of the Word. (1) An error in matters of faith, fundamental or essential to salvation. (2) Stubbornness and contumacy in holding and maintaining it. A Man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject. Now that this rejection is all one with excommunication, appears by what Paul speaks, 1 Tim. 1.20. *Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.* Their heresy, or blasphemy was in saying the resurrection was past.

Some would have none be counted an heretic but he who is convicted and condemned so to be in his own conscience, mistaking Paul 's words, *knowing that he that is such, is subverted, being condemned of himself.* He may be condemned of himself, though not for his heresy, yet for his spending his time about

questions, and strife of words, to the disquieting the peace of the Church; or though not condemned of himself directly, yet indirectly; according to the purport of his own notion, or what he grants about the point in debate, &c. Else the Apostle refers to some notable and notorious self-condemned heretic. It is a great question, whether *Hymenaeus and Alexander* were condemned in their own consciences, about that heresy charged upon them, and yet were delivered up to Satan. However the rule is plain, respecting any that are subverted, and resolutely maintain any heretical notion, i. e. after he has been twice (or oftener) admonished, that is, after all due means used, and pains taken with him, to convince him of his abominable error; and yet if he remains obstinate, he must be delivered up to Satan ; that is, the righteous censure of the Church must pass upon him, as in the case of other notorious Crimes. Heresy is a work of the flesh: and hence some conceive such ought to be punished by the civil magistrate.

Question. *What is an admonition?*

Answer. It is a faithful endeavor to convict a person of a fault both as to matter of fact, and his duty thereupon, charging it on his conscience in the name of the Lord Jesus with all wisdom and authority.

Question. *What is a Church admonition?*

Answer. When an offending brother rejecting private admonition by one, or by two or three persons; the complaint being brought to the Church by the elder, the offending member is rebuked and exhorted in the name of the Lord Jesus to due repentance; and if

convicted, and he repents, the Church forgives him, otherwise casts him out, as I before showed.

Question. *May a Church admit a member of another congregation to have communion with them, without an orderly receiving him as a member?*

Answer. If the person is well known by some of the Church, and that he is an orderly member of a Church of the same faith, he being occasionally cast among them they may admit him to transient communion for that time; but if he abides in that town or city remote to the Church to whom he belongs, he ought to have his regular dismissal, and so be delivered up to the care and watch of the Church where he desires to communicate.

Question. *If an excommunicated person has obtained of God true repentance, and desires to be restored to the Church, what is the manner of his reception?*

Answer. Upon his serious, solemn and public acknowledgment thereof before the Church, and due satisfaction according to the nature of his offence being given, the elder solemnly proceeds and declares in the name of the Lord Jesus, that the sentence which A.B. was laid under (upon his unfeigned repentance) is taken off, and that he is received again as a member, &c. To the praise and glory of God.

Question. *How ought a pastor to be dealt withal, if he to the knowledge of the Church, or any members thereof, walketh disorderly, and unworthily of his sacred office, and membership?*

Take the answer of another author here.

Answer. “Those Members, to whom this is manifestly known, ought to go to him privately, and unknown to any others, (and with the spirit of meekness, in great humility) lay his evil before him, and entreat him as a father, and not rebuke him as there equal, much less as their inferior; and if they gain upon him, then to receive him into their former affection and esteem, forever hiding it from all others. But if after all tender entreaties, he prove refractory and obstinate, then to bring him before the Church, and there to deal with him; they having two or three witnesses in the face of the Church, to testify matter of fact against him to their personal knowledge.

2. But before he be dealt with they must appoint one from among themselves, qualified for the work of a pastor, to execute the Church censure against him, &c.” Yet no doubt, the Church may suspend him from his communion, & exercising of his office presently, upon him being fully convicted. But seeing in the multitude of counsel there is safety, sure no Church would so proceed without the advice of the presbytery, or of a sister-church at least.

Question. Suppose a member should think himself oppressed by the Church; or should be unjustly dealt with; either withdrawn from, or excommunicated, has he no relief left him?

