

The Glory of a True Church

By Benjamin Keach

THE GLORY OF A TRUE CHURCH,
And its Discipline display'd. 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

1 Tim. 3.15. *That thou mayst know how thou oughtest
to behave thy self in the House of God, which is the
Church of the living God,
the Pillar and Ground of Truth.*

Original printing: London, 1697. Edited 2022, Thomas Brooks.

Several variations of the subject text were found, and while no version showed any significant differences, there were evidently minor changes to word order, sentence structure, or other non-essential formatting qualities. This is a derivative of several of these works, as the original manuscript was unavailable.

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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. And, 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 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. 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

The Glory of a True Church

Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel-Church.

Before 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 Publick Service and Worship of God; among whom the Word of God and Sacraments are duly administered, according to Christ's Institution. (*Act. 2.41, 42, 43, 44, Act. 8.14. Act. 19.4, 5, 6. Eph. 1.1, 2. and 2.12, 13, 19. Col. 1.2, 4, 12. 1 Pet. 2.5. Act. 5.13, 14. Rom. 6.17. Heb. 6.1, 2.*)

2.The Beauty and Glory of which Congregation doth consist in their being all Converted Persons, or *lively Stones*; being by the Holy Spirit, and Faith of the Operation of God, united to Jesus Christ the Precious Corner-Stone, and only foundation of every Christian, as well as of every particular Congregation, and of the whole *Catholick Church*. (*Rom. 6.3, 4, 5. 1 Pet. 2.4, 5, 6. Eph. 2.20, 21. Col. 2.19.*)

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 hath done for their Souls, or their Experiences of a Saving work of Grace upon their Hearts; and also the Church should enquire after, and take full satisfaction concerning their Holy Lives or

Good Conversations. (*Isa.* 66.16. *Act.* 11.4, 5, 6, &c. 23, 24. *1 Pet.* 3.1. *2 Cor.* 8.5. *Jer.* 50.5.)

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 endeavour 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 to give them the right Hand Fellowship of a Church, or *Church Organical*. (*Heb.* 13.17; *1 Pet.* 5.1, 2.)

A Church thus constituted ought forthwith to choose them a Pastor—Elder or Elders—and Deacons, (we reading of no other Officers, or Offices abiding in the Church) and 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 after in a Day of solemn Prayer and Fasting, that they have elevated 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 prov'd, 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 acting not according to the Rule of the Gospel, having something wanting. (*1 Tim.* 3.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. *Tit.* 1.5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. *Tit.* 1.7. *Act.* 6.6. *1 Tim.* 5. 22.)

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, and to administer all the Ordinances of the Gospel which belong to his Sacred Office, and to be faithful and laborious therein, studying to shew himself approved unto God, *a Workman that needeth 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 found 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 Truth. What Interest hath God greater in the World which he hath committed unto Men than this? Moreover, he must make known the whole Counsel of God to the People. (*1 Cor. 9. 16, 17. Act. 20.31,35; 2 Tim. 2.15. 2 Cor. 4.1, 2. 1 Tim. 3. Jer. 3.15. 2 Tim. 4.2. 2 Cor. 5.15. Act. 20.20, 27.*)

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 succour the tempted, and to reprove them that are unruly. (*Pro. 27.23. 1 Thess. 5.15.*)

3. 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 shew 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 he glorified, and Religion delivered from Reproach. (*1 Tim. 4.12.*)

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 affirm any greater Power than God hath given him; but to shew a humble and meek Spirit, nay to be *clothed with Humility*. (*Jam. 2.4. 1 Tim. 5.21. 1 Pet. 5.3 and 5.6.*)

The Office and Work of Deacons.

The 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 do give 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. (*Act. 6.1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10. Act. 5.7, 8, 9, 10. 1 Cor. 15.2. Act. 6.1.*)

Of the Duty of Church-Members to the Pastor.

1st. '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, faith *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? (*1 Thess. 5.25. Heb. 13.18.*)

Motives to this:

1. Ministers Work is great: *Who is sufficient for these things?* (2 Cor. 2.16.)
2. The Opposition is not small which is made against them. (1 Cor. 16.9.)
3. God's loud Call is (as well as Ministers themselves) for the Saints continual Prayers and Supplication for them. (1 Tim. 4.3, 4, 5.)
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 dishonoured, and his Ways and People reproached.

