

THE  
GLORY  
OF A  
TRUE

CHURCH

CHURCH

BENJAMIN KEACH (1640-1704)

# THE GLORY OF A TRUE CHURCH

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# THE GLORY OF A TRUE CHURCH

*That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself  
in the house of God, which is the church of the living God,  
the pillar and ground of the truth.—1 Timothy 3:15*

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized...  
And the Lord added to the church daily such  
as should be saved.—Acts 2:41, 47*

## Epistle to the Reader

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<sup>1</sup>) and in the apostolic churches’ constitution, and not after men’s inventions.

Because the typical<sup>2</sup> church of the Jews was national and took in their carnal seed<sup>3</sup> (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<sup>4</sup> of the congregational way<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> **institution** – act of establishing.

<sup>2</sup> **typical** – Old Testament symbol or type of a New Testament fulfillment; the visible congregation of God’s Old Covenant people was the Jewish nation, a type of the New Covenant gospel church.

<sup>3</sup> **carnal seed** – children by natural birth.

<sup>4</sup> **reverend divines** – respected theologians, such as John Owen (1616-1683) and Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679).

<sup>5</sup> **congregational way** or **Independency** – Congregationalism arose in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and influenced the development of the Particular Baptists, among whom Benjamin Keach was a prominent leader. Congregationalism, unlike Presbyterianism, taught that each local congregation, not its elders alone, has the divine right under Christ’s authority to entire independence in governing its affairs; but, like the Presbyterians, it retained the practice of infant sprinkling.

of the rules of discipline causes no small trouble and disorders in our churches. 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 1697*

## 1. Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church

Before there can be any orderly discipline among a Christian assembly, they must be constituted into a church-state<sup>6</sup> in an orderly and regular manner according to the institution of Christ in the gospel.

1. A church of Christ according to gospel institution is a congregation of godly Christians who, being first baptized upon the profession of faith, as a stated assembly, do by mutual agreement and consent give themselves up to the Lord and to one 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<sup>7</sup> are duly administered according to Christ’s institution (Act 2:41-44; 8:14; 19:4-6; Eph 1:1-2; 2:12-13, 19; Col 1:2-4, 12; 1Pe 2:5; Act 5:13-14; Rom 6:17; Heb 6:1-2).

2. The beauty and glory of such a congregation consists in their being all converted persons, or “lively<sup>8</sup> stones” (1Pe 2:5), being by the Holy Spirit and faith of the operation of God united to Jesus Christ, the precious cornerstone and only foundation of every Christian, as well as of

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<sup>6</sup> **church-state** – duly constituted congregation under the rule of Christ; visible church of Christ on earth, ordered according to Christ’s Word.

<sup>7</sup> **sacraments and ordinances** – As the text makes clear, English Particular Baptists in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, such as Benjamin Keach, William Kiffin, William Collins, and Hercules Collins, used the terms *ordinance* and *sacrament* interchangeably, though apparently with different emphases. An *ordinance* is something divinely commanded, and a *sacrament* is “both a sign and a means of grace” (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 267). The term *ordinance* points to its *origin*, its divine ordination; for example, Christ’s command for His disciples to practice baptism and the Lord’s Supper. *Sacrament* points to its *function*: what those ordinances mean or convey. *Ordinance* had a broader meaning than *sacrament*, and the Particular Baptists employed it to strengthen their arguments in favor of believer’s baptism. The concept of *sacrament* arose from the Latin translation of the Greek *mysterion* (mystery) by *sacramentum*, which in classical Latin meant a soldier’s oath of allegiance, accompanied by the symbol of a tattoo. From this, the idea developed of sacraments as “signs of holy things” (Carter Lindberg, *European Reformations*, 182) or “a visible sign of an invisible grace” (Muller, 267). Roman Catholicism teaches that a sacrament confers grace *ex opere operato*, which means that it channels God’s efficacious grace automatically—without faith or repentance in the recipient. In contrast, the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Baptists did not use the term *sacrament* as Romanism does. For instance, in Hercules Collins’ *An Orthodox Catechism* (1680), Question 65, we read, “What are the sacraments? They are sacred signs and seals [*confirmations*] set before our eyes and ordained of God for this cause, that He may declare and seal by them the promise of His gospel unto us, to wit, that He giveth freely remission of sins and life everlasting...to everyone in particular that believeth...” Collins signed the 1677/89 Second London Baptist Confession, which always uses the term *ordinance*, while *sacrament* is never used. And Nehemiah Coxe’s *A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of an Elder and Deacons in a Baptized Congregation*, speaks of “...the administration of the sacraments or ordinances of positive institution in the church.” So then, for Keach and other 17<sup>th</sup> century Baptists, God’s Word, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and prayer were ordinances or sacraments, that is, God-ordained “means of grace” by which God the Father, through Christ, sends the Holy Spirit to convey effectual spiritual blessings and strength to believers. This is often called “the spiritual presence view.”

<sup>8</sup> **lively** – living.

every particular congregation and of the whole catholic church<sup>9</sup> (Rom 6:3-5; 1Pe 2:4-6; Eph 2:20-21; Col 2:19).

3. Before each person is admitted as a member in such a church so constituted, they must declare to the church (or to 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. Also, the church should enquire after and be fully satisfied concerning their holy lives or good conversations<sup>10</sup> (Psa 66:16; Act 11:4-6, 23-24; 1Pe 3:1; 2Co 8:5; Jer 50:5).

