A VIEW OF THE SOCIAL WORSHIP AND ORDINANCES

by James Alexander Haldane

A

VIEW

OF THE

SOCIAL WORSHIP

AND

ORDINANCES

OBSERVED BY THE FIRST CHRISTIANS,

DRAWN FROM THE SACRED SCRIPTURES ALONE:

BEING

AN ATTEMPT TO ENFORCE THEIR DIVINE OBLIGATION;

AND TO

REPRESENT THE GUILT AND EVIL CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECTING THEM.

BY JAMES ALEX. HALDANE.

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PREFACE.

THE Writer of these pages is aware, that the subject of them is by no means popular, even among those who are esteemed the disciples of Christ. Besides the particular prejudices of va rious persons in favour of their own practice, the subject, by a kind of general consent, has of late years been considered as little connected with practical religion. Whether this has arisen from most parties being conscious that their own modes of worship are little conducive to godliness, and that they cannot be defended from the Scriptures, he presumes not to determine.

The religion of Jesus, in its doctrines, precepts and institutions, is one connected whole; in proportion as one part is overlooked, the force of all will be weakened. He who feels, as every Christian must, his proneness to let slip the most important truths of the word of God, will be thankful that the Lord has graciously employed various means to preserve in our minds the remembrance of them. He has revealed his will in the most engaging and affecting manner, and has also instituted various ordinances of worship, all which represent, and are memorials of the doctrines of his word.

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If, in reading the history of the life of a great man, we had at the same time an opportunity of seeing his anions delineated in the most correct and the finest paintings, it would make a far deeper impression on our minds than the mere narrative.

> Things to the mind before unknown,
> And ent'ring by the ear alone,
> Draw less attention and surprise,
> Than had they enter'd by the eyes.*

The ordinances of Christ are just so many sensible images of the doctrines he taught. When these are observed as he delivered them, they greatly tend to impress us with just views of the truth, and where they are in any measure corrupted, they naturally lead us into error and misapprehension. Error and misapprehension in sentiment, must always produce error in practice; for it is certain from the word of God, that holiness springs from the knowledge and belief of the truth.

The great end aimed at in these pages, is to promote love and union amongst Christians, and consequently the success of the gospel in the world. The author is convinced, that both these are, intimately connected with the subject of the book.

True, genuine, and sincere union, is absolutely impradicable while professors neglect to enquire,

* Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.
Horat. Ars Poet, translated by Dr Stedman.

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to understand, and to practise the directions of the word of God respecting social worship, and consequently their attempts to diffuse the knowledge of Christ will be feeble, inconsistent, and ineffectual.

He will be happy to receive correction wherein he has erred, for although he is persuaded that he treads on sure ground respecting the general principles which he has adopted, he is yet sensible that he may, in some respects, have committed mistakes in the application of them; and if so, he knows that the error must have bad consequences on his mind.

This book is not intended as a standard for the order of any church of Christ. Should it be adopted as such, the views of the writer would be thereby completely defeated. His design is to excite his brethren in Christ to study the Scriptures on this and every other subject, and to appeal only to the law and to the testimony. In so far as it produces this effect, his object will be gained. He cordially adopts the language of Mr Ainsworth; 'If any places (viz. of God's word) be alleged amiss or impertinent, or things gathered otherwise than the text will afford, (as through my ignorance or unheediness, no doubt, many may be;) I humbly ask pardon for the same, both of God and his people; and do desire the reader not to rely upon my judgment in any thing, but as himself, by the wisdom of God's Spirit, shall see agreeable unto truth. For, if any shall build up-

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on my words, without sure ground from the law of the Lord, he shall first offend God, who hath given his Scriptures by divine inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16–17. to teach and persuade all truth, to reprove and correct all error; to instrust in righteousness, and make men perfect unto every good work: he shall injure me also, who have written these things to be tried and examined by Christ's law, not to be accepted for a law; and he shall injure his own soul, by relying upon the word of frail man, whose breath is in his nostrils, which cannot establish the heart, nor assure the conscience in any thing. Let, therefore, the grass wither, and the flower fade, for it is the word of our God that shall stand for ever!' Isaiah 40:8.*

The Author hopes that criticisms or remarks, however just, on the manner or style in which he has written, will not be considered as reasons for neglecting what is here laid before the Public.

He now commends this attempt to place the truth before the minds of Christians, to that powerful influence which can produce attention, banifh prejudice, and work effectually and practically against all opposition!

EDINBURGH, *June* 4. 1805.

* Preface to Ainsworth's Treatise on the Communion of Saints, p. lxxviii. Set his two Treatises re-published at Edinburgh, 1785.

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86. note, l. 1. *for* magno *read* magna
122. l. 17. *for* or *read* and
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142. l. 17. *for* or *read* nor
179. note, l. 1. *for* σωζωμενους read σωζομενους
258. l. 5. *for* rule in *read* rule over
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269. l. 6. *dele* the ministry
407. running title, *for* SOSIAL *read* SOCIAL
437. l. 15. *after* any *dele* other

A

VIEW

OF

SOCIAL WORSHIP,

&c.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDING TO EVERY PART OF THE WORD OF GOD.

THE sacred Scriptures contain a complete revelation of the will of God. They inform us of the character of God, and of the duties we owe to him. This revelation was made by degrees, but has been long since completed, and the canon of Scripture finally closed. The utmost perspicuity is united with the greatest brevity in this wonderful book. Being the work of God, it possesses the perfection of its Author, and is able to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly fumiflied unto every good work.

Christians regard the Bible with veneration:

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they are jealous of its honour, and justly esteem it to be the foundation of all their hopes. On the truth of what is there delivered, they rest their eternal all; and, trailing in the Saviour whom it reveals, they are enabled, in poverty and sickness, in affliction and death, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Every Christian owns he is blind, ignorant, and liable to err at every step; he considers the word of God to be a light to his feet, and a lamp to his path; yet too many imagine, that every part of this revelation does not demand scrupulous regard. Some things which it contains, they judge to be indifferent and unimportant; nay, they do not hesitate to affirm, that attention to these diverts the mind from fundamental truths. Surely good men are not aware of the consequences of such an opinion. It represents Scripture to be inconsistent, and Christ's kingdom to be divided againsl itself, while it is calculated to produce disregard to every precept which may be contrary to our inclinations. This sentiment is highly dishonourable to God; it tends to diminish our regard for his authority. The more we respect any person, and the more exalted he is, the more minute attention we pay to whatever he says. A hint of his will is sufficient from a king to a loyal and affectionate subject. Must we not then, entertain inadequate views of the wisdom of God, when we think that any part of his holy book may be overlooked?

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The Bible is one consident and united whole, Every part is connected; the most minute precepts are adapted to Strengthen the influence of the most important doctrines. It is completely different from the systems of men. Even in those which display the greatest human wisdom, we sometimes find inconsistencies; but in the revelation of God these have no existence. So great is the harmony, and so intimate the connection between all parts of the word of God, that ignorance of one part always leads to error, in another. Thus men having forsaken the Scriptures in regard to modes of worship and church order, foon began to imagine that they were deficient in many other respects, and that these defects must be supplied by tradition, and the authority of the church. On the other hand, right views of one subject contained in the sacred volume, tend to correct our mistakes on other subjects. It is indeed possible to be much occupied about external order, while we neglect the weightier matters of the law, but this does not arise from minutely attending to whatever God has revealed, but from doing so in an improper and partial manner. We may not only ruin our souls while attending to external matters, but we may perplex ourselves about the greatest and most fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and wrest them also to our own destruction.

It is the will of God that his people should be holy. To promote holiness he has given us a

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revelation, that we, believing his exceeding great md precious promises, might be partakers of a divine nature. This, his grand end, is never for a moment lost sight of in any precept he delivers; and if we lose sight of it, we can derive little benefit from any of the ordinances which he has enjoined. To view the matter thus is surely more to the honour of revelation, than to suppose that we belt show our regard for its authority by overlooking such parts as we judge unnecessary. But what shall we say of those, who imagine that a diligent examination of the order established in the first churches by Christ and his apostles, would render them less spiritual, and obstruct their growth in grace! This is downright antinomianism. It puts the means in opposition to the end. The Scriptures, however, are wrested to support this sentiment. The kingdom of God, say they, is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost—assuredly: and therefore, say the Quakers, it is absurd to baptize or administer the Lord's supper. This is carrying the argument to its proper length; but it is not considerent in those who condemn such conduct, to adduce this and similar passages of Scripture, as a proof that it is of little importance what external order the churches adopt.

It is freely granted, that every part of divine truth is not in itself equally important, although all is sanctioned by the same authority. There are some doctrines, without the knowledge of

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which we cannot be saved. There are others of which good men have been comparatively ignorant; but Hill every doctrine is important. By ignorance of one, we, in some measure, lose the beautiful harmony of divine truth. Our resemblance to God bears an exact proportion to our real knowledge of him. Thus the apostle prays for the Coloffians, "that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of *understanding,* to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ," Col. 2:2. No man is perfect in knowledge. None can say that in this he has attained, or is already perfect; and if any man say that he is satisfied with the measure of his knowledge, provided he could but grow in holiness, he manifests great ignorance of the way of salvation revealed in Scripture, where growth in knowledge and in grace are always declared to be inseparable. Paul counted all things loss for the excellency of the *knowledge* of Christ, and desired to *know* him and the power of his refurredtion, Phil. 3:8, 10.

Amongst the men of the world, a man's creed is thought of little consequence, provided his practice be good. A deceived heart turns them aside. They do not perceive the connection between just views of the character of God, and delight in doing his will. They consider the great doctrines of the gospel to be merely specu-

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lative points, on which good men may, and do entertain different opinions. They justify their indifference about these, by their dislike of controversy. They affirm that zeal about such matters sours the temper, and often disorders the intellect. The man, on the contrary, who is taught of God, understands that true holiness is necessarily connected with the belief of the truth; that the whole of revealed truth is practical, and effectually works in those who believe. He therefore earnestly contends for the faith once delivered to the saints, and on account of his attachment to that gospel which is the power of God unto salvation, he is branded as a bigot by the world. How much does the conduct of some Christians towards their brethren resemble this! They judge it unimportant what outward order is adopted in worship, provided we hold fast the great truths of God, and follow after holiness. They do not perceive the influence the one has upon the other; that both are enjoined by the same authority; and that while we do the one, the other is not to be left undone. I would not for a moment be thought to put the most important doctrines of the gospel on a footing with order or modes of worship. The man who worships God in spirit and in truth, and he only, shall be accepted: but order and modes of worship may, and must have much influence in promoting spirituality, and in fixing our minds on the object of worship, or leading them away to what will prove hurtful to our

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souls; yet are we told, that attention to the Scriptures on these matters tends to distract the mind, and only leads to disputation and controversy.

If, then, we would pay proper respect to the revelation with which we are favoured, let us attend to the whole of it. The more we do so, the more shall we perceive the wisdom of God in every part. We shall experience the efficacy of the belief of the truth, in sanctifying our minds, and in making us delight in holiness, while by attending to the various ordinances delivered to the churches, the belief and influence of the truth will be greatly promoted. I would say to those who are afraid of attending to all Christ's commandments, left their minds be rendered less spiritual, as Philip said to Nathanael, "Come and see." External matters may indeed be contended for by carnal men, destitute of the truth, but still they are a part of that Scripture which cannot be broken; and although they may be perverted and wrested by the ungodly to their own destruction, they are admirably suited to promote the benefit and comfort of the humble follower of Jesus.

The loss we may suffer by neglecting any part of the revelation of God, is incalculable. Harvey was led to the discovery of the circulation of the blood, by considering what might be the purpose of valves in the veins, which, opening by pressure on the one side, and closing by pressure on the other, admitted the blood to flow only in one direction. He was convinced that this eco-

nomy answered some important purpose; he knew not what it might be, but attributing this to his own ignorance, and persuaded that nature did nothing in vain, he persevered in his researches, and his success justified the foundness of the principle he had assumed.

Some might ridicule Harvey for supposing, that attention to such minute parts of the human frame could lead to any useful discovery, or salutary practice; they might urge him to attend to the structure of the more important parts of the body: but they were silenced by the event, and the practice of medicine is now greatly influenced, and the welfare of mankind promoted, by this important discovery. If Christians entertained the same considence, that whatever the wisdom of God has seen fit to record in the lively oracles, is designed for our instruction, and that obedience to every precept is calculated to promote holiness, they would reap much advantage and edification from it, and it would have an equally salutary effect on their souls.

It is not indeed essential to salvation that we should know all which God has revealed. We are all, alas! imperfect in knowledge; but surely it is necessary to salvation, and the inseparable effect of believing the gospel, that we *desire* to know whatever God has revealed. It is undoubtedly inconsistent with the spirit of a Christian, to be indifferent about any part of the will of God. Let it be most carefully observed, that according to the

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Scriptures we can only have full evidence that we shall persevere, and consequently that we shall be saved, when we give all diligence to grow *in knowledge,* as well as in faith, fortitude, patience, and godliness, 2 Pet. 1:5. 11. *It is also essential to salvation,* that we observe and profess whatever we do know to be the will of Christ. If, from regard to human authority, worldly interest, or from that indolence which prevents men from searching matters to the bottom, we neglect any of his commandments, alleging that they are minute or unimportant, we sin presumptuously, our hearts must condemn us, and God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. A good subject never thinks of violating human laws, under pretence of their being of little consequence. This would justly be deemed an impeachment of the wisdom of the legislature by whose authority they were enacted, and would, in every case, subject him to punishment: and shall Christians treat the laws of Jesus with less respect, the infringement of any one of which infers condemnation? James 2:10.

Our extreme proneness to error, in regard to religion, is also an important reason why we ftiould diligently attend to every part of the word of God. This disposition is acknowledged by all who admit the corruption of human nature. The wisest men have always displayed their folly in religion, when unenlightened by divine revelation. Many, even with the Scriptures in their

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hands, and these, too, persons appearing eminently pious and holy, have, by forsaking the Scriptures, and adopting human traditions, fallen into the grossest absurdities. Many such, I doubt not, are now in heaven; but surely their history teaches us to give heed to the word of God, which we are certain cannot mislead us. A supposed latitude in Scripture respecting what were called circumstantials, led the way to all the abominations of Popery; and we ought not to neglect the admonition, to prove *all* things, and to hold fast that which is good, especially as we have such an example before our eyes.

In consequence of this natural perverseness and proneness to err, we are warned in Scripture, if we will be wise, to become fools that we maybe wise, 1 Cor. 3:18.; that is, instead of being guided by our own reasonings, we must submit, as fools, to be taught of God. We are also allured, that whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in nowise enter therein, Luke 18:17. When we receive with reverence the whole of the word of God, applying each part of it to the use for which it was designed, considering it all to be highly important, we resemble a little child sitting at the feet of its father; but when we take upon us to decide what we shall receive as binding, and what we shall neglect as unsuitable to our circumstances, we discover a very opposite temper. We could not admit a principle which will lead us into

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greater temptation to conformity with the world in matters of religion, and, by improper compliances, to do away the offence of the cross. Paul, by preaching circumcision, might have avoided perfection, Gal. 5:11.; but although circumcision was nothing in itself, 1 Cor. 7:19. yet he would not give place by subjection to any one, no, not for an hour, in matters of religion, that the truth of the gospel (the gospel in its simplicity) might continue in the churches which he had planted.

If we once admit the principle of adapting order and modes of worship to our circumstances, instead of adopting those, and only those, which are recorded in Scripture, it is difficult to say where we shall stop. Are all ordinances and modes of worship indifferent? No Christian will say so. Can a precise line be drawn, beyond which we must not go in deviating from Scripture? This is imposlible. To receive whatever the Scripture contains, is a clear and precise rule, capable of being reduced to pradlice, wherever men are savoured with revelation; but once depart from this, and we are all uncertainty; our practice cannot be in faith, and therefore cannot be acceptable to God, Rom. 14:23.

The arguments used on this subject equally prove the impropriety of adopting any practice in religion, not sanctioned by Scripture. Indeed the principle held by some, that we may lawfully set aside some precepts formerly delivered to the churches, is always accompanied with a supposed

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necessity of supplying *deficiencies.* These principles stand or fall together. They are equally pernicious. And although men profess to limit their application to things indifferent, they wear a most unfavourable aspect on the perfection, fulness, and authority of the word of God. But what are these indifferent things? Let us hear Mr Locke on the subject. 'Things in their own 'nature indifferent, cannot, by any human autho-'rity, be made any part of the worship of God, 'for this very reason, because they are indiffe-'rent; for since indifferent things are not capa-'ble, by any virtue of their own, to propitiate 'the Deity, no human power or authority can 'confer on them so much dignity and excellency 'as to enable them to do it. In the common 'affairs of life, that use of indifferent things which 'God has not forbidden, is free and lawful; and 'therefore in those things human authority has 'place. But it is not so in matters of religion. 'Things indifferent are no otherwise lawful in 'the worship of God, than as they are instituted 'by God himself; and as he, by some positive 'command, has ordained them to be made a part 'of that worship which he will vouchsafe to ac-'cept of at the hands of poor sinful men: nor 'when an incensed Deity shall ask us, Who has 'required these, or such like things, at your 'hands? will it be enough to answer him, that 'the magistrate commanded them. If civil juris-'diction extended thus far, what might not law-

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'fully be introduced into religion? What hodge-
'podge of ceremonies, what superstitious inven-
'tions, built upon the magistrate's authority,
'might not, against conscience, be imposed upon
'the worshippers of God? For the greatest part
'of these ceremonies and superstitions consists in
'the religious use of such things as are in their
'own nature indifferent; nor are they sinful upon
'any other account than because God is not the
'author of them. The sprinkling of water, and
'the use of bread and wine, are both in their own
'nature, and in the ordinary occasions of life, al-
'together indifferent. Will any man therefore
'say, that these things could have been introdu-
'ced into religion, and made a part of divine
'worship, if not by divine inflitution? If any
'human authority or civil power could have done
'this, why might it not also enjoin the eating of
'fish, and drinking of ale, in the holy banquet, as
'a part of divine worship? Why not the sprink-
'ling of the blood of beasts in churches, and ex-
'piations by water or fire, and abundance more
'of this kind? But these things, how indifferent
'soever they be in common uses, when they come
'to be annexed unto divine worship, without di-
'vine authority, they are as abominable to God
'as the sacrifice of a dog. And why a dog so
'abominable? What difference is there between
'a dog and a goat, in respect of the divine na.
'hire, equally and infinitely diftant from all affi-
'nity with matter, unless it be that God required

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'the use of the one in his worship, and not of the 'other? We see therefore that indifferent things, 'how much soever they be under the power of 'the civil magistrate, yet cannot upon that pre-'tence be introduced into religion, and imposed 'upon religious assemblies, because, in the wor-'ship of God, they wholly cease to be indifferent. 'He that worships God, does it with design to 'please him and procure his favour; but that 'cannot be done by him who, upon the command 'of another, offers unto God that which he knows 'will be displeasing to him, because not com-'manded by himself. This is not to please God, 'or appease his wrath, but willingly and know-'ingly to provoke him by a manifest contempt; 'which is a thing absolutely repugnant to the 'nature and end of worship.'* This reasoning respects the authority of the civil magistrate in matters of religion; but it proves with equal force, that all will-worship, whatever is not appointed by God, is improper, and that we ought therefore to receive the Scriptures, and nothing else, as binding in the worship of God. Yet are there some pious men who, even without inquiry, would set aside those parts of Scripture which seem to interfere with their own practice, and would represent attention to them, as calculated to divert the mind from the weightier matters of the law. Before we act on such a principle, we ought diligently to examine whether we

* Locke's Letter on Toleration, p. 109–115. Glasg. edit.

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are warranted to do so. But the subject will not bear examination, and, as if conscious of the badness of the cause they have espoused, some good men, in certain situations, discourage all inquiry in such matters, and are ever deprecating attention to what they call non-essentials. I well recollect the effect this had upon my own mind. When I turned my attention to infant baptism, and had scruples on that subject, instead of hearing scriptural arguments alleged for the practice, I heard good men ridiculing the idea of so much attention being paid to it. This had almost convinced me, that there was nothing material to be said in its favour.

Upon the whole, it seems evident, that it highly becomes us to attend to every part of the word of God. Every thing we there meet with is important. Were Scripture more studied under this impression, there would be a rapid progress among Christians, both in knowledge, in uniformity of sentiment and religious observances, and in the practice of holiness. It is high time to make off that temper of mind which indisposes us for the investigation of truth; which leads us to cherish the prejudices we have received from our fathers, and which renders us unwilling to go beyond them on any subject.* This has a show of humility, but in fact it arises from sloth,

* A Burgher Elder lately observed in the Associate Synod, that the use we ought to make of our forefathers is, to stand on their shoulders, and to try how much farther we could see.

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prejudice, and indifference about divine truth. We ought, indeed, cautiously to avoid being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine; but if our steadiness do not arise from regard to the authority of God; if it do not proceed from diligent attention to his word, it no more deserves the name of stedfastness in the faith, than the parsimony of a miser deserves the name of economy.

I conclude this chapter with reminding my readers of the solemn warning which closes the revelation of God. It demands the serious attenion of those who do not hold themselves bound o be implicitly directed, in all things, by the word of God: "I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from die words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." This declaration is peculiarly suitable, not only as the conclusion of the New Testament, but of that part of it, in particular, which especially exposes to our view, and our abhorrence, the abominations of false religion, under the influence of which Christians have entered into forbidden and corrupt alliance with the world, a sin which is styled, in the figurative language of that book, *committing fornication with the kings of the earth,* and have

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thus made the word of God void by corrupt traditions. The warning, I doubt not, is given chiefly to prevent the Scriptures from being mutilated; but it also admonimes all to tremble at God's word; to receive it as a complete and confident revelation, to be embraced and respected in all its parts; and to beware lest, through indolence, or compliance with the opinions of men, we introduce distinctions founded on our own ignorance, and thus put asunder what God has joined,

CHAPTER II.

THERE IS REASON TO PRESUME, THAT THE NEW TESTAMENT CONTAINS INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING EVERY PART OF THE WORSHIP AND CONDUCT OF CHRISTIAN SOCIETIES, AS WELL AS CONCERNING THE FAITH AND PRACTICE OF INDIVIDUALS.

THE Lord Jesus, in writing to the church of Thyatira, says, "I will put upon you no other burden; but that which ye have already, hold fafl till I come," Rev. 2:24–25. This exactly agrees with the awful denunciation, quoted above, against those who add to or take from the word of God. Both evidently imply, that

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nothing besides what is contained in Scripture is to be binding on our consciences; and surely it is absurd to introduce into religion what is *not* a matter of conscience.

One part of the perfection of Scripture consists in its being completely adapted to the character and circumstances of men. We observed, that from the consideration of our proneness to err, we ought scrupulously to adhere to the directions of God. This part of our character also affords a strong presumption that God has given us a full and distinct rule, which may at once guide the humble inquirer, and render those inexcuseable who, refuting to hearken to him, presume to walk in their own counsels. Had man been less perverse, the same precision would not have been necessary; but as we must suit our instructions to the capacity and character of the pupil, so has God, we may presume, condescended to deal with us. Now, whether we consider the blindness and folly of men in matters of religion, as represented in Scripture, or as demonstrated by fasts, the necessity of a clear and precise rule will evidently appear.

This necessity is further evident, from the influence which good or bad laws must always have upon society. A great part of the worship of Christians is social. One chief design of the gospel is, to enlarge the affections towards mankind, especially towards those who belong to Jesus Christ. The happiness and prosperity of any

society depends, in a great measure, on the laws by which it is governed. A church of Christ is a society, and without proper laws it cannot subsist. 'Forasmuch as no society, how free soever, or upon whatsoever slight occasion instituted, (whether of philosophers for learning, of merchants for commerce, or of men of leisure for mutual conversation and discourse), no church or company, I say, can in the least subsist and hold together, but will presently dissolve and break to pieces, unless it be regulated by some laws, and the members all consent to observe some order; place and time of meeting must be agreed on; rules for admitting and excluding members must be established; distinction of officers, and putting things into regular course, and such like, cannot be omitted.'* Whoever makes these laws ought to be very well acquainted, not only with the nature and design of a Christian church, but with those circumstances which, through the corruption of human nature, may arise to frustrate the design of the association. Unless he possess this knowledge in a very great degree, his laws will assuredly clash with the spirit of the institution, and, instead of repressing, will be likely to produce confusion. Now, where shall we find the man, since the days of the apostles, possessed of such an extensive acquaintance with the nature of Christ's kingdom, of such minute knowledge of the human heart, and, at the same time, so uninfluenced by local

* Locke on Toleration, p. 42–44.

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prejudice, as to be capable of establishing laws which shall tend, in the greatest degree, to repress corruption amongst Christians in their associated capacity, and yet to lay their consciences under no unnecessary restraint? If it be alleged, that I have represented the laws for the government of the church of Christ, as requiring more precision than is in fact necessary, I would appeal to the effect of good or bad laws on civil society. What a difference is there between the state of this country, and that of Spain or of Turkey! Does not this arise, in a great degree, from the superior excellence of the laws by which we are governed? But laws are still more important in an association wholly designed to promote religion. God may be much dishonoured by the state of the heart, although this be not discovered by adtions; and laws which are intended to promote holiness of heart, require to be framed with much more wisdom than such as only extend to outward conduct.

As religion is a matter of revelation, in regard to which we are constantly cautioned against leaning to our own understanding, and exhorted to become like little children—as the purpose of the formation of churches is purely religious—and as good or bad laws so eminently tend to promote or to obstruct the prosperity of all societies, it is surely most reasonable to expect, that we shall find in Scripture an universal rule for the direction of Christians in their associated character.

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To these considerations let us add, God's declared abhorrence of will-worship. God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of those who are about him. To introduce any of *our own* devices into his worship, is not only contrary to that reverence which he uniformly enjoins, but is marked with his decided difapprobation. "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men: Therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid," Isa. 29:13–14. Here, departure in heart from God is connected with worshipping him in ways of human invention, and the Lord Jesus, quoting this same passage, assures us, that if our fear be taught by the commandments of men, our worship is vain, Matt. 15:9. The same truth is enforced by the apostle, when he warns Titus 1:14, not only against Jewish fables,* but against *commandments of men that turn from the truth.* This is a maxim of universal application in religion, 'This pride and folly of men was that which lost

* These Jewish fables deserved the name of things indifferent, much more than many others to which the term has in modern times heen appiied; yet against these Titus is warned.

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all knowledge of God in the world, and all obedience unto him. The ten commandments are but a transcript of the light and law of nature. The first of these required that God, the only true God, the Creator and Governor of all, should be acknowledged, worshipped, believed in, and obeyed. And the second was, that we should not make unto ourselves any image or representation of him. Whatever he would do himself, yet he strictly forbids that we should make any such unto ourselves. And here began the apostasy of the world from God. They did not absolutely reject him, and so call off the first fundamental precept of the law of nature, but they submitted not unto his wisdom and authority in the next, which was evidently educed from it. They would make images and representations of him unto themselves. And by this invention of their own, they first dishonoured him, and then forsook him, giving themselves up unto the rule and service of the devil. Wherefore, as the way that God in infinite wisdom found out for the representation of himself unto us, was the only means of recovery from the first apostasy; the way found out by men unto the same end, was the great means of calling the generality of mankind unto the farthest degree of a new apostasy from God, whereof our nature is capable. And of the same kind will all our contrivances, in what belongs unto his worship and glory, be found to

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be, though unto us they may appear both specious and necessary.'*

If any shall say that the *worship* of God is indeed fixed, and from that appointed mode we are not to deviate, but that other matters, in regard to the order of churches, are left undetermined—let them give us, if they can, from the word of God, a more precise standard for our worship, than can be given for the constitution of a church, the character of church members, the ordinance of discipline to be observed in a church, &c. But how much contention and bloodshed has arisen about modes of worship! How many, by penal laws, have been compelled, against their consciences, to comply with modes and forms which they detested! There are few things in religion over which men have claimed and exercised more power, than in the most solemn ordinances: but every act of a church of Christ, ought to be an act of worship, an act of obedience to the authority of the Head of the church; and whatever they do in their associated capacity, ought not only to be done from regard to his authority, but as actually in his prefence; for he hath said, "Where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

It is said also, that the Scriptures chiefly regard the state of the heart. This is most certain. I do not argue for any one regulation being con-

* Owen on the Person and Glory of Christ, p. 101–102. Ed. edit. 1800.