2dly. They ought to shew a reverential Estimation of them, being Christ's Ambassadors, also called Rulers, Angels, &c. they that honour them, and receive them, honour and receive Jesus Christ. *Esteem them very highly in Love for their Work sake.* Again, he saith, *Let the Elders that rule well, be accounted worthy of double Honour, especially they who labour in Word and Doctrine:* that is, as I conceive, such that are most laborious. (2 Cor. 3.19, 20. 1 Thess. 3.13. 1 Tim. 5.17.)

3dly. 'Tis 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 your selves.* (Heb. 13.5, 17.)

4thly. 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. (Jer. 20.10. Zeph. 2.8. 2 Cor. 11.21, 23.)

5thly. 'Tis the Duty of Members to go to them when under Trouble or Temptations.

6thly. 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 teacheth, in all good things. Who goeth a Warfare at his own Charge? who planteth a Vineyard, and catch not of the fruit thereof? &c. Even so hath 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 honourably. The Ministers Maintenance, tho it is not by Tythes, &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 Saviour, faith Dr. *Owen*, 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. (*Gal. 6.6. 1 Cor. 9.7, 8. ver. 14. ver. 11. Mat. 10.9, 10. See Dr. Owen's Eshod, p. 21, 22.*)

7thly. It is their Duty to adhere to them, and abide by them in all their Trials and Persecutions for the Word. *Ye were not ashamed of me in my Bonds, &c. (2 Tim. 4.16, 17, 18.)*

8thly. 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. (Eshod, pag. 27. Act. 14.27.)*

Query, *Are there no ruling Elders besides the Pastor?*

Answ. 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 mention'd, or how to be chosen.

2. Because we read not particularly what their Work and Business is, or how distinct from preaching Elders; tho 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. (*Rom.* 12.8. *1 Tim.* 3. *Tit.* 1.5, 6, 7.

Quest. *May an Elder of one Church if called, warrantably administer all Ordinances to another?*

Answ. 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 hath no Right or Authority to administer as an Elder in any other where he is not so much as a Member.

Quest. *May a Church call out a Teacher that is no ordained Elder to administer all Ordinances to them?*

Answ. 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 can't 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 incompleat 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! (*1 Cor.* 14.33, 38.)

Of the reception of Members.

Quest. *What is the Order of receiving Members into the Church, that were no Members any where before?*

Answ. 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 endeavour to satisfy such Persons, especially if the Reasons of their dissent seem weighty. (*Psal.* 55.15. *Act.* 9.26, 27. *3 Joh.* 9, 10. *Rom.* 14. 17, 19. *1 Pet.* 3.15. *1 Cor.* 14.40. *Rom.* 15.1, 2. *Act.* 11.2, 3, 4, 5, 6.)

Quest. *What is to be done when a Person offers himself for Communion from a Church that is corrupt, or erroneous in Principles?*

Answ. 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 any thing or not against his Life and Conversation: if satisfied in both these respects, the Church may receive him.

Quest. *To whom is it Members join themselves? is it to the Elder, or to the Church?*

Answ. They are joined to the whole Community of the Church, being incorporated as Members thereof, and thereto abide, tho the Pastor be removed by Death. (*Act.* 2.47. & 5.11, 15.)

The Power of the Keys, with Church - Discipline, and Members Duties one to another.

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 publick Worship of God, of a different nature: besides, such things may (on the 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 on the Word which they have newly heard: tho in finall 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, faith Dr. *Chauncy*, is in the Church, whereby it is exercised in the Name of Christ, having all lawful Rule and Government within it self, which he thus proves, *viz. (Acts 16.5. 2 Thess. 1.3, 6.)*

'1. The Church essential is the first Subject of the Keys.

'2. They must of necessity to their Preservation, purge themselves from all pernicious Members.

'3. They have Power to organize themselves with Officers.

'4. 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.

'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.

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 call 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 Leaven, that you may be a new Lump. (1 Cor. 5.4, 5. 2 Thess. 3.6, 14. 1 Cor. 5.7.)*

Of Church-Censures.

Now as to Church-Censures I understand but two besides Suspension, *viz.* (1.) Withdrawing from a Member that walks disorderly. (2.) Calling 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 can't withdraw from him, or cast him out.