When admitted as 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 signifies in the name of the church their acceptance of each person, and endeavor to take 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 gives them the right hand of fellowship as a church or church organic<sup>11</sup> (Heb 13:17; 1Pe 5:1-2).

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 in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Moreover, they are to take special care that bishops (or overseers/elders) as well as the deacons have in some competent manner all those qualifications. And, in a day of solemn prayer and fasting, they elevate<sup>12</sup> them to their office (whether pastors or deacons). They, accepting the office, must be ordained with prayer and laying on of hands of the eldership—being first proved and found fit persons for so sacred an office. Therefore, such are very disorderly churches who have no ordained pastor or pastors. They are not acting according to the rule of the gospel, having something lacking (1Ti 3:2-7; Ti 1:5-10; 1:7; Act 6:6; 1Ti 5:22).

## 2. Of the Work of a Pastor, Bishop, or Overseer

1. The work of a pastor is to preach the Word of Christ, or to feed the flock, to administer all the ordinances of the gospel that belong to his sacred office, and to be faithful and laborious therein, studying to show himself “approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Ti 2:15). He is a steward “of the mysteries of God” (1Co 4:1), and therefore ought to be a man of good understanding and experience—being sound in the faith and 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 diligently declare the mind of God and to preach “in season, [and] out of season” (2Ti 4:2)—God having committed unto him the ministry of reconciliation, a most choice and sacred truth

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<sup>9</sup> **catholic church** – *catholic* is used here in its original sense of “universal,” not to be confused with Roman Catholicism; “the whole catholic church” is the universal church of Jesus Christ, consisting of all true believers throughout all time.

<sup>10</sup> **conversations** – conduct of spiritual living.

<sup>11</sup> **organic** – description of the church, not simply an organization, but a living organism, that is, functioning as the body of Christ, alive in the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:12-25).

<sup>12</sup> **elevate** – install.

(2Co 5:18). What greater interest in the world has God than this that He has committed unto men? Moreover, he must make known the whole counsel of God to the people (1Co 9:16-17; Act 20:31, 35; 2Ti 2:15; 2Co 4:1-2; 1Ti 3; Jer 3:15; 2Ti 4:2; 2Co 5:15; Act 20:20, 27).

2. A pastor is to visit his flock, to know their state, to watch over them, to support the weak, and to strengthen the feeble-minded and assist the tempted, and to reprove them that are unruly (Pro 27:23; Act 20:35; 1Th 5:14).

3. He is to pray for them at all times; and be 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 (Col 4:12; 1Th 3:10).

4. And he is to show them in all respects, as near as he can, a good example in conversation, charity, faith, and purity; so that his ministry may be the more acceptable to all, the name of God be glorified, and religion<sup>13</sup> be delivered from reproach (1Ti 4:12).

5. He must see that he carries it to all with all impartiality, not preferring the rich above the poor, nor lording it over God's heritage, nor affirming any greater power than God has given him; but to show a humble and meek spirit, even to be clothed with humility (Jam 2:4; 1Ti 5:21; 1Pe 5:3, 6).

### **3. Of the Work of Deacons**

The work of deacons is to serve tables, that is, to oversee provisions for the Lord's Table, the minister's table, and the tables of the poor. They should a) provide bread and wine for the Lord's Table; b) see that every member contributes to the maintenance of the ministry according to their ability and their own voluntary subscription or obligation;<sup>14</sup> c) see that each member do give weekly to the poor as God has blessed him; and d) visit the poor and know their condition as much as in them lies—that none, especially the aged widows, be neglected (Act 6:1-10; 5:7-10; 1Co 16:2; Act 6:1).

### **4. Of the Duty of Church Members to the Pastor**

a. It is the duty of every member to *pray* for their pastor and teachers: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified" (2Th 3:1). Again, says Paul, "Praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col 4:3). "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Act 12:5). They that neglect this duty seem not to care either for their minister or their own souls—or whether or not sinners be converted and the church edified. They pray for their daily bread, and will they not pray to have the bread of life plentifully broken to them (1Th 5:25; Heb 13:18)? Motives to this are as follows:

1) Ministers' work is great: "who is sufficient for these things?" (2Co 2:16).

2) The opposition made against them is not small (1Co 16:9).

3) God's loud call (as well as the call of ministers themselves) is for the saints' continual prayers and supplication for them (Col 4:2-4).

4) Their weakness and temptations are many.

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<sup>13</sup> **religion** – biblical Christianity; the true faith.

<sup>14</sup> **subscription or obligation** – pledge or promise.

5) The increase and edification of the church depends upon the success of their ministry.

6) If they fall or miscarry<sup>15</sup> God is greatly dishonored and His ways and people reproached.

b. They ought to show a *reverential esteem* of them, as they are Christ's ambassadors, also called rulers, angels, and so forth. They that honor and receive them, honor and receive Jesus Christ. "Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1Th 5:13). Again, he says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine" (1Ti 5:17)—that is, as I conceive, those who are most laborious.

c. It is the church members' 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" (Heb 13:5, 17).

d. It is their duty to take care to *vindicate* them from the unjust charges of evil men or tongue of infamy,<sup>16</sup> and not to take up a reproach against them by report, nor to grieve their spirits or weaken their hands (Jer 20:10; Zep 2:8; 2Co 11:21-23).