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tained in the word of God, which is not designed or calculated to promote holiness of heart; but if matters of outward order are not altogether unimportant; if they may be framed so as to guard us, in some measure, against temptation, and to promote reverence to God and love to man, it affords a strong presumption, that the word of God contains full directions respecting them.

It is certainly proper that our religion should not be loaded with unnecessary ceremonies. Now we know how very prone man is to multiply these. The natural effect of this is to divert the mind from real religion, and to harden the wicked in their infidelity. The regulations of man in religion, always useless, are frequently in direct opposition to the will of God. This arises from his natural perverseness and ignorance; and of this we have a notable instance in the conduct of the Jews. Not satisfied with what God had revealed, they proceeded to supply deficiencies, and by one of the laws which they devised, they completely set aside one of God's commandments, Matt. 15:3. This was not intentional. They still professed the greatest reverence for God's law; but their folly prevented them from perceiving, that as the Scripture could not be broken, as nothing superfluous was to be found in it, so neither was there any deficiency to supply; that when at a loss for the path of duty, they ought to study it diligently, with prayer to God for wisdom to understand it.

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The abuses which have actually taken place, afford a very strong preemption that Scripture does not countenance that latitude in matters of external order, for which many contend. One deviation from the apostolic practice took place after another, till the man of sin was seated on his throne in the temple of God, assuming the power of changing times and laws. Indeed, where this awful apostasy is foretold in Scripture, adherence to the apostolic practice is immediately enjoined in the most particular manner. The apostle having noticed this dreadful falling away, and having characterized the man of sin and his deluded followers, who, not receiving the love of the truth, should be given up to the grossest delusion, contrasts the character of the Thessalonian church with theirs: He proceeds, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast; and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle." Here he evidently enforces regard to what *he* had taught, as the sure and only preservative from this dreadful calamity. So long as the authority and the injunctions of the apostles were regarded as sacred, an effectual stop was put to any manifest defection; but as soon as Christians assumed the principle, that circumstances warranted a departure from their plan, anarchy, confusion, and irreligion, advanced with rapid strides, and soon covered the world with the grossest darkness.

It is most evident, that the papal system could

never have arisen, had the word of God been deemed a sufficient, indispensable, and permanent rule respecting the order of churches of Christ. It is no less evident that, considering the folly of human nature, it was hardly possible but gross corruptions must necessarily have arisen, if matters of order were left, in a good measure, vague and undetermined. We may therefore reasonably presume, that the Lord did not leave a breach in his fold so easily accessible to the enemy of his people, nor expose them to such inroads as he might make by means of it. Of one thing we are sure, that they would have been far less exposed to these by having a determinate rule. Dr Campbell, in his Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, traces the gradual corruption of the churches, and points out many cases, in which it might be very plausibly supposed that good men, while designing to promote religion, in fact led the way to all subsequent corruptions. We certainly know that the corruption did take place. Now, whether is it more reasonable to conclude, that this proceeded from neglecting a rule contained in the Scriptures of truth, or that in consequence of the Scriptures containing no such rule, men were almost unavoidably led into the snare of the devil?

A further presumption that the New Testament contains a complete system of regulations for Christian worship, arises from God's dealings towards men in every age. We have nothing recorded which leads us to suppose, that ever

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God left his worshippers to their own discretion, respecting the manner of worshipping him. In every age, the substance of his law to his people was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart." But their obedience to his commandments was ever the proof of their love. These commandments not only respected their duty to men, but the manner in which God was to be worshipped, and what ceremonies were to be observed by them. He set apart the seventh day from the beginning, and although all days were in themselves indifferent, we cannot suppose that any who regarded his authority would have changed this for another. It is true, we cannot speak particularly of the mode of worship before the law, because the account we have of every thing of that date is so very short. But we know God instituted sacrifices, and was highly displeased when there was a deviation from those which he had established; as in the case of Cain, who, instead of God's appointed offering, brought the first fruits of his ground. Before the flood there was a distinction between clean and unclean beasts, Gen. 7:2. which could only arise from the revealed will of God. Noah, and all the patriarchs, evidently appear to have built an altar wherever they offered sacrifices, and we find God, on one occasion, commanding Jacob to build one, Gen. 35:1. Now this must have arisen either from an altar being a human invention, which was thus sanctioned of God, or that it was his own appoint-

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ment. God promised to bless Isaac, and multiply his seed, because Abraham obeyed his voice, and kept his charge, his commandments, his statutes, and his laws, Gen. 26:5. which shows that God had delivered various ordinances to Abraham, although we are not informed of them.

The precision which was to be observed under the law is manifest. Every part of the social worship of Israel was minutely pointed out; and we find that Moses, who was charged with delivering the laws of God to the people, received the honourable testimony that "he was faithful in all his house." There was indeed one important reason for this precision, that all the ordinances were typical, and intended as a testimony of the truth of the gospel; as well as to lead the mind of the pious Israelite to look for the accomplishment of the promise made to Abraham. But the minuteness with which the ordinances of worship were delivered, was also intended to separate Israel from the nations; not only to preserve them from idolatry, but to prevent strangers from incorporating with them. The types are now fulfilled, the shadows have passed away, and the substance is come. One reason for the minute directions given to regulate the worship of Israel, is therefore at an end. But although one cause of this precision has ceased, the other remains in full force. The Lord has warned his people as solemnly against conformity to, or union with the world, as he did Israel of old against mingling with the na-

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tions. His language to them is not less pointed: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and be a father to you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty," 2 Cor. 6:17–18. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," Luke 16:13. "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners," 1 Cor. 15:33. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," Gal. 5:9. Now if, in order effectually to separate Israel from the nations, such precicion in the constitution of the Jewish church and in their ordinances of worship were necessary, can we suppose, that when the same end was to be attained under the gospel, no such means were em ployed? If Moses was faithful, as a *servant,* over God's house, Christ was faithful, as a *son,* over his own. He knew what was in man; his proneness to start aside from God, like a deceitful bow; the influence of proper laws in regulating the social intercourse of his people—and did he omit to deliver such laws? or is his holy word sealed up, and nothing precise and perspicuous to be found on this subject? Although Israel must not admit idolaters into their communion, lest they should be drawn aside, is it left to our discretion, whether the churches of Christ shall consist of a mixed multitude, or of those who give evidence of being members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones?

Few, I presume, consider themselves sufficiently

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acquainted with the precise import of the latter part of Ezekiel's prophecy, to endeavour from thence to establish any particular mode of worship for the New Testament churches; yet that it refers to the times of the gospel, I suppose will be generally admitted. There is one passage which I shall just mention, which appears to me to intimate that God has delivered in Scripture a form for the New Testament churches, and that this form shall be understood and adopted. It is, Ezek. 43:10–11. "Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern. And if they be afhamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof; and write it in their fight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them." Mr Scott, in his notes on this passage, observes, 'This may be also referred to the times when the whole church shall be reformed according to the standard of Scripture; when all denominations of Christians shall difcern by that light their deviations from the truth of God, in doclrine, discipline, worship and practice, repent of them, and attempt to restify them; and this beginning of humiliation will make way for their more complete instrustion in every part of the divine will.'

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If this interpretation be just, and it seems to be so, then the Scriptures do contain a standard of doctrine, discipline, worship, &c. and those who do not at present humbly search for it, are living in sin. The testimony of the above author is the less suspicious, as he is a minister of the church of England, and sets out on this exposition of the vifion of Ezekiel by observing, that 'it is vain to attempt laying down rules for church government, discipline, worship, &c. from such an obscure vision.' *Notes on Ezek.* xl. ver. 1. With this sentiment I fully agree; but I think the whole vision, if it be allowed to refer to gospel times, affords the strongest presumption that Christ has left a precise and determinate rule for the government of his people.

This supposition is much strengthened by John's vision, Rev. 11:1–2. in which there is a plain reference to the visions of Ezekiel. The angel having given him a reed, commanded him to measure the temple of God and the altar, and them that worship therein; but the court which is without the temple, he was directed to leave out, and not to measure, for it was given unto the Gentiles. This denoted, says Mr Scott, 'that in the predicted period there would be a small number, whose doctrine, worship, and behaviour, would bear meafuring by the word of God.' Unless we suppose that the word of God contains a standard for worship and discipline, as well as for doctrine, it is hard to conceive how the Christian church

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was capable of being measured under the representation of the temple, yet none will doubt that it was so represented to John.

All agree that there are some ordinances expressly appointed in the church of Christ. If so, is it not a fair conclusion, that these, and these only, are to be observed. They are indeed few and simple, but they are quite sufficient. We shall hereaster have occasion to advert to the causes why they have not been deemed so.

None who have considered the subject will deny the great importance of unity of sentiment among Christians. I do not know a greater obstacle to the spread of the gospel in this country, than the variety of fefts and parties, or denominations, as they are too softly called. This proves, I am persuaded, a stumbling-block to many, and also tends to alienate the minds of Christians from each other. Real Christians are all indeed of one mind as to the great doctrines of the gospel. They are all baptized by one Spirit into one body; and thus our Lord's prayer, John 17:21. has been so far answered in every age. But this unity is not obvious to superficial observers, and our Lord mentions it, as the reason of his petition, "that the world may know that thou hast sent me." That there are certain features of character in all real believers, which constitute, so to speak, a kind of family likeness, and which must, in some measure, be noticed by the world, is true; but how much more striking would this be, if Christians

were of one mind respecting worship and discipline, and every external observance.

Some have fondly hoped for a general agreement amongst Christians on these subjects; others think this of little consequence, provided they love one another. But has not every one observed, how much difference of sentiment on these subjects has tended to extinguish love? If then we admit, that the New Testament is not explicit on this subject; if we maintain that no precise standard is there laid down; if we must accommodate ourselves to the prejudices of people of different countries, all prospect of agreement on one plan is at an end, and nothing is to be expected but perpetual divisions. Jesus Christ has not promised, that any prophet shall hereaster arise to supply what is deficient, and, instead of exhorting us to receive laws from man in regard to his worship, he hath once and again warned us against it. He has taught us indeed to be subject to magistrates, but this only respects the things of this life. "Call no man Father," says he, "on earth." But if Scripture contain a perfect standard, nothing more is necessary to produce perfect harmony among Christians, than diligently to investigate the word of God in order to discover this, and then simply to embrace it. This, then, affords a very strong presumption, that Scripture does contain such a standard.

The importance of uniformity amongst Christians, is not only evident in itself, but has been

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allowed in every age since the Reformation. Good men have lamented the differences which have subsisted, and which have not only occasioned strife amongst themselves, but have also given infidels a handle to reject and to ridicule all religion. Various plans have been devised for promoting uniformity; but all these, as might be expected, have failed. Indeed the success of such plans was not in itself desireable. It could only have taken place, by churches giving way to one another's prejudices. It is necessary, in common life, sometimes to give up what we know to be our right, for the sake of peace or some greater advantage. But such conduct respecting religion is not countenanced in the word of God. Every one must be fully persuaded in his own mind, and no evil is to be done that good may come. We must by no means encroach on the liberty given to every church to walk according to their own light. If we endeavour to model one church after the example of another now existing, we shall make little progress unless authority be employed, and in this case our zeal is not according to knowledge, our weapons are carnal. But if a model exist in the New Testament, by which all churches ought to be regulated; if each be occupied in imitating this, they will gradually approach nearer to each other; and thus the numberless sects and parties which dishonour the religion of Jesus, will be at an end. When a number of children are taught to write by one master,

we expect to see a refemblance in their hand-writing. This naturally arises from each copy, ing the writing of the master, to whom all look up; but what progress could be expected if they were employed in copying from each other, or in quarrelling who wrote best.

These different arguments afford, when considered singly, a very strong presumption that the Scripture contains instructions with regard to every part of the social worship and conduct of Christians; but when taken in connexion, they seem to warrant the fullest belief of this. When we consider the perfection and fulness of Scripture, so often mentioned, together with the character of those to whom it is addressed—the influence which good or bad laws must necessarily produce in any society, but especially in one of a religious nature—God's declared abhorrence of will-worship—man's proneness to multiply ceremonies, and the pernicious tendency of these—the conserences which have actually arisen from departing from the word of God—When we consider that God has in every age given directions as to his worship, even in things indifferent—and especially the precision of the ordinances under the law—the faithfulness of Christ as the prophet of his church—the importance of unity to promote love among Christians—and the impossibility of unity taking place, if there be no standard:—Viewing all these things in connection, we tread upon firm ground when we affert, that there is

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the greatest reason to presume, that the New Testament contains instrustions concerning every part of the worship and conduct of Christian societies, as well as concerning the faith and practice of individuals.

CHAPTER III.*

ALL CHRISTIANS ARE BOUND TO OBSERVE THE UNIVERSAL AND APPROVED PRACTICES OF THE FIRST CHURCHES RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE.

SECTION I.

THE various opinions entertained respecting the obligation under which Christians are said to observe the approved and universal practices of the first churches, may be reduced to the following.

1*st*. That we are not bound by these at all, nor can they be ascertained.

2*d*. That we are bound in a certain degree, or by the spirit of them, but that we have the liberty of making alterations according to circumstances.

* Some of the arguments used in this chapter, appeared in a Letter on the Lord's Supper, from the Author, to the Church of Christ assembling in the Tabernacle in Edinburgh, to which are added, Miscellaneous Observations.

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3 *d*. That the approved and universal practices of the first churches are recorded in Scripture for our learning; that these constitute a complete system, adapted to every age, and to all circumstances; and that by this the churches of Christ are to be regulated.

As to the first, I suppose few persons who regard the authority of Christ and his apostles will defend it. It represents a great part of the New Testament, as merely calculated to gratify the curiosity of the antiquarian, who may desire to investigate the order and mode of worship of the first churches, as an entertaining piece of history. It also leaves us without any appearance of a guide at all in worship or order, and must consequently imply, that these have no influence whatever on the welfare of Christian churches; that the number of observances which we adopt is not of the smallest consequence; and that with equal advantage we may discard them altogether. These consequences must necessarily arise from our having no rule on these subjects; for if they had not been wholly unimportant, doubtless the Lord Jesus would not have left them unenjoined.

The second opinion is in some respects preferable, but it labours under one great disadvantage. It is so indefinite, that while it professes to give us directions, it leaves us completely in doubt how far we ought to follow them. It is calculated to perplex the serious enquirer; to leave him in uncertainty whether,

considering his circumstances, he be keeping too close to, or departing too far from the apostolic pattern. From this he can only be delivered by adopting the opinion, that outward form or order is in a great measure, if not wholly unimportant; and this will lead him to regard many of the ordinances of Christ with indifference. It also lays men under great temptation to suit their modes of worship and order to their inclinations and their interest; that is, to aft as if they had no rule whatever. Those who hold it, will not however affirm, that we are at liberty to make alterations on all the practices of apostolic churches; they will not say of *all* the ordinances observed by them, that they are to be retained, or set aside, according to circumstances. They ought therefore to endeavour to draw a line, and to show us what part of the order of the apostolic churches is to be uniformly observed, and what we may lawfully set aside.

The third proportion, that we ought implicitly to follow the practices of the apostolic churches, and that these are made known in Scripture with sufficient plainness, promises fair, if it can be substantiated, to remove these difficulties; It will effectually guard us against uncertainty, and, if well founded, it will give us fresh cause to admire the wisdom of Jesus, and his tender care of his people, whose frame he well knows.

We have already considered the importance of attending; to whatever is contained in the word of

God. Every one must admit, that much is said in the New Testament about the manner in which the churches of Christ ought to be regulated. All Scripture is practical, but this part of Scripture is not practical, if we are not bound to follow it; for in that case it is like any other history, which affords us matter of speculation rather than of instruction. Several reasons have been given which lead us to presume that the New Testament contains full instructions to regulate the conduct of churches, as well as of individuals. All the weight of these arguments directly bears upon the present question; for it is certain, that if we are not bound by the practices of the apostolic churches recorded in Scripture, there is no precise model whatever in the New Testament for the constitution and government of a church.

We may safely argue the obligation under which we are said to follow, in all things, the approved and universal practices of the apostolic churches, from the character and office of the persons by whom these were enjoined. Jesus Christ did not personally establish churches; but he delegated to his apostles authority and power to do so. They were his chosen witnesses, appointed not only to testify that God had raised him from the dead, but endued with power from on high, to regulate the affairs of his kingdom on earth. To qualify them for this important work, they not only enjoyed the advantages of his personal ministry on earth, but during forty

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days after his resurrection, he instructed them in the things of the kingdom of God, Acts 1:3. But as the matter was too important to be left entirely to the management of men, though thus qualified, they were baptized also with the Holy Ghost, and received power to act as infallible teachers in the churches, Acts 1:5, 8. Speaking and acting under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they claimed that submission to their authority which belongs to God alone. "Ye know," says Paul, "what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. He, therefore, that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given us his Holy Spirit," 1 Thess. 4:2, 8. It is true, he is here speaking of moral precepts; but in regard to the order of the churches, he uses exactly the same language. Having given various direstions as to the manner of proceeding in the church of Corinth, he sharply reproves them for presuming to deviate from these. "What!" says he, "came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord," 1 Cor. 14:36–37. No language can be stronger. If, then, even those who were favoured with miraculous gifts, were not permitted to deviate from the precise order established by the apostles in positive institutions, how can ages think of assuming this liberty?

The apostles, at all times, anxiously avoided

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preaching themselves, as the lords over God's heritage. They professed themselves the servants of those among whom they laboured, yet were they ever jealous of any disobedience to their commands. "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 which ye received from us;* and if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be amamed," 2 Thess. 3:6, 14. Those who lied to them, and attempted to mislead them in their official capacity, lied not to men, but to God, Acts 5:4. It was, in fact, attempting to impose on the Holy Spirit. In the commission given them by the Lord, we are plainly taught in what manner we are to view whatever they taught. "Go ye, therefore," said Christ, "μαθητευσατε, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," Matt. 28:19–20. They were first to publish the gospel and to baptize believers, and then to teach them all things. This was the plan which they observed. They first preached sal-

* Hence we see, that walking disorderly was deviating from the apostolic traditions or ordinances;—a better definition of disorderly conduct cannot be adopted in our own days.

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vation to sinners, and then separated the disciples, Acts 19:9. delivering to them the ordinances, 1 Cor. 11:2. in the observance of which they were to seek after growing conformity to Christ, and to keep themselves unspotted from the world. The Lord not only promised to be with them while they lived, but to the end of the world, to give testimony to the doctrines they preached, and to countenance the ordinances which they delivered—those "*all things*" which he had commanded them to teach, and which the Holy Ghost should bring to their remembrance, John 14:26.

The dignity of their office is pointed out by the most express testimonies of Scripture. Besides what has been already mentioned, we might quote Matt. 10:40. "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." All who receive the Scriptares, receive, on the authority of the apostles, the great doctrines of the gospel. Many, however, think they may set aside their precepts in regard to lesser matters; but surely we ought to-be very careful of admitting such a principle. How much it may be perverted is evident; for while one considers church-order to be unimportant, another may judge baptism, the Lord's supper, or even the great doctrines of the gospel, to be matters of small moment, provided we are but moral in our conduct. ' Melancthon, complying with the suggestions of that lenity and moderation which were the great leading principles in

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the whole course of his conduct and actions, declared it as his opinion, that in matters of an *indifferent* nature, compliance was due to the imperial edicts. But in the class of matters indifferent, this great man and his associates placed many things which had appeared of the highest importance to *Luther,* and could not, of consequence, be considered as indifferent by his true disciples; for he regarded as such, the doctrine of *justification by faith alone;* the *necessity of good works to eternal salvation;* the *number of the sacraments;* the *jurisdiction* claimed by the *Pope and Bishops; extreme unction;* the observance of certain religious festivals, and several superstitious rites and ceremonies. Hence arose that violent scene of contention and discord that was commonly called the *adiaphoristic* controversy, which divided the church for thirty years, and proved highly detrimental to the progress of the Reformation.'* We may learn from this, how absurd is the idea of those who affirm that things in themselves indifferent are left to our discretion. This principle, in fact, tends to throw the whole of religion into confusion, for each man would contend, that he only added or neglected things indifferent. We have an instance of one who acted contrary to the mind of the apostles in matters of church-order, and who is denounced as one who did not receive them: "I wrote unto the church, but

* Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. cent. xvi. sect. 3. part 2. translated by MacLaine.

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Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence, receiveth us not," 3 John 9.

To the apostles were committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven. By publishing their doctrine they have opened the door, and none shall enter any other way. When the Pharisees made void the law of God by their traditions, they are said to have taken away the key of knowledge; perverting the doctrines of Scripture, and misleading their disciples, they neither entered heaven themselves, nor permitted others to enter. But the apostles being put in trust with the gospel, were faithful stewards of the mysteries of God, and both saved themselves and those who heard them. They published remission of sins to all who believed; they denounced condemnation on the disobedient; and Jesus assured them he would ratify their words: "Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained," John 20: 23. Being dead, they still speak to us in the New Testament; and every individual, to the end of time, whom they condemn, shall be condemned; and to those whom they justify, there shall be no condemnation. Hence the church is said to have twelve foundations, and in them are written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, Rev. 21:14. Hence is it said to be built on the foundation of the apostles. Eph. 2:20 When, therefore, we trace any observance of social religion up to the approved practice of the first

churches, we go as high as we can, or as we need to go, we arrive at divine authority, and are consequently bound implicitly to obey.

We have an additional proof on this subject, from the consequence attached by the apostles to the ordinances they delivered to the churches. That *they* judged these to be highly important, is evident from so much being said on the subject in their writings. We noticed that Scripture contains nothing superfluous; it is *all* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness. If precepts concerning their order and institutions were not intended to regulate ours, why are they delivered so particularly, where brevity is in general so much studied? And if these were intended for our direction, we must by no means set aside the authority of apostolic practice, to remind the churches of which the Epistles were written.

The importance attached by the apostles to these subjects, is also manifest from the very strong manner in which they condemn those who deviate from them, and from the jealousy with which, as mentioned above, they enforced obedience. All the abuses which Paul in his Epistles so earnestly endeavoured to rectify, respected matters of order and discipline. I only recollect one instance where his reproof appears to regard what we call doctrine. Having mentioned those who denied the resurrection, says he, "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners; awake to

righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God." Here he seems afraid left the church should be infected with this dreadful error; but even this is noticed as a proper subject of discipline, for he adds, "I speak this to your shame." The other abuses in the church of Corinth consisted in their neglectingthe order he had prescribed, in their following different leaders, &c. The Galatians only added circumcision, and some of the external rites of Judaism, to the number of their ordinances; but their embracing these showed so much carnality of mind, that the apostle feared left he had loft his labour among them, chap. 4:11.

No doubt the Epistles chiefly relate to the great doctrines of the gospel, and to the practice which Christians should maintain; but neither of these was the occasion of most of the reproofs which the apostle found necessary. Thus we learn how early Satan endeavoured to obstruct the success of the gospel, by leading men away from the simplicity of the ordinances, and by removing, under many plausible pretences, the barriers appointed by the Lord to promote love, harmony, and holiness in his churches, and then breaking in like a flood by means of those who spake lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared as with a hot iron. This indeed always appears to have been the progress of error in the churches. First the ordinances were corrupted by ignorant or designing men; then followed various abuses for

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which there was now no suitable remedy; and, by and bye, the gospel was perverted and lost sight of entirely. How remarkably do we see this verified in ecclesiastical history. The mystery of iniquity worked in the apostles time. Men like Diotrephes, loving to have the pre-eminence, received them not. Thus did the spirit of antichrist begin to show itself. "We are of God; he that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us; hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error," 1 John 4:6. In the apostles days were many antichrists, 1 John 2:18. By and bye, primitive episcopacy, as it is called, was established. The people being now taught to look on their bishops as the *successors* of the apostles, were easily led away from apostolic practice. It is the nature of error to proceed with increasing rapidity. New ceremonies were introduced, and new officers appointed, till the man of sin was firmly seated on his throne, and real religion almost forgotten. It is also worthy of observation, that the abuses in the church of Rome, in regard to the power claimed by priests, the rites and ceremonies, first awakened mens minds to the corruptions of that mother of abominations. Dr Campbell observes, that the Reformation began by exposing the errors of the Romish system respecting order and discipline. The attack upon what is generally called doctrine, he remarks, was posterior, although after-

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wards the reformers chiefly rested their cause on this basis.

We learn the importance which the apostles attached to the ordinances they delivered to the churches, not only by their censuring every deviation from these, but from their commending adherence to them. "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances (or traditions) as I delivered them to you." He also sent to remind them of his ways, 1 Cor. 4:17. and represents attention to the order he had established, as connected with stedfastness in the faith of Christ, Col. 2:5. In short, we have the strongest proof of the importance which these holy men of God, under the immediate influence of his Spirit, attached to the particular ordinances which they delivered to the churches.

That these ordinances were not arbitrary and indifferent, is manifest also from the universal uniformity observed in the practice of them. This has indeed been called in question by some. It would be sufficient to reply, we have no hint of any allowed deviation; but Paul expressly tells us, he delivered the same ordinances to *every* church. "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as *I teach every where in every church,*" 1 Cor. 4:17. Here he not only states the uniformity

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of his practice in the mod express terms, but says concerning his ways, that they were *in* or *by Christ,* that is, appointed by Christ. This perfectly coincides with the passage formerly quoted, 1 Cor. 14:37. where, in giving directions about the order to be observed in the church of Corinth, he requires the most highly favoured with spiritual gifts to acknowledge, that the precepts he there delivers were the *commandments* of the Lord. Hence it follows, that an injunction delivered by an apostle, or the practice of any church, handed down to us in Scripture as sanctioned by him, ought to be accounted a revelation of the Lord's will to us on that particular point; for the apostles did not in these matters give their advice, but delivered their injunftions with authority: and if we may credit their own declarations, they did not deviate in one instance, from their practice in another. Paul elsewhere alludes to the uniformity of his practice in the churches. "As God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk, and so ordain I in *all* churches," 1 Cor. 7:17. This might appear less remarkable, if his labours had been confined to a particular region, but the sphere in which he moved was wide and extended. He planted churches among Greeks and Barbarians in Europe and in Asia, yet in them all he delivered the same ordinances, and enjoined the same practices. This similarity in the order of the churches was preserved for a considerable time after the

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decease of the apostles. Let any one turn to Lord King's Inquiry, or read Mosheim's Larger Account of the First Century,* and he will see that diversity of climate, character, and political circumstances, made no difference whatever in church-order. Deviations from the original constitution soon afterwards indeed began to take place, but for a considerable time the resemblance in the order of all the churches was apparent. The Romans were under the necessity of varying the form of civil government in their colonies or provinces, according to the circumstances of the countries composing their vast empire; but whereever the gospel was preached, the same ordinances were delivered to all the churches, and they became followers of the churches which in Judea were in Christ Jesus, not only in suffering the same persecutions, but in observing the same institutions and regulations.

The apostles interfered not with civil laws, but they taught all Christians to renounce their former religious customs, and to be governed entirely by Jesus Christ. His laws are equally suited to every climate, and every country, and therefore, in every situation, they were to be adopted by his followers, who were thus to be distinguished from all other people.

The uniformity of the practices of the apostles established in the churches, is not only manifest

* J.L. Mohemii Inst. Histor. Christ. Majores Sæcul. Primum. Helmst. 4to. 1739.