Answer. We believe he has relief; and also, that there is no Church infallible, but may err in some points of faith, as well as in discipline. And the way proposed, and agreed to, in a general assembly, held in London, 1692. of the elders, ministers, and messengers of our Churches, we approve of, which is this; viz. The grieved or injured person may make his application to a sister-

church for communion; and that Church may send some brethren in their names, to that congregation that have dealt with him, and they to see if they can possibly restore him to his place; but if they cannot, then to report the matter charged, with the proofs, to the Church that sent them: and if that congregation shall, after a full information, &c. be persuaded the person was not orderly dealt with, they may receive him into their communion.

11. SUCH THAT CAUSE DIVISIONS

Or unduly separate themselves from the Church.



This I find is generally asserted by all congregational divines, or worthy men, i. e. That no person has power to dismember himself: i. e. He cannot, without great sin, translate himself from one Church to another; but ought to have a dismissal from that Church where he is a member: provided that Church is orderly constituted, nothing being wanting as to any essential of salvation; or of church-communion: But if not, yet he ought to endeavor to get his orderly dismissal.

Nor is every small difference in some points of religion, (or notions of little moment,) any grounds for him to desire his dismissal.

That he cannot, nor ought not to translate himself, see what a reverend writer saith:

“He cannot, saith he, for many reasons:

1. It is not decent, much less an orderly going away; but very unmannerly, and a kind of running away.

2. Such a departure is not approved of in families, or civil societies.
3. It destroys the relation of pastor and people: For what may be done by one individual person, may be done by all.
4. What liberty in this kind belongs to the sheep, belongs to the shepherd; much more he may then also leave his flock at his pleasure, without giving notice or reason thereof to the Church.
5. It is breaking covenant with Christ, and with the congregation, and therefore a great immorality; he being under obligation to abide steadfastly with the Church; i. e. till the Church judge he has a lawful call to go to another congregation.
6. It's a schism: For if there be any such thing in the world, it's of particular societies.
7. It is a despising the government of the Church.
8. It is a particular member's assuming to himself the use of the keys; or rather stealing of them.
9. There is as much reason persons should come into a Church when they please, without asking consent, as depart when they please.
10. It is very evil and unkind in another Church, to receive such an one, as not doing as they would, or should be dealt with.
11. Such practices can issue in nothing else than the breach and confusion of all particular Churches; and make them like parishes.

12. Such departures cannot be pleaded for in the least, but upon the notion of a Catholic visible Church, wherein all members and officers are run into one organized Church, which will, and must introduce, a co-ordinate (if not a subordinate) pastoral government, by combination of elders, over all the Churches; and therefore by synods and classes.

13. It is like a leak in a ship, which, if not speedily stopped, will sink at last.

14. It tends to anarchy, putting an arbitrary power in every member.

15. It breaks all bonds of love, and raises the greatest animosities between brethren and churches.

16. It is a great argument of some guilt lying-on the party.

Thus the Dr.

Again he saith, "It is no more in the just power of a particular member to dissolve his church-relation, than in a man to kill himself: but by his said withdrawment he doth schismatically rend himself from his communion, and so separate himself sinfully.

Question. *What is the just act of the Church, that clothes this irregular separation, with the formality as it were of an excommunication.*

He answers. ('Calling) this a mixed Excommunication i. e. Originally proceeding from, and consists in, the act of the brother himself, and is the formality of his offence; upon which proceeds the just and unviolable act of the Church.

The judgment of the Church publicly declared by the elder of the congregation; as the Dr. words it; viz.

That A. B. having so and so irregularly and sinfully withdrawn himself from the communion of the congregation, we do now adjudge him a non-member, and one that is not to communicate with the Church, in the special ordinances of communion, till due satisfaction is given by him.

Yet we believe, as the Dr's Opinion is, that a Church may, (if they find the case to be warranted by the Word of God; or as it may be circumstanced) give a dismissal to a member, when insisted on, to another regular Church, though not in every case of small offence, or dissent in some small points of different notions, or from prejudice; for, that may tend soon to dissolve any Church: For what Church is it, where every member is of one mind in every particular case and thing about notions of religion?