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

f. It is their duty to provide a comfortable *maintenance*<sup>17</sup> for them and their families, suitable to their state and condition. "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal 6:6). "Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof?" (1Co 9:7). "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1Co 9:14). "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" (1Co 9:11). 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 minister's maintenance, though it is not by tithes 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. Dr. Owen<sup>18</sup> says that our Savior and the apostles plead it from grounds of equity and justice, and all kinds of laws and rules of righteousness among men of all sorts call for it (Mat 10:9-10; 1Co 9:7-11; Jam 5:4).<sup>19</sup>

g. It is their duty to *adhere* to them and abide by them in all their trials and persecutions for the Word (2Ti 1:16; 4:16).

h. Dr. Owen adds another duty of the members to their pastor, namely, to *agree to come together* upon his appointment: "When they were come, and had gathered the church together..." (Act 14:27).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> **miscarry** – go astray by sinful conduct.

<sup>16</sup> **infamy** – defamation; slander.

<sup>17</sup> **maintenance** – financial support.

<sup>18</sup> **John Owen** (1616-1683) – theologian, chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell, and vice-chancellor of Oxford University; most of his life a minister in Congregational churches.

<sup>19</sup> John Owen, *Eshcol* (1648), 21-22. Subtitled: *A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan...Rules of Direction for the Walking of the Saints in Fellowship, according to the Order of the Gospel.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



### *Questions answered*

*Question:* Are there no ruling elders besides the pastor? *Answer:* There might be such in the primitive<sup>21</sup> apostolic church, but we see no ground to believe it an abiding office to continue in the church, but was only temporary,

1. Because we find no mention of the qualifications of such elders, nor how they are to be chosen.

2. Because we do not read what their particular work and business is, or how it is distinct from preaching elders. However, we see that 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 they are to be chosen, and their work declared, but of no other office or officers in the church, but these only (Rom 12:8; 1Ti 3; Ti 1:5-9).

*Question:* May an elder of one church, if called, warrantably<sup>22</sup> administer all ordinances to another church? *Answer:* Surely not, for we find no warrant for any such practice, he being only ordained pastor or elder of that particular church that chose him. He hath 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 have 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, that 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 remain 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 priest’s work and office (1Sa 13:8-14), who were not of the priesthood nor called by Him to administer in holy things<sup>23</sup> (1Co 14:33, 38)!

## **5. Of the Reception of Members**

*Question:* What is the order of receiving into the church members who were no members anywhere before? *Answer:* a) The person must give an account of his faith and of the work of grace upon his soul before the church. Also, a strict enquiry must be made about his life and conversation. b) 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. c) 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<sup>24</sup> until satisfaction is obtained in that respect. d) 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,

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<sup>21</sup> **primitive** – early; first.

<sup>22</sup> **warrantably** – acceptably.

<sup>23</sup> A pastor is not a priest, but the author makes an analogy between the nature of a priest’s office, as overseeing and administering God’s truth to God’s people, and a pastor.

<sup>24</sup> **put by** – put on hold.

especially if the reasons of their dissent seem weighty (Psa 66:16; Act 9:26-27; 3Jo 1:9-10; Rom 14:17-19; 1Pe 3:15; 1Co 14:40; Rom 15:1-2; Act 11:2-6).

*Question:* What is to be done when a person offers himself for communion from a church that is corrupt or erroneous in principles? *Answer:* a) The church ought to take an account of his faith in all fundamental points and of the work of grace upon his heart. b) If satisfied, then send also to that corrupt people to know whether they have anything or not against his life and conversation. c) 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 there they should abide, though the pastor be removed by death (Act 2:47; 5:11-15).

## 6. Of Authority for Church Discipline

1. 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 (on the account of discipline) may come before the church that might not be expedient to be heard on the Lord's Day, lest it disturb the spirits of any members and hinder their meditation on the Word that they have newly heard. 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, says Dr. Chauncy,<sup>25</sup> is in the church, whereby it is exercised in the name of Christ, having all lawful rule and government within itself (Act 16:5; 2Th 1:3-6). This he thus proves:

1. The church essential is the first subject of the keys.
2. They must, of necessity to their preservation, purge themselves from all pernicious<sup>26</sup> members.
3. They have power to organize themselves with officers.
4. If need be that they call an officer from outside or one of another church, they must first admit him a member that they may ordain their officer from among themselves.
5. 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.<sup>27</sup>

And that the power of the keys is in the church appears to me from Matthew 18:17, "If he neglect to hear the *church*." It is not said, "If he will not hear the elder, or elders." Also see what the Apostle Paul says, in directing the church to call out the incestuous person. He does not give this counsel to the elder or elders of the church, but to the church itself. So he com-

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<sup>25</sup> **Isaac Chauncy** (1632-1712) – English Congregational minister, theologian, and author. He studied theology and medicine at Harvard and Oxford universities; his works include extensive writings on church order; born at Ware, Hertfordshire, England.

<sup>26</sup> **pernicious** – wicked.

<sup>27</sup> Isaac Chauncy, *The Divine Institution of Congregational Churches, Ministry and Ordinances*, 1697, 103-105.

mands the church to withdraw from every brother that walks disorderly. “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump” (1Co 5:4-5, 7; 2Th 3:6-14).

## 7. Of Church Censures<sup>28</sup>

Now, as to church censures, I understand but four: a. suspension; b. withdrawing from a member that walks disorderly; c. private offences; and d. calling out or excommunicating such that are either guilty of notorious or scandalous crimes, of heresy, or of contemning<sup>29</sup> the authority of the church. Briefly to each of these:

### *a. Suspension*

Suspension is to be when a member falls under sin, and the church needs time fully to hear the matter, and so can't withdraw from him or cast him out.

### *b. Withdrawing from one who walks disorderly*

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” (2Th 3:11).