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by such express declarations as we have noticed, but also in all the epistles, in every one of which we see the very same constitution and ordinances. Can we suppose that their practice actually varied, and yet that not a hint of this is to be found in any of the epistles which relate so much to the subject? Timothy and Titus were employed by Paul to regulate the churches which he had planted. He informs Timothy that his purpose in writing to him was to teach him how to behave in the house of God, 1 Tim. 3:15. Among other things in these epistles, we have the apostle's instrustions respecting various parts of the internal government of the churches, and these all convey the idea of complete uniformity. These faithful ministers were employed by Paul to set in order churches in countries far distant from each other, and surely we must have had some hint on the subject, if they might lawfully deviate from the usual order in consequence of local circumstances.

But in considering the obligation under which we are laid to follow the approved practice of the apostolic churches, we may be allowed to advert to the sentiments generally held amongst professed Christians. If any of the religious rites of any party be called in question, do they not uniformly endeavour to establish these by appealing to the practice of the primitive Christians? Indeed so far has this been carried, that the practice of the three first centuries after Christ has also been resorted to. This has opened a wide door for

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abuses. It goes upon the supposition, that during that time the churches retained their original purity: but surely we may learn from the corruptions in the churches, even in the days of the apostles, that this was mod improbable. We are even expressly warned upon this subject, by being informed that the mystery of iniquity was at work in their time. Probably the practices of the three first centuries is appealed to in place of the apostolic, from supposing that the latter is of itself inefficient; but this is by no means the case. If we carefully observe the express precepts delivered in the New Testament, the practices of the churches mentioned with approbation, and what is said respecting the abuses which so early crept in, through flight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive, we shall find a complete system, calculated to answer every purpose which Jesus had in view in the institution of churches.

We have no reason, then, to suppose with some, that the Scriptures are deficient in specific directions on the subject, and that much is left to our own discretion. This opinion originated in men mistaking the nature of a Christian church. Instead of viewing it as a body of Christians knit together in love to Christ and to one another, associating for mutual edification and comfort, it has been represented as a complex machine, involving various objects both temporal and spiritual. To the management of such a body,

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the short and simple rules delivered in the New Testament are indeed completely inadequate; but in place of considering these rules as too general, and requiring additions of our deviling, it would argue more humility, and a greater sense of our own ignorance, to suppose that a body which could not be governed by the laws recorded in Scripture, must be somewhat different from an apostolic church. In one sense we may admit that the Scriptures contain only general rules. This is the case with all laws whatsoever, and equally applies to the moral precepts as to the positive institutions of the word of God.

A remark by a late writer upon this subjedt is well worthy of confederation: 'It is said, that there are many general rules given to the apostolic churches, for the actual and orderly observance of which, it is necessary that various subordinate circumstances should be settled which are left undetermined in Scripture; and that the determination of such circumstances in any church, according to the dictates of human prudence and expediency, is not to be censured as a departure from the laws of Christ, or an unwarrantable addition to them. In reply (adds he) to this I would observe, that none can consistently urge it who do not aim at walking according to these general rules delivered by the apostles, or who continue in any church where they are set aside, and where any regulations inconsistent with their observance are adopted. Now it is certain, that

not only the established church of this country is such, but that every political establishment of religion under the name of Christianity has ever been such, and must necessarily be such from the nature of the thing. The call, therefore, remains in full force upon every disciple of Christ, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." Brethren, according as you obey this call, you will find that his laws leave nothing undetermined, which it is needful or profitable should be determined.'*

I adore, said one, the fulness of Scripture. This fulness, respecting every thing connected, with religion, will be more evident the better we understand it. When we come to speak of the order and discipline of the first churches, I hope it will appear, that no case *can* occur in a church of Christ, concerning which we have not sufficient directions in the New Testament. These directions do not exclude the exercise of prudence and discretion. Wisdom is necessary to apply the laws of Christ properly; but to use our reason in she application of laws, is widely different from assuming a right to add to, or to alter them. Some allege, that if we exclude all human authority, modern churches have none to occupy the place of the apostles, who superintended the first churches. Yes; we have the apostles still. Being dead, they speak to us in Scripture. When on earth

* Address to Believers of the Gospel of Christ, &c. by John Walker, B. D. late-Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, p. 48.

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their weapons were not carnal; they governed by persuasion and not by force. Some withstood their words, and did them much evil, 2 Tim. 4: 14–15. but as the servants of the Lord they did not strive, but in meekness instrusted even those who opposed them, looking to God to give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth. We are still favoured with their instrustions, and as the canon of Scripture is complete, we have greater advantages than the early churches. We also see in the abuses which took place, the dangers to which such societies are exposed; and in the instructions they received, the proper means of avoiding them, and the remedies which are to be applied to redress them if they do occur.

Section II.

But still we are told, that we have no specific directions in the New Testament, fixing the constitution and government of a Christian church under all circumstances. If this means, that no such directions are drawn up in a systematic form, it is admitted. No part of divine truth is there delivered to us in this manner. Most of our Lord's precepts arose out of the circumstances in which his disciples were placed. They were peculiarly adapted to these circumstances, and hence many have frequently argued, that our situation being different, we are not to understand them as binding all generations.

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Arguments of the same nature, subversive of divine truths the most fundamental, have been maintained. How often has it been said, that regeneration and conversion were requisite only for heathens? that the separation from the world so often infilled on, does not apply to our circumstances who live in a Christian country? that self-denial and taking up the cross are now unnecessary? with many more equally absurd evacions of the doctrines and laws of Christ. Had the Lord delivered these doctrines in a systematic form, and declared them to be equally applicable to every age, such objections might have been removed; but carnal men would still have found other objections as excuses for disregarding what they disliked. We may be assured that the mode of teaching adopted by our Lord is the best. Indeed there is a very obvious reason for divine truth not being revealed in the form of *human* systems, similar to those of philosophy or of law, or of any-other science or art. It would have appeared less practical. We are all sufficiently prone to turn the doctrines of the gospel into speculation, and the most effectual means of guarding against this has been adopted in the word of God. Let any one devote himself to the study of systems of divinity constructed by men, with all the formalities of human science, he will find himself grow forgetful that divine truth is concerned *with his business and his bosom,* and that it does not readily *win its way to his heart.*

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Nothing can tend more to show us the practical nature of the precepts delivered to the churches, in regard to positive institutions, than the history of their appointment accompanying so closely that of the circumstances which gave rise to them. Thus the election of deacons is related in connection with the complaint that the widows were neglected, Acts 6. the ordinance of putting away a corrupt member with the history of the inceftuous person, 1 Cor. 5.; and this should teach us, what we shall consider more particularly hereaster, that these precepts are not arbitrary, but contrived, with the most consummate wisdom, to repress sin and to promote holiness. Thus many of the laws, too, delivered to Israel, are best understood when we view them in connection with the events which gave rise to them. The account of Nadab and Abihu illustrates and enforces the precept, that the priests should drink no wine when going into the tabernacle, Lev. 10:9. The Lord was pleased to permit and record the guilt of the sons of Aaron, for a warning to future priests; and he also permitted and recorded many abuses in the apostolic churches, with the remedies he was pleased to provide, that, by attending to them, we might be guarded against similar evils. At the same time it must he admitted, that precepts delivered in the historical way may be readily overlooked by inattentive readers, who, while amused with what they read, may forget that it is a revelation from God for *their* direction and in-

struction. This appears to have been the case as to church-order. We often find those who candidly say they have never studied the Subject, at the same time perfectly consident that no rule relating to this is contained in the New Testament. But surely there may be such a rule, although some attention, with prayer, and Study, be necessary to discover and understand it. I recollect an observation in a system of moral philosophy, that while Scripture gives us many excellent moral directions, it by no means contains a complete system of morals. The author must have adopted this sentiment, not from there being any real deficiency in Scripture respecting the various duties we owe to our neighbour, but from their not being drawn up in a systematic manner, and thus he fell into the same error with those who for the same reason maintain, that the word of God contains no precise unalterable Standard of church-order.

All good men have highly disapproved of those who excuse their disregard of the great doctrines of the gospel, by saying they were only interesting to the first ages, and in the peculiar circumstances in which men were then placed; but, while judging others, do they not condemn themselves, if they plead for setting aside scriptural order by similar arguments? The precepts in regard to both are delivered in the same manner, and the sentiment by which the one is set aside, may be employed by others in wresting the Scriptures to their own destruction.

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The simplicity and want of parade in Christ's kingdom, lead men to overlook or undervalue many important doctrines, as well as smaller precepts. The following observations from a sermon of President Edwards, on the Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath, give a satisfactory answer to those who object to the obligation of apostolic practice, because not delivered in a particular way. 'The mind and will of God concerning any duty to be performed by us, (says that excellent writer) may be sufficiently revealed in his word, without a particular precept, in so many express terms, enjoining it. The human understanding is the ear to which the word of God is spoken; and if it be so spoken that that ear may plainly hear it, it is enough. God is sovereign as to the manner of speaking his mind, whether he will speak it in express terms, or whether he will speak it by saying several other things which imply it, and from which we may, by comparing them together, plainly perceive it. If the mind of God be but revealed, if there be but sufficient means for the communication of his mind to our minds, that is sufficient; whether we hear so many express words with our ears, or see them in writing with our eyes; or whether we see the thing that he would signify to us, by the eye of reason and understanding.

'Who can positively say, that if it had been the mind of God that we should keep the first day of the week, he would have commanded it in ex-

press terms, as he did the observation of the seventh day of old? Indeed, if God had so made our faculties, that we were not capable of receiving a revelation of his mind in any other way, then there would have been some reason to say so. But God hath given us such understandings, that we are capable of receiving a revelation when made in another manner. And if God deals with us agreeably to our natures, and in a way suitable to our capacities, it is enough. If God discovers his mind in any way whatsoever, provided it be according to our faculties, we are obliged to obedience; and God may expect our notice and observance of his revelation, in the same manner as if he had revealed it in express terms.'*

The ordinances of Christ are delivered in the same way as all human laws. These are established according to circumstances, and promulgated to the generation existing at the time of their enactment, as representing every future generation; and unless they are repealed, or the constitution to which they belong be overturned, they are considered, in consequence of such promulgation, to be binding on posterity. Some indeed may grow obsolete, either from the inconveniencies attending their execution, or from those changes to which all human affairs are liable. But the laws of the kingdom of Christ are dictated by infinite foreknowledge and wisdom. This kingdom cannot be moved. The face of the world may be

* President Edwards' Twenty Sermons, p. 203. Edin. 1789.

changed, the sentiments of men may alter, but *it* is not of the world, and cannot be affected thereby. 'The laws of the gospel (says Mr Walker) extend to the heart as well as to the life, and speak to all men without exception, at all times, and in every situation. They utter their voice with such precision and perspicuity, that none can be at a loss to discover their meaning. They do not bend to the humours of men, nor accommodate themselves to those flexible maxims and customs which by turns prevail in this or the other age and country; far less do they grow obsolete, as human statutes do, which by long disuse lose their force, and become void. Like their great Master, what they were yesterday, they are the same today; and in every succeeding period their efficacy will continue, till time itself shall be no more. And, therefore, when I repeat the words of this sacred book, you are to consider them as spoken to yourselves in particular, and no less binding upon you in their most simple and obvious meaning, than they formerly were upon those to whom they were primarily addressed.'*

The difference of our circumstances is the great plea with many for rejecting the practice of apostolic churches. They consider this to be a sufficient warrant for setting aside what they admit to *have been* of divine institution. Mosheim, in his Ecclesiastical History, openly maintains this;

* Mr R. Walker's Sermons, vol. ii. p. 327. London 1792.

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'Neither Christ nor his holy apostles have commanded any thing clearly or expressly concerning the external form of the church, and the precise method according to which it should be governed. From this we may infer, that the regulation of this was in some measure to be accommodated to the time, and left to the wisdom and prudence of the chief rulers, both of the state and of the church. If, however, it is true, that the apostles acted by divine inspiration, and in conformity with the commands of their blessed Master, (and this no Christian can call in question) then it follows, that that form of government which the primitive churches borrowed from that of Jerusalem, the first Christian assembly established by the apostles themselves, must be esteemed as of divine institution. But from this it would be wrong to conclude, that such a form is immutable, and ought to be invariably observed, for this a great variety of events may render impossible. In that early time, every Christian church consisted of the *people,* their *lenders,* and the *ministers* or *deacons,* and these indeed belong essentially to every Christian society.'* Here it is granted, that a certain form of government was instituted at Jerusalem by divine authority: and that all the primitive churches borrowed their constitution from thence; yet is it alleged, that we are not to judge that this form is immutable, because in those days a Christian church consisted only of the

* Eccl. Hill. cent. i. part 2. chap. 2.

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people, their leaders, and deacons. Now, what renders it impossible for us in these days to form churches consisting in like manner of *such* people, *such* leaders, *and such* deacons? and what entitles us to take it for granted, that a divine institution can be lawfully set aside by the wisdom and prudence of chief rulers of the state and of the church?

The outward circumstances of the Jews varied considerably, at different times, during the dispensation under which they lived, but still the ordinances appointed at Sinai, in every jot and tittle, remained the same; and after their return from the captivity, the book of the law was their guide in the regeneration (as Josephus calls it) of their affairs, and the Old Testament is closed with a commandment to observe the law of Moses, with the statutes and judgments, Malachi 4:4. although the situation of Israel at that time was totally different from their circumstances when the law was given, or before the captivity. But wherein consists the great difference of our circumstances? Not in the moral state of the world, which could alone affect the question. Doth not the whole world still lie in wickedness? Are not Christians still a little flock? It is true, we live in a nation declared Christian by the highest human authority; but what then? Does the mere name make any difference? Our laws favour the profession of Christianity; we are not persecuted by the state, as the first Christians

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were: so much the less temptation have we not fully to follow Christ. But probably the true difference lies here. From their circumstances they were obliged either to serve God or mammon. They were hated unless they renounced Christianity, both name and thing. We avoid reproach which we should incur by openly laying aside the name; and although all who are in earnest about religion, experience that the offence of the cross has not yet ceased, even by being united with the church *by law established,* or other bodies formed on similar principles, we may, in a great measure, escape suffering thereby, and many inconveniences. In primitive times, some practised circumcision, not for conscience sake, because they were persuaded it was enforced by divine authority, but lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ, Gal. 6:12. They could profess Christianity, yet by retaining and preaching circumciiion, they did not appear so singular, or wholly to have forsaken the religion of their relations and of their country; and thus were more at their ease than consistent and decided Christians.

If it be admitted, that the character of human nature is exactly the same as formerly, let it also be admitted, that the means adopted by the apostles were the best which could be employed for promoting the interests of a spiritual kingdom, for directing the hearts of believers into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ, and it

follows, that the same means will best promote the same end in every age. This opinion, that the order of churches should necessarily vary with the varying circumstances of men, arose from applying to the kingdom of Christ those principles which only apply to a worldly kingdom; whereas it is not of the world, and consequently cannot be affected in its government by the changes, whatever they may be, which take place in the world.

The most plausible arguments in support of the idea, that our circumstances render it necessary for us to act on a different plan from the apostolic churches, are founded on their being possessed of miraculous gifts; but this will not bear examination. There are indeed some directions given in apostolic times, which, from the difference of our circumstances, we cannot now observe, because the miraculous gifts of the Spirit have ceased. We cannot even precisely discriminate the different miraculous gifts mentioned in the New Testament. We read of speaking either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine, 1 Cor. 14:6. But although we may not be able precisely to define what is meant by each of these, no one will say that on this account all ought to be silent in the church. The pastor may surely admonish the church, or they may endeavour to edify one another, although they cannot prophesy or speak with tongues. But where will the objection lead us? Those who use it, ought to follow it out. It at once precludes all

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appeal to the Scriptures on the subject of church government. If those who use it quote Scripture as acknowledging presbytery or ruling elders, they argue against themselves. Let them argue with episcopalians on the ground of expediency, but they have no right to say, that episcopacy is not founded on Scripture; for it may be replied, in apostolic times they had miraculous gifts, which we have not. It may also be argued on this ground, that there is no necessity to have churches at all. The apostles indeed collected churches, but as they had miraculous gifts, their circumstances were entirely different from ours. We *may* therefore forsake the assembling of ourselves together, unless we happen to judge it expedient, and this must be a matter of forbearance among those who differ. Baptism with water was frequently accompanied wtth the communication of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost; but as these have now ceased, however expedient water-baptism may be, its necessity is a matter of doubtful disputation, on which good men may differ, while they equally honour the laws of Jesus Christ. Nay, this mode of arguing will lead to still more serious consequences. Paul lived by faith on Jesus Christ. But Paul had, in a remarkable degree, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, which we have not, and therefore our circumstances being different, it does not follow we are bound to live by faith. Jesus promised that these signs should follow them that believe—"In my

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name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover," Mark 16:17–18. But now there are no such persons in the world; therefore it follows, either that this promise has failed, in other words, that there is no truth in Christianity, or that there is now no one who really believes it to be true. Both of which suppositions being evidently absurd, it is clear that the blessings promised to *believers* were confined to the first ages, before Christianity was established, and that in our situation, born as we are in a Christian country, we ought not to lay too much stress upon faith, for we may be real believers, and yet have our portion assigned us with the transgressors. We may be Christians, but if we are wicked Christians, we shall assuredly be condemned. Such is the style of argument which men should consistently maintain.

Those for whom we write would not approve of this conclusion. They would say it was founded on misrepresentation, for although miraculous gifts have ceased, the manner of a sinner's acceptance with God remains the same, the promises are all *yea* and *amen* in Christ Jesus. "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," is a truth which cannot be affected by any change of outward circumstances in those to whom the gospel is preached. We

answer their objection against our being bound by the precepts delivered by the apostles to the churches, in the same manner. The ordinances delivered in the New Testament respecting gospel ivorship, remain the same, and are binding in every situation. Our not being possessed of miraculous gifts, precludes us from following certain practices enjoined on those who possesssd them; but this no more frees us from the obligation of precepts delivered to the churches, which are in our power, than poverty, which might effectually prevent us from distributing to the necessities of others, would warrant us to set aside the precept of loving our neighbour as ourselves.

What has been said will apply to the different offices in the apostolic time, which are enumerated in Scripture, apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues, 1 Cor. 12:28. We cannot distinguish among these, but we may rest satisfied with knowing, that bishops or elders, and deacons, are the only offices essential to a church of Christ. The qualifications necessary for these, are written for the direction of the churches in their choice, 1 Tim. 3. Not so the qualifications of an apostle or evangelist; these were extraordinary ministers, chosen by the Lord himself. A church may be complete without them, and indeed they did not properly belong to any church. Whether a church be possessed of miraculous gifts, is a question which has no necessary connection

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with its being or not being exactly on the apostolic model. It is an accidental circumstance. Nations may have the same form of government, while the one is much larger and more powerful than the other, and while there are many other differences, merely local. But if one be a monarchy, and the other a republic, or if the supreme power be more limited in one country than the other, their form of government is essentially different. Were a king to direct that one of his sons should be placed upon the throne of a conquered country, with certain specified powers, he would not consider his orders to be complied with, if the people were to model the government in a manner considerably different from the form he had given, alleging, that the spirit of the commandment was attended to, for order was preferred, and his fon had a very comfortable situation as the first magistrate. True, the king would reply, but it is not the order I judged most expedient, nor has my son the measure of power which I appointed for him. If we might not thus trifle with an earthly king's commands, shall we pretend to establish an order in the churches, different from that confessedly appointed by men who, in this respect, could not err, under the pretence that all we have to do, is to attend to the spirit of their directions, and that this spirit is merely to maintain an appearance of decency by any means we judge expedient? Such, says De Lolme, is the English constitution, that

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those who make alterations on this beautiful machine had need to beware, lest they touch some unobserved spring which may destroy the whole. Perhaps the remark, is not inapplicable to our subject.

If we do not hold ourselves bound by apostolic practice, we throw all order in churches into the utmost confusion. Every man may consider himself at liberty to judge whether, in his particular circumstances, it is advisable to attend to the ordinances at all. We may illustrate the effect of Christians not holding themselves bound by the approved practice of the apostolic churches, by mentioning the sentiments of a pious minister in regard to the ordinance of baptism, who maintained, that none could show this to have been intended as a perpetual ordinance in the church.* It was given, he said, to the first disciples, but it did not follow that it was always to be continued. How would those who deny the obligation of recorded apostolic practice confute this opinion? yea, how could they prove that we are bound to observe ordinances at all? They may administer baptism as a matter of expediency; but how can they show that we are under any obligation on the subject? The Lord's supper, it may be said, was appointed for the apostles, and although Paul

"Nor is such a sentiment peculiar to him. Books have been written in defence of this by persons of great ability, and who have very attentively studied the Scriptures, viz. Mr Emlyn, Mr Wakefield, and others.

received it by revelation that this ordinance should be observed by the church at Corinth, as no *precept* is delivered *to us,* we may use our own discretion, according to the circumstances in which we are placed. As to the first day of the week, we *may* observe it as well as any other day, but it must be left to our option, whether to prefer it to the Jewish Sabbath.* Where, it may be asked, is the *precept* for forming a church at all? Where is there a *commandment* to *us* to exercise discipline? Where is the necessity for our having a stated ministry? In short, this principle will, by necessary consequence, lead to throw every part of Christian worship completely loose, and to set aside every ordinance of the New Testament, except in those cases in which *we may judge it expedient to retain them.*

Few would choose to carry matters thus far, but the consequences cannot be avoided, unless we admit, *that the recorded and approved practice of the apostles, who settled the order and discipline of the first churches, binds us equally as positive precepts would, directly addressed to ourselves.*

It was said formerly, "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints;" and again, "Let all things be done decently and in order." But now there can be no uniformity. The laws of Christ must vary

* Several Baptist churches in England observe the seventh day, and do not hold themselves bound to observe the first day of the week.

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with local circumstances; what is *order* in one country, will be disorder in another; and the inquiry, what is order in a church? will exactly resemble Mr Pope's inquiry,

> Ask where's the North? at York—'tis on the Tweed,
> In Scotland at the Orcades—and there
> At Greenland, Zembla, or one knows not where;
> No creature owns it in the first degree,
> But thinks his neighbour farther gone than he.

A considerable part of Scripture is now become obsolete! The laws of Christ are changeable, and may be affected and set aside by physical causes, or by the makings of the nations! Although he has commanded us neither to add to, nor to take from his word, we may neglect the precepts once delivered to the saints, because our external circumstances are different from theirs!

This doctrine not only destroys the authority of apostolic precepts in regard to church-order, but might be employed to oppose every individual and relative duty. The Christians at Rome were to be subject: to the powers that be, Rom. 13. Servants were to be obedient to their masters at Ephesus, Eph. 6:5. But our circumstances are different, and it does not follow that these duties are incumbent on us.* Surely,

* In this way, all the directions to servants in the New Testament must be of little practical use in this country. The servants there spoken of were in general slaves, but servants in this country are in very different circumstances.

then, the church needs an oracle, or an infallible head upon earth, who may, according to circumstances, change times and laws, else (as when there was no king in Israel) every one will do what is right in his own eyes. It would appear, then, not only that the man of sin arose from the fancied liberty of deviating from the primitive model, but that his rise was almost a necessary consequence of this fatal principle. Dr Reid shows, that Bishop Berkley's conceit of the non-existence of matter, and Mr Hume's of the non-existence of spirit, was, in like manner, only carrying to a proper length the absurd theory concerning *ideas,* which philosophers had adopted for upwards of two thousand years.

But do not all Christians in fact hold themselves virtually bound by apostolic practice? How can they vindicate, on any other principle, the neglect of the seventh, and the observance of the first day of the week? Why do they assemble together for worship on this day? Is it not because this was the practice of the apostolic churches? If then we are bound in one instance, can we reject the same obligation in another? And certainly the regard that Christians pay to the first day of the week, is a striking proof of the importance they attach to apostolic practice; by which, in this instance, an express command to sanctify the seventh day, delivered with the utmost solenmity, is set aside. The late Mr Randal, in his treatise on the Lord's Supper, after noticing those passa-

ges of Scripture which prove that the apostles established the observance of it every first day of the week, and quoting those which establish their observance of the Lord's day, adds, 'In these we think that we vindicate well the change of the Sabbath day, and the sanctifying it for holy purposes, against opposers, reckoning them defective in their profession of Christianity, if not living in opposition to its spirit and rules, who act not accordingly; but can we feel the *force* of a *law* so strongly in the one case, and does it make so *slender impressions* on us in the other? Why it should be thus, is not so easy, it may be, to tell, when confessedly no argument can be formed on these places for the one, that is not of equal force at least for the other.'*

This reasoning directly applies to our subject. We cannot set aside the obligation of primitive practice, without almost renouncing Christianity, and surely we ought not to assume a dispensing power to set aside ordinances equally important with those we retain, while we cannot pretend to have any warrant from Scripture for doing so. But so anxious are men to assert their freedom from obligation to observe *the practices of the first churches,* that they have objected that the laws delivered to them are not suitable at present, because Christians *are less holy.* If by this it be meant, that the system of laws to be gather-

* If this respectable author had exemplified his own doctrine, it might probably have had more influence.

ed from the New Testament is not sufficient to restrain or to influence a mixed multitude, calling themselves a Christian church, it is most freely granted. It appears to be one peculiar excellence of the order laid down in Scripture for the government of the churches, that real religion is essentially necessary to the observance of it. Without some measure of this, a church formed on the apostolic model can hardly exist or stick together. Love for the truth's sake, is the perfect bond which connects the body, and where this is wanting, no artificial tie can be substituted in its place. The regulations delivered by the apostles are sufficient to repress and correst the remaining corruption of real Christians, but altogether inadequate to restrain ungodly men. If our churches are to be ruled by the Scriptures alone, they must be composed of members of the same description as the apostolic churches.

If the objection mean, that real Christians of the present times are not sufficiently holy to be governed in the same way as formerly, it is absurd. It is true, however, that a departure from these rules tends to promote conformity to the world. Those who are connected with a church whose constitution is different from that delivered by the apostles, labour under a great disadvantage. They do not enjoy all the means appointed for their edification. But do we not see in this objection the language of voluntary humility? In the same way we may set aside some other

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precepts, as too hard for us. Does not this resemble an unbeliever exculing his neglect of orayer, or of any other duty, by saying he has not faith, or is not sufficiently holy; that these duties are for believers, not for him. Why is he not a believer? is not this his guilt, and will it not prove his condemnation?

But probably the objection is founded on that common sentiment, that the former days are better than the present. The Scriptures inform us of the mighty power of the word of God on the hearts of men; what a change it produced; that the most unholy were sanctified through the truth: but they also relate the remaining corruption of Christians; they by no means represent them as faultless; the abuses in the churches are clearly pointed out, as at Corinth, in Galatia and Asia, &c. and there we see that they were men of like passions with ourselves.

But still if we are behind them, is there not a cause? Yes, say some, the Spirit is now withheld. Does our carnality, then, arise from the character of the days in which we live? Is not this very like charging it upon God? If indeed the Spirit be withheld, we may be assured our iniquities have separated between us and our God. Is his hand shortened? "Turn ye at my reproof," says the Lord, Prov. 1:23. "and I will pour out my Spirit upon you!" When we consider the unhallowed union which has taken place between the church and the world, and the consequent

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conformity of real Christians to worldly maxims and manners, no wonder if the Spirit has been grieved: and how mall his blessed influences be restored, but by searching and trying our ways, and returning to the Lord. Let us then tremble at God's word, and hear what the Spirit faith unto the churches. If we return to God, he will return to us. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? James 4:4, 8. Behold I stand at the door (says Jesus) and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me, Rev. 3:20.

Good men generally lament the low state of religion in the reformed churches. Is it not worth while to inquire, whether this does not in part proceed from neglecting the ordinances of Christ, respecting the constitution and discipline of churches? Is there no reason to believe, that we experience the truth of what the Holy Ghost once and again aflures us will be the case, "A ltttle leaven leavens the whole lump?" Are not many Christians in a situation where neither the precept, "Purge out the old leaven," nor that in Matt. 18:15, 17: are, nor can be, attended to? Is this a matter which God overlooks?