And such that make divisions, and cause schisms, or discord among brethren, to disturb the peace of the church, if they cannot be reclaimed, must be marked, and dealt with as great offenders: It being one of those things that God hates, and is an abomination to him.

Question. *What is a full and lawful dismissal of a member to another Church, upon his removing his habitation, or on other warranted cases.*

Answer. We answer a letter testimonial, or recommendation of the person; and if he intends to abide there wholly, to give him up to that communion, and fellowship, to be watched over in the Lord.

12. DISORDERS OR CAUSES OF DISCORDS

and how to be prevented, corrected, and removed.



First, one cause of Discord is, through the ignorance in some members of the rules of discipline, and right government; particularly when that rule in Matth. 18. is not followed.

But one person makes up an offence against another, and speaks, of it to this or that person, before he has, told the brother offending, of it; which is a palpable sin, and a direct violation of Christ's holy precept: and such must, as offenders themselves, be in a gospel way dealt with.

To prevent this, the discipline, of the Church should be taught; and the members informed of their duties.

II. Another thing that causes trouble and disorder in a Church, is want of love, and tender affections to one another; as also not having a full sight and sense of the great evil of breaking the bonds of peace, and unity: O that all would lay this abominable evil to heart, how base a thing it is to break the peace of a private family, or neighbourhood; but much more sinful to disturb the peace of the Church of the living God, and break the bonds of the unity thereof. Behold, how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity! But, O how ugly and hateful is the contrary!

III. Another disorderly practice is this, When one member or another knows of some sinful act, or evils done by one or more members, and they conceal it; or do not act according to the rule; pretending they would not be looked upon as contentious persons:

but hereby they may become guilty of other men's sins, and also suffer the name of God, and the Church, to lie under reproach, and all through their neglect. This is a great iniquity.

IV. When an elder, or Church shall know that some persons are scandalous in their lives, or heretical in judgment, and yet shall bear or connive with them.

V. When Members take liberty to hear at other places, when the Church is assembled to worship God: this is nothing less than a breaking their covenant with the Church, and may soon dissolve any Church: For by the same rule, one may take that liberty, another; nay, every member may. Moreover, it casts a contempt upon the ministry of the Church and tends to cause such who are hearers to draw off and to be disaffected with the doctrine taught in the Church, (they knowing these dissenters do belong unto it.) I exhort therefore, in the name of Christ, this may be prevented: And any of you that know who they are, that take this liberty, pray discover them to the Church. We lay no restraint upon our members from hearing such, who are sound in the faith at other times.

VI. The liberty that some take to hear men that are corrupt in their judgments; and so take in unsound notions, and also strive to distil them into the minds of others, as if they were of great importance. Alas, how many are corrupted in these days, with Arminianism, Socinianism, and what not! This causes great trouble and disorder.

VII. When one Church shall receive a member or members of another congregation without their consent or knowledge: Nay such that are disorderly and may be loose livers, or cast out for

immorality; or persons filled with prejudice without cause. This is enough to make men atheists, or contemn all Church authority, and religion: For has not one regular Church as great authority from Christ as another.

VIII. Another disorder is, when members are received without the general consent of the Church; or before good satisfaction is taken of their godly lives, and conversations: Or when a Church is too remiss in the reception of her members.

IX. Another disorder is, when a Church shall receive a charge against a member, (it being an offence between brother and brother) before an orderly proceed has been made by the offended person.

X. When judgment passes with partiality; some are connived at, out of favor or affection: Levi was not to know his father or mother in judgment.

XI. When members do not constantly and early attend our public assemblies, and the worship of God on the Lord's-day especially, but are remiss in that matter: This is a great evil.

XII. When part of a Church shall meet together as dissatisfied, to consult Church-matters, without the knowledge or consent of the Church, or Pastor: This is disorderly, and tends to division; and such should be marked.