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 (Psa 15:1-3). Backbiting is a 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.<sup>30</sup>

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” (2Th 3:12). They must be admonished.

An admonition is a faithful endeavor to convict a person of a fault, both as to matter of fact<sup>31</sup> 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.

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” (2Th 3:6). This is not a delivering up to Satan,

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<sup>28</sup> **censures** – spiritual discipline and correction administered by a local church.

<sup>29</sup> **contemning** – despising.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, Vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 20; Poole (1624-1679) was an English Nonconformist theologian, best known for his commentary cited here.

<sup>31</sup> **matter of fact** – factual information about a particular situation.

excommunicating or dismembering<sup>32</sup> 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” (2Th 3:15, 14). 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, or divulge the private resolves<sup>33</sup> of the church. 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 (Heb 12:25).

### ***c. Private offences of one brother against another***

As touching private offences, the rule of Matthew 18:15-19 is to be observed. Only this by the way must be premised: if only one brother or two have the knowledge of some member’s crime, yet if it be publicly known to the world and the name of God be reproached (it being an immoral act), a private brother is not to proceed with such an offender according to Matthew 18, but forthwith to bring it to the church that the public scandal may be taken off [see section d. below].

But if it be a private offence or injury done to a brother or sister in particular, and not a notorious scandalous sin, that brother must not mention it to one soul either inside or outside the church until he has proceeded according to the rule [of Matthew 18]:

(1) He must tell his brother his fault. “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Mat 18:15). You must labor in love and all affections to convince him of his fault.

(2) But if he will not hear you, you must take one or two more. But first, make sure they are discreet persons and such that are most likely to gain upon him. They are to labor with you with all wisdom to bring him to the sense of his fault. It is 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 so that the matter may be issued<sup>34</sup> and the church not troubled with it. “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Mat 18:16).

(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.<sup>35</sup> The elder is to put the question, whether the offending brother in their judgments be incorrigible<sup>36</sup> and refuses to hear the church. After 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 fullness of their proceed-

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<sup>32</sup> **dismembering** – removing from membership.

<sup>33</sup> **resolves** – decisions of the church.

<sup>34</sup> **issued** – brought to a result or closure.

<sup>35</sup> **cast out** – excommunicated; barred from the Lord’s Supper and fellowship of the church.

<sup>36</sup> **incorrigible** – beyond reasonable hope of correction.

ings, in the name and by the authority of Christ, pronounces the sentence of excommunication to this effect:

That \_\_\_\_ 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 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 (1Co 5:5).

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 (Mat 18:17).

“The delivery unto Satan,” says Dr. Chauncy, “signifies only the solemn exclusion of a person from the communion of the church, the visible kingdom of Christ, and disenfranchising<sup>37</sup> 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.”<sup>38</sup> This being done, he is to be esteemed to be no better than a heathen man, or publican, or as an evil person and not to have so much as intimate civil communion withal.

#### **d. Excommunication**

##### *1) Of scandalous persons guilty of gross acts of immorality*

If any member fall into 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 the holy name of God, His church, and His people—when the said offender is so charged, the church must send one or two brethren to him to come before the congregation. If he will not come but does slight and contemn the authority of the church, that will bring further 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<sup>39</sup> is to pass upon him—to the end he may be brought to unfeigned repentance and the name of God cleared. Some time must be taken to make it appear<sup>40</sup> that he has true repentance by the reformation of his life and holy walking afterwards, before he is received again and the censure of the church in a solemn manner is taken off (Mat 18).

Dr. Chauncy puts this 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 (1Ti 5:21; Act 5:11; Jude 1:23; 1Co 5; 2Co 7:11).<sup>41</sup>

It is the opinion of Dr. Chauncy 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

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<sup>37</sup> **disenfranchising** – depriving of church privileges.

<sup>38</sup> Chauncy, *The Divine Institution of Congregational Churches*, 126.

<sup>39</sup> **censure** – in this case, excommunication.

<sup>40</sup> **make it appear** – make it more clear and certain.

<sup>41</sup> Chauncy, *The Divine Institution of Congregational Churches*, 122-123.

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 whether he immediately repented or “if he repent not, then...” But, says he, “deliver such an one unto Satan” (1Co 5:5). Speaking of Miriam the Lord says, “If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again” (Num 12:14).

## 2) *Of dealing with heretics and blasphemers*

As touching heretics or heresy, when they are convicted, the same censure 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 [of God’s just wrath against sin], or justification by His righteousness alone; or to deny the resurrection of the body, eternal judgment, or the like.

Yet, our annotators say the word *heresy* 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 who “bring in damnable heresies...denying the Lord that bought them” (2Pe 2:1; see Poole’s *Annotations* on 1 Corinthians 11:19 and 2 Peter 2:1).

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, and 2) stubbornness and contumacy<sup>42</sup> in holding and maintaining it. “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject” (Ti 3:10). Now, that this rejection is all one with excommunication appears by what Paul speaks, “Of whom is Hymeneus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1Ti 1:20). Their heresy, or blasphemy, was in saying the resurrection was past.

Some would have none counted a 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” (Ti 3:11). He may be condemned of himself—though [if] not for his heresy yet for his spending his time about questions and strife of words to the quieting 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, and so on. Otherwise, the apostle refers to a specific notable and notorious self-condemned heretic. It is very questionable whether Hymeneus and Alexander were condemned in their own consciences about that heresy charged upon them, and yet they were delivered up to Satan. However the rule is plain respecting any that are subverted and resolutely maintain any heretical notion: after he has been twice (or more) admonished—that is, after all due measure used, and pains taken with him to convince him of his abominable error—and yet if he remains obstinate, he must be “delivered unto 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.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> **contumacy** – firm resistance to authority.