Some account for the low state of religion, by

saying? the church is yet in the wilderness,* Rev. 12:14.; by and bye we shall have more light; meantime we must do what good we can, without running, too fast.' But what brought the church into the wilderness? was it not the iniquity of its members? By disregarding the ordinances of Christ, they grieved his Holy Spirit, and by assuming the liberty of regulating the outward order of the churches according to circumstances, they brought themfeives under the dominion of antichrist. "My people," said God of old, "would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me: So I gave them up unto their own hearts lust, and they walked in their own counsels," Psal. 81: 11–12.

How is the church to be brought out of the wilderness? From whence is the light to arise? Are we to have a new revelation? or do we expect the teaching of the Spirit, except by means of the word of God? The same light has been in the world ever since the New Testament was completed; the pillar of the cloud and the fire still conducts the true Israel. If men do not wander in the same gross darkness as formerly, it is because somewhat more attention is paid to that blessed book; and if knowledge shall yet be greatly increased, this will be the effets of our

* It was the declared opinion of a late eminent minister of the church of Scotland, that there would be no remarkable revival of religion till the church and the world were separated; yet he continued in the national church till his death!

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attending more closely to the lively oracles of God, and consequently of our understanding them better. Let us not then say, "The time is not come, the time when the Lord's house shall be built," but let every Christian consider his ways.

SECTION III.

THOSE who justify their own practice, while they evidently depart from the ordinances delivered by the apostles for the regulation of the churches, allege, that there are some ordinances which churches, professing to be guided by apostolic practice in all respects, do not follow. For instance, the community of goods in the church at Jerusalem—observing the Lord's supper daily—love-feasts—washing one another's feet—the kiss of love, and the example set in Paul's vow, Acts 18:18.

With respect to the first let it be observed, that there was no such practice enjoined on that or any other church. Their felling their lands and houses was *voluntary,* as evidently appears by Peter's address to Ananias. His sin did not consist in not giving the whole price, but in endeavouring to deceive the apostles who were filled with the Spirit; and therefore his keeping back part of the price is called, lying to the Holy Ghost, Acts 5:3. "While it remain-

ed, (said Peter) *was it not thine own?* and after it was sold, *was it not in thine own power?* Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lyed unto men, but unto God," ver. 4. He might have kept it without being found fault with; but when he hypocritically sought the character of deadness to the world, and love to the brethren, to which other members of the church were so justly entitled, Peter employed the authority given by the Lord to the apostles, for the edification of the churches, 2 Cor. 10:8. 10 punish him, for they had in them a readiness to revenge all disobedience, 2 Cor. 10:6. Should a church, or any of its members, think it proper at present to have all things in common, they are accountable to Jesus Christ alone; but if they made this a term of communion, it would be utterly unscriptural. At all events, communion of goods was *confined* to the church of Jerusalem. Nothing of the kind is mentioned in any other church, but the contrary practice undoubtedly prevailed in several of these.

But although this answer is sufficient, there is another which totally removes this objection: There seems no just ground for supposing that a community of goods did exist at Jerusalem in any other sense than that a great degree of liberality to the poor took place among them. I am aware of the difficulty of combating an opinion long taken for granted; but we ought to prove all things. Mosheim, the author of the Ecclesiastical

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History, has published a treatise on the subject,* to which I would refer those who are not satisfied with the following remarks.

Luke's words are, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one foul: neither said any of them, that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common. Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles feet; and distribution was made unto every man, according as he had need," Acts 4:32, 34–35.

This may either express, that the whole property of the members, who had all sold their houses and lands, was put into a common stock, and that from this the necessities of each was supplied; or the words may, with equal propriety, be understood to mean, that there existed so much love in this church, that each of them was ready to communicate to the wants of their brethren, to the utmost of their power: that, to testify their affection, and to supply the wants of the poor, some who had houses and lands sold their possessions, and laid the price at the apostles feet, and that they superintended the distribution to those who had need. If the words may be

* De vera Natura Communionis Bonorum in Ecclesia Hierosolymitana Commentatio, apud Dissertat. ad Hist. Eccles. pertii nent. Vol. alteram Alton, et Lub. 1767.

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understood in either sense, it remains to endeavour to ascertain the true meaning. It is no slight argument for the latter, that it represents matters in a point of view much more natural and easy, corresponding both with the practice of other churches, and the precepts delivered to them by the apostles. The former teaches us to view the church of Jerusalem as lingular, in adopting a custom which must necessarily have been atended with very great confusion and inconvenience, and which, while it favoured more of orientation, does not seem so well calculated to answer the end. In supplying a great number from a common flock, some would be in greater danger of being overlooked, than if their fellow disciples, families, liberally distributed to the support of their brethren. Besides, some would require almost, or altogether all that they could earn. Did such bring their earnings to the treasury, and then take them away? This must have been the case, if the communion be understood in its common sense, unless we are also to understand, that they gave up working altogether, and were supported from the common flock. But the complaint of the Grecians plainly shows us who were supplied out of the public fund. They complained of their *widows* being neglected; on the common supposition, each individual was to be supplied, and probably, in this case, there would have been a general complaint of the Grecians being

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neglected, in place of their, widows only being mentioned.

Now, we find in other churches direstions to supply widows; and this affords a strong presumption, that the poor alone were supplied from the public fund raised by the voluntary and liberal contributions of the brethren. But if we are to take the words so ftridtly, then not only all the lands, but all the houses were sold, so that not only public tables must have been necessary, but houses also must have been purchased by the church for the use of the brethren. All is plain and easy on the other supposition; and in the conduct of the church of Jerusalem, every church of Christ has a beautiful example (which they are bound to follow) liberally to supply the wants of the poor, and, to the utmost of their power, to alleviate their necessities and their distress.

The precept given by Paul to the Corinthians will illustrate this subject. In exhorting them to make a contribution for the saints, he says, "I mean not that other men be eased and you burdened, but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: as it is written, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack," 2 Cor. 8:13, 15. The meaning of this is very obvious. Paul exhorts the brethren at Corinth to contribute to the necessity of the poor saints In Judea; but to prevent

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their imagining that this arose from partiality for his countrymen, he tells them, if they stood in need of it, he should be equally ready to exhort the Jewish brethren to assist them; that believers in Jesus ought, by this mutual communication of their worldly goods, to refemble the Israelites in the wilderness, who received an homer of manna whether they gathered much or little, Ex. 16:18. But, by interpreting the equality in this passage with the same strictness as we generally do the communion of goods in Jerusalem, we may understand the apostle as enjoining a levelling system, for which indeed it has been urged, and an absolute communion and equality of property between the brethren at Corinth and Jerusalem.

Mosheim quotes a saying of Socrates, Παντα των Φιλῶν κοινα, *all things are common among friends,* but none understand this in the same way in which Luke is generally understood in Acts 4:32. 'He quotes many testimonies of the same kind from other ancient writers, where they speak in the same manner, and yet evidently mean only to express the liberality which real friendship produces. He observes, that we cannot gather from the writings of any author of the first and second century, that such a communion did not exist among Christians as that mentioned by Luke. He quotes a number of testimonies which mention the communion of goods among Christians in the same language that Luke uses, in circumstances where all confess that nothing more than great liberality

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is meant. If, then, the communion of goods mentioned by them is consistent with each remaining master of his own property, is it not most natural to understand Luke as meaning the same? He says it was not till the fourth century was far advanced, that this passage in the Acts was thought to express that the church of Jerusalem had their goods in common, in the same way as the monks have, so that probably the true origin of the communion of goods, was to find countenance in Scripture for the absurdities of monkery. He concludes by thus giving the sense of the passage under consideration. 'There was truly great harmony amongst all the disciples of Christ. None of them preferred their wealth or their property above the love they bore to the brethren; but, wherever there was occasion, most willingly assisted the indigent. None regarded his riches as if the use of them was to be confined to himself, but each conudered himself bound to share them with the poor. This sacred love went even farther, so that a sort of public treasury was established, from whence the sick, widows, orphans, and others who were in poverty, were supplied. To this each contributed according to his earnings, and when this was not sufficient to support so great a number of poor persons, some who were rich, or who had lands either without the city, or houses within it, besides what they themselves inhabited, sold these possessions, and devoted the price of them to the public good: and this

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they did the more willingly, as they were assured that the deftruction of Palestine and of the Jewish state was approaching.'*

It appears, then, that the communion of goods at Jerusalem, so far from being an argument against following the example of the apostolic churches, is an example worthy of imitation in every church of Christ, which is doubtless bound, in the strongest manner, to provide for the poor of the flock.

The only argument from Scripture for the practice of daily communion, is drawn from Acts 2: 46. "And they, continuing daily in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." Now it is certain, that although the expression *breaking bread* is used in the New Testament to signify the ordinance of the Lord's supper, it also

* 'Magna vero erat omnium Christi discipulorum consensio et Concordia. Neque quisquam ex illis divitias et bona amori in fratres præferebat; verum si id res ita poscebat perliberaliter aliorum indigentiam juvabat. Nemo opes suas sic spectabat ac si usus earum ad se unice pertineret sed unusquisque suum esse credebat cum laboraritibus ea comniunicare. Quin longius sanctus ille amor progrediebatur. Ut effet nnde alerentur ægroti, vidnae, orbi et reliqui, quos inopia premebat publicum quoddam condebatur ærarium huc quantum quisque poterat de suis fructibus referebat, Quumqvie id non sufficeret ad tantum pauperum multitudinem sustentandum, opulentiores nonnulli quibus aut agri extra urbem, aut in urbe tecta erant, præterea quæ incolebant, possessiones istas vendebant constatamque inde pecuniam publicis conscetabant commedis. Idque tanto facicbani libentius quanto noverant certius ultimam Palestinæ rebulqe Judeorum cladem imminere'—*J. L. Moshemii Dissert. ad Histor. Ecclesiast. pertinant. Vol. alterum, pag.* 52.

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denotes partaking of food at an ordinary meal. See Matt. 14:19. Mark 8:19. Luke 24:35. In general, there is no difficulty in distinguishing when the one and when the other is meant. When breaking bread is mentioned, Acts 2:42. in connection with the apostles' doctrine, and the fellowship and prayers, we cannot doubt this to intend the ordinance of Christian worship, which consists in breaking bread. So when we read of the disciples at Troas coming together on the first day of the week to break bread, Acts 20:7. we cannot be at a loss to conclude that this means the Lord's supper. They met on the first day of the week, because on that day Jesus rose from the dead. The question then is, Whether the principal object of their meeting on the day which had come in place of the Sabbath, was to observe a solemn ordinance intimately connected with the resurrection of Jesus, or to join in partaking of a common meal? for certainly breaking bread, in the one sense or in the other, was the chief purpose of their assembling, as is evident from the history. This question may be answered without much difficulty. But if any one should object, that there is not an absolute certainty that the Lord's supper is meant, let him observe, that the church of Corinth, on the same day, 1 Cor. 16:2. came together into one place, and did eat and drink, professing to observe the ordinance of the supper, 1 Cor. 11:11, 20–21.; let him farther take notice, that the same order of worship was

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established by the apostles in every church, 1 Cor. 4:17. and surely his doubts must be removed.

It is admitted, that we cannot *so clearly* ascertain, whether breaking bread in Acts 2:46. means the ordinance of the supper, or partaking of ordinary food. But if it be at best doubtful, no solid argument can be built on it, and consequently we cannot be accused of discarding universal and approved apostolic practice, because we do not follow what, in the opinion of some, was the custom of an apostolic church. Besides, as the Lord's supper is evidently mentioned within four verses, it is not probable that an account of it should be here repeated. An important piece of instruction is contained in the 46th verse, if we suppose it only to relate to their common food. It shows how these Christians ate their bread with joy, Eccles. 9:7. Being accepted in the beloved, and having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, the satisfaction produced by this entered into all their enjoyments and occupations, and their example is recorded that we may learn to rejoice in the Lord always.

With respect to the practice of churches after the apostles days, we do not hold ourselves bound by it, nor by any thing not recorded in Scripture. What we contend for is, the indispensable obligation of *all* the ordinances recorded in the New Testament as delivered to the churches; or, which is the same thing, the practice of the churches mentioned with approbation by the apostles. But it

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does not appear that daily communicating was ever general, although it was doubtless the practice of some churches in the third and fourth centuries.

The Lord's supper was first observed on Thursday. We shall not assert, that it is unlawful to obey Christ's dying commandment on any day; we only contend, that by the approved practice of apostolic churches, it is demonstrated to be the appointment of Christ, that his churches *must* observe it every first day of the week, and the evidence of this is just as strong as that they or we are required to assemble at all on that day to sanctify it. If a church can assemble every day, they may do so, but at all events they *must* meet on the Lord's day, if they desire to keep his commandments. So, if they *may* eat the Lord's supper every day, yet they are not warranted to condemn those who only observe it on the first day of the week.

With respect to the *love feasts,* we have ho account in Scripture which fixes this to have been the practice of the apostolic churches at all, or which gives us any direction with respect to them. Jude indeed, ver. 12. says, "these are spots in your feasts of charity." But certainly this is not sufficient to ascertain the custom of a church regularly assembling to eat together. The expression may refer to partaking of the Lord's supper, which is called the Christian feast, 1 Cor. 5:8. one great end of which is to promote bro-

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therly love; or it may refer to Christians meeting together, not as a church, but in smaller companies, just as they now do when they visit one another, eat and drink together, and enliven their society by joining in prayer, and singing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Would not a false professor be a *spot* in such a company?

But there is still greater ambiguity in the original expression, which we render *feasts of charity,* (εν ταις αγαπαις) nor are commentators well agreed about the meaning of the word. The apostle, writing to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 11:22. says, "Have ye not *houses* to eat and drink in?" and then goes on to describe the Lord's supper, the only occasion on which, so far as we learn from Scripture, the whole church is bound to eat and drink in their collective capacity. He concludes the subject, "If any man hunger, let him eat at *home,* that ye come not together to condemnation," ver. 34. By this he did not mean to prevent the members from eating and drinking together, but undoubtedly this discountenances the idea, that their meeting *as a church,* to eat and drink, was an ordinance of Christ.

Much has been said of the love-feasts being practised in primitive times, subsequent to those of the apostles; but Tertullian is the first who mentions them, above two hundred years after Christ, and he does it in such an ambiguous manner, that no one can say whether he intended more than Christians meeting in one another's houses, a practice

highly proper, and which tends much to promote love, if these meetings be properly conducted.

The commandment for saluting one another with a *holy kiss,* is repeated once and again in the New Testament. In like manner, Christians are commanded to "wash one another's feet," John 13:14.; and one of the qualifications of those widows who were to be maintained by the church was, that they had warned the saints feet, 1 Tim. 5:10. Hence some Christians hold the necessity of the members of a church still saluting one another with a kiss, and washing one another's feet.

The kiss was enjoined as a token of affection. As such, it was much used in Judæa and the eastern countries. This we learn from the Old Testament. The apostles, writing to those who lived in countries where it was customary, directed them to greet one another with a kiss of love; their saluting was not to be the effect of mere politeness, as among the people of the world, but it must be the expression of the heart. But we do not know in what way it was conducted.* Considering the jealousy of the natives of eastern countries, it is not probable that the apostles should recommend, even in the case of

* It is common in the East, for equals to salute one another by kissing the head, the hand, or shoulder. See Harmar's Observations on Scripture, vol. ii. p, 53, 54, 57.

admission into a church, that all the members should in this way salute one newly joined to them. Far less can we suppose, that it should be attended to as a piece of mere form, as perhaps it has become in some churches which have adopted it. In this country, a kiss is at present by no means so common a manner of salutation as in the East. This is manifest, both from the Old and New Testament, and from the account of eastern manners to this day. Paul commanded his brethren to salute one another, according to the custom of the country where they lived; and if we, as members of a church, in brotherly love, use the modes of salutation customary in this country, we then observe this direction.

In those countries where the apostles laboured, frequent *washing the feet* was necessary, both from dress and climate. When fatigued with travelling, and overpowered with heat, the latter of which might occur almost daily, the brethren being ready to wash one another's feet was highly proper; but in this country it would be often troublesome to the person we intended to serve, and consequently a piece of mere bodily exercise, having much the appearance of voluntary humility. Those amongst us who hold its obligation, do not, we believe, differ from others who reject it, so much in practice as in profession. The Lord of glory warned his servants feet, not to establish an unmeaning ceremony, but to shadow forth the blessings of his sal-

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vation, and to teach us ever to be ready, with genuine humility, to perform the meanest service, when necessary, for our fellow creatures, and especially our brethren in Christ, and when it is so, no doubt this among the rest.

We might also notice what is said of *long hair.* This was in certain countries in those days peculiar to women, and hence a mark of effeminacy in any man who affected it. It was confounding the distinction in the appearance of the sexes. Had a Christian in those days shaved his beard, as we do, there can be no doubt it would have been equally condemned, and surely would have been highly improper. But so long as the dress of those among whom we live is consistent with decency, and evidently distinguishes the sexes from each other, we may safely, and agreeably to the apostolic doctrine, comply with their customs—thus, in things in themselves indifferent, which vary in every country according to circumstances, becoming all things to all men, and giving none offence (calling no stumbling-block in the way) either to Jew or Gentile, or the church of God. We are aware of the use which may be made of these remarks. It may be argued, that if we do not literally and strictly, in all things, adhere to the custom of the churches as recorded in Scripture, we desert our own argument, as to churches now being bound to observe exactly the same order with those planted by the apostles. It will be granted by all, that they established an

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order highly expedient *as circumstances then stood;* but it may be said, that we are not tied down by the letter, but by the spirit of their traditions. The objection is specious, and we do not wish to shrink from it. We trust our object is not to perplex, but to establish the minds of our brethren in Christ.

We observe, then, that the same objection has often been made against some of the mod important moral precepts delivered by Christ. He commands his disciples to pluck out a right eye, and cast it from them, Matt. 5:29.; again, "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also," Matt. 5:39. We should condemn while we wondered at any man who *literally* obeyed either the one precept or the other; yet we are bound to observe these precepts, we count them highly valuable, and think they convey much instrustion. Says an objector, You admit that the language is figurative? Undoubtedly. He replies, Then why not consider Christ's atonement, or the commandment to live by faith, as figurative also? We should answer, that in the one case it was evident we should act contrary to other express precepts of Scripture; that nothing is there required of us, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God; that no man of common sense was in any danger of being missed by precepts which are evidently to be observed in their spirit, and not in the letter; and that, notwithstanding such precepts, the Bi-

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ble is a very plain book, and that he alone who loves the darkness, can remain ignorant with it in his hand, John 3:19. Perhaps we might not succeed in convincing him, but we should not admit that his objection was well founded. In like manner, if Christians will not allow that any fixed order was established by the apostles for the churches of Christ in every age, because we admit that the precepts which enjoin the kiss of love, washing the saints feet, and not wearing long hair, ought to be observed in the spirit, and not in the letter, we must just say with he apostle when writing on this order, If any be ignorant, let him be ignorant, 1 Cor. 14:38. But we will not admit, that to silence his objections we ought to enforce customs, which, being merely local, and consequently unmeaning and absurd in another situation, would tend to make the religion of Jesus ridiculous in the eyes of men who are happy to find a stumbling-block, and would say it enjoined needless peculiarities, and an affectation of Angularity. No. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and there is not one positive precept in the New Testament, which has not in view the cultivation of these, and not the promoting needless Angularity. Upon the same principle on which our brethren tell us we disobey the apostolic injunction, by omitting the kiss of love, we may charge them with neglecting the precept to cut off a right hand, because

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they obey it in the spirit, and not in the letter. But while we cannot commend their minuteness, and, as we apprehend, their want of discrimination, we consider this extreme into which they fall, as being very different from, and much less reprehensible than the conduct of those who show, by their practice, that they think that the plainest apostolic practice in the government of churches, may be set aside by the ambiguous term *expediency.* If we have been tedious on this subject, it is because we thought it deserved to be enlarged on, because we highly respect arguments drawn from the word of God, and think the practice founded on them deserves the greatest attention. Surely no one will say, that when the apostle exhorts believing women to reverence their husbands, after the example of Sarah, who called Abraham Lord, 1 Pet. 3:6. that in order to obey this precept, it is proper or necessary to use the same *term* of respect; yet this must be the case, if we are not to distinguish between the spirit and the letter.

With respect to Paul's vow, Acts 18:18. it was never supposed that every part of the *private* conduct of the apostles is binding on Christians. They were men of like passions with ourselves, and consequently fell into sin; and their failings and sins are not recorded in Scripture with approbation, but with censure. Witness Peter's dissimulation, and Paul's quarrel with Barnabas. But they could make no mistake in settling the

order of the churches, for which they were so well qualified by the instructions they received after the resurrection, Acts 1:3. and especially by the abundant influences of the Spirit, which they enjoyed in so singular a degree, that they could add this sanction to their decrees, "He that knoweth God, heareth us," 1 John 4:6.

Respecting Paul's conduct, Acts 21:23. and his circumcising Timothy, we are bound to act in the same manner in similar circumstances. In these he became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews. We, too, are to become all things to all men, in things which are in themselves indifferent. But let us take care how we apply this principle; we must, in the first place, ascertain whether a thing be *lawful,* before we enquire whether it be *expedient,* 1 Cor. 6:12. If this be not the case, we must withstand even a brother to the face, Gal. 2:11. and must by no means make improper compliances, to render the gospel palatable to men of any description.

Upon the whole, then, it appears, that *all Christians are bound to observe the universal and approved practices of the first churches recorded in Scripture;*—that these practices, the express precepts delivered by Jesus Christ and his apostles, and the reproofs of disorderly conduct in the apostolic churches, furnish us with a clear, precise, and determinate rule, for every part of social worship. It appears also, that the arguments which are employed in opposing this conclufion, are not only

calculated to introduce confusion, to set aside all ordinances whatsoever as binding upon the conscience, but may also be employed to subvert our belief of the most important doctrines, and to lead us to make light of the most direct and important precepts of Christ.

This rule, it is true, is not delivered in the same manner as were the precepts to Israel of old; and the reason will be obvious, if we attend to the nature of the dispensation under which they were placed. The law, says an apostle, Gal. 3:24. was our schoolmaster until Christ; and the heir, he adds, so long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, 4:1. This procedure was, in every particular, exactly suited to the infant state of the church. During this period, the Father declared his will by laying down a rule of conduct most palpable and plain, just as the elements of any science are taught. Accordingly we find the whole system which regulated their *moral conduct,* both as individuals and as a collective body, delivered to Israel exactly in the same way as the directions for their *social worship.* But when grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, when the people of God were to be no more servants but sons, then we see a different mode of instruction adopted, both as to moral duties and social worship: the particular lines of which are not indeed so minutely marked, but when taken as a whole, and considered in connexion with the elements already laid down, the

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knowledge of the will of God is thereby conveyed to us in a manner not less precise and pointed than it was under the law.

The Scriptures contain as complete and pre-eife directions for the form and regulation of churches, that is, of associated Christians, as for their conduct individually. The rule of duty for each, is laid down exactly in the same manner, and to the same extent. If difficulties occur in ascertaining the former, are not these often equally felt in regard to the latter? Let the reader in this view feriouily consider the subject. If conviction of the truth of what is here advanced be the consequence, he will at once perceive the vast importance of the present enquiry; the loss which believers must necessarily sustain if this subject be overlooked; and the manifest sinfulness of their conduct who, either through prejudice or negligence, refuse to examine, and thus make void a very considerable portion of the word of God. It is well known how little progress was made in natural philosophy for thousands of years. The reason is obvious. The inquiries of philosophers were conducted on a wrong plan. They first formed a theory, and then sought for plausible arguments to establish it. The consequence was, one theory supplanted another, and it, too, gave place in its turn to a fresh one! Bacon introduced a new system; he taught philosophers to reason from facts, and thus gradually to form a sys-

tem, one excellence of which would be, that, however limited, it would be solid.

Let Christians adopt the same plan in regard to church-government. Instead of forming a system agreeable to our views of expediency, and then searching for passages of Scripture to support it, let us begin by ascertaining particular facts in regard to the apostolic churches.

According to Bacon, nothing in natural philosophy ought to be assumed which is incapable of being proved; so ought it to be in our case. Let us enquire, for instance, what precise idea is conveyed by the word "church" in the New Testament? of what characters the apostolic churches were composed? what offices they had? what qualifications were required for the discharge of the duties of these? what ordinances they observed? how they proceeded in regard to offences? Thus we shall tread on sure ground.

In setting out on our enquiry, we must expect some difficulties. Our knowledge of every part of revelation is imperfect; but on this account to reject what is plain, is as absurd as for a philosopher to give up the study of nature because he meets with what he does not understand. The more his knowledge increases, the more will his difficulties be removed. On this plan I intend to proceed in the following pages. How far I may succeed in exactly delineating the constitution and government of the primitive churches, must be left to the judgment of those who shall peruse

this work. I am fully persuaded that the Scriptures do contain an exact rule, suited to every situation. I hope to be able to state this, without falling into any very important error. I am far from supposing, however, that every text shall be so clearly illustrated as to carry conviftion to the minds of those who read with attention, or even who agree with me in general; but we should remember, there are other parts of divine truth, in the explanation of which Christians who hold the same general sentiments are not agreed.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE CAUSES OF THE DIVERSITY OF OPINION AMONG CHRISTIANS RESPECTING SOCIAL WORSHIP, AND THE EVILS ARISING FROM IT.

HAVING endeavoured to establish the obligation under which we are laid to follow the approved practice of apostolic churches, before we proceed to delineate that practice, it may not be improper to consider the causes of the diversity of opinion among Christians on this subject, and the prevalence of that idea which has long been

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gaining ground, that we are to be guided by expediency in regard to all external matters in religion, such as the order of churches, &c.

We have already noticed, that the abominations of the church of Rome *originated* in departing from the apostolic model; that this system was gradually established; and that good men had inadvertently promoted it, by sanctioning modes and ceremonies of human invention, which they judged expedient.

Every one knows to what a dreadful height the abuses of that church had arrived at the time of the Reformation, and we cannot be sufficiently grateful to God for raising up so many eminent men to bring about that blessed work.

The reformers, however, laboured under various disadvantages. From their education they must necessarily have been, in many respects, under the influence of prejudice. 'Many abuses,' says an able writer of the church of England,* 'lay open to the observation of men of *all* sorts; but it could hardly be credible of a sudden by men or *any* sort, that the greatest part of that structure called THE CHURCH, which pretended to have for its foundation *the apostles and prophets, and Christ* himself for its corner-stone, should be a mere heap of antichristian rubbish. It is therefore no wonder, that the most enlightened of our Protestant fathers should be afraid to demolish too much. It was evident with what props and supports the

* Archdeacon Blackburne.

most eminent saints and doctors of former ages had accommodated the edifice; and these, it might well be imagined, would hardly have been placed there by such venerable hands, without some good reason and apparent necessity. In those days, nothing was thought to be sufficiently confirmed by Scripture testimonies, without additional vouchers from the ancient worthies of the church; and accordingly Tertullian, Chrysostom, Austin and Jerom, regularly took their places on the same bench of judgment with Paul, Peter, James and John'.*

Besides the prejudices of education, the reformers were also exposed to great temptations not to carry matters so far as perhaps they wished. Religion was under the immediate cognizance of the governments of every country in which they laboured. To oppose the present system was nearly allied to treason. Many priests who had their livings by the established order of things, perceived that their craft was in danger, and were not remiss ia stimulating the rulers to execute the laws against heretics. This reduced them to one of three alternatives:—to be silent altogether; to denounce the whole system of union between church and state as antichristian; or to steer the middle course, and by not carrying matters too far, to obtain the patronage and support of those rulers who were either convinced by their doctrines, or who, disgusted with the tyranny of Rome, were desirous,

* Confessional.

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for political reasons, of withdrawing from its communion.