XIII. Another thing that tends to disquiet the peace of the Church is, when there are any undue heats of spirit, or passion showed in the pastor, or others, in managing the discipline of the Church. Have we not found by experience the sad effect of this? Therefore things must be always managed with coolness, and sweetness of

spirit, and moderation; every brother having liberty to speak his mind, and not to be interrupted, until he has done; nor above one speak at once.

XIV. When one brother or more dissents in the sentiments of their minds from the Church, in any matters circumstantial; either in respect of faith, practice, or discipline, and will not submit to the majority, but raise feuds; nay, will rend themselves from the Church, rather than consent.

I Query, what reason, or ground, has any Man to refuse Communion with a Church that Christ has not left, but has Communion with?

XV. When any member shall divulge, or make known to persons, not of the congregation, nor being concerned in those matters what is done in Church-meetings, the Church in this respect (as well as in others) is to be as a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. This oft times occasions great grief, and the disorderly person should be detected. Is it not a shame to any of a private family, to divulge the secrets of the family? But far greater shame do these expose themselves unto.

XVI. Another disorderly practice is this; viz. When a member shall suggest, and seem to insinuate into the minds of other members some evil against their pastor, yet will not declare what it is; and may only be evil surmisings, and out of prejudice; and yet refuses to acquaint the pastor with what it is: This is very abominable, and a palpable violation of the rule of the Gospel, and duty of members to their minister. Such a person ought to be severely rebuked, and if he confess not his evils, and manifesteth unfeigned repentance,

to be dealt with farther. Moreover, it is a great evil in another to hear such base insinuations, and neither rebuke the accuser, and so discharge his duty, nor take two or three more to bring the person to repentance. If he deal thus by a private brother, it is a great evil, but far worse to an elder, whose name and honor, ought with all care and justice, to be kept up, as being more sacred.

XVII. Another disorderly practice is, (which causes much trouble) When the public charges of a Church are not equally born; but some too much burdened, when others do but little or nothing.

And also, when everyone does not contribute to the poor, as God has blessed them, on every Lord's Day, or first day of the week, as he has commanded.

XVIII. Another disorder is this, when members refuse to communicate with the Church at the Lord's table, because some person, or persons, they think are guilty of evil, and yet they have not proceeded with them according to rule: These either excommunicate the Church, or themselves, or those persons at least, they censure unwarrantably.

I beseech you for Christ's sake, that this may never be anymore among you: You ought not to deal thus with them; or refuse your communion, (though faulty) until the Church has dismembered, or withdrawn from them; or at least suspended them.

XIX. When one member, shall believe, or receive a report against another, before he knows the truth of the matter.

XX. When an accusation is brought against an elder, contrary to the rule, which ought not be without two or three witnesses, as to the matter of fact.

XXI. When the word of God is not carefully attended upon, on week, or lecture-days, by the members generally; though the said meeting being appointed by the whole Church.

XXII. When days of prayer and fasting, and of public thanksgiving, or when days of disciplining are not generally attended upon.

Lastly, when gifted brethren are not duly encouraged: First privately to exercise their gifts; and being in time approved, called forth to preach or exercise in the Church: And when encouragement is not given to bestow learning also upon them, for their better accomplishment. What will become of the Churches in time to come, if this be not prevented with speed?

13. GLORY AND BEAUTY OF A TRUE GOSPEL CHURCH



First, that which primarily tends to the glory of a Church is the foundation on which it is built, which is Jesus Christ. Now this is a blessed and glorious foundation.

I. In respect of God the Father, who laid this foundation in his eternal purpose, counsel, and decree; Behold I lay in Zion; and this is as the result of his infinite wisdom, love, and mercy to his elect.

II. In respect had unto Christ himself, who is this foundation. He is a suitable foundation.

1. In respect to the glory of God in all his attributes.

2ly. In respect to our good; he answering all our wants, who are united to him, or built upon him.