2. If any Member walks disorderly, tho not guilty of gross scandalous Sins, he or she, as soon as it is taken notice of, ought to be admonished, and endeavours to be used to bring him to Repentance: *For we hear that there are some which walk disorderly, not working at all, but are busy-bodies.* Such as meddle with Matters that concern them not, it may be (instead of following their Trade and Business) they go about from one Member's House to another, telling or carrying of 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, which, if so, it is back-biting; and that is so notorious a Crime, that without Repentance they shall not ascend God's holy Hill. Back-biting is a diminishing our Neighbour's, or Brother's good Name, either by denying him his due Praise, or by laying any thing to his Charge falsely or irregularly, or without sufficient cause or evidence, *Thus our Annotators*. But this of disorderly walking does not announce 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. (2 Thess. 3.11, 12. Psa. 15.1, 3. 2 Thess. 3.12.)

3.

Of true Admonition.

1. An Admonition is a faithful Endeavour to convict a Person of a Fault, both as to Matter of Fact and Circumstance; and 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 publick, the Church ought to send for the Offender, and the Pastor must admonish him before all.

2. But if after all due Endeavors used he is not reclaimed, but continues a disorderly Person, the Church must withdraw from him. *Now we command you Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every Brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the Traditions he received from us*. This is not a delivering up to Satan, Excommunicating or dismembering the Person; for this sort are still to be owned as Members, tho 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 exhort him as a Brother: if any Man obey*

not our Word, note that Man. It appears that such who refute to adhere to what the Pastor commands and exhorts to, 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 that neglect private or family Prayer, or neglect their attendance on the Lord's Supper, or to contribute to the necessary Charges of the Church, or suffer any Evils unreproved in their Children; all such may be lookt upon disorderly Walkers, and ought to be proceeded against according to this Rule, or divulge the private Resolves of the Church, as well as in many like cases. (2 Thess. 2.6. 2 Thess. 2.14, 15. Heb. 12.25.)

Of private Offences of one Brother against another.

1.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 publickly 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 *Mat. 18* but forthwith to bring it to the Church, that the publick 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 hath proceed according the Rule.

(1.) He must tell his Brother his Fault. *Moreover, if thy Brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault betwixt thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy Brother.* (Mat. 18.15.)

Thou must labour in Love and all Affections to convince him of his Fault; but if he will not hear thee,

(2.) Thou must take one or two more, but before see they are discreet. Persons, and such that are most likely to gain upon him; and they with thee are to labour with all Wisdom to bring him to the fense 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 for so the matter may be issued, and the Church not troubled with it: *But if he will not hear thee, take 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: The Elder is to put the Question, whether the offending Brother be in their Judgments incorrigible, and refuseth 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 fullness 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, 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. (1 Cor. 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.

‘The delivery unto Satan (faith Dr. *Chauncy*) signifies only the solemn Exclusion of a Person from the Communion of the Church, the visible Kingdom of Christ, and disfranchizing 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. (*Mat. 18.17.*)

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 publickly 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 flight 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 doth appear, his Charge is to be laid before him, and the Witnesses called; and after he has made his Defence, and said all he hath 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 hath 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. (*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 Honour 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 tryed Evidence of his true Repentance under that Ordinance of Christ which is appointed to that end." (1 Tim. 5.21. Act. 5.11. Jud. 23. 1 Cor. 5. 2 Cor. 7.11.)

Observe, It is the opinion of the Doctor, that tho the Person be penitent, yet because his Sin is open and scandalous, he ought to be cast out to vindicate the Honour 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 thorow 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 seven Days (speaking of Miriam) and after that let her be received again.* (Num. 12.14.)

Of dealing with Hereticks and Blasphemers.

As touching Hereticks 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. (See Pool's Annot. on 1 Cor. 11.19. 2 Pet. 2.1.)

Two things render a Man an Heretick 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 Heretick, 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 Hymeneus 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. (*Tit. 3.10. 1 Tim. 1.19, 20.*)

Some would have none but counted an Heretick 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, tho 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 tho 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 Heretick. It is a great question, whether *Hymeneus* 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 hath been twice (or oftner) 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 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.

Quest. *What is an Admonition?*

Answ. It is a faithful endeavour 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.

Quest. *What is a Church Admonition?*

Answ. 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 shewed.

Quest. *May a Church admit a Member of another Congregation to have Communion with them, without an orderly receiving him as a Member?*

Answ. 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 dismission, and to be delivered up to the care and watch of the Church where he desires to communicate.