<sup>43</sup> The author may be appealing to the possibility of the magistrate punishing heresy to demonstrate that it is a scandalous sin like others punished by civil authority. The role of the civil magistrate in the OT theocracy

### *Questions answered*

*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 rejects private admonition by one (or two or three) persons, the complaint being then brought to the church by the elder, the offending member is rebuked and exhorted in the name of the Lord Jesus to due repentance. If convicted and he repents, the church then forgives him; but otherwise it 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 which he belongs, he ought to have his regular dismissal<sup>44</sup> and 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 acknowledgement 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 the offender was laid under is taken off upon his unfeigned repentance and that he is received again as a member, to the praise and glory of God (Mat 18:18; 2Co 2:6-7; 1Ti 5).

*Question:* How ought a pastor be dealt with if he, to the knowledge of the church or any members thereof, walks disorderly and unworthily of his sacred office and membership? Take the answer of another author here. *Answer:*

1. 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, Gal 6:1), and lay his evil before him, entreat him as a father, and not rebuke him as their equal, much less as their inferior. If they gain upon him then they ought to receive him into their former affection and esteem, forever hiding it from all others.
2. But if after all tender entreaties he prove refractory and obstinate, then they ought 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.
3. But before he be dealt with they must appoint one from among themselves qualified for the work of a pastor to execute the church’s censure against him. Yet no doubt, the church may suspend him from his communion and the exercise of his office immediately upon his being fully convicted.

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included the punishment of heretics and blasphemers; however because the New Testament writers do not clarify that such a role should belong to civil authorities outside of the nation of Israel, many are hesitant to take such a position.

<sup>44</sup> **regular dismissal** – request the transfer of his membership in an orderly way, which often included his previous church issuing a letter of recommendation to the new church.

*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 [we believe] 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 in 1692 of the elders, ministers, and messengers of our churches we approve of—is this: 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 the congregation that has dealt with him, to see if they can possibly restore him to his place. But if they cannot, then they should report the matter that was charged, with the proofs, to the church that sent them. And if that congregation shall, after a full information, be persuaded the person was not dealt with in an orderly way, they may receive him into their communion.

3) *Of such that cause divisions, or unduly separate themselves*

This I find is generally asserted by all congregational divines or worthy men: that no person has power to dismember himself. He cannot without great sin translate<sup>45</sup> 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 lacking 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<sup>46</sup>) any grounds for him to desire his dismissal.

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

He cannot for many reasons: 1) It is not decent, much less an orderly going away, but very unmannerly, and a kind of running away (Phi 1:27; Ti 2:10).

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 (Rom 1:31)—he being under obligation to abide steadfastly with the church till the church judge he hath a lawful call to go to another congregation.

6) It is a schism, for if there be any such thing in the world, it is of particular societies (Act 2:42; 1Co 12:14-25; Heb 10:25).

7) It is a despising of the government of the church (Jude 1:19).

8) It is a particular member's assuming to himself the use of the keys, or rather stealing 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 a one as not doing as they would or should be dealt with.

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<sup>45</sup> **translate** – transfer.

<sup>46</sup> **moment** – importance.



11) Such practices can issue in nothing else than the breach and confusion of all particular churches and make them like parishes.<sup>47</sup>

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 subordinate) pastoral government by combination of elders over all the churches, and therefore by synods and classes.<sup>48</sup>

13) It is like a leak in a ship, which if not speedily stopped will sink it 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...<sup>49</sup>

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 withdrawal he does schismatically rend himself from his communion and so separate himself sinfully (Jude 1:19; 1Co 1:10; 3:3; 11:18; Heb 10:22-25).<sup>50</sup>

*Question:* What is the just act of the church that clothes this irregular separation with the formality, as it were, of an excommunication? *Answer:* Chauncy answers calling this a “mixed excommunication,” originally proceeding from and consisting in the act of the brother himself, and is the formality of his offence—upon which may proceed the just and inviolable<sup>51</sup> act of the church. Such judgment of the church [may be] publicly declared by the elder of the congregation:

That \_\_\_\_ 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 (Rom 16:17-18; 2Th 3:6, 14-15; Jude 1:12).<sup>52</sup>

Yet we believe, as Dr. Chauncy’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. [However, this should] not be in every case of final offence, or of 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

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<sup>47</sup> **like parishes** – reflecting the church conceived of as simply composed of all professing Christians who live in a particular locality, rather than of regenerate Christians who have entered into covenant commitment to one another.

<sup>48</sup> **synods and classes** – regional assemblies of elders whose decisions are binding on the congregations under them, a feature of presbyterian church government. Keach’s argument is that members’ leaving their congregation for another without respect for their original congregation’s authority makes it appear that the visible church is broader than the local congregation, and requires regional ruling assemblies of elders at a higher level than the congregation, something he strongly opposed.

<sup>49</sup> **guilt on the party** – the person’s disorderly removal of himself from church membership is a compelling evidence for some guilt on his part.

<sup>50</sup> Isaac Chauncy, *The Doctrine Which Is according to Godliness, to Which Is Annexed a Brief Account of the Church-Order of the Gospel according to the Scriptures* (1694), 339-340 & 342.