3. In respect of the preciousness of Christ, as a foundation; a stone; a precious stone.

4. In respect to the durableness of it i. e. a tried stone; a sure foundation.

Brethren, a foundation of a house must of necessity be laid; no house can be built without a good foundation, that will stand firm, and unmovable; it is the strongest part of the building, and it bears all the weight of the whole superstructure: So doth Jesus Christ.

III. The beauty and glory of a true Church, consists in the true and regular, or right constitution of it; nothing being wanting that is essential to it, upon this account.

IV. It consisteth in the excellency, glory, and suitableness of the materials 'tis built with, answering to the foundation; all precious stones, lively stones; all regenerated persons.

V. In that all the stones be well hewed and squared; all made fit for the building, before laid in. Were it thus, there would not be so great a noise of the hammer and ax, in church discipline, as indeed there is. It was not thus in the type, I mean in Solomon's Temple.

VI. It's beauty and glory consisteth in that all the stones being not only united by the Spirit, to Christ the foundation, but also to one another in sincere love and affection. In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth up unto an holy Temple in the Lord.

VII. It consisteth in the holiness and purity of the lives and conversations of all the members: Be ye Holy, for I am Holy. Holiness becomes thy house, O God, for ever.

VIII. It consisteth in that sweet union and concord that ought to be in the Church; all like the horse: in Pharaoh's chariot, drawing together: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. By this shall all men know you are my disciples, if you love one another.

IX. In their having the divine presence with them: Or when the glory of God fills his Temple.

X. In keeping out all unsanctified, or unclean persons, or if they get in, to purge them out by a strict and holy discipline, or else it will soon loose it's beauty.

XI. In that zeal and equality that should be showed in all to keep up the honor, peace, and comfort of the Church, and the ministry thereof.

XII. In the administration of right discipline; to see no neglect nor delaying of justice, through carelessness, or partiality: (1.) No ways partaking of other men's sins; which may be done by conniving at it; (2.) By lessening or extenuating of it (3.) By countenancing, or any ways encouraging any in sin. (4.) By not restoring a brother, that confesses his sin when overtaken. (5.) Not bringing in a just charge against an offender, nor rebuking him; and yet have communion with him.

2ly. Not to wrest judgment, out of it's true and right channel: Nor to inflict a greater censure than the law of Christ requires on any.

3ly. Timely to acquit and discharge a penitent person.

4ly. Not to do anything out of prejudice, but in love, and bowels, of affection; and to do all in Christ's name, or by his authority.

XIII. To *sympathize with the afflicted, succor the tempted, and relieving the poor and distressed: Rejoicing with them that rejoice, and mourning with them that mourn.*

XIV. To *speak evil of no man*; not only speaking no evil of their brethren, but of no man, to his hurt or injury, detracting from his worth and honor: See Sirach, *Whether it be to friend or foe, talk not of other men's lives; and if thou canst, without offence, reveal them not.* We must not discourse his faults, unless in a Gospel-way; and that too, to amend the person, and not out of passion, or prejudice to expose him, but out of love to his soul. Yet we may speak of the evils of others, (1.) When called to do it, in a legal or Gospel-way; and it is a sin then to conceal his crime. (2.) Or when it is to prevent another, who is in danger to be infected by his company, or ill example. (3.) Or in our own just defense and vindication. Moreover, consider the evil of reproaching of others.

First as to the causes why some do it.

One Cause is from want of love: Nay from malice; and hatred.

1. From the baseness, ill nature, and cruelty of the accusers disposition.
2. 'Tis occasioned from that itch, of talking and meddling in the affairs of other men.
3. Or perhaps to raise their own esteem and honor, some degrade their brother; which is abominable.

Consider it is theft, or robbery ; nay, and 'tis worse than to rob a man of his goods, because thou takest away that which perhaps thou canst not restore again.

Moreover consider, that such who reproach others, lay themselves open thereby to reproach.

Moreover know, he that receives, or hearkens to the scandal, is as guilty as the accuser; he is like a person that receives stolen goods, and so is as bad as the thief.