Quest. *If an Excommunicated Person hath obtained of God true Repentance, and desires to be restored to the Church, what is the manner of his Reception?*

Answ. Upon his serious, solemn and publick Acknowledgement thereof before the Church, and due Satisfaction according to the nature of his Offence being given, the Elder solemnly proceeds and declares 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. (*Mat. 13.18. 2 Cor. 2.6, 7. 1 Tim. 5.*)

Q. 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.

Ans. '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 intreat him as a Father, and not rebuke him as there Equal, much less as their Inferiour; and if they gain upon him, then to receive him into their former Affection and Esteem, for ever hiding it from all others. But if after all tender intreaties, 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 qualifyd for the *work of a Pastor*, to execute the Church's Censure, against him, &c. Yet no doubt, the Church may Suspend him from his Communion, and exercising of his Office presently, upon his being fully Convicted.

Q. 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?

Ans. We believe he hath 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.

Of 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 hath power to dismember himself: *i.e.* He cannot, without great Sin, translate himself from one Church to another; but ought to have a Dismission 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 endeavour to get his orderly Dismission. (Rom. 6.17. Heb. 6.2, 3.)

Nor is every small Difference in some points of Religion, (or Notions of little moment,) any grounds for him to desire his Dismission.

That he cannot, nor ought not to Translate himself, see what a Reverend Writer saith: (Dr. Chauncy pag. 339.)

“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 hath 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. (Acts 2.42. 1Cor. 12.6. 14.7. 1.20, 21, 25.)

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 them. (Heb. 10.25. Jude 19.)

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 no thing 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 *Catholick* 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*.

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 ev'ry Member.

15. 'It breaks all Bonds of Love, and raiseth 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." (Jude 19. 1 Cor. 1.10 & 3.3 & 11.18. Heb. 10.22, 23, 25.)

Quest. '*What is the just Act of the Church, that cloathes this irregular Separation, with the Formality as it were of an Excommunication.*

He Answers. ('Calling) this a mixt Excommunication *t.c.* 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."(Rom 9. 17, 18. 2 Thess. 3.6, 14, 15. Jude 12.)

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 dismission to a Member, when insisted on, to another regular *Church*, tho not in every case of finall 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. (2 Timo. 2.23. 2 Thess. 3.14. Prov. 6.16.)

Quest. *What is a full and lawful Dismission of a Member to another Church, upon his removing his Habitation, or on other warranted Cases.*

Ans. 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. (Rom. 16.2. Acts 18.27.)

Of Disorders, or causes of Discords, and to be prevented, corrected, and removed.

I. 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. (Matt. 18.15.)

But one Person takes up an Offence against another, and speaks of it to this, or that Person, before he hath 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 fight 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! (John 13.12, 17. Eph. 4.3. Heb. 13.1. Eph. 4.31, 32. & cap. 5.2. Psal. 132.1. Jam. 3.16.)

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 lookt upon as Contentious Persons: but hereby they may become guilty of other Mens Sins, and also Suffer the Name of God, and the Church to lye under Reproach, and all thro their neglect. This is a great Iniquity. (Acts 5.3, 8. Levit. 19.17.)

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 found in the Faith at other times. (Acts 4.23.)

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. (2 Pet. 2.2.)

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 hath 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. (Acts 9.27. Mat. 18.15.)

X. When Judgment passes with Partiality; some are connived at, out of favour or affection: *Levi* was not to know his *Father* or *Mother* in Judgment.

XI. When Members do not constantly and early attend our publick Assemblies, and the worship of God on the Lord's-day especially, but are remiss in that matter: This is a great Evil. (Psal. 63.1. Cant. 7.12. Mark 16.1.)

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. (1 Cor. 12. 25. Romans 16.17.)

XIII. Another thing that tends to disquiet the Peace of the Church is when there are any undue heats of Spirit, or Passion shewed 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. (2 Tim. 2.25.)

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 their Majority, but raise Funds; nay, will rend themselves from the Church, rather than consent. (Jude 19. Jam. 3.14, 16.)

I Query, what reason, or ground, hath any Man to refuse Communion with a Church that Christ hath not left, but hath 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 inclosed, 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. (Cant. 4.12.)

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, & 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 rebuk'd; 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 deals thus by a private Brother, it is a great Evil, but far worse to an *Elder*, whose Name and Honour, ought with all Care and Justice, to be kept up, as being more Sacred. (Rom. 1. 29. 1 Tim. 6.4. Zech. 7.10. 1 Tim. 5.19. 1 Timo. 5. 1 Cor. 8.14.)

And also, when every one does not Contribute to the Poor, as God has blessed them, on every Lord's day, or first day of the Week, as he hath Comanded. (1 Cor. 16.2.)