<sup>51</sup> **inviolable** – incapable of being broken.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 342-343.

cannot be reclaimed, must be marked and dealt with as great offenders. [Divisiveness] being one of those things that God hates and is an abomination to Him (2Ti 2:23; 2Th 3:14; Pro 6:16-19).

*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:* [Such lawful dismissal may consist of] a letter testimonial or recommendation of the person. And if he intends to abide there wholly [the church may thus] give him up to that communion and fellowship to be watched over in the Lord (Rom 16:2; Act 18:27).

## 8. Of Disorders: Causes of Discord

[The following are causes of church disunity and disorder. They are to be prevented and corrected in each true gospel church.]

1. One cause of discord is through the ignorance in some members of the rules of discipline and right government, particularly when that rule in Matthew 18 is not followed (v. 15). Instead, one person takes 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<sup>53</sup> sin and a direct violation of Christ’s holy precept. 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.

2. Another thing that causes trouble and disorder in a church is lack 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. Oh, that all would lay this abominable evil to heart! How base a thing it is to break the peace of a private family or neighborhood! But it is 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!” (Psa 133:1). But, oh, how ugly and hateful is the contrary (Joh 13:12-17; Eph 4:3; Heb 13:1; Eph 4:31-32; 5:2; Jam 3:16)!

3. 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 wish not to 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 (Act 5:3-8; Lev 19:17).

4. 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.

5. 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, and so another, nay, every member, may. Moreover, it casts 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, that this may be prevented. And any of you that know who they are who take this liber-

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<sup>53</sup> palpable – obvious.

ty, please reveal them to the church. [Nevertheless] we lay no restraint upon our members from hearing at other times such who are sound in the faith (Act 4:23).

6. 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,<sup>54</sup> Socinianism,<sup>55</sup> and what not! This causes great trouble and disorder (2Pe 2:2).

7. When one church shall receive a member or members of another congregation without [that congregation's] consent or knowledge. Nay, such are disorderly and may be loose livers,<sup>56</sup> 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?

8. Another disorder is when members are received without the general consent<sup>57</sup> of the church, or before good satisfaction is taken of their godly lives and conversations, or when a church is too remiss<sup>58</sup> in the reception of her members.

9. Another disorder is when a church shall receive a charge against a member (it being an offence between brother and brother) before an orderly proceeding has been made by the offended person (Act 9:27; Mat 18:15).

10. When judgment passes with partiality, and some are connived at<sup>59</sup> out of favor or affection. Levi was not to know his father or mother in judgment (Lev 19:15).

11. 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 (Psa 63:1; Song 7:12; Mar 16:1).

12. 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 (1Co 12:25; Rom 16:17).

13. Another thing that tends to disquiet the peace of the church is when there are any undue heats of spirit or passion shown 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, sweetness of spirit, and moderation—every brother having liberty to speak his mind and not to be interrupted until he has done; nor [should more than] one speak at once (2Ti 2:25).

14. 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

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<sup>54</sup> **Arminianism** (from Jacobus Arminius, 1560-1609, Dutch theologian) – doctrinal system that rejects the doctrine of predestination, teaching instead that God's choice of individuals was based on His foreknowledge of their accepting or rejecting Christ by their own free will.

<sup>55</sup> **Socinianism** (from Faustus Socinus, 1539-1604, Italian theologian) – doctrinal system that denies the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ (making Him a mere man), the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, predestination, original sin, radical depravity, eternal hell, and that Christ offered any atonement (or satisfaction) to God for sin.

<sup>56</sup> **loose livers** – those who live worldly lives without regard for God's holiness.

<sup>57</sup> **general consent** – consent of the congregation as a body.

<sup>58</sup> **remiss** – relaxed; negligent.

<sup>59</sup> **connived at** – silently approved.

submit to their majority, but raise feuds; nay, will rend themselves from the church rather than consent (Jude 1:19; Jam 3:14-16). I query, what reason or ground has any man to refuse communion with a church that Christ has not left, but has communion with?

15. 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 often 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 (Song 4:12).

16. Another disorderly practice is this: 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 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 of the duty of members to their minister. Such a person ought to be severely rebuked; and if he does not confess his evils and manifest unfeigned repentance, he must be dealt with further. 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 deals 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 (Rom 1:29; 1Ti 6:4; Zec 7:10; 1Ti 5:19; 1Co 8:12).

17. 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 (1Co 16:2).

18. Another disorder is this: when members refuse to communicate with the church at the Lord's Table because they think some person or persons are guilty of evil, and yet they have not proceeded with them according to rule. These either excommunicate the church or themselves, or at least they censure those persons unwarrantably (Mat 18). I beseech you for Christ's sake that this may never be any more among you. You ought not to deal thus with them or refuse your communion (though faulty) until the church has dismembered, withdrawn from, or at least suspended them.

19. When one member shall believe or receive a report against another before he knows the truth of the matter (Jer 20:1, 10).

20. 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 (1Ti 5:19).

21. When the Word of God is not carefully attended upon on week or lecture-days by the members generally, though the said meeting be appointed by the whole church (Isa 55:3; Act 2:1-2; Act 10:33).

22. When days of prayer and fasting, days of public thanksgiving, or days of disciplining are not generally attended upon<sup>60</sup> (Joel 2:16).

23. Lastly, when gifted brethren are not first duly encouraged 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 accomplish-

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<sup>60</sup> **generally attended upon** – attended by the congregation as a whole.

ment. What will become of the churches in time to come, if this be not prevented with speed? (2Ti 2:2).

## 9. What Tends to the Glory and Beauty of a Gospel Church

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 (1Co 3:4).