Their zeal for the cause in which they had embarked forbade their remaining silent. They lived at a period when the union of church and state had subsisted a thousand years. During that time, the propriety of this incorporation had hardly ever been doubted; and it was not to be expected, that they should clearly at once understand the propriety of separating them. The middle course was, therefore, not only the safest for themselves, but probably corresponded most with the knowledge they had attained. It was accordingly embraced. In the course of their disputes with Roman Catholics, their views, it is likely, were enlarged as to the nature of the kingdom of Christ; but differences of opinion amongst themselves, the dispositions of the rulers, and the prejudices of the countries in which they lived, all tended to fetter them in conduct, and to prevent their following closely apostolic practice. The apostles aimed merely at the conversion of individuals; *they* had in view reforming nations, and consequently the means they employed greatly differed. The apostles had no prospect of success but in the power of the Holy Ghost accompanying, to the heart, the doctrine they preached. It was a great object with the reformers to gain over the magistrates to their party, and to turn a part, at least, of the revenues of the church to the support of a better system—indeed they were

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disappointed and murmured that they did not obtain the whole.

Although the principles of the reformers naturally tended to make the word of God the sole criterion in matters of religion, this noble sentiment was not explicitly declared for some time. Had they been persuaded of this one general principle, and pursued it to its just consequences, it must have satisfied them, that nothing could justify the life of carnal weapons in support of religion. But while they led the attention of men to the Scriptures, while they exposed many of the abominations of the church of Rome, they retained the very essence of antichrist, by seeking, and obtaining wherever they could, a civil establishment for religion. They confounded civil liberty with that wherewith Christ sets his people free. 'They inferred the lawfulness of refilling wicked and unrighteous princes, from the principles of election and grace. Calvin is said to have declared the contrary to be civil idolatry; and this very doctrine was afterwards employed by Grotius to procure the Arminians the countenance of the civil government.'*

They endeavoured to expose the degeneracy of the church of Rome, by comparing it with ancient times; but instead of going back to the days of the apostles, and showing what a church of Christ was in their estimation, they drew many of their maxims from the writings of the fathers, and the

* Confessional.

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decrees of the first councils. This, in all probability, arose partly from not considering that the practice of the apostles was recorded to be a complete guide for the churches in every age; and partly because they saw many of their followers ready to stagger at the length they had already departed from that church wherein they were educated. We have some instances in which their practice greatly differed from their avowed principles. 'The knowledge the reformers had of this matter (viz. the frequent observance of the Lord's supper, says Mr Randal) was agreeable to the truth; let us next consider their practice; here, alas! was the short-coming.'* They distinguished between what was desirable and what was attainable, and were afraid left by going too far they should mar the whole. Instead of endeavouring to destroy prejudice by manifestation of the truth, they made truth, in some respects, bend to prejudice. Their opposers loudly demanded, Where will you stop? and they were in too great haste to answer the question, by drawing up their Confessions, which contained the *ne plus ultra* of reformation, beyond which neither they nor any since, on their plans, have ever gone.

In the different countries where the principles of the reformers were embraced, different modes of church-order and government were adopted; and so little acquainted were they with the rights of ronfeience, that they did not helitate to enforce

* Randal on the Lord's Supper, p. 42. last edition.

compliance with their modes of worship. Thus we see that sentiment, so much condemned by the Holy Ghott, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos," not merely encouraged at the Reformation by influence and argument, but men compelled to adopt the sentiments of Luther in Germany, of Calvin at Geneva, of Knox in Scotland, and of Zuinglius in Switzerland.*

The progress of this spirit of intolerance in religion, is well described by a celebrated historian. 'Such are the capital articles in this famous Recess, which is the basis of religious peace in Germany, and the bond of union among its various Mates, the sentiments of which are so extremely different with respect to points the most interesting and important. In our age and nation, to which the idea of toleration is familiar, and its beneficial eflefts well known, it may seem strange that a method of terminating their dissensions, so suitable to the mild and charitable spirit of the Christian religion, did not sooner occur to the contending parties. But an expedient which, how salutary soever it might be, was repugnant to the sentiments and practice of Christians during many ages, did not lie obvious to discovery. Among the ancient heathens, all whose deities were local and tutelary, diversity of sentiment concerning the object or rites of religions worship seems to have been no source of animosity, be-

* See Beza de Hæreticis a civili magistratu puniendis, apud Stephan. 1534.

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cause the acknowledging veneration to be due to any one god, did not imply denial of the existence or the power of any other god; nor were rhe modes and rites of worship established in one country, incompatible with those which other nations approved of and observed. Thus the errors in their system of theology were of such a nature as to be productive of concord, and notwithstanding the amazing number of their deities, as well as the infinite variety of their ceremonies, a sociable and tolerating spirit subsisted almost universally in the pagan world.

'But when the Christian revelation declared one Supreme Being to be the sole object of religious veneration, prescribed the form of worship most acceptable to him, whoever admitted the truth it held, of consequence saw every other mode of religion to be absurd and impious. Hence the zeal of the first converts to the Christian faith in propagating its doctrines, and the ardour with which they laboured to overturn every other form of worship. They employed, however, for this purpose, no methods but such as suited the nature of religion. By the force of powerful arguments, they convinced the understandings of men; by the charms of superior virtue, they allured and captivated their hearts. At length the civil power declared in favour of Christianity, and though numbers, imitating the example of their superiors, crowded into the church, many still adhered to their ancient super-

stitions. Enraged at their obstinacy, the ministers of religion, whose zeal was still unabated, though their sanctity and virtue were much diminished, forgot so far the nature of their own million, and of the arguments which they ought to have employed, that they armed the imperial power against these unhappy men, and as they could not persuade, they tried to compel them to believe.

'At the same time, controversies concerning articles of faith multiplied, from various causes, among Christians themselves, and the same unhallowed weapons which had first been used against the enemies of their religion, were turned against each other. Every zealous disputant endeavoured to interest the civil magistrate in his cause, and each in his turn employed the secular arm to crush or to exterminate his opponents. Not long after, the bishops of Rome put in their claim to infallibility in explaining articles of faith, and deciding points in controversy, and bold as the pretention was, they, by their artifices and perseverance, imposed on the credulity of mankind, and brought them to recognize it. To doubt or to deny any doctrine to which these unerring instructors had given the sanction of their approbation, was held to be not only a refilling of truth, but an act of rebellion against their sacred authority; and the secular power, of which by various acts they had acquired the absolute direction, was instantly employed to avenge both.

'Thus Europe had been accustomed, during

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many centuries, to see speculative opinions propagated or defended by force; the charity and mutual forbearance which Christianity recommends with so much warmth were forgotten, the sacred rights of conscience and of private judgment were unheard of, and not only the idea of toleration, but even the word itself, in the sense now affixed to it, was unknown. A right to extirpate error by force, was universally allowed to see the prerogative of those who possessed the knowledge of truth, and as each party of Christians believed that they had got possession of this invaluable attainment, they all claimed and exercised, as far as they were able, the rights which it was supposed to convey. The Roman Catholics, as their system rested on the decisions of an infallible judge, never doubted that truth was on their side, and openly called on the civil power to repel the impious and heretical innovators who had risen up against it. The Protestants, no less consident that their doctrine was well founded, required, with equal ardour, the princes of their party to check such as presumed to impugn or to oppose it. Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Knox, the founders of the reformed church in their respective countries, inflicted, as far as they had power and opportunity, the same punishments which were denounced against their own disciples by the church of Rome, on such as called in question any article in their creeds. To their followers, and perhaps to their opponents, it would have appeared

a symptom of diffidence in the goodness of the cause, or an acknowledgment that it was not well founded, if they had not employed in its defence all those means which it was supposed truth had a right to employ.

'It was towards the close of the seventeenth century, before toleration, under its present form, was admitted first into the republic of the United Provinces, and from thence introduced into England. Long experience of the calamities of mutual perfecution, the influence of free government, the light and humanity acquired by the progress of science, together with the prudence and authority of the civil maghlrate, were all requisite in order to establish a regulation so repugnant to the ideas which all the different sects had adopted, from mistaken conceptions concerning the nature of religion and the rights of truth, or which all of them had derived from the erroneous maxims established by the church of Rome.

'The recess of Augsburg, it is evident, was founded on no such liberal and enlarged sentiments concerning freedom of religious inquiry or the nature of toleration. It was nothing more than a scheme of pacification, which political considerations alone had suggested to the contending parties, and regard for their mutual tranquillity and safety had rendered necessary. Of this there can be no stronger proof than an article in the recess itself, by which the benefits of the pacification are declared to extend only to the Catholics

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on the one side, and to such as adhered to the Confession of Augsburg on the other. The followers of Zuinglius and Calvin remained, in consequence of that exclusion, without any protection from the rigour of the laws denounced against heretics. Nor did they obtain any legal security until the treaty of Westphalia, near a century after this period, provided that they should be admitted to enjoy, in as ample manner as the Lutherans, all the advantages and protection which the recess of Augsburg affords.

'But if the followers of Luther were highly pleased with the security which they acquired by this recess, such as adhered to the ancient system had no less reason to be satisfied with that article in it, which preserved entire to the Roman Catholic church the benefices of such ecclesiastics as should hereafter renounce its doctrines. This article, known in Germany by the name of the Ecclesiastical Reservation, was manifestly so conformable to the idea and to the rights of an established church, and it appeared so equitable to prevent revenues, which had been originally appropriated for the maintenance of persons attached to a certain system, from being alienated to any other purpose, that the Protestants, though they foresaw its consequences, were obliged to relinquish their opposition to it. As the Roman Catholic princes of the empire have taken care to see this article exactly observed in every case where there was an opportunity of putting it in

execution, it has proved the great barrier of the Romish church in Germany against the Reformation; and as from this period the same temptation of interest did not allure ecclesiastics to relinquish the established system, there have been few of that order who have loved truth with such disinterested and ardent affection as to abandon, for its sake, the rich benefices which they had in possession.'*

In every country where the reformed principles were embraced, a confession minutely stating every thing respecting religion was drawn up. These confessions were considered to be of the highest authority, and the zeal of Christians was much directed to maintain the authority of their standards. To differ materially from what had been adopted, was accounted heresy, and this was attended with serious consequences. The following celebrated passage in the Westminster Confession of Faith, shows how little progress had been made in the knowledge of religious liberty for a hundred and twenty years.† It is declared, chap, xxiii. 'That the civil magistrate has a right to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the church;' that

* See Robertson's History of Charles V. vol. iv, p. 201,–208. ad edit. 8vo.

† Luther publicly burned the decretals and canons by which the Pope's supremacy was established, and also the bull issued against him at Wittemberg, Dec. 10. 1520. He was publicly expelled from the church, at Rome, by Leo X. on the 6th of January 1521.—The first meeting of the Assembly of Divines was held in Henry VII.'s Chapel at Westminster, July 1. 1643.

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the truth of God be preferred pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline be prevented and reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed; for the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatever is transacted be according to the word of God.' It is abundantly evident howmuch, this system is calculated to perpetuate error, by checking inquiry. It inevitably also lays the foundation of numberless divisions, for it is impossible that Christians can be truly united except on the ground of truth. Error must necessarily gender strife; and there is in the mind of man a principle of opposition to constraint in regard to opinions, which, unless amidst gross ignorance, has always, upon these subjects, set force at defiance.*

In the conduit of the reformers, then, we have

* 'Charles V. after abdicating his throne, was peculiarly curious with regard to the construction of clocks and watches, and having found, after repeated trials, that he could not bring any two of them to go exactly alike, he reflected, it is said, with a mixture of surprise and regret on his own folly, in having bestowed so much time and labour on the more vain attempt of bringing mankind to a precise uniformity of sentiment, concerning the intricate and mysterious doctrines of religion.'—Dr Robertson's Charles V. vol. iv. p. 313. The remark is perfectly just; uniformity of sentiment in religion can never be produced by human authority. It can only arise from men's xonsciences being brought into subjection to the authority of God, and from, their diligently studying his word to know his will.

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the origin of that variety of sentiments which has abounded amongst Christians in regard to religion, and especially as to modes of worship. and discipline. Although each party professed to find the outlines of their system in the word of God, yet none pretended that the New Testament contained a full and complete model. Indeed, without going back to what Paul calls the weak and beggarly elements, they never could have supposed that Scripture authorised, far less commanded, that the civil magistrate should interfere in regulating religion. If this essential part of their system was not merely omitted but discountenanced by the whole tenor of the New Testament, they could not consider it as a complete and unerring guide. They bound men, however, to the most minute adherence to their standards; and it is to be observed of them, as of all who have vindicated persecution, that this was directed more against deviation from their forms and modes, than against gross sins. While they all endeavoured to promote perfect uniformity at home, they found it necessary to cultivate a friendly intercourse with each other, in different countries, from an apprehension of the dangers to which they were exposed by the church of Rome. Their descendents, anxious to defend the Protestant interest against the attacks of the Catholics, who had no small advantage against them from the variety of opinions they held, began more explicitly to maintain, that greater latitude was given in Scrip-

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ture respecting church-order, and that it was very much left to the prudence of men, and to the circumstances in which they were placed.

The Erastians, as they are called, maintained, that all discipline was left perfectly uninstituted, and that the civil government in each country might regulate this as they judged proper. Some accidental circumstances tended also to blind the minds both of the reformers and of the princes who favoured them. The Anabaptists at Münster maintained that magistrates had no authority in the church; but they denied also their authority over the saints even in civil matters. The absurd sentiments of these fanatics, and the excesses of which they were guilty, were calculated to prejudice men against any appearance of conformity to their sentiments.

On considering all circumstances, we have abundant cause to be thankful, that the reformers escaped so far from the prejudices of education; but instead of pressing forward, their descendents have been contented to walk by their light. The veneration in which their memory has been held, has prejudiced the great bulk of the people against any deviation from their sentiments, and the respectable and lucrative situations which adherence to established religion has secured, and which departing from it must forfeit, has tempted many not to pursue their views of truth so far as otherwise they might have done. The speculations also of good men respecting the usefulness of the

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situations in which they are placed, which they must relinquish if they fully adopt the apostolic plan, has proved a great hindrance.

Although the diversity of opinion among Christians concerning church-order may thus be so easily accounted for from the situation in which they have been placed, and from their veneration for the first reformers, yet nothing has tended more to confirm the prejudices of men on the subject, than this diversity. The exemplary conduct, the zeal and holiness of men in churches where there is no scriptural order, which cannot be denied, have been brought forward to show that this was a matter of little consequence. This argument would equally militate against the Reformation. Assuredly there were, and still are eminently holy men in the corrupt communion of the church of Rome. We ought to love the image of Christ wherever we see it; and if we confine our love to our own party, we deceive ourselves. If we love the Lord Jesus, we must love those who are guided by his Spirit. When we see a man loving the gospel, dead to the world, desirous of promoting the glory of God, not seeking his own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's—we cannot but feel our hearts knit to him, wherever he be. A man may, on the other hand, agree with us about the external order of a church, and yet we may be satisfied that he is destitute of real religion, or at lead very lukewarm. Another may, in our judgment, be acting erroneously in conti-

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nuing connected with an antichristian establishment, and yet we may be constrained to love him for the truth's sake. But although there are Christians eminently holy in unscriptural societies, and others who are not exemplary in churches which follow the apollolic practices, we ought not on that account to consider church-order to be unimportant, or unconnected with spirituality and holiness, any more than we should conclude that fresh air or cleanliness are not subservient to health, because we find some very stout children in the confined dirty lanes of a great city, and others sickly in the pure air of the country.

The disproportionate zeal discovered by some respecting church-government, has doubtless also tended to blind the minds of Christians, and has prevented them from considering the subject with the attention it deserves. They have seen some very zealous in those matters, who were little concerned to manifest or to promote the power of religion. The end of all God's commandments is love: and wherever the mind is diverted from following after holiness and spirituality of mind, by attention to order, we are turning the law of God against itself, and abusing the Scriptures. We are not serving the Lord Jesus, but our own vanity, party-spirit, and selfishness. All church-order is ordained for a certain purpose, and if this be not kept in view, it becomes mere bodily exercise. A church may boast of its acting it, conformity to the apostolic model. Like that at

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Laodicea, they may say, "We are rich, increased in goods, and have need of nothing, while in fact they are wretched, and poor, and blind, and naked," in a great measure destitute of the experience and power of religion in the hearts of the members. In such cases, their order has become the righteousness in which they trust—"The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are we." To such we may apply our Lord's words, "These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day." If we trust in our creed, our prayers, our tears, our sanctification, our good works, they are all abominable before God; but without them we cannot be Christians.

We may, in like manner, pervert the order established by Jesus Christ, but we cannot follow him fully without observing it, and although we may be Christians while inattentive to this by neglecting his lead commandments we shall suffer loss in our souls, and are proportionally little in the kingdom of God. The pains taken in training a new regiment would be ridiculous parade if not connected with its object. It is valuable only as it fits the soldiers for actual service. The discipline of a church, in like manner, is important only as it promotes watchfulness, circumspection, and love in the members. This was the end of its institution, and we shall never attain the end so well by forsaking the appointed means, or by substituting others in their place.

A body of men suddenly called together, may individually possess all the qualities essential to good soldiers, but if not properly trained to act together, they will disappoint expectation in the day of battle. A company of real Christians, unacquainted with scriptural order, exactly referable them. They are real soldiers of Jesus Christ; but not being accustomed to that discipline, co-operation, and fellowship which he has enjoined, many defefts will appear in their daily conduct, which this would have corrected.

Another circumstance also may be mentioned, which gives rise to this difference of opinion. Man is ever prone to extremes. His mind is narrow, and is apt to be exclusively filled with one object. One man's attention is engrossed with superintending the order of a few Christians meeting in an upper chamber. Another beholds multitudes of immortal souls perishing for lack of knowledge; his soul is drawn out in prayers and efforts for their salvation; he goes forth preaching the everlasting gospel, gladly desiring to spend and to be spent for Christ. He is filled with indignation at the small company, who seem desirous merely that they themselves should win Christ; his zeal perhaps carries him too far, and because he sees them deficient in some things, he disregards what is praise-worthy. He perceives that there must be some kind of order in a church, but not having attended particularly to the subject, or finding it impossible to observe the order

of the first churches in his present connexion, and determined not to abandon what he considers to be a great sphere of usefulness, he treats it as a matter of indifference.

The New Testament shows us, that the apostles united zeal for the conversion of sinners, with Uriel attention to the welfare of believers. They published the gospel to every creature, and when some believed and others believed not, they then separated the disciples, and formed them into distinct societies, Acts 19:9. Let us imitate both parts of their conduct. We shall ever find, that attention to the practices of the churches in the New Testament, will tend to promote zeal for the conversion of sinners, unless it engross too much of our attention, unless we forget the object for which it is appointed, or unless, by expelling too much from the means, we put them in the place of Christ and of the end. In this case it is no wonder if our souls decay, and all our exertions for spreading the gospel be completely paralysed.

Good men have always contended for the importance of the great doctrines of Christ, and on this account have been charged by the world with bigotry and party, spirit, for attaching so much importance to matters which ignorant men consider to be purely speculative, and little, if at all connected with practice. Such charges, however, have not led the real disciples of Christ to undervalue the truth of God. They know that they proceed from indifference about religion, and

from displeasure that this indifference is reproved by the respect of others for the authority of God. But many good men, adopting an improper distinction between doctrine and discipline, have shunned discussion on the order appointed by Christ for the government of his church, and have been as liberal in the application of the charge of bigotry, &c. to such as regarded his authority on this subject, as the world has been towards them on account of their respect to what are called the peculiar doctrines of the gospel.

If the order of the churches be really distinct from what Christ taught, the less attention we pay to it the better. But before we adopt the distinction, and argue for the importance of the one, and the insignificance of the other, we ought to show that Christ has taught, and directed his apostles to teach, nothing concerning the order and government of his churches. No Christian, I presume, will attempt to do so. Now, whether any thing which he or they taught may be set aside, or considered at best as too trifling to merit our solemn attention, will not surely be questioned by Christians.

Doctrine and discipline are indeed but words, and I do not wish to contend merely about words; but words are the means by which we communicate our ideas, and the improper use of them has been the great cause of disputes both in religion and philosophy.

Good men perceive the importance of just

views of truth, and therefore contend for purity of doctrine. The world considers it of little consequence what we believe, provided we be but charitable; that is, provided we be indifferent about our creed. How much does the conduct of some Christians referable this! They say church-order is of little or no importance, provided a man be not a bigot; that is, provided he be not persuaded that the order he follows is exclusively of divine appointment, and binding on all believers.

There is, no doubt, such a thing as bigotry. Dr Johnson defines it, 'Blind zeal, prejudice, unreasonable warmth in favour of party or opinions.' If this be a just account of bigotry, provided a man's zeal for a particular form of church-order be founded on knowledge, his zeal is not *blind;* consequently he is no bigot. If his opinions and practice be the result of candid investigation, they do not arise from *prejudice;* he is, therefore, not a bigot. Further, if his warmth in favour of a party be not unreasonable; if he adopt proper methods to disseminate his sentiments; if he do not attach *undue* importance to any particular opinion, according to this definition, which seems a just one, he is not a bigot.

If any man, indeed, shall earnestly contend for a certain order or form of government to be observed in the churches because it is new, without seriously examining the Scriptures on the subject, and impartially attending to the objections brought against his system, we admit the propriety of

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applying the term *bigotry* to his conduct. If he be a zealous Presbyterian or Independent, because his father, or some eminent man to whom he looks up, was so, we do not defend him. If his zeal for Christianity *chiefly* appear in minute attention to external order, we are far from attempting to vindicate him: we should, on the contrary, warn such of the danger of being occupied with a form of godliness, or of giving heed to questions which gender strife, rather than godly edifying; for however important the subject be in itself, it may be perverted, and will, in that event, be extremely injurious to his soul. If his attachment to a particular system prevent him from cherishing love to all the disciples of Jesus for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them, his conduct is undoubtedly unscriptural; but if he has seriously, and with earnest prayer, examined the Scriptures on the order and discipline proper to be observed in a church of Christ; if, after weighing objections, he be persuaded that a certain order is exclusively appointed by God, and if he attend to this himself, and recommend it to others, with a view to promote spirituality of mind and holiness of life, while he loves all the disciples of Jesus, although he judge them, in some respects, not to be walking according to the rule of God's word, he is no bigot, nor can he be justly charged as actuated by party-spirit. Such a man will ever be ready calmly to hear what can be said against his system. He has not contrived

it himself, nor received it by tradition from his fathers, but considers it to be a part of divine revelation, and being persuaded that he is always prone to err, and that error of every kind must have a bad effect upon his mind, he is ready to receive with thankfulness farther light upon the subject, and to hear with patience what may be candidly and seriously said for his information.

A man may be a bigotted Calvinist. From education, or from his mind having been much employed on the points of difference between that and other systems, his whole conversation may turn on these topics; he may lose his temper when contradicted, he may wrest passages of Scripture left they should seem to favour his opponents, and he may plainly show that he is under the influence of prejudice and blind zeal: but a man may be fully persuaded of the truth of the system called Calvinism, and be deeply convinced of its importance, without meriting the reproach of bigotry. The same will hold true concerning church-government. A man may contend for a particular form in an unchristian and bigotted manner. If an Independent, he may be attached to all who hold the same sentiments, without examining what good effect their church-order has produced on their minds, or whether they are studying to maintain the power of religion. If he be of the established church, he may advise others to attend their parish ministers, although the gospel be not preached by them; thus preferring the establish-

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ments and arrangements of men, to the doctrine of Christ. In either case he may well be called a bigot. Another may be more sensible of the importance of scriptural order, which he may observe, and steadily maintain that all Christians. are bound to observe, without the smallest tincture of party-spirit.

I dwell the more upon this subject, because due attention has not been paid to it. The spirit of intolerance manifested by our fathers, and their zeal for what we now plainly see to be unscriptural, has rendered it popular to declaim against. attention to church-order, under the odious name of party-spirit; Good men despise the charge of party-spirit brought against them by a Socinian. They pity his ignorance. Let them beware, lest, while charging their Christian brethren with party-spirit, because they argue in favour of an excluuve: form of church-government, they ignorantly condemn or discourage attention to a subject which? God has been pleased explicitly to reveal.

How often is a smile, or a remark on the pernicious effecls of bigotry, put in place of argument when this subject is mentioned! By, some, those who most heartily despise all concern about any particular form of church-government, are often most applauded. Whence does this proceed? A person who was never esteemed a bigot, in answer to a letter wherein the writer had been showing his liberality by condemning those who attended to discipline and church-order, observed,

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'that those only (who possessed any information, on the subject) despised church-order, whose situation rendered their observance of the apostolic order impracticable.' Let us not then be led away by sounds. Men ought, by means of candid examination of Scripture, to be fully persuaded in their own minds, what to omit, and what to perform. Without this, no religious duty is a reasonable service.

When, instead of searching the Scriptures, and praying for farther light, as new born babes desiring the unadulterated milk of the word, we are inclined to search for arguments to justify our own; practice, these will not be wanting. This state of mind fosters prejudices. Our scruples, which, if attended to, would have led us to the Scriptures and to a throne of grace, and ultimately, by the blessing of God, to the path of duty, being stifled, wear away. The less a man listens to the voice of conscience, the feebler it becomes. Many rejoice in having got rid of what they now consider to be weak scruples. Let them examine *how* they got rid of them. Was it by fairly meeting the objections which occurred to their minds? Was it by searching the subject to the bottom? or was it by acting in opposition to their convictions? Scruples may be got rid of both ways. Those who have received a religious education, feel many scruples before they can run. to the same excess of riot with others; but when once fairly initiated, these scruples appear weak

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and childish, and they hug themselves on their supposed superiority to weak prejudices.

I do not here intend to enlarge on the bad effects which arise from the differences among Christians about church-order. Some of them have been already hinted at. We know what a handle they give to infidels, and to those who are indifferent about religion; what alienation of mind they produce among real Christians; and how much they cramp their united exertions: and however much good men, deploring these consequences, may endeavour to put a stop to them by enforcing mutual forbearance, from the consideration of the inconsiderable nature of their differences, experience may teach us that this will, never succeed.

To prove, then, that the Scriptures contain a particular standard and model for the imitation and government of the churches of Christ, which ail Christians are enjoined by divine authority to follow, (however they may be branded as perpetuating division and party-spirit) will be found to be the only way by which union and brotherly love can be promoted amongst Christians. For this union God has made provision in the accounts of the churches in the New Testament. In this, as in other respects, the foolimness of God is wiser than man. Let him then that hath an ear, hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

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CHAPTER V.

ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

SECTION I.

WHEREVER the apostles went, they preached the gospel, and besought and enjoined men to repent and believe it. When their preaching was successful, they directed their converts to associate for the observance of public worship and ordinances, always on the first day of the week, and also at other times. These societies were called churches. In this they have been imitated by all Christians. But it is not sufficient to retain appearances. In order to follow their example, our churches must resemble theirs; their constitution must be similar. How much did the church of Rome, in the apostle Paul's time, differ from the church of Rome some hundred years afterwards! Obedience to the commandment of Christ does not consist in preserving the name while we do not observe the ordinance itself. We condemn the Roman Catholics, who profess to observe Christ's dying commandment while the great bulk of the people receive only

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the bread. We say this is not to eat the Lord's supper, because while the name is kept up, the aclion is different. The same will apply to the constitution of a church. Our churches must be similar to those planted by the apostles, and acknowledged in the word of God as his churches; we do not otherwise attend to the ordinance at all.