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 they 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. (Math. 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: You ought not to deal thus with them; or refuse your Communion, (tho faulty) until the Church has dismember'd, 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. (Jer. 202.10.)

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. (1 Tim. 5.19.)

XXI. When the word of God is not carefully attended upon, on Week, or Lecture-days, by the Members generally; tho the said Meeting being appointed by the whole Church. (Isa. 55.3. Acts 2.1, 2. Acts 10.33.)

XXII. When Days of Prayer and Fasting, and of publick Thanksgiving, giving, or when days of Disciplining are not generally attended upon. (Joel 2.16.)

Lastly, When Gifted Brethren are not duly encourage: 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?

What tends to the Glory and Beauty of a true Gospel-Church.

1. 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. (1 Cor. 3.4.)

I. In respect of God the Father, who laid this Foundation in his eternal Purpose, Counsel, and Decree; *Behold I lay in Sion*; and this is as the result of his infinite Wisdom, Love, and Mercy to his Elect. (Isa. 28.16.)

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.
2. In respect to our Good; he answering all our wants, who are united to him, or built upon him.
3. In respect to 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. (Isa. 28.16.)

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 beareth 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*. (1 Pet. 2.5.)

V. In that all the Stones he 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*. (1 Kings 6.7.)

VI. It's Beauty and Glory consisteth in that all the *Stones* being 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, growth up unto an holy Temple in the Lord*. (Eph. 2.19, 20, 21.)

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*. (1 Pet. 1.16. Psalm 93.5.)

VIII. It consisteth in that sweet Union and Concord that ought to be in the Church; all like the *Horses 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 ye are my Disciples, if you Love one another*. (Cant. 1.9. Eph. 4.3.)

IX. In their having the divine Presence with them: Or when the Glory of God fills his Temple. (Exod. 20.24. Mat. 18.20.)

X. In keeping out all unfancified, 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. (1 Cor. 5.5, 6, 7.)

XI. In that Zeal and Equality that should be shewed in all to keep up the Honour, Peace, and Comfort of the *Church*, and the Ministry thereof. (2 Cor. 8.14. Tit. 3.2.)

XII. In the Administration of right Discipline; to see no neglect nor delaying of Justice, thro carelessness, or Partiality:

1st. No ways partaking of other Men's Sins; which may be done by: (1.) 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 any thing 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*, *Succour* 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 Honour: 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 *Defence* 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. Another, from the Baseness, ill Nature, and Cruelty of the accusers *Disposition*. At times, 'tis occasioned from that itch, of talking and meddling in the *Affairs* of other Men. Then again, perhaps to raise their own Esteem and Honour, 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. Know also that he who Receives, or Harkens 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 *Vertue* the more clearly.

Alas, in our days, some that would be thought to be great Professors flick not to vilifie 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 it self, 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 Humane and Divine. (3 John 9, 10. Gen. 9.22.)

XV. *When they bear one anothers 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. (Gal. 6.1.)

Motives thus to do:

1. Consider what a Burden Jesus Christ hath born for thee.
2. What a Burden thou has to bear of thine own. (Gal. 6.5.)
3. Mayst not thou in some things be a Burden to thy Brethren?

4. Wouldst thou not have others bear thy Burden.
5. May not God cause thee 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. (Rom. 3.10.)

XVI. 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 gainsaying of Corah*? The Apostles speaks of some that are *Selfwilled, Presumptuous, who are not afraid to speak evil of Dignities*. (Jude 11. Numb. 22.7, 21.)

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*. (2 Pet. 2.10.)

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. (Rev. 2.1. 1 Tim. 3.5. Act. 23.5.)

Lastly, When Holiness, Righteousness, Charity, Humility, and all true Piety is prest upon the Consciences of every Member, and appears in the Minister: also that all strive to excel therein, with their uttermost Care and Diligences. (Psal. 11.3. 1 Pet. 1.23.)

The Conclusion

Know my Brethren, That *God loves the Gates of Sion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob* Therefore the publick Worship of God ought to be preferred before private. (Psal. 87.2.)

1. This supposeth 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 Publick 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. (Neh. 1.2.)

Yet others may attend on all other publick Ordinances with the Church; as publick Prayer, Reading, and Preaching the Word, and in Singing *God's Praises*, as hath 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 shew your high Value, and Estimation for the publick Worship of *God*.