1. In respect of God the Father, Who laid this foundation in His eternal purpose, counsel, and decree: “Behold, I lay in Zion” (Isa 28:16). And this is as the result of His infinite wisdom, love, and mercy to His elect, a) in respect to the glory of God in all His attributes; b) in respect to our good—He answering all our wants who are united to Him or built upon Him.

2. In respect unto Christ Himself, Who is this foundation: a) in respect to the preciousness of Christ, as “a foundation a stone,” “a precious...stone”; b) in respect to the durability of it, “a tried stone...a sure foundation” (Isa 28:16). Brethren, a foundation of a house must of necessity be laid; no house can be built without a good foundation, one 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 does Jesus Christ.

3. The beauty and glory of a true church consists in the true and regular (or right) constitution of it, nothing being lacking that is essential to it upon this account.

4. The beauty and glory of a true church consists in the excellency, glory, and suitability of the materials it is built with, answering to the foundation [the living Christ]: all precious stones, lively stones, all regenerated persons (1Pe 2:5).

5. The beauty and glory of a true church consists in all the stones being 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,<sup>61</sup> I mean in Solomon’s Temple (1Ki 6:7).

6. Its beauty and glory consist in that all the stones are not only united by the Spirit and faith of the operation of God to Christ the foundation, but also to one another in sincere love and affection. “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21).

7. It consists in the holiness and purity of the lives and conversations of all the members: “Be ye holy; for I am holy...Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever” (1Pe 1:16; Psa 93:5).

8. It consists in that sweet union and concord that ought to be in the church, all drawing together like the horses in Pharaoh’s chariot, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Song 1:9; Eph 4:3). “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Joh 13:35).

9. It consists in their having the divine presence with them, as when the glory of God fills His temple (Exo 20:24; Mat 18:20).

10. It consists 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 lose its beauty (1Co 5:5-7).

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<sup>61</sup> type – pattern pointing to something greater.

11. It consists in that zeal and equality that should be shown in all to keep up the honor, peace, and comfort of the church and the ministry thereof (2Co 8:14; Ti 3:2).

12. It consists in the administration of right discipline, to see no neglect nor delaying of justice through carelessness or partiality:

a. Not to partake of other men's sins, which may be done

1) 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) by not bringing in a just charge against an offender nor rebuking him and yet having communion with him.

b. Not to wrest judgment out of its true and right channel, nor to inflict a greater censure than the law of Christ requires on any.

c. Timely to acquit and discharge a penitent person.

d. Not to do anything out of prejudice, but in love and bowels of affection; and to do all in Christ's name, by His authority.

13. It consists in sympathizing with the afflicted, succoring the tempted, and relieving the poor and distressed (1Th 5:14). "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom 12:15).

14. It consists in speaking 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."<sup>62</sup> 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: a) when called to do it in a legal or gospel way (it is a sin then to conceal his crime, Ti 1:10-13); or b) when it is to prevent another who is in danger to be infected by his company or ill example (2Ti 2:17-18); or c) in our own just defense and vindication (Gal 2:11).

Moreover, consider the evil of reproaching others.

First as to the causes why some do it: One cause is from want of love, nay, from malice and hatred. Another is from the baseness, ill nature, and cruelty of the accuser's disposition. It is occasioned from that itch of talking and meddling in the affairs of other men. Or perhaps some degrade their brother to raise their own esteem and honor, which is abominable. Consider, it is theft or robbery, nay, it is worse than to rob a man of his goods, because you take away that which perhaps you cannot restore again. Moreover, consider that such who reproach others lay themselves open thereby to reproach. Moreover, know that he who 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.

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<sup>62</sup> **Sirach** – Ecclesiasticus 19:8, also known as "The Wisdom of Ben Sira"; part of the Apocrypha, written during the period between the Old and New Testaments. Neither Jewish nor Protestant scholars believe that the apocryphal writings are inspired, infallible Scripture, but many have considered them to contain helpful information.

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<sup>63</sup> stick not to vilify<sup>64</sup> Christ's ministers, even some of the best of men. They 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 Ham who discovered his father's nakedness. These persons violate all laws both human and divine (3Jo 1:9-10; Gen 9:22).

15. The beauty and glory of a true church is exhibited when they bear “one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). And that you may do this, consider where is that church in which there are no burdens to be born (Gal 6:1). Consider what a burden Jesus Christ has born for you. Consider what a burden you have to bear of your own (Gal 6:5). May you not in some things be a burden to your brethren? Would you not have others bear your burden? May not God cause you to bear a more heavy burden because you cannot bear your brother's? It is a fulfilling the law of love, nay, the law of Christ (Gal 6:2; Rom 13:10).

16. 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 (Num 16:1-3; Jude 1:11)? The apostle speaks of some that are self-willed, presumptuous, who are not afraid to speak evil of dignities (2Pe 2:10). God has put a glory and high dignity upon the church and in its authority and power: “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Mat 18:18). Moreover, the pastoral office is an office of dignity; they are called rulers, angels, and 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 (Rev 2:1; 1Ti 3:5; Act 23:5).

17. Lastly, the beauty and glory of a true church is exhibited 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 diligence (Psa 110:3; 1Pe 1:23).

## 10. Conclusion

Know, my brethren, that “the LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob” (Psa 87:2). 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 that 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 (Neh 9:2). Yet others may attend on all other public ordinances with the church:

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<sup>63</sup> **professors** – professing Christians.