The word εκκλησια, *church,* means an assembly of any kind. It is often-applied to Israel, which formed one assembly in the wilderness, as their males did three times a year at Jerusalem. It is sometimes applied to an assembly called by a magistrate, and sometimes to a tumultuous assembly. In Acts 19:32. the mob is called *the church,* and again in verse 40. he dismissed *the church.* Verse 39. the same word is used for an assembly called by the magistrates. I shall here quote a passage from Dr Campbell on this subject. 'Properly there is, in the New Testament, but two original senses of the word εκκλεσια, which can be called different, though related. One is, when it denotes a number of people actually assembled, or accustomed to assemble together, and is then properly rendered by the English terms, congregation, convention, assembly, and even sometimes crowd, as in Acts 19:32, 40. The other sense is to denote a society united together by some common tie, though not convened, perhaps not convenable, in one place. And in this acceptation, as well as in the former,

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it sometimes occurs in classical writers, as signifying a state, or commonwealth, and nearly corresponding to the Latin *civitas.* When the word is limited, or appropriated, as it generally is in the New Testament, by its regimen, as του θεου του κυριου του Χριστου, or by the scope of the place, it is always to be explained in one or other of the two senses following, corresponding to the two general senses above mentioned. It denotes either a single congregation of Christians, in correspondence to the first, or the whole Christian community, in correspondence to the second. We can hardly ever be at a loss to know from the context which of the two is implied. That it is in the former acceptation, is sometimes evident from the words in construction, as της εκκλησιας τη εν Κεγχρεαις, and τη εκκλησια του θεου τη εν Κορινθω and the like. In the latter sense it ought always to be understood, when we find nothing in the expression, or in the scope of the passage, to determine us to limit it; for instance in the following, Επι ταυτη τη πετρα οικοδομεσω μου την εκκλησιαν. Ὁ κυριος προσετιθει τους σωζομενους καθὸ ἡμεραν τη εκκλησια. In this last acceptation of the word, for the whole body of Christ's disciples, wheresoever dispersed, it came afterwards to be distinguished by the epithet καθολικη. They said, ἡ εκκλησια ἡ καθολοικη, the catholic or universal church.

'But in any intermediate sense, between a single congregation and the whole community of Christians, not one inllance can be brought of the

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application of the word in sacred writ. We speak now, indeed, (and this has been the manner for ages) of the Gallican church, the Greek church, the church of England, the church of Scotland, as of societies independent and complete in themselves. Such a phraseology was never adopted in the days of the apostles. They did not say the church of Asia, or the church of Macedonia, or the church of Achaia, but the churches of God in Asia, the churches in Macedonia, the churches in Achaia. The plural number is invariably used when more congregations than one are spoken of, unless the subject be the whole commonwealth of Christ. Nor is this he manner of the penmen of sacred writ only. It is the constant usage of the term in the writings of ecclesiastic authors, for the two first centuries. The only instance to the contrary that I remember to have observed, is in the epistles of Ignatius, on which I have already remarked.*

'It adds considerable strength to our argument, that this is exactly conformable to the usage, in regard to this term, which had always obtained among the Jews. The whole nation, or commonwealth of Israel, was often denominated, πασα ἡ εκκλησια Ισραηλ. And after the revolt of the ten tribes, when they ceased to make one people or Hate with the other two, we hear of πασα ἡ εκκλη-

* The Docctor does not reject the epistles of Ignatius as altogether spurious, but thinks they are of no authority, as it is evident they are considerably mutilated.

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¨τ 1·σια Ιουδα, This is the large or comprehensive use of the word, as above observed. In regard to the more confined application, the same term εκκλησια, was also employed to denote a number of people, either actually assembled, or wont to assemble, in the same place. Thus all belonging to the same synagogue were called indifferently εκκλησια, or συναγωγη, as these terms in the Jewish use were nearly synonymous. But never did they call the people belonging to several neighbouring synagogues εκκλησια, or συναγωγη, in the Angular number, but εκκλησια and συναγωγαι, in the plural. Any other use in the apostles, therefore, must have been as unprecedented and unnatural as it would have been improper, and what could not fail to lead their heaters or readers into mifrakes.'*

The apostolic churches were collected by the preaching of the gospel. The apostles were so far from having any authority by which to induce or to compel men thus to unite, that they were exposed to constant and powerful opposition in their work. Instruction and persuasion were the only means they employed. By manifestation of the truth they commended themselves to every man's conscience. They besought men to be reconciled to God, and to give themselves up to him who had shed his blood for the guilty.

Although every blessing bestowed upon belie-

* Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, vol, i. p. 203, –206.

vers is freely given them of God, yet the Lord Jesus always bestows these on his people, in the way of obedience to his commandments. It is with his own, in the strictest sense, that we serve him; yet he graciously rewards our services. Our observance of ordinances is an act of obedience to Christ, and we receive a present reward in the benefit and comfort we derive from them.

The end of the institution of a church is abundantly manifest. God says to his people, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." Jesus delivers his people from the present evil world, and commands them to associate together, that they may have fellowship with himself and with each other. Thus was Noah separated in the ark. from the world which perished; Lot was separated from Sodom; Abraham from his kindred; and Israel after the flesh from the nations. "Lo," said Balaam, "the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." The ordinances of worship delivered to them, precluded their intercourse with their neighbours. Their learning the ways of the heathen, was the cause of many severe judgments which they endured.

In like manner, if any one will come after Jesus, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him. He must remember Lot's wife, and not look back on the world. He mustt love the disciples of Jesus, cultivate their friendship,

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and mutually give and receive every adt of kindness. To promote love to Christ and to one another, they are to unite in church fellowship, to watch over one another in love, and to observe together various ordinances. Thus having forsaken all for Christ, they receive an hundred fold in the present life. Every one who is a subject of the King of Sion is their kinsman and brother; and the comfort of the Holy Ghost which they enjoy while walking in the fear of the Lord and associating with his people, amply compensates for the loss of friends or of worldly comforts which they have sustained.

The disciples of Jesus are surrounded with enemies on every hand, and one great end of the formation of a church is, that they may strengthen one another in the good ways of the Lord. "Two are better than one; for if one fall, the other will help him; but wo to him who is alone when he falleth."

The members of a church are bound to esteem one another as brethren, yea, as members one of knother; for they are one body, which is reprefented by their eating the same bread, 1 Cor. 10:17.* A church is a representation of the general assembly or church above, and in proportion as the members walk in love, holding the

* Οτι εις αρτος εν σωμα οι πολλοι εσμεν, *Because* (or rather, *as*) *there is one bread, we being many are one body*. The common translation conveys no meaning. "For we being many are one bread," &c. See Whitby and Macknight.

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unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the refemblance is exact. Christians are bound to love all who love Jesus Christ. The formation of a particular church, and the special duties to the members thereof, by no means preclude us from expressing general affection for all the Israel of God.

The more we exercise love to our brethren with whom we dwell, the more will our love increase to the whole body. Christian love must not only be in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. We have little or no opportunity of doing good to the great body of Christians whom we never saw, nor shall see in the flesh; but a church is a single branch of the great family of God, and in this connexion we have a special opportunity of testifying by actions our love to the brethren of Jesus. We are to rebuke and admonish one another, by no means suffering sin upon our brother. If we were seeking honour one of another; if this were our governing principle, as it is in societies of worldly men, such conduct would soon gender strife; but the more the ordinances of Christ: are attended to in a church of Chriit, from proper motives, the more will the members be united in love. The Lord hath bestowed a variety of gifts on his people, and they are bound to use them for each other's benefit. The existence of a church gives an opportunity of occupying these talents for the common good, and thus the edification of the body

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is promoted, by every man, as he hath received the gift, ministering the same as a good steward of the manifold grace of God.

A Christian church is not only calculated to promote the edification of Christians, but the conversion of sinners. We have seen that the formation of churches is intended to promote love amongst Christians. This is closely connected with the conversion of the world. Jesus prayed that his disciples might be one, that the world might believe that the Father had sent him, John 17:21. A church is a city set on a hill; a light in the world to direct the attention of men to the testimony of Christ's death, resurrection, and second coming. When the members of a church are not spiritual, holy, and exemplary, this end is in a great measure defeated; but if they make their light to shine before men, others, seeing their good works, will glorify their Father in heaven. Such, it is evident from the New Testament, was the end of the institution of the apostolic churches.

The apostles held out no worldly motive to induce men to become Christians, or to connect themselves with a church. They obtained no civil privileges by doing so. The connexion was perfectly voluntary in regard to man. It was regard alone to the authority of an unseen Saviour, and to eternal things, which led them to enter into it. If they disregarded these, they were answerable to Christ alone. No man had

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a right to punish them. God still caused his sun to shine, and his rain to descend on them, and thus taught his people to do them good as they had opportunity. When the scheme of uniting the church and the world took possession of the minds of men, they permitted no man to buy or sell except he had the mark of the beast, or they suspended this decree by an act of toleration; but every thing of this kind is foreign to a church of Christ as exhibited in Scripture. It is an association which has no head upon earth; which, as a body, can receive no laws from any one but Christ Jesus. Those who joined the apostolic churches were not thereby freed from their obligations to honour and to be subject to the powers whom God hath ordained over the things of a present life. The kingdom of Jesus is spiritual, neither interfering with human governments, nor admitting their interference in its peculiar concerns. The Lord taught his disciples to render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and to God the things which are God's; that is, to obey their civil governors in all civil matters, but in religion to acknowledge no human authority.

In attending to the constitution of the apostolic churches, we must observe that Christ is always represented as ruling over a willing people, and governing by love. Love to him and to one another, was the perfect bond, and the only one by which the churches were united. When any auxiliary bond is employed in a society, it no

longer resembles the apostolic churches; its constitution is different. 'They are mistaken,' says Dr Erskine, 'who think that the outer-court, Rev. 11:1–2. represents the visible church. For the church, considered as inwardly the habitation of God, and outwardly employed in his worship, is represented by the temple and inner-court, where was the altar, and where the Israelites worshipped. But the outer-court represents a corrupt society, assuming the name of the church, whose pretentions God will demonstrate to be false, and which he will give up to be trodden down by her enemies. This may be the reason why the angel commissioned to measure the temple, was prohibited to measure the outer-court, because that outer-court was properly no part of the temple.'*

It is not surprising, then, that the apostles infilled so much on brotherly-love. Every ordinance they delivered is calculated to promote it; and where love was not promoted, the end of the ordinance was not obtained. How different were these societies from the world! There, men live in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another, yet are kept together by self-interest and temporal ties. In the apostolic churches, love to Christ cemented them together, and when this was wanting, no substitute was recommended. Human governments only aim at regulating the conduit. The wholesome laws under which we live

* Theological Dissertations, p. 94. Lond, 1765.

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in this country, secure our lives and properties in the midst of wickedness. The laws delivered to the churches respected the state of their hearts as well as their external conduct; and if the hearts of the members were not right, the outward restraints were too feeble to prevent open rebellion against Christ. He is not so careful about the appearance as the reality; and the freedom he gives his people in their associated character, is calculated to prove a stumbling-block to wicked men, and to make them manifest.

Under every human government men must part with a portion of their natural freedom, which is well exchanged for the security and the blessings it provides. This is not the case in the churches of the saints. The members neither become subject, strictly speaking, to any individual, nor to the whole body of their brethren. The apostles warned and exhorted them to stand fast in the glorious liberty wherewith Christ had made them free; to remember one was their master, even Christ; to him alone they are accountable; to his laws alone they are subject. Their brethren do not become the lords of their consciences; while they are all to be clothed with humility, to esteem others better than themselves, yea, all to be subject one to another—they are on no account to deviate from what appears to themselves to be duty: "Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin." As to pny thing in itself indifferent, neither opposite to the spirit of the gospel, nor to any precept

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delivered by the apostles, such as the eating of meats in the first churches, there they are their own matters, and in such a case, although a thing be lawful, it may not be expedient. They must not therefore please themselves; but if they are prevented from attending to any thing which appears to them to be their duty, either by the opinion of an individual or of a church, they are evidently seeking to please men, and are noylonger the servants of Christ.

Men void of religion may frame a civil government. They may choose such an one as they think best; but the apostles taught believers to consider themselves the servants of Jesus. As such they entered a church, and consequently no laws in that church must interfere with their allegiance to him. To prevent this, the apostles delivered laws which they were to obey in their associated state, and these were neither to be increased, nor diminished, nor changed.

If any number of people form a voluntary society, they may exclude or receive whom they please; but such were not the instructions of the apostles to the churches. If any one desired to join them, they were to inquire whether Christ had received him? and if so, to give him the right hand of fellowship—for church-fellowship is an ordinance for *all* his people. Did it appear by the conduct of a member that they had been mistaken; that he was not living in subjection to

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the authority of Christ, the church was then, and then only, to exclude him.

A member of the apostolic churches might withdraw when he pleased; he might thus cast off the authority of Christ: all that his brethren could do, was to warn him of the consequences; and if he persisted, to behave towards him as a heathen man and a publican. It is evident, then, that this connexion, being founded on subjection of mind to Jesus Christ, was capable of being maintained without many regulations which are absolutely necessary in civil society. It is, therefore, no objection to the constitution of the churches of Christ, that it would not answer in civil matters. It was not intended to do so. A form of government such as that of the churches of saints, is not fit for wicked men, nor even for merely moral men, not under the influence of the gospel. The kingdom which the apostles sought to establish, was righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Whatever ordinances tend to promote these, they, under the influence of the Spirit, delivered to the churches; and any addition, however plausible, will have a contrary effect.

Many Christians have grossly erred on this subject. They have been guided in their views of the government of the churches, by their political opinions. No wonder that men of the world have fallen into the same error. 'No bishop, no king,' said King James I. Whatever

form of church-order is adopted on such principles, is equally absurd. That the bishop should govern with unlimited sway, is not more so than that the people should be subjected to the authority of the elders; and that the people should govern themselves, is fully as opposite as either to the apostolic institutions. Christians are subjects of a king. Jesus has, by his apostles, delivered the laws by which his subjects shall be governed, and informed us how these laws are to be administered. The more we attend to his will, the more of his countenance and approbation may we expect to receive.

Section II.

In opposition to the view given of the word "church," some have endeavoured to show, that by a church in the New Testament is sometimes meant the elders, whom they call the representatives of the whole body; but this is not only completely void of proof, but directly contrary both to the letter and spirit of the passages where the word occurs. We find the people called the church, exclusive of the elders, Acts 15: 22. but never are the elders so denoted without the people.

'One of the natural consequences,' says Dr Campbell, 'of all those great distinctions of

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the sacred order was, that they made way for another, by which the ministers of religion, in a manner, appropriated the term church to themselves. I have had occasion, in these lectures, to lay before you the only undoubted acceptations wherein I find the word εκκλησια employed in the New Testament, and have observed, that when applied to the disciples of Christ, it always denotes either the whole Christian community, or all those of a particular congregation, under the guidance of their own pastors. I have also pointed out one deviation from the latter of these original meanings, naturally consequent on the change that in a few centuries ensued, when the bishop, instead of the oversight of one congregation, had the superintendancy of many congregations; that is, when his one congregation, on account of the increase of proselytes, was split into several, and when the habit of applying the word in the singular number to the whole of a bishop's charge, prevailed over strict propriety, and the primitive use of the term. This prepared men for a still farther extension of the name to all the congregations of a province under the same metropolitan, and afterwards to all those of a civil diocese under the same patriarch or exarch.

'I now intend to point out another still more remarkable deviation; a deviation not from the latter, as those now mentioned were, but from the former of the two primitive senses, whereby

the word is applied to the Christian commonwealth. Then it means, as is pretended, either the church collective, that is, the whole community of Christians, or the church representative, that is, say some, the whole clerical orders, say others, the church judicatories, especially the supreme. And this, I acknowledge, is a distinction that is favoured not only by those of the Romish communion, but by most sects of Protestants also. To many, however, and I acknowledge myself one of the number, it is manifest, that it is no less a novelty than the former, having no foundation in the scriptural usage.

'The Hebrew word קהל exactly corresponds to the Greek εκκλησια, and is commonly rendered by it in the septuagint, the only Greek translation of the Old Testament in use in the days of our Saviour. Its idiom and phraseology was consequently become the standard, in all matters that concerned religion, to all the Jewish writers who used the Greek language, and were commonly distinguished by the name of Hellenists. From them the term was originally borrowed by the penmen of the New Testament. From their manner of using it, therefore, the general meanings of the word are to be sought. But though the phrases כל קהל ישראל in Hebrew, and πασα ἡ εκκλησια Ισραελ in Greek, the whole church of Israel, do frequently occur in the Old Testament, there is not a single passage in which they are not confessedly equivalent to the phrases נוי

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ישראל כל־ת and παν το εθνος Ισραηλ, all the nation of Israel. The same may be said of the phrases להל אלחים and עם אלחים, ἡ εκκλησια θεου and ̓ λαος θεου, the church of God and the people of God. A distinction between these would have been pronounced by them inconceivable, as being a distinction between the church and its constituent members. In the Latin translation called the Vulgate, the date of which, or a great part of which, if I mistake not, is about the beginning of the fifth century, the Greek word is commonly retained, having been long before naturalized among Christians. Accordingly they rendered those phrases in the Old Testament, *omnis ecclesia Israel* and *ecclesia Dei*.

'I know not for what reason our English translators have never admitted the word *church* into their version of the Old Testament, notwithstanding the frequent use they have made of it in their translation of the New. They have always rendered the Hebrew word above mentioned by the English words, congregation, assembly, or some synonymous term. I do not mean to say, that in so doing they have mis-translated the word. Either of these English names is, perhaps, as well adapted to express the sense of the Hebrew, as the appellatives of one language commonly are to convey the ideas suggested by those of another. But these English words were altogether as fit for expsessing the fcife of the word εκκλησια in the New Testament, as of the word קהל in the

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Old; the former being the term by which the latter had been rendered almost uniformly in the septuagint, and which had been employed as equivalent by all the Hellenist Jews. What I blame, therefore, in our translators, is the want of uniformity. They ought constantly to have rendered the original expression, either *church* in the Old Testament, or *congregation* in the New. Terms so perfectly coincident in signification, as those Hebrew and Greek names are, ought to have been translated by the same English word. There is one advantage at least resulting from such an attention to uniformity, which is this, that if the application of the word should, in a few passages, be dubious, a comparison with the other passages wherein it occurs, often serves entirely to remove the doubt. They are the more inexcuseable in regard to the present instance, that they do not refuse the title of church to the Israelitish commonwealth, when an occasion of giving it occurs in the New Testament, though they would take no occasion in the Old. Thus they have rendered the words of Stephen, who says, speaking of Moses, Acts 7:38. "This is he that was in the church in the wilderness." Ὁυτος εστιν ᾿ γενομενος εν τη εκκλησια εν τη ερημω.

'But in the use neither of the Greek word in the New Testament, nor of the correspondent Hebrew word in the Old, do we find a vestige of an application of the term to a smaller part of the community, their governors, pastors, or priests, for

instance, as representing the whole. The only passage, as far as I can learn, that has been, with any appearance of plausibility, alleged for this purpose, is Matt. 18:17. where our Lord, in the directions he gives for removing offences between brethren, enjoins the party offended, after repeated admonitions in a more private manner have proved ineffectual, to relate the whole to the church, ειπε τη εκκλησια; and it is added, "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen and a publican." Now I ask, by what rule of sound criticism can we arbitrarily impose here on the word *church,* the signification of church representative, a signification which we do not find it bears in one other passage of Scripture? To affirm, without proof, that this is the sense of it here, is taking for granted the very point in question.

'But we have more than merely negative evidence that the meaning of the word is here, as in other places, no more than congregation, and that the term ought to have been rendered so. Let it be observed, that our Lord gave these directions during the subsistence of the Mosaic establishment; and if we believe that he spoke intelligibly, or with a view to be understood, we must believe also, that he used the word in an acceptation with which the hearers were acquainted. Dodwell himself saw the propriety of this rule of interpreting, when he said,* 'It very much con-

'* Distinction between Soul and Spirit, &c. § 7.

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firms me in my reasonings, when I find an interpretation of the Scriptures not only agreeable to the words of the Scriptures, but agreeable also to the notions and significations of words then received. For that sense which was most likely to be then understood was, in all likelihood, the true sense intended by the Holy Ghost himself. Otherwise there could be no security that his true sense could be conveyed to future ages, if they had been themselves mistaken in it, to whose understanding the Holy Ghost was then particularly concerned to accommodate himself.' Now all the then known acceptations, as I showed before, of the name εκκλησια, were these two, the whole Jewish people, and a particular congregation. The scope of the place sufficiently shows it could not be the former of these senses, it must therefore be the latter. What further confirms this interpretation is, that the Jews were accustomed to call those assemblies which met together for worship in the same synagogue by this appellation, and had, if we may believe some learned men conversant in Jewish antiquities, a rule of procedure similar to that here recommended, which our Lord adopted from the synagogue, and tranfplanted into his church.

'Another collateral and corroborative evidence, that by εκκλησια is here meant not a representative body, but the whole of a particular congregation, is the actual usage of the church for the first three hundred years. I had occasion for—

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merly to remark, that as far down as Cyprian's time, which was the middle of the third century, when the power of the people was in the decline, it continued to be the practice, that nothing in matters of scandal and censure could be concluded without the consent and approval of the congregation. And this, as it appears to have been pretty uniform, and to have subsisted from the beginning, is, in my opinion, the best commentary which we, at this distance, can obtain on the passage.

'If any impartial hearer is not satisfied on this point, I would recommend it to him, without the aid of any commentator on either fide of the question, but with the help of proper concordances, attentively to search the Scriptures. Let him examine every passage in the New Testament wherein the word we render church is to be found; let him canvass in the writings of the Old Testament every sentence wherein the correspondent word occurs; let him add to these the apocryphal books received by the Romanists, which, as they were either originally written, or translated by Hellenists, amongst whom the term εκκλησια was in frequent use, must be of some authority in ascertaining the Jewish acceptation of the word; and if he find a single passage wherein it clearly means either the priesthood, or the rulers of the nation, or any thing that can be called a church representative, let him fairly admit the distinction as scriptural and proper. Otherwise he cannot

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admit it, in a consistency with any just rule of interpretation.

'I observed, in a preceding lecture, that the term εκκλησια is, in some passages, applied to the people, exclusively of the pastors. The same was remarked of the word κληρος, (not as though these terms did not properly comprehend both, but because, in collectives, the name of a whole is often given to a great majority) but I have not discovered one passage wherein either εκκλησια or κληρος, is applied to the pastors exclusively of the people. The notion, therefore, of a church representative, how commonly soever it has been received, is a mere usurper of later date. And it has fared here as it sometimes does in cases of usurpation, the original proprietor comes, though gradually, to be at length totally dispossessed. Should any man now talk of the powers of the church, and of the rights of churchmen, would the hearers apprehend, that he meant the powers of a Christian congregation, or the rights of all who are members of the Christian community? And if they should come to learn that this is his meaning, would they not be apt to say, 'It is pity that this man, before he attempts to speak on these subjects, does not learn to speak intelligibly, by conforming to the current use of the language?' It is therefore not without reason that I affirm, that the more modern acceptation, though an intruder, has jollied out the rightful and primitive one almoil entirely. But as every man,

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who would be understood, is under a necessity of employing words according to the general use of the time present,

> Quem penes arbitrium est, et jus, et norma loquendi;

when I employ, for the future, any of the words affected by this remark, I am always, unless when the connection indicates the contrary, to be understood as using them in the sense in which they are now commonly received. Only by the deduction that has been given of the origin of the change, we may perceive, that from what is said in relation to the church in Scripture, nothing can justly be concluded in support of church authority, or the privileges of church-men, in the sense which these terms generally have at present.'*

The Roman Catholics maintain, that by *the church* is meant the Pope,† and consider the

* Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, vol. i. p 319, –328.

† 'Those passages wherein Christ: seems to give authority to the church, as that wherein he says, that it is the *pillar and basis of the truth,* and that other, Let him who *will not hear the church be to thee as a heathen and a publican,* are all to be understood of its head, which is the Pope.' See the speech of Father Lainez at the Council of Trent, *apud* Campbell Eccl. Hist. vol. ii. p. 169.

'With regard to *the church,* he (Wickliff) was not fond of applying the words *church* and *churchmen* merely to the clergy. As these were often men of bad lives, he thought such application a vile prostitution of these sacred names. Besides, it had bad influence, he thought, upon the laity, seeming to exclude them from the pale of Christ's church, and to give them a dispo-

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precept, "If he will not hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican," to imply the submission which is to be paid to his authority, on pain of excommunication.

While the importance of the office of an elder is much insisted upon in Scripture, there is not the smallest countenance given to any authority over the people, similar to that which the clergy, as they are called, have usurped. The elders are, as we shall see, to put the laws of Christ in execution, but only with consent, and in presence of the church.

The principal objection against the word *church* always denoting, in the New Testament, a single congregation, is drawn from the account in Scripture of the church at Jerusalem. Three thousand persons were converted on the day ot Pentecost, and soon after many more, Acts 2:41, 47, 4:4, 5:14. How could such numbers meet in one congregation?

We are but imperfectly acquainted with the state of things at Jerusalem, The temple-worship was completely different from any thing among us. Vast crowds of Jews came up to the great feasts from every part of Judæa and the adjacent countries. We have no reason to suppose that the

sition for licentious practice. If they were not of Christ's *church,* they were not under Christ's laws. He would never, therefore, have any idea fixed to the word *church,* but that of the whole body of Christians.'—Gilpin's Life of Wickliff, page 59, Lond, 1766.

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thousands who believed were all fixed inhabitants of Jerusalem. Although, doubtless, those who were converted would incline to continue with the apostles, yet we cannot suppose that they could with propriety remain there, while their families and occupations demanded their presence at their own abodes. They would return, and tell what great things God had done for them, and thus the foundation of new churches would be laid. Arguments arising from supposed difficulties, are always to be received with caution, for there may be circumstances, in affairs so remote, of which we are ignorant, which, if known, would make all plain.

We learn from Josephus, that the multitude who assembled in the temple was immense. He says, (Jewish War, Book vi. chap. 9.) that Cestius, under Nero, directed the high priests to take the number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the time of the passover. They found the sacrifices to be 256,500, which, allowing ten persons to each victim (the ordinary number), amounts to 2,565,000 persons, pure according to the rites of the law, deducting those who by uncleannesses could not partake at this feast. He elsewhere estimates the number of those who assembled at the feast of the passover at 3,000,000,* a number to which the usual resident inhabitants bore no proportion. The disciples at Jerusalem continued to join in the temple-worship, Acts 3:1.

* Book ii. chap. 14.

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and of course might have been esteemed a new sect of Jews. We know* that heathen writers, as Suetonius and Tacitus, thought them such. This may have been the case, and where an objection is brought from an alleged impossibility, it is sufficient to show how the accounts may be reconciled. There are difficulties in reconciling the various accounts of our Lord's appearances after his resurredtion; but every Christian believes they perfectly harmonize, although, from the conciseness of the narrative, he may not be able to point out the precise order of events. In answering the cavils of infidels on this subject, it has been thought sufficient to show how the various accounts may be made to agree, without affirming that an exact account is given of the matter.†

If, then, from the state of the Jewish worship, the Christians may probably have all met together in the temple, this ought to be deemed a sufficient answer to an argument founded entirely on the supposed difficulty of the case. Besides, it is surely very improper to allege any difficulties whatever, in opposition to express divine testimony. We have not a hint in Scripture, of the church of Jerusalem being divided into separate congregations. It is, on the contrary, uniformly spoken of as one congregation, in the following words of the Holy Ghost. "The same day were

* Claudius, cap. 25. Annal. lib. xv. cap. 44.
† See Scott's Answer to Paine.

added unto them above three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellow ship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," Acts 2:41–42. "And all that believed were together," ver. 44. "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple," ver. 46. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved," ver. 47. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul," Acts 4: 31–32. "And they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.* And of the rest durst no man join himself to them; but the people magnified them," Acts 5:12–13. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not meet that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, whom we may appoint over this business.

* We are here expressly informed, that they all assembled in Solomon's porch. To this it has been objected, that the place was not sufficiently large to hold so many, as is evident from the dimensions of the porch built by him, 1 Chron. 3:4. But it no where appears that this porch was the same place wkich went by the name of Solomon in our Lord's time. We are sure that this place was capable of containing a great multitude. Under a sermon preached there, at lead two thousand were converted, Acts 3:11. 4:4,

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And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, See. whom they set before the apostles," Acts 6:1, 2, 3. 5, 6. "The day following, Paul went in with us to James; and all the elders were present. And they said unto him, The multitude mud needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come," Acts xxi. 18. 22. "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying—And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me. Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas," Acts 15:4, 5, 6. 12, 13. 22. Let any one judge what is the plain and obvious import if these passages. Do they not all express or imply, that the believers at Jerusalem were one undivided body, assembling in one place for the worship of God? By whatever rule of interpretation this is denied, the most important facts and doctrines of the gospel may be set aside.