This being one of the grand and notorious evils of these days I speak the more to it.

If you abominate this evil, and avoid it, you will shine in grace and virtue the more clearly.

Alas, in our days, some that would be thought to be great professors stick not to vilify Christ's ministers, even some of the best of men; and are so full of malice, they care not what wrong they do to their brethren, nor to the truth itself, or interest of God, and so expose themselves to a lasting shame, and their spirit, and practice, to an abhorrence; they are like cursed Cham who discovered his fathers nakedness; these persons violate all laws, both human and divine.

When they bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ: And that you may do this; consider where is that Church in which there are no burdens to be born.

[Motives thus to do.]

1. Consider what a burden Jesus Christ has born for you.
2. What a burden thou hast to bear of thine own.
3. Mayst not thou in some things be a burden to thy brethren?
4. Wouldst thou not have others bear your burden.

5. May not God cause you to bear a more heavy burden; because thou canst not bear thy brother's?

6. Tis a fulfilling the law of love, nay the law of Christ.

XV. The glory and beauty of a congregation, is the more manifest, when the authority of the Church, and the dignity of the pastoral office is maintained. How great was the evil of the gain-saying of Corah? The apostles speaks of some that are *self-willed, presumptuous, who are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*

God has put a glory and high dignity upon the Church and in it's authority and power; *Whom ye bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.*

Moreover, the pastoral office, is an office of dignity; they are called rulers, angels, fathers: For any therefore to cast contempt on the Church, or pastor, is a great evil, and a reproach to Christ, and tends to disorder and confusion.

Lastly, when holiness, righteousness, charity, humility, and all true piety is pressed upon the consciences of every member, and appears in the minister: also that all strive to excel therein, with their uttermost care and diligences.

14. CONCLUSION



now my brethren, that *God loves the Gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob:* Therefore the public worship of God ought to be preferred before private.

1. This supposes there must be a visible Church.

2. And that they frequently meet together to worship God.

3. That they have an orderly ministry and one ordained elder, at least, to administer all public ordinances.

4. Moreover, that all persons have free liberty to assemble with the Church, and to partake of all ordinances, save those which peculiarly belong to the Church; as the Lord's Supper, holy discipline, and days of prayer and fasting. Then the Church of old separated themselves from all strangers.

Yet others may attend on all other public ordinances with the Church; as public prayer, reading, and preaching the Word and in singing God 's praises, as has formerly been proved. May others my brethren, join in prayer with us, and not praise God with us?

But, O my brethren! let me beseech you to show your high value, and estimation for the public worship of God.

[Motives hereunto.]

1. Since God prefers it thus: Or has so great esteem of his public worship.

2. Because he is said to dwell in Zion; It is his habitation forever. The place, where his honor dwells.

3. Here God is most glorified. In his Temple everyone speaks of his Glory; My praise shall be in the great congregation.

4. Here is most of God's gracious presence (as one observes it.)

1. His effectual presence, *in all places; Where I record my name, thither will I come; and there will I bless you.*

2. Here is more of his intimate presence: *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

5. Here are the clearest manifestations of God's beauty, which made holy David desire to dwell there forever. See the appearance of Christ to the Churches, Rev. 2. cap. 3.

6. In that it is said, that those that should be saved, in the Apostles days, God added unto the Church.

7. Here is most spiritual advantage to be got: *Here the dews of Hermon fall, they descend upon the mountain of Zion. Here God commands the blessing, even life for evermore. I will abundantly bless her provision and satisfy her poor with bread.* Here David's doubt was resolved.

8. Here you received your first spiritual breath, or life, many souls are daily born to Christ. That good which is most diffusive, is to be preferred; but that good which most partake of, is most diffusive; *O magnify the Lord with me! let us exalt his name together.* Live coals separated, soon die.