Motives hereunto:

1. Since God prefers it thus: Or has so great Esteem of his publick Worship.
2. Because he is said to dwell in Sion; It is his Habitation for ever. The place, where his Honour dwells. (Psal. 132.13. Psal. 25.9.)
3. Here God is most Glorified. In his *Temple* every one speaks of his Glory; *My Praise shall be in the great Congregation*. (Psal. 29.2.)

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 thee.* (Exod. 20.24.)

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 seven *Golden Candlesticks.* (Mat. 18.20. Rev. 1.13.)

5. Here are the clearest manifestations of God's Beauty, which made holy *David* desire to *dwell there for ever.* See the appearance of Christ to the Churches, *Rev. 2. cap. 3.* (Psal. 27.4.)

6. In that it is said, that those that should be Saved, in the Apostles days, God added unto the Church. (Acts 2.47.)

7. Here is most Spiritual Advantage to be got: *Here the Dews of Hermon fall, they descend upon the Mountain of Sion. Here God commands the Blessing, even Life for evermore. I will abundantly bless her Provision, and satisfie her Poor with Bread.* Here *David's* Doubt was resolved. (Psal. 132.3. Psal. 130.15. Psal. 73.16, 17.)

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. (Psal. 87.5. Psal. 34.3.)

9. Brethren (as a worthy *Divine* observes) the Church in her publick 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 publick Worship? *My Soul longeth,*

yeay, even, fainteth for the Courts of the Lord. How amiable are thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! (Psal. 84.1, 2.)

10. See how the Promises of *God* run to *Sion*, or to his *Church: He will bless thee out of Sion.* 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 publick Worship! Come out of your Closets to the Church? What signifies all you do in Publick, if you were not such that keep up the Worship of God in your own Families? (Isaiah 35. Psal. 128.3. Isai. 51.3. Prov. 8.34. Psal. 25.14. Psal. 87.4. Mat. 6.6. Jer. 10.25.)

O neglect not Prayer, Reading, and Meditation! And take care also to Educate and Catechise 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.* (Eph. 6.4. Phil. 1.27.)

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* Threefold Cord, that will be One, or it will be Three; it can't be Two; nor can it be broken. (Ecc. 4.9, 10, 11, 12, 13.)

The Solemn Covenant of the Church at its Constitution.

The covenant of the Church of Christ, meeting in White-Street, at its constitution, June 5th, 1696

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, of each other, in the Sense of our own Unworthiness, give up our selves 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. (Ezek. 16.6, 8. 2 Cor. 8.5. Hos. 2.23. 2 Cor. 6.16.)

Being fully satisfied in the way of Church-Communion, and the Truth of Grace in some good measure upon one anothers Spirits, we do solemnly join our selves 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. (Exod. 26.3, 4, 6. Isa. 62.5. Psal. 122.3. Eph. 2.23. Eph. 4.16. 1 Pet. 2.5. Psal. 93.5. Isa. 55.8. Luke 1.74, 75.)

1. We do promise and ingage 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 our

selves, and lovely to the rest of the Lord's People. (2 Cor. 7.7. 1 Tim. 6.11. 2 Pet. 1.6, 7. Act. 20.19. Phil. 2.3. Joh. 13.34 and 15.12.)

2. We do promise to watch over each others 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. (1 Pet. 1.22. Lev. 19.17. Heb. 10.24, 25. 1 Thess. 5.14, 15. Rom. 15.)

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. (Eph. 6.18. Lam. 5.16. Col. 4.12.)

4. We do promise to bear one anothers 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. Heb. 13.3. Rom. 12.15. 2 Cor. 11.29.)

5. We do promise to bear with one anothers 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. (1 John 3. 17, 18. Gal. 6.1. 1 Thess. 5.14. Rom. 15.12. 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; Ephes. 4.3. (Jude, v. 3. Gal. 5.1. Tit. 3.9, 10. 2 John v. 10.)

7. *We do promise to meet together on 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. 3.10 and 10.25. Mal. 3.16. Rom. 14.18 and 15.16. Eph. 4.16.)*

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 or Minister, God having ordained that they that Preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. (And now can any thing lay a greater obligation upon the Conscience, than this Covenant, what then is the Sin of such who violate it?) (2 Cor. 9.7, 8, 9, -- 12, 13. Gal. 6.6.)*

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.

Prepared for:

*Hopewell Primitive Baptist Church
870 CR 4870
Winnsboro, TX 75494*