From the view we have taken of the constitution of the apostolic churches, it appears, that although embarked in the same cause, they must have been completely independent of each other,

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Jesus has not even permitted an individual to transfer to a church the subjection which is only due to himself. Far less can we suppose, that he has given one church, or churches, dominion over others. If the distinttion stated between the objects of a church, and those of any civil association be attended to, it will be evident that such an order of things would greatly retard, instead of promoting the end which Christ had in view in appointing churches. This is incompatible with the exercise of human authority or coercion. Here is an internal argument which is sufficient to settle the dispute.

But can any thing be found in Scripture to countenance the idea of the dependence of congregations of saints upon one another? In vain do we look for it. Paul did not order the churches of Achaia to correct the abuses of the church of Corinth, although it was situated in that region. He wrote to the church itself, which is expressly said to have been a congregation of saints coming together into *one* place to observe the ordinances of Christ, 1 Cor. 11:20. If regard to the authority of Christ did not lead them to correct abuses, they were incorrigible. No other authority could be of any avail. It would then have been evident that they had departed from the faith, and the only means of recovering them would have been to have again preached the gospel to them as unbelievers.

But in confluence of the alliance of what has

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been called the church and the state, and the maxims of the latter being applied to the former, Christians have connected the idea of disorder with the want of compulsory power, and have sought for some warrant in Seripture for the establishment of spiritual courts; that is, courts exactly resembling civil judicatories, to decide on the concerns of a spiritual kingdom, and to enforce obedience to their decrees by authority. On the foundation of the account given us, Acts 15. of a meeting of the church of Jerusalem, with the apostles and elders, a passage wholly inapplicable to the purpose, has been built the theory of synods and councils, composed of the representatives of various churches, to settle the order of the churches within their bounds.*

According to Presbyterians, this was an assembly, or, in their language, a synod composed of the representatives of different churches. Nay, they point out to us some of the members. The late worthy Mr Brown of Haddington thus paraphrases Paul's words: "But neither Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised," Gal. 2:3.* But to manifest how stedfastly I adhered to my principles relative to the freedom of the gospel state, and how far I was from giving the lead countenance to the supposed necessity of observing the law of Moses as

* See this subject fully considered in Reasons of Separation from the Established Church, by Mr Innes, and in an Exposition of Acts 15. by Mr Ewing.

a condition of justification before God, Titus, who was a Gentile, was admitted as a minister of Christ, and a member of the synod, without being circumcised.'

If we attend to the account given of the meeting at Jerusalem, it seems a very simple narrative, penned for an obvious and important purpose, and giving no sanction either to synod or council. We learn from Acts 13. 14. that Paul and Barnabas being called by the Holy Ghost to go upon a mission, were recommended to the grace of God by the church at Antioch, by prayer, falling, and laying on of hands. Having fulfilled the work, they returned; and having assembled the church, they rehearsed all which God had done with them, and especially how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. Soon after this, certain Jews came from Jerusalem, who informed the Gentile Christians at Antioch, that except they were circumcised, and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved. Paul and Barnabas, who had been employed and qualified to declare to the Gentiles the whole counsel of God, had no small dissension and disputation with them, but still they maintained their error. What was to be done? If the Jewiih teachers were right, the Gentile converts at Antioch were yet in their sins. It was agreed on all hands, that the word of the Lord had sounded out from Jerusalem. The apostles were still there, who were the chosen witnesses of the death and re-

surrection of Christ, Acts 10:41. to whom, in a particular manner, the promise of the Spirit was given to guide them into all the truth, John 16: 13.; to whom, then, could they so properly apply?

It is true, Paul was not inferior to the chief of the apostles, although he had not been called to attend our Lord while he was upon earth. He had learned the gospel, and the whole will and counsel of God, by the immediate revelation of Jesus Christ, but he was the apostle of the Gentiles, and but little known to the brethren in Judæa. He was looked upon with a jealous eye by many of his countrymen, who were not disposed to acquiesce in his decision. He had already delivered his sentiments, and it was of much importance that it should be fully proved that he and the other apostles were guided by the same Spirit, Gal. 2:6, 7, 8. especially as circumcision was practised by Christians at Jerusalem. Accordingly the church at Antioch determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other brethren, should go up to Jerusalem, that the dispute might be decided.

On their arrival, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders. These came together to consider the question of the necessity of circumcision to salvation. After much disputing,* (similar to what had formerly

* This disputing could not be amongst the apostles, who, in ordering the affairs of the church, were under the infallible di-

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taken place at Antioch) between Paul and Barnabas and the Jewish brethren, Peter and James delivered their opinion. This was adopted unanimously, ver. 22. and letters were written in the name of the apostles, the elders, and the whole church, declaring, not merely the opinion of a church that the Gentiles should not be circumcised, but the decree and determination of the Holy Ghost.* Thus was the question finally settled, and the sentence inserted as a part of that Scripture which cannot be broken. Circumcision was a solemn ordinance of God, and it was therefore proper that it, as well as the law of Moses, should thus publicly be declared to be no longer necessary for the acceptable worshippers of Jehovah. Had there not been a revelation from God on this subject, it is more than probable that difference of practice, as to circumcision, might have

rection of the Holy Ghost, and never differed in their doctrine; and yet it has been alleged to be similar to the debates which take place in church courts.

* The expression, *it seemed good to the Holy Ghost,* does not appear to refer to the Spirit as guiding the apostles, but to the testnnony quoted by James from the word of God, concerning the Gentiles being received into the church. At every period Gentiles might be circumcised and incorporated with Israel; but their being still spoken of by the Holy Ghost as Gentiles, while the name of God was called upon them, implied that they were true worshippers of God, and yet not incorporated into the Jewish church. If we apply the expression, however, to the Spirit by which the apostles were directed, it will follow, that no synod of uninspired men can claim this as a precedent for their decrees being received.

continued among Christians to this day; but, by this decision, the Jews were gradually prepared for laying it aside.

It is evident, then, that this meeting bears no resemblance to a modern synod, composed of representatives from different parishes or congregations, assembling for the purpose of hearing appeals on cases of discipline, as well as on other things, and by their authority settling any points of difference which may have arisen in these. Paul and others were there from Antioch, not as judges, but to obtain the decision of the apostles. Indeed this council, as some call it, would rather authorize appeals to a particular church, an argument which has not escaped the church of Rome,*

* Eckius, the famous adversary of Luther, used the very same weapons against that Reformer, which Presbyterians employ against congregational government 'The apostles and elders convened,' says he. 'The Gentiles did not oppose themselves to the apostles, in like manner as Luther to the councils, saying, 'By what authority—By what Scripture do ye this? Why do ye deprive us of the liberty conferred on us by Christ?' For although during the deliberation (i.e. this recorded in Acts 15.) they cited that passage in the 9th chapter of Amos, yet respecting the three things prohibited they brought in nothing, and also respecting the decision they adduced no passage of Scripture—At Antioch they received the things concluded on at Jerusalem. but Luther rejects the things concluded on at Rome. It appears, then, at the time, that a council had power to determine that some things were necessary which were not simply necessary for faith. Why should not the same power abide in the church, since necessity always requires it?'—See a very scarce and curious book, entitled, 'Enchiridion Locorum Communium adversus Lutherum et alios Hostes Ecclesiae,' Paris, 1572. p. 13.—It

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and thus gives a fairer sanction to Popery than to Presbytery.

It may appear strange, that if a revelation was to be given respecting this matter, the whole church should be joined in the decree of the apostles, or that they and their elders, as well as the apostles, should be called together to consult. But by this means a great end was gained. The church heard all that could be said upon the subject, tosether with the decision of the chosen witnesses and ambassadors of Christ, and thus, no doubt, would be disposed the more readily to embrace uncircumcised Gentiles as brethren in Christ.

The apostles well knew their superiority over others in the church, and, on proper occasions, boldly asserted it; but they avoided this without necessity. It was their delight not to command out to entreat, Phil. 8–9.; and hence Peter, when addressing elders, prefers the title of elder, that he might not seem to assume superiority, 1 Pet, 5:1. For the same reason they added in the decree, *the elders and the church,* just as Paul in his epistles frequently joins some of his brethren to himself; but no one supposes that this impeaches the authority of the epistle, or that it implies Timothy, Sosthenes, or the brethren who were with him, Gal. 1:2. to have been inspired.

would be easy to quote from this book, on every part of the argument, reasonings of perfectly similar tendency with those which are every day employed in defence of exclusive clerical authority in national churches.

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Although much has been said on this passage of Scripture, as sanctioning appeals to synods, &c. few persons at present attempt to maintain it. Indeed the independency of the first churches is generally admitted by the most candid and able commentators, and by the writers of ecclesiastical history. 'The churches in those early times,' says Mosheim, 'were entirely independent, none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each one governed by its own rulers and its own laws. For though the churches founded by the apostles had this particular deference shown them, that they were consulted in difficult and doubtful cases, yet they had no juridical authority, no sort of supremacy over the others, nor the least right to enact laws for them. Nothing, on the contrary, is more evident, than the perfect equality that reigned among the primitive churches; nor does there ever appear in this first century, the smallest trace of that association of provincial churches, from which *councils* and *metropolitans* derive their origin. It was only in the second century that the custom of holding councils commenced in Greece, from whence it soon spread through the other provinces.——The meeting of the church of Jerusalem mentioned in the xvth chapter of the Acts, is commonly considered as the first *Christian council.* But this notion arises from a manifest abuse of the word *council.* That meeting was only of one church, and if such a meeting be called a *council,* it will follow that

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there were innumerable councils in the primitive times. But every one knows, that a *council* is an assembly of deputies or commissioners sent from several churches associated by certain bonds in a general body, and therefore the supposition above mentioned falls to the ground.*

If we cannot find the divine right of classical presbytery, synods, &c. in Acts 15. in vain shall we look, for it elsewhere in the word of God. The common defence of this system in these days is, that we are not bound to follow the example of the apostolic churches, but are left, in a great measure, to our own discretion in these matters. The late Dr Hardy, a minister of the church of Scotland, and Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the University of Edinburgh, an authorised instructor of those training for the ministry, scrupled not publicly, in his lectures, to treat with ridicule the idea of the order of *that* church being prescribed in Scripture.†

Some have been apprehensive that the independency of the churches must prevent their union

* Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, cent. I. part. ii. chap. 2. See also on this subject, the quotations from Mosheim, 'De Rebus Christianorum ante Constantinum,' at the end of Mr Ewing's Exposition before referred to.

† He was in the use of telling his students, that synod sermons used formerly to be divided into four heads, proving the divine right, 1. of kirk sessions—2. of presbyteries—3. of synods—4. of general assemblies.—What a pity, said he, that the preachers should have forgot to prove the divine right of the committees of overtures and bills!!

and co-operation. Union of churches is highly important, and must take place in as far as religion prospers among them. If they are guided by the word of God, they will have the same end in view, and consequently must be united. But in order to union in religion being beneficial, it must be voluntary. As love is the perfect and only bond by which the members of a church are connected, this is sufficient for uniting different churches. Love alone can produce useful co-operation amongst them. Considering the relation in which they stand to each other, it is highly important that by mutual good offices they should cultivate brotherly love. This may be done by their giving and receiving advice; by their praying for each other, especially when any thing difficult or important occurs; by their joining to promote the spread of the gospel; by their sending messengers to each other, as we find the apostolic churches did, 2 Cor. 8:23.; by their communicating to each others necessities, and by many things similar. Such correspondence is calculated to have the happiest effects, while it allows the most perfect liberty and independence to each church.

Stimulated by mutual love, the first churches co-operated in relieving the poor saints at Jerusalem, and the same principle will lead the churches of Christ to co-operate in whatever tends to promote the Redeemer's will and glory. The influence of human authority, whether veiled in a

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Pope, a Patriarch, a bench of Bishops, or a General Assembly of clergymen, is but a poor substitute for this. Even voluntary associations to regulate the order of churches in a certain district are unscriptural. One church may advise another as well as an individual may advise an individual, but any attempt to influence by authority the order of any church, is a departure from Scripture, and never can be attended with good effects.

It may be alleged, that if a church has not some body of men to controul it, they will be apt to act improperly and partially. All men are liable to err, and every church needs the constant care of the great Shepherd. But this care he ever exercises. He has promised to be in the midst of them when met in his name. If we view a church merely like other societies, they may be considered to be equally prone to err, and we may imagine it might be an advantage to have unprejudiced persons to appeal to; but as God promised to Israel of old a special superintendance, so has Jesus to his churches. It was never intended that they should go on without it, and this is calculated to keep up a spirit of dependence on himself, without which no church can prosper.—We have thus traced from Scripture the constitution of the apostolic churches. This is so plainly delineated in the word of God, that many of the best informed men in churches of an opposite description condemn their own practice, by

freely admitting the view which has been here given.

We may learn, from what has been said, the nature of a true church of Christ, respecting which there have been many disputes. It is a society formed for the same purpose as the churches planted by the apostles, and whose constitution is the same with theirs. Deviation from these renders a society unworthy of the name. The gospel may be preached, and some other ordinances administered, as baptism and the Lord's supper, and still a religious assembly where this takes place, and in which there may be many Christians, may not be a church of Christ.

Fellowship-meetings, which have long existed in this country, more nearly resemble churches of Christ than many great bodies which have assumed the name. These are voluntary associations for mutual edification. They are composed only of such as appear to one another to be saints. A certain discipline is maintained in them, and they only need to observe other ordinances to render them complete. It is worthy of observation, that the members of many such meetings would on no account admit to this private fellowship the great body of those whom they avouch to be brethren, by joining with them in showing forth the Lord's death.

We may here observe how much the Lord has countenanced what came nearest his own ordinance. Perhaps the edification of Christians has

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been more promoted by these meetings, than by any other means which those connected with them have enjoyed; and the comfort which believers have there enjoyed, in fellowship together, has prepared the minds of many for coming out of unscriptural churches. It is not to be wondered at, that from the beginning they have been regarded by these churches with a jealous eye. This was the case even in an early and a comparatively pure period of the church of Scotland. 'During their want of faithful ministers, many serious people,' says Mr Brown, 'in Scotland and Ireland, had met together on Sabbaths and other occasions for prayer and spiritual conference. Some, before they were driven from Ireland, had been a little infected with *Brownism* from England, and had inclined to join the Independents in New-England. These brought along with them some of their singularities, which were overlooked on account of their remarkable piety, till an appearance thereof happened in the charge of Henry Guthry of Stirling, afterward worthless bishop of Dunkeld. The laird of Lecky, a man remarkable for knowledge and serious godliness, and who had been a distinguished sufferer under the late bishops, much encouraged fellowship-meetings for prayer and Christian conference. Several of his neighbours, who could not read themselves, or who thought his manner more edifying than their own, attended his family-worship. Some, who probably came as spies,

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alleged, that in prayer he used some expressions not duly honourable to Guthry his minister. Guthry immediately prosecuted Lecky before his presbytery, and got fellowship-meetings condemned as prejudicial to the standing office of the ministry, and got the magistrates to extirpate them from the place. Not satisfied with this, he laboured to have them utterly abolished from the nation; and by collecting and exaggerating reports of their imprudencies, he drew Mr Henderson and Mr Calderwood, who had seen the Brownistical disorders in Holland, and some other leading clergymen, to his side. In the Assembly 1638, he had attempted to foist in a complaint against these meetings. But Messrs J. Livingston, S. Rutherfoord, and D. Dickson, and others, unwilling that many serious saints should be publicly discredited for the imprudence of a few, got the affair kept from any public hearing; and it was agreed that Guthry should preach up the duty of family-worship, upon which he said these meetings encroached, and that the eminently pious Messrs Blair, Livingston, and M'Lellan, who befriended such societies, should preach against night-meetings, and the abuses complained of. Their soft and Christian methods of correcting or preventing such abuses not pleasing Guthry, who hated to see or hear of any others more serious than himself, he continued to exclaim against these meetings in general. To quench this flame of contention, Messrs Henderson and Borthwick

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upon the one side, and Dickson and Blair upon the other, held a solemn conference on the point. Henderson drew up a paper of regulations or caveats for such meetings, bearing, That the members should be few, and such as were proper to meet together; that the meetings should not interfere with public or family-worship, or relative duties, nor be held in the night; that they should be occasional, and no wise tending to separate the members from the rest of the congregation; that no impertinent questions, nor uncharitable judging of others should be allowed in them; that if any members in them had any objection against the common form of public worship, (as *bowing* in the pulpit, and singing the *Gloria Patri*), they should discreetly lay them before the persons concerned; and finally, that all things relative to them should be conducted with holiness, prudence, humility, and charity. This gave general satisfaction. But Guthry and his assistants, pretending that caveats brought in bishops, pushed the matter into this northern assembly, in which they expected their friends to be strongest. Guthry poured forth torrents of accusation against the absent Lecky, and the society meetings. Simson of Bathgate seconded him; and in the most outrageous manner upbraided Rutherfoord, Livingston, and M'Lellan, as encouragers of them. Supported by the Earl of Seaforth, and many of the northern clergy, Guthry and his faclion thought to have carried an

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act for the utter suppression of them. But Dickson, Baillie, Rutherford, and others, so warmly opposed them, that they could only get it enacted, That people should observe family-worship with the members of the family alone; that reading of prayers is lawful, where none can pray extempore; that none but preachers shall explain Scripture; and that no innovation relative to the time, matter, or manner of religious worship, or the number or quality of joiners in it, be introduced without allowance from the Assembly.'*

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO COMPOSED THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

SECTION I.

It was imposlible to consider the constitution of the apostolic churches, without, in some measure, anticipating our present subject. What was said in the former chapter, clearly

* History of the Church of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 181,–183. by the late Mr Brown of Haddington. Glasg. 1784.

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shows of what kind of persons the apostolic churches were composed. If the intention of Jesus in appointing that churches should be collected, was to separate between his own people and the rest of the world, it follows, that the members ought to be such as are his disciples. The manner in which they are to be governed, proves this with equal certainty. This is the worst possible for any society who are not his disciples. It leaves room for whispering, swellings, tumults, and divisions, and does not commit sufficient power to any individual, or to the church, to suppress these in persons who are not under the influence of the authority of Christ. It is well adapted, and sufficiently strong to curb the remaining corruption of real Christians; but never being intended for worldly men, the only direction a church has respecling such, or those who in their manners resemble them, and will-not listen to admonition, is to put them away.

We formerly quoted the vision contained in the last chapters of Ezekiei's prophecies, and observed, that although we do not fully understand it, this must refer to the times of the gospel. While there is a constant allusion to the temple-worship, there are many things entirely different from, nay opposite to this. Of this description is the following: "And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord, O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, in that ye have brought into my sanc-

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tuary strangers uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant, because of all your abominations. And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things; but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves. Thus saith the Lord God, No stranger uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel," Ezek. 44:6, 7, 8, 9. On this passage Mr Scott most justly observes, 'The introduction of strangers that had not been circumcised, to eat of the peace-offerings and oblations, or even to eat the fat and the blood, of which none ought to have eaten, would have been a gross violation of the Mosaic law. But the uncircumcised *in heart,* as well as in flesh, are here mentioned; and there was no law to exclude unregenerate persons, who were circumcised, and ritually clean, from the ordinances of the temple: so that this must denote a different constitution; and it seems to refer to the prostitution of the Christian sacraments, by admitting ungodly persons to them, who come from secular motives, or in hypocrisy, to partake of them; and to the admission of such persons into the ministry, as seek nothing but the emolument; which things are the scandal, and threaten the ruin of the Protestant churches, as well as others. Thus God's covenant is broken, and its

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seals, and the most sacred institutions of Christianity, are prostituted, secularized, and abused; the charge of the most holy things is neglected, and keepers are placed over the charge of God in the sanctuary, to please the humours, to flatter the pride, or to subserve the lusts of men. Such, abuses will be terminated when this prophecy shall be fulfilled.' In his practical observations on the same passage, he says, 'Then the glory of the Lord filleth his sanctuary, and his people adore him with humble gratitude; and we should carefully meditate on these goings of our God and King, and hearken to all that he says to us concerning the ordinances and laws of his house; and we should mark well the entrance into his courts, and all the goings out of them. Thus we shall be able to see how rebelliously even professed Christians have prostituted his sacraments and the sacred ministry, by throwing them open to strangers, enemies, and evidently unregenerate persons, to the disgrace of the gospel, the grief of true believers, the dishonour of God, and the encouragement of wicked men. Alas, they to whom these charges have been committed, have not kept them, but have profaned them for secular interest or carnal affection, to feed hungry relatives, or to enrich or humour ungodly connections. Or men have heaped to themselves flattering teachers after their own lusts; or they have made the seals of God's covenant the passport to preferment. These are gross violations of the cove-

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nant, and great abominations, of which it should suffice all the parties concerned. They have always been the ruin of vital godliness, in proportion as they have prevailed, and, alas, they prevail almost universally.'

These remarks are most just and apposite. The old covenant was written on tables of stone, but God promised a new covenant, to be written on the fleshly tables of the hearts of his people; and those alone are to be acknowledged as members of his churches, who show by their fruits that such is their character.

That the churches planted by the apostles were composed of such as they deemed real believers, will appear by consulting the addresses of the different epistles. "Paul, to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called saints: To the church of God at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints: To the saints which are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus: To the saints in Christ. Jesus which are at Philippi: Peter, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us." &c. &c.

No doubt false brethren unawares crept in among them, Gal. 2:4. It was not necessary that the apostles should be infallible in judging of characters; they might be mistaken. Impressions which appeared to be made by the Spirit of God might wear off. We have Paul's explicit testimony concerning the church of Philippi. It was composed of such in whom the apostle was

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bound to believe that God had begun a good work; and he declares it to be meet for him to think this of *them all,* chap. 1:7.

The same is manifest by the whole tenor of all the other epistles. To adduce all the proofs of this which might be brought, would be to transcribe the whole of them. Every allusion to the manner in which they were collected; every description of the character of the members; every exhortation; every rebuke and warning given them, could only, with propriety, be addressed to believers. They had put off the old man with his deeds, Col. 3:9. were all the children of light and the day, 1 Thess. 5:5. were temples of the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. 6:19. They were to purge out the old leaven, that they might be a new lump unleavened, 1 Cor. 5:7. to beware lest any root of bitterness spring up to trouble them, and thereby many be defiled.* The Lord condemns one church for having some among them that held the doctrine of Balaam, and commends another which could not bear them who were evil, Rev. 2.

In the epistle to the Corinthians we have a very strong testimony for the necessity of purity of communion. The apostle, 1 Cor. 3:9,–17. compares the church of Corinth to a building of which he had laid the foundation; and proceeds to warn those who might succeed him, how they carried up the building, from the consideration of

* Compare Heb. 12:15, 16, 17. with Deut. 29:18.

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the consequences to themselves. Members might be added to the church who were *saved,** and who gave evidence of this: these he represents under the emblem of gold, silver, precious stones; or men destitute of the truth might be received, whom he compares to wood, hay, stubble.† Although the difference might not immediately appear, yet he warns them that the great day would discover how they had acted: "If any man's work abide which he shall build thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, yet he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire," ver. 13–14. Real believers would be the crown of joy and rejoicing to him by whom they were added to the church; but others would not stand the fiery trial, and therefore, although the builder of such, who was himself a Christian, might be saved, yet his work should be burned, and his joy impaired.

Having thus warned those who might succeed him, of the loss they should suffer by adding to the church improper members through inatten-

* Τους σωζομενους, the saved. Compare Acts 2:47. with 1 Cor. 1:18.; the words are the same in both places, but are properly rendered only in the latter place,

† If any one will examine the different emblems here used by the apostle, it will appear that the same are often used in the Old Testament, to distinguish the righteous and the wicked. See Lam. 4:2. Job 23:10. Psal. 66:10. Isa. 54:11, 13 Mal. 3:17. Also, Jer. 5:14. 2 Tim. 2:20. James 1:11. Mat. 4: 1. See Macknight's note on 1 Cor. 3:12, also an illustration of his passage in the Missionary Magazine, vol. vii. pp. 225. 494.

tion, he denounces an awful judgment against such as should wilfully admit worthless materials into the building. "If any man destroy (φθειρες) the temple of God, him shall God destroy," (φθερει), ver. 17.

The defection of the churches of Galatia is afcribed to improper members being retained in communion. "This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you; a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," chap. 5:8–9.; and the Corinthians are also warned, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump, and are solemnly commanded to purge out the old leaven, that they might be a new lump unleavened, 1 Cor. 5:6–7. To purge out the old leaven is to put away the wicked person, ver. 13.

Some have alleged that notoriously wicked persons alone are to be put away, such as the man who lived in incest; but throughout the whole New Testament, we find but two characters held forth, the children of God, and the children of the wicked one. The latter, out of the evil treasure of their heart, must bring forth evil things; and this leaven will not be the less apt to leaven the lump, that it does not break forth into gross crimes which tend to shock common decency. Probably men destitute of real religion, yet outwardly decent, are the most dangerous persons with whom Christians can associate.

We have a striking declaration of the Holy Ghost, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, re-

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specting this. Some among them had said there was no resurrection, 15:12. The apostle establishes, by the very strongest evidence, the resurrection of Christ, and shows that a denial of the resurrection was in fact subverting the gospel. He observes, that nothing but this glorious prospect could support him under his afflictions, and that all he had suffered for the gospel was of no avail, if the dead rise not. He goes on, ver. 33. "Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: *I speak this to your shame.*" Here he condemns them for having among them such as had not the knowledge of God, and assures them, that however plausibly they might impose upon themselves, such persons would injure and pervert those who were otherwise minded. In short, if we have not sufficient proof that the apostolic churches consisted of those, and those alone, who gave evidence of conversion to God, we may despair of attaining certainty of any thing contained in the word of God.

Some have represented the *term saints* used in the epistles, as well as the description of the churches there given, to relate only to their external privileges. Before good men employ such arguments, they should consider where they will lead. In the same way every doctrine of the gospel may be set aside. Baptism with water will become regeneration: the work of the Spirit

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on the heart will only refer to miraculous gifts, and thus every truth of God may be explained away. It is true, that the members of the churches being really saints, depended on the truth of the profession which they made. God alone can judge the heart, but they gave sufficient evidence of their being the disciples of Jesus to produce in the minds of the apostles love for the truth's sake.

Notwithstanding all that the Scripture says, some, however, endeavour to prove that the first churches were not composed of true believers only. It is granted that improper persons crept in unawares; but was ever any one allowed by the apostles to continue, who gave evidence of being destitute of the truth? It has been alleged, that the sins committed in these churches could not have been committed by real Christians, and that the abuses and iniquities among them were greater than at present prevail in national churches. Paul was afraid lest when he came to Corinth he should find in the church debates, strifes, envyings, wrath, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults, and left he should bewail many which had sinned already, and had not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lasciviousness which they had committed, 2 Cor. 12:21. But let the circumstances of the Corinthians be considered. They were just converted from idolatry. The same disposition to comply with the world, which leads too many Christians in this country to spend their

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time in worldly company, to marry those who are not believers, or to go with their friends to a place of worship where the gospel is not preached, would have led them, in those days, to the commission of fornication, or to eat in an idol's temple. These did not affect the good character of men at that period. Fornication was not even considered to be a crime,* and real Christians, by the influence of temptation, might easily be drawn aside to indulge in the revelling to which they had been so long accustomed, when for a moment they let the truth slip out of their minds. Hence the abuses among them, however inexcuseable, must not be judged of by the moral state and opinions of this country. Independent of religion, we are less liable from our habits, and from regard to public decency, to fall into such excesses. It has been properly observed concerning the Hindoos, 'that should those who have appeared to embrace the gospel, or others who may hereafter come forward, prove to be real Christians, they may, notwithstanding, be less amiable characters than are commonly found amongst us. Human character, as cognizable by men, is a

* Socrates, Plato, Demosthenes, and Cicero, with many others, might be appealed to in proof of the promiscuous commerce of the sexes being thought innocent, both among Greeks and Romans. Cicero, in his oration for M. Cælius, says, 'When was this not done? When was it found fault with? When was it not allowed? Can the time be named when this practice, which is now lawful, was not accounted so?' See Dr Leland's Advantages and Necessity of Revelation, vol. ii. 4to. p. 151, 151, &c.