9. Brethren (as a worthy divine observes) the Church in her public worship is the nearest resemblance of Heaven, especially in singing God's praises. What esteem also had God's worthies of old, for God's public worship? *My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. How amiable are thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!*

10. See how the promises of God run to Zion, or to his Church: *He will bless you out of Zion.* O let nothing discourage you in your waiting at the posts of Christ's door: David desired *rather*

to be a door-keeper in the house of God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. Yet nevertheless do not neglect, for the Lord's sake, private devotion; viz. Secret, and family-prayer: O pray to be fitted for public worship! Come out of your closets to the Church? What signifies all you do in public, if you are not such that keep up the worship of God in your own families?

O neglect not prayer, reading, and meditation! And take care also to educate and catechize your children; and live as men and women that are dead to this world: and walk for the Lord's sake as becomes the Gospel.

See that zeal and knowledge go together; a good conversation. and a good doctrine go together. These two together, are better than one.

Brethren, he that makes the Word of God his rule, in whatsoever he doth, and the glory of God his end in what he doth, shall have the Spirit of God to be his strength. This is like Solomon 's three-fold cord; that will be one, or it will be three; it cannot be two; not can it be broken.

SOLEMN COVENANT OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

The solemn covenant of the Church of Christ, meeting in White Street, at its Constitution; June, 5. 1696.



Who desire to walk together in the Fear of the Lord, do, through the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, profess our deep and serious Humiliation for all our Transgressions. And we do also solemnly, in the Presence of God,

of each other, in the Sense of our own Unworthiness, give up ourselves to the Lord, in a Church state according to the Apostolical Constitution that he may be our God, and we may be his People, through the Everlasting Covenant of his Free grace, in which alone we hope to be accepted by him, through his blessed Son Jesus Christ, whom we take to be our High Priest, to justify and sanctify us, and our Prophet to teach us; and to subject to him as our Law-giver, and the King of Saints; and to conform to all his Holy Laws and Ordinances, for our growth, Establishment, and Consolation; that we may be as a Holy Spouse unto him, and serve him in our Generation, and wait for his second Appearance, as our glorious Bridegroom.

Being fully satisfied in the way of Church-Communion, and the Truth of Grace in some good measure upon one another's Spirits, we do solemnly join ourselves together in a Holy Union and Fellowship, humbly submitting to the Discipline of the Gospel, and all Holy Duties required of a People in such a spiritual Relation.

1. We do promise and engage to walk in all holiness, godliness, humility, and brotherly love, as much as in us lieth to render our communion delightful to God, comfortable to ourselves, and lovely to the rest of the Lord's people.

2. We do promise to watch over each other's conversations and not to suffer sin upon one another, so far as God shall discover it to us, or any of us; and to stir up one another to love and good works; to warn, rebuke, and admonish one another with meekness, according to the rules left to us of Christ in that behalf

3. We do promise in an especial manner to pray for one another, and for the glory and increase of this Church, and for the presence of God in it, and the pouring forth of his Spirit on it, and his protection over it to his glory.

4. We do promise to bear one another's burdens, to cleave to one another, and to have a fellow-feeling with one another, in all conditions both outward and inward, as God in his providence shall cast any of us into

5. We do promise to bear with one another's weakness, failings, and infirmities, with much tenderness, not discovering to any without the Church, nor any within, unless according to Christ's rule, and the order of the Gospel provided in that case.

6. We do promise to strive together for the truths of the Gospel, and purity of God's ways and ordinances, to avoid causes, and causers of division, endeavoring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; Ephes. 4 3.

7 We do promise to meet together on Lord's Days, and at other times, as the Lord shall give opportunities, to serve and glorify God in the way of his Worship, to edify one another, and to contrive the good of His Church.

8. We do promise according to our ability (or as God shall bless us with the good things of this world) to communicate to our pastor of minister, God having ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. (And now can anything lay a greater obligation upon the conscience, than this covenant, what then is the sin of such who violate it?)

These and all other gospel duties we humbly submit unto, promising and purposing to perform—not in our own strength, being conscious of our own weakness—but in the power and strength of the blessed God, whose we are and whom we desire to serve, to whom be glory now and forevermore. Amen.

FINIS.