<sup>64</sup> **stick not to vilify** – do not hesitate to speak evil of.

as public prayer, reading and preaching the Word, and 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, oh, my brethren! Let me beseech you to show your high value and estimation for the public worship of God.

#### *Motives for public worship*

1. Since God prefers it thus, or has so great esteem of His public worship.
  2. Because He is said to dwell in Zion: "He hath desired it for his habitation" (Psa 132:13), "The place where thine honour dwelleth" (Psa 26:8).
  3. Here God is most glorified. In His temple everyone speaks of His glory (Psa 29:9); "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation" (Psa 22:25).
  4. Here is most of God's gracious presence (as one observes it), His *effectual presence*: "In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee" (Exo 20:24). 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" (Mat 18:20). He walks in the midst of seven golden candlesticks [representing the churches] (Rev 1:13).
  5. Here are the clearest manifestations of God's beauty, which made holy David desire to dwell there forever (Psa 27:4). See the appearance of Christ to the churches in Revelation 2-3.
  6. In that it is said that those that "should be saved" in the apostles' days God added unto the church (Act 2:47).
  7. Here is most spiritual advantage to be gotten (Psa 132:3-5). Here the dews of Hermon fall; they descend upon the mountain of Zion where God commands "the blessing, even life for evermore" (Psa 133:3). "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread" (Psa 132:15). Here David's doubt was resolved (Psa 73:16-17).
  8. Here you received your first spiritual breath or life; many souls are daily born to Christ (Psa 87:5). That good which is most diffusive is to be preferred, and that good which most partake of is most diffusive. "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name *together*" (Psa 34:3). 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? "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD" (Psa 84:1-2).
  10. See how the promises of God run to Zion, or to His church: "The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion" (Psa 128:5). Oh, let nothing discourage you in your waiting at the posts of Christ's door (Pro 8:34). David desired rather to "be a doorkeeper in the house of [his] God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psa 84:10).
- Yet, nevertheless, do not neglect, for the Lord's sake, private devotion: namely secret and family prayer. Oh, pray to be fitted for public worship! Come out of your closets to the church! What signifies all you do in public if you were not such that keep up the worship of God in your own families? (Isa 35; Isa 51:3; Psa 25:14; Psa 87:5; Mat 6:6).



Oh, neglect not prayer, reading, and meditation! And take care also to educate and catechize<sup>65</sup> your children. Live as men and women that are dead to this world. Walk for the Lord's sake as adorns the gospel (Eph 6:4; Phi 1:27).

See that zeal and knowledge go together; a good conversation and good doctrine go together. These two together are better than one (Ecc 4:9-13).

Brethren, he who makes the Word of God his rule in whatsoever he does, and the glory of God his end in what he does, shall have the Spirit of God to be his strength. This is like Solomon's threefold cord that will be one, or it will be three; it cannot be two, nor can it be broken (Ecc 4:12).



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<sup>65</sup> **catechize** – instruct by means of questions and answers. *Spurgeon's Catechism* by Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) and *A Catechism for Boys and Girls* by Erroll Hulse (1931-2017) are available from Chapel Library.

## **Appendix:**

### **A Solemn Covenant of a Church at Its Constitution**

We 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 and of each other, in the sense of our own unworthiness—give up ourselves to the Lord into a church state according to the apostolic constitution, that He may be our God and we may be His people, through the everlasting covenant of His free grace. In this 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. [We give up ourselves to the Lord] to subject ourselves to Him as our Lawgiver and the King of Saints, and to conform to all His holy laws and ordinances for our growth, establishment, and consolation; so that we may be as a holy spouse unto Him, serve Him in our generation, and wait for His second appearance as our glorious Bridegroom (Eze 16:6-8; 2Co 8:5; Hos 2:23; 2Co 6:16).

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 (Exo 26:3-6; Isa 62:5; Psa 122:3; Eph 2:18-22; 4:16; 1Pe 2:5; Psa 93:5; Isa 55:8; Luk 1:74-75).

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 (2Co 7:7; 1Ti 6:11; 2Pe 1:6-7; Act 20:19; Phi 2:3; Joh 13:34; 15:12).

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 (1Pe 1:22; Lev 19:17; Heb 10:24-25; 1Th 5:14-15; Rom 15).

3. We do promise to pray in a special manner for one another, for the glory and increase of this church, for the presence of God in it, for the pouring forth of His Spirit on it, and for His protection over it to His glory (Eph 6:18; Lam 5:16; Col 4:12).

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 (Gal 6:2; Heb 12:12-13; 13:3; Rom 12:15; 2Co 11:29).

5. We do promise to bear with one another's weakness, failings, and infirmities with much tenderness, not discovering to any outside the church nor any within, unless according to Christ's rule and the order of the gospel provided in that case (1Jo 3:17-18; Gal 6:1; 1Th 5:14; Rom 15; Eph 4:31-32).

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, "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3; Jude 1:3; Gal 5:1; Ti 3:9-10; 2Jo 1:10).

7. We do promise to meet together on the Lord's Days and at other times as the Lord shall give us opportunities, to serve and glorify God in the way of His worship, to edify one another, and to contrive the good of His church (Heb 3:12-13; 10:25; Mal 3:16; Rom 14:18-19; 15:16; Eph 4:16).

8. We do promise according to our ability (that is, as God shall bless us with the good things of this world) to communicate to our pastor or minister, God having ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. (And can anything lay a greater obligation upon the conscience than this covenant? What then is the sin of such who violate it?) (2Co 9:7-13; Gal 6:6-10).

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.