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compound of various materials, and arises from a number of very different causes. The state of morals in a country will have an inconceivable influence in forming the exterior of its inhabitants. That which is reputable and advantageous, is certain to be pursued in a considerable degree, and not a little for these purposes. Christianity has wrought so much in this and in some other nations, that gross lying, theft, robbery, adultery, &c. are in a good degree shamed out of countenance. No man can preserve his reputation, while he openly indulges in these vices. It is not so, however, in Hindostan. Such practices are there so common, that no manner of disgrace attaches to them. This being the case, there is nothing in the state of society to restrain a Hindoo from gross immorality. If he be restrained, it is merely by Christian principle, and the connection he has with Christians; which may not be equal to the same things accompanied, as they are in Europeans, with other things. This seems to have been the case with the Corinthian Christians. Their city was vicious to a proverb, and they were a very unamiable people. They set up men as heads of parties, held communion at idolatrous feasts, connived at fornication, went to law before the unjust, and profaned the Lord's supper to the purposes of sensual indulgence. If such a community were to appear amongst us, we should probably deem them a company of hypocrites, and give them up

as strangers to real religion. Yet Paul did not give them up, but pursued and reclaimed them. And it is worthy of our inquiry, Whether the evenness and regularity of character which we possess, be not greatly owing to adventitious circumstances, rather than to the immediate influence of Christianity? If all that appears amiable in us, but which in reality arises from no higher motives than a regard to our own interest or reputation, were taken out of the scale, and nothing left but the pure effect of Christian principle, we might not be able greatly to outweigh either a Corinthian or a Hindoo.'*

The apostles distinguished between a man being overtaken in a fault, and being a stranger to Christ. To the former all are too liable; but notwithstanding this, all believers are new creatures—they cannot sin as the wicked do, because they are born of God. Sin hath not dominion over those who are under grace. Paul, considering the temptations to which the Corinthian Christians were exposed by dwelling in a city notorious for idolatry and the works of the flesh, used much forbearance, and delayed his visit from time to time, that he might give them space to repent. Having commanded one notorious offender to be put away, he waited to see what effect this example would have on others; but he assures them, that when he came he would not spare, but would

* Preface to vol. ii. of the Periodical Accounts relative to the British Missionary Society, p. 9,–11.

purge the church of such as, not being reclaimed by gentle means, gave reason to believe they were none of Christ's, and that he would even use the miraculous powers which the Lord had conferred on the apostles to punish the disobedient. "Therefore I write these things, (says he) being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction," 2 Cor. 13:10.

The apostle was at this time writing to those whom he judged to be sanctified in Christ Jesus, 1 Cor. 1:2. whom he believed to be called into the fellowship of the Son of God, ver. 9. who were, as he believed, washed, justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God, 1 Cor. 6:11. and whom he expected to be obedient to the solemn injunctions he sent them, in which expectation he was not disappointed, 2 Cor. 7:8, 18. Some among them had fallen into gross sins, perhaps some false brethren had unawares crept in; but there is nothing to lead us to suppose that any were admitted without making a credible profession. That some who set out well drew back, is unquestionable. When these made themselves manifest, they were evidently no longer members of Christ, and consequently could not be suffered to continue in a church which was one body, considing of many members, animated by the Spirit of Christ.

We are expressly informed that a church is

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bound to judge the character and conduct of its members. "What have I," says Paul, "to do to judge them also that are without, do *ye* not judge them that are within?" 1 Cor. 5:12. But does any one seriously believe that the abuses and irregularities of the first churches were recorded in Scripture to sanction similar abuses in after ages 5 Have we ever a hint of improper characters being suffered to continue in a church without marked disapprobation being expressed on this account? and are we to justify our deviations from the laws of Christ, by pleading the example of those against whom he so frequently testifies his displeasure on account of them?

Section II.

It has been observed, that although the theorems of Euclid are universally admitted, if they had any reference to subjects in which the interests and passions of men are concerned, they would undoubtedly have been controverted. It seems imposlible to refill the force of the arguments which prove that the apostolic churches consided of men really converted to God; but many Christians having connected themselves with societies of a complexion entirely different from the primitive churches, have used much ingenuity to justify themselves, by attempting to prove, as

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far as they are able, the low state of religion in-
the apostolic churches.

What is said by the apostles Peter and Jude. concerning ungodly and impure professors, has been alleged to prove the mixture of characters in these churches. In every age there have been men professing religion, who were enemies to the cross of Christ. In regard to such we have sufficient directions, 1 Cor. 5:11. and Timothy is commanded to *turn away* from such, although they had a form of godliness, 2 Epist. 3:5. Do Peter and Jude contradict Paul? Did they address churches consisting of such characters? or, do they not mention the characters of these wicked men, to guard the churches against them? Why did they call them spots,* ver. 12. when they feasted with them, if not to lead them to look diligently to the characters of those with whom they associated? But it appears from the epistle of Jude, that these men had gone out from the churches of Christ. They could not, it seems, endure the wholesome distipline established by the apostles. "These are they who separate themselves, sensual, (ψυχικοι, *natural men*) having not the Spirit," Jude 19.

The state of the churches in Asia Minor, Rev.

* σπιλαδες, which should rather be rendered rocks or shelves, persons who might be the means of others making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. Both Peter and Jude especially allude to false teachers who troubled the churches; they appear to be the same of whom Paul speaks, Phil. 3:18–19.

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2. 3. is also brought forward to show, that in the first churches there was a mixed communion. There were indeed many evils in these churches, but of what kind? In Ephesus they had left their first love, Rev. 3:4. Their fervour and zeal were abated, but there is no evidence of a mixed communion there of saints and ungodly men. On the contrary, they are commended for exercising discipline in trying and rejecting false apostles, and for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans, ver. 2, 6. The church at Smyrna is not blamed. That in Pergamos is commended for holding fast Christ's name, and not denying his faith; and the only thing for which they are reproved and threatened is the neglect of discipline, in not *putting away* those who held false doctrine, ver. 13, 14, 15. The church at Thyatira is much commended, and is reproved only for *suffering* a woman to seduce Christ's servants, ver. 20. The church at Sardis was in a backsliding state, Rev. 4:1,–6. They had a name to live while they were dead. They had lost the life and power of religion. They are exhorted to be watchful, and to strengthen *the things which remain which are ready to die,* for, says the Lord, I have not found thy works *perfect* before God. They are called to remember how they had received and heard. The Lord had already, by his apostles, delivered his laws to his church, and the neglect of these had probably brought them into a declining state. There may

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have been improper characters in the church of Sardis, but this does not necessarily follow from our Lord's words.* Do good men never need to be called to repentance? It is highly probable that the decay of religion had produced inattention to discipline; but are we to judge of the state of the apostolic churches, by the practice of *one* so severely condemned by the Lord? Or do any suppose, that because all Chrittians are bound to follow the practice of the churches recorded in the Scriptures with approbation, that therefore they have a right to imitate those who were guilty of manifold but censured abuses? Do not the examples they plead aggravate their guilt, as they are always mentioned in connection with the Lord's disapprobation of their conduct? As individuals, we are bound to be followers of those

* Our Lord mentions, that *there were a few names in Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and who should walk with him in white,* but he gives them no commandment to leave the church; and hence some infer, that Christians are not bound to separate from worldly societies, called churches. But the cases are completely different. Many things were indeed reprehensible in the church at Sardis, but it no where appears that its constitution was changed. This was no doubt still the same with that of the other apostolic churches, and hence there was no necessity for calling any to separate from it; but if the church had begun to walk disorderly, and contrary to the tradition received from the apostles, all the disciples of Jesus would have been, and were called, by the authority of God, to separate from it. See 2 Thess. 3:6. Had they neglected the admonition given them by Jesus, Rev. 3. those who valued his authority must have turned away from them, as having merely a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, 1 Tim. 3:5.

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who through faith and patience inherit the promises; but shall we presume to vindicate adultery or murder, because a very eminent servant of God was guilty of these? or shall we not rather take warning from such passages of scripture, and avoid the rocks on which others have split? 1 Cor. 10:6.

Philadelphia is commended, and exhorted to stedfastness. Laodicea is condemned as lukewarm, and threatened with rejection, Rev. 4: 15. &c.; but we have no hint of a mixed communion. A believer may fall into a state similar to that of this church, and if he does not repent he shall perish; but by the warnings and threatenings of the word of God, his people are recovered, while others, after all their profession, draw back to perdition; and we cannot tell but in their case the Lord's threatening may have produced their recovery. The Lord concludes his exhortation with words calculated to prevent them from being swallowed up of overmuch sorrow: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."—Thus it appears, that so far from the addresses to these churches countenancing mixed communion, the churches were reproved and threatened when they permitted improper persons to remain amongst them.

Another argument has been founded on our Lord's conduct to Judas. It has been said, that he was not removed from the table, but permitted to eat the Lord's supper with the other dis-

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ciples, when this ordinance was instituted. Hence it is inferred, that we may sit down at his table with ungodly people, whom we know to be such. But we have reason to believe that Judas was not present. John informs us that he went out immediately on receiving the sop, 13:30. Now, as this could take place only at the passover, he could not be present at the Lord's supper which followed it. Luke differs from the other evangelists in the order in which he relates these events. Nor is this uncommon. But admitting for a moment that he was present: Judas was unknown to any but to the Lord. His character was not even suspected. When the Lord said to the disciples, one of you shall betray me, each of them answered, "Lord, is it I?" It is not maintained, that those who make a credible profession of religion should be excluded, nor that hypocrites may not obtain admission into the best regulated churches. But what would our objectors infer from Judas being present at the Lord's supper? If they conclude that such persons ought not to be put away from the fellowship of Christians, it will follow, that murderers, and characters the most abominable, (for we shall not find a worse than his), ought to be admitted, and continued among them. Thus they not only set aside the order of Christ's house, but condemn their own practice in professing to exercise any degree of discipline whatever.

The parable of the tares, (Matt. 13:24,–30.)

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is also adduced as a proof that we ought not so to discriminate. This proceeds on a mistake. Our Lord has told us that the field is the *world,* ver. 38. not the church. But the view of the parable taken by some would prove too much, viz. that we ought not to put away any wicked person from a church of Christ, 1 Cor. 5:11. but to let both the righteous and the wicked grow there together until the harvest. I know not that any society, calling itself a church, professes to carry matters so far. This consequence, however, cannot be avoided, if the parable was designed to countenance a mixed communion of Christians and unbelievers. In that case, we must admit an express contradiction in the New Testament. But the intention of the parable was at once to teach the disciples of Jesus, that he permits no perfecution for religion, and to show them the reason of his sparing wicked men in the world.

In the kingdom of Israel, the sword was to be used against idolaters, &c. (read Deut. 13: 6,–17.) but now this is at an end. Vengeance belongs to God, and although he has delegated power to magistrates to use the sword for the preservation of order in civil society, he has given to none the power of punilhing men for unbelief and false religion.

Besides, we are informed by Jesus that an *enemy* had sown the tares. Surely this ought to make every one of his professed disciples (who apply the parable to church members) tremble at the

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thought of admitting improper persons, lest in doing so they fulfil the design of Satan. The tares were sown while men slept; now the disciples of Jesus, and especially his ministers, ought to watch particularly against those devices of the enemy of which the Lord has warned them. In short, although the parable has been interpreted so as to set aside all discipline towards members already admitted, it cannot be converted into an excuse for neglecting the most careful examination of those who apply for admission into a church, but in this view must be considered as a serious warning in regard to this. 'When the devil brought in the tares,' says President Edwards, 'it is manifest he brought in something that did not belong there. He counteracted the owner of the field, and did it under the very notion of crossing his design. An enemy (it is said in the parable) hath done it. How doth this consist with the tares having a lawful right, by the owner's warrant and appointment, to have a standing in this field?

'If the great Physician of souls hath built his church as an infirmary in compassion to those that are sick, for this end, that they may be brought in and healed there, shall it be said with surprise when such are found there, How came these sick people here? and shall the companionate Physician who built the hospital say, "An enemy hath done this." *Those who act on these principles do that at noon-day, in the pretence of God, angels*

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and men, which the devil doth in the dead of night, when men slept.'★

The following observations on this parable by Mr Gisborne, a clergyman of the church of England, are just and pertinent. 'God abstains from commissioning his ministering angels to go forth and root up the tares, lest with them they should also root up the wheat. Men, impelled by the desires, and constrained by the necessities of their nature, to live according to the intention of Providence in society, find themselves, in various respects, closely united, notwithstanding radical differences of views and of character. Neighbourhood, relationship, lawful occupations, common interest, mutual advantage, and the requisite offices and intercourse of life, bind together, by numerous and inseparable ties, the servant of God and the servant of Satan. The righteous and the wicked are so firmly connected, that affliction cannot overtake the latter without also reaching the former. The tares do not grow up singly and separately among the wheat, but are so twisted round it, and so entangled among it, so interwoven with it, that to pull them up without pulling up the wheat is impossible. Less injury will result to the crop of good grain from their continuance, than from an attempt to extirpate them.——

'Suppose an individual to be distinguished in wickedness, proud, sensual, dissolute, profane, a despiser of religion, a teacher and encourager of

★ President Edwards' Reply to Williams, p. 103. Boston 1751.

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sin: "Why," you ask, "is this man permitted to live and to spread mischief around him year after year? no general calamity is requisite for his removal; why does not death single him out at once?" How know you but that the man may live to repent? But not to dwell on that possibility, are there no other persons for whose sake he may be spared? Is there no plant of wheat which might be fatally injured, if this weed were now plucked up? Has he not parents whose present interests are closely involved in his? Has he not a wife or a child who may be left destitute if he should be cut off? Has he neither brother, nor relative, nor friend, nor acquaintance, to whom his existence is at present useful, or to whom Omniscience may foresee that at a future period it will be advantageous? May not even his vices be overruled by the providence of God into beneficial warnings to others? May not his pride teach some to cherish meekness? May not his intemperance evince the excellence of sobriety? May not his irreligion impress on others the beauty of holiness? In seasons of cold, or of drought, or of immoderate rain, the prosperity of a weed may for a time afford useful shelter to a item of wheat. May not this weed be as yet suffered to grow that it may answer a similar purpose?'*

I conclude this section by referring to some passages in the late Dr Erskine's Dissertation on the Character and Privileges of the Christian Church.

* Gisborne's Sermons, vol. ii p. 185–186. 2d edition.

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'The words εκκλησια, קהל, signify a people not only called, but gathered by a call, who hearken to and comply with the offers of the gospel, and are called "chosen and faithful," Rev. 17:14. who are called by that inward call of the Spirit, which renders the outward call of the gospel effectual. A call attended with invincible power, like that to Matthew, Matt. 9:9. "follow me;" or that, John 11:43. "Lazarus come forth;" nay, like that by which God "calls the things that are not as though they were," Rom. 7:17. and "commands light to arise out of darkness," 2 Cor. 4:6. Hence we read of the called according to God's purpose, Rom. 8:28. and of the purpose of God according to election Handing, not of works, but of him that calleth, Rom. 9:11. So that we may define the Christian church, a society of persons effectually called, or a company of penitents, united by faith and love to Christ as their head, and to one another as members of his mystical body, and on every proper occasion outwardly discovering this union. Now, if the church of Christ is a society of persons who obey the gospel call, it is evident hypocrites are no members of that church.* For the

* It is true that no hypocrite is a member of the church of Christ, if by the church we understand those who are member? of his body. But the word church, as has been shown, besides signifying the general assembly of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, also means a society of persons who give satisfastory evidence of discipleship. False brethren may re-

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gospel calls to a humble penitent reliance upon Christ, not to a bare profession of Christianity; and invites us to fellowship with Jesus, 1 Cor. 1:9. and a right to his kingdom and glory, 1 Pet. 5:10. not to any external society and advantages. The outward call of the gospel constitutes none members of the church, save those who comply with it. Else even infidels, and openly profane persons, who hear the gospel preached, would be members of the church. We are invited to come to the church, having on the wedding garment. To come without it we are not allowed. God has no where enjoined those who want faith to profess it. Indeed it is impossible that the God of truth should enjoin a falsehood. When, therefore, we require a profession of faith in order to church privileges, we, on the matter, acknowledge faith itself necessary. For the only reason why we regard a profession, is our supposing that he who makes it is a true believer. Faith, or rather the righteousness it receives, we consider as the foundation of his title to church privileges, and profession only as an evidence of that title. He who makes a credible profession, is accounted a member of the church, because from such profession, as an evidence, we judge that he possesses the proper condition of church membership, not

main for a time in such a society. Although the Doctor's remarks are in general excellent, there is some degree of obscurity in what he says, from not attending to this distinction.

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because such profession is itself that condition. So that we reckon none members of the visible church, without reckoning them members of the invisible church likewise, or, in other words, without reckoning them united to Christ by a true and lively faith, and entitled to heaven through his perfect righteousness. The union and communion of church members, one with another, is founded only on their union with Christ. Consequently, where there is no real union with him, there can be no real union with the members of his mystical body.'——'He only has a title to the honourable name of Christian, who departs from iniquity, 2 Tim. 2:19. If any man has not the Spirit of Christ in him, he is none of his, Rom. 8:9. Christ is the door of the sheep, and therefore none are God's sheep who enter not in at this door, John 10:7. 14:6. He that believeth not, whatever he profess, has no part in Christ's salvation, but is condemned already. Nothing external is of any avail under the gospel, unless accompanied with the new creature, or faith that worketh by Jove, Gal. 5:6. 6:15. Old things are done away, and all things are become new, 2 Cor. 5: 17. The Messias is of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, and does not judge after the sight of the eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears, Isa. 11:3. It is the heart, not the outward appearance which he regards. The most splendid performances, if without charity, he ac-

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counts as nothing, 1 Cor. 13:2, The Lord only knoweth them that are his, 2 Tim. 2:19. Consequently that which constitutes one a member of the Christian church, is invisible to the human eye. Believing with the heart, as well as conferring with the mouth, is a necessary condition of the gospel salvation, Rom. 10:9. Those who are only outwardly, and in profession religious, are of the synagogue of Satan, Rev. 2:9. 3:9. spots in our feasts, 2 Pet. 2:13. Jude 13. children of the devil, 1 John 3:10. tares sowed by the wicked one, Matt. 13:38. false brethren brought in, or crept in unawares, Gal. 2:4. Jude 4. having no lot nor portion in the blessings of Christ's purchase, because yet in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, Acts 8:21, 23. Hence Paul pronounces a general sentence of excommunication against false-hearted professors, 1 Cor. 16: 22. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus, let him be anathema maranatha." And, indeed, who can be more detestable, and worthy of a more dreadful curse, than he who harbours in his heart enmity against Christ, under the mask of pretended friendship? In the day of judgment Christ will profess to all such, Depart from me, I never knew you, ye workers of iniquity, Matt. 7:22. He could not have said, in so absolute terms, that he was never related to them, if he had owned them, while on earth, as his church and people. Does not that rebuke, Matt. 22:12. "Friend,

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how camest thou in hither, not having on the wedding-garment," import, that hypocrites have no right to a place among God's people? We are told, the man thus rebuked was speechless, having no excuse to make for his conduct. But he might have excused it, if bare profession was all that was necessary to render one a member of the visible church.'——'Therefore, *every particular visible church was considered by the apostles as composed only of true believers;* and these not baptized with the Holy Ghost, were accounted by them no members of Christ's mystical body. What then shall we say of those who in all their actions are animated and influenced by the devil, who live after the flesh, and retain nothing of the Christian save the empty name? Christians are as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. 2:5. And is that, think you, the character of men dead in trespasses and sins?'—He then considers the design of baptism and the Lord's supper, and clearly proves that they ought only to be administered to believers: that ministers, indeed, may lawfully administer them to hypocrites, and so, says the Doctor, 'may a judge lawfully assign you a sum of money, when, by credible witnesses, you prove your right to it, though after all you have bribed the witnesses to perjure themselves.' The sacraments, he says, are no instituted means of conversion, being intended to strengthen faith

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where it is, not to produce it where it is not. He observes, if reflections on the sin of unworthily partaking of the sacraments, produce the conversion of a hypocrite, reflections on murder or adultery may do the same. God may bring good out of evil.

'Has the unconverted professor of religion,' he asks, 'a better claim to the fellowship of the faithful than the infidel or profane? Are the living and the dead united? Do falsehood and dissimulation render men holy? So soon as the hypocrisy of a professor is manifested, he is no longer looked upon as a member of the church.'——'1 Cor. 5:10,–13. is brought as an evidence that men may be brethren, and within the church, who yet are covetous, extortioners, or living in some other course of presumptuous sin. But though this passage shows that bad men may be tolerated in the world, and civil intercourse lawfully kept up with them, it equally shows, that church-fellowship with those whom we know to be bad is unlawful. The Israelites, in the time of the passover, were to search, and cast out of their houses all the leaven that was in them, and that was allowed to be in them at other times.'——'Hypocrites may lurk in the church, as leaven might lurk in a house in the time of the passover, notwithstanding the most diligent search. But hypocrites have no right to be there, and, so foon as they are discovered, mud be turned out. They are called *brethren,* 1 Cor. 5:11. They are mem-

bers of the church in the opinion of others. But brethren in truth they are not. They seem to be within, and indeed are within the church, as to the body, but they are without it as to the soul. They are within, in the same sense as leaven, which ought to have been without. It deserves our notice, that the apostle does not speak of some of the church as within, and of the world as without. All then who belong to the church are within, or members of the church invisible. Some are so truly, and in the eyes of God; others only apparently, and in the eyes of men. The first have a title to be within; the second have no title. If we reckon them within, it is only because their profession being credible, we charitably believe it sincere, and that consequently they are united to Christ. And hence, so soon as we find from their course of life that their profession was deceitful, it becomes our duty to renounce communion with them.'——

'Thus it has been sufficiently proved, that a church is a society of saints, sincerely professing the same faith, partaking of the same sacraments, interested in the same spiritual privileges, and entitled to the same heavenly blessings; and that therefore hypocrites belong not to that society. This is the Bible idea of the word church, and therefore it ought to be received, however it differ from fashionable opinions.'——

'The greater part of modern Christians have, I acknowledge, in their sentiments of the nature

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of the church, widely deviated from Scripture and antiquity. And the fiction of a visible church really in covenant with God, and yet partly made up of hypocrites, has almost universally prevailed. What were the causes of this I stay not to enquire. One thing, however, deserves to be remarked. Truth, in this particular, has gained signal advantages over vulgar prejudice and systematic ideas, even where it has not enabled men entirely to make off these fetters. Many able Lutheran divines, who espouse the common distinction of a visible and invisible church, and warmly oppose the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of saints, have notwithstanding asserted and proved, that the proper notion of the word church, in the New Testament, is, the congregation of the inwardly sanctified, or, as others express it, those elected to eternal life, and against whom the gates of hell shall never prevail.'——

'The spirit and frame of the epistles would be perfectly unaccountable, should we suppose them partly addressed to hypocrites and self-deceivers, who had the form, but were strangers to the power of godliness, and thus were every moment in danger of dropping into the pit of destruction. Doubtless, had that been the case, they would have been calculated, as sermons recorded in other parts of Scripture directed to such people are, to awaken in them a sense of their hazardous condition, and to excite them to fly from the wrath to come.'——

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'Every particular church mentioned in the New Testament, is described as consisting of persons united to Christ by faith and love, and inwardly holy. We must either say that in these times no hypocrites were intermixed with the church, or that, though intermixed with it, they were no part of it. The first is improbable. The instance of Simon the forcerer proves, that in admitting men to the church, the apostles did not always act by the gift of discerning spirits. Paul considers it as possible, that men might give all their goods to feed the poor, and their bodies to be burned, who yet wanted charity, 1 Cor. 13:3. Ananias and Sapphira, Hymenreus and Alexander, were for a time deemed sincere by their fellow prosessors.'——'Since then the apostles addressed societies in different places outwardly associated for divine worship, by properties peculiar to good men, it follows, that they considered none else as members of these societies.'——'Churches, therefore, ought to put away from among them, those whose profession is discovered by their practice to have been insincere. To renounce fellowship with such, Christian charity forbids not, nay duty requires.'*—The authority of Dr Erskine is not brought forward to establish a doubtful point, but to call the attention of Christians to the force of truth on the mind of a man endowed with abilities for judging of it, and

* Dissertation on the Character and Privileges of the Apostolic Churches, *passim*.

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who must have received a contrary bias both from education and habit.

Section III.

Having, I hope, established the fact, that the primitive churches were composed of such only of whom it was meet for the apostles to think that a work of grace was begun in them, we conclude with some observations on the admission of members into churches amongst ourselves.

The instructions in the word of God on this subject, although indirect, are amply sufficient to guide us. We are clearly taught of what members churches of Christ should consist, and the evidences are fully laid down by which we are to distinguish them.

Those who are connected with churches where discipline is neglected, excuse themselves for countenancing impure communion by saying they cannot judge the heart. They maintain, that in order to admit a member, we have only to ascertain the irreproachableness of his moral character, and that he possesses a competent knowledge of the doctrines of the Scripture. This standard is, in truth, as high as can be fixed, and higher than is applied in any national church, but it comes far short of a proper test of real religion.

Good men are at no loss in forming a judg-

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ment of character on other occasions. They do not hesitate to speak of certain persons as real believers, and of others as at best doubtful characters. Indeed without this, there are many precepts which cannot be obeyed. We cannot associate with the people of God as such, nor express that special love which we owe to the genuine disciples of Christ, without forming a judgment of characters. We cannot even suit our conversation so as to be useful to those in whose company we are. We shall be in danger of crying peace to the formal professor or self-righteous Pharisee. But Christ has given us a standard by which to judge: "By their fruits ye shall know them." By attending to their general conversation and conduct, as well as to their knowledge and professed experience, we may generally form a proper judgment.

A church may after all be mistaken in some whom they admit. The apostles probably were so as to Simon Magus, and many others; but this ought to make us the more careful to receive none, without what appears to us satisfastory evidence that Christ has received them. We ought not to consider ourselves as having a right to receive or to exclude, but endeavour to ascertain by evidence who are really believers, and consider the evidence of this as Christ's voice to the church, commanding us to admit them. After they are admitted, they must also be, diligently

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watched over, and retained or put away according to their fruits.

There is no objection to the propriety of the distinction between visible and real Christians, provided by visible Christians we understand those whom we believe to be real Christians, and who appear to us, on proper evidence, to have the Spirit of Christ. If by visible Christianity be meant any thing short of the appearance of real Christianity; if a man being born in what is called a Christian country, being baptized, and not grossly immoral, constitutes him, as we think, a visible Christian, the term is unscriptural and absurd. If we do not use proper means to ascertain whether those applying to be members of a church are real Christians or not, we neglect our duty to Christ, and call a stumbling-block, in their way.

It is not enough that a man wishes to join a church, and professes to believe: it is not enough that he can answer our inquiries on the leading doctrines of the gospel; and that he may not be chargeable with gross sin. This may be the case, and he may yet be a stranger to Christ. We know that the word of God effectually works in all who believe, and we are bound to inquire what effect this has produced on him. Whenever the truth is believed, a great change takes place on the mind. We must not fix our standard too high, nor consider great attainments in knowledge or in the Christian life to be necessary in order to

the admission of a person into a church. We are only to endeavour to discover whether he has passed from death to life. If we omit particular inquiry on this subject, we neither do justice to the person applying, nor to the church. It is pleasing to think that the interest of both is always united; if it be advantageous for a person to be admitted, it is for the benefit of the church, and not otherwise. If, by receiving a man into a church, we could make him a Christian, it would be desirable to receive all who apply; but a church of Christ, we have seen, is a society of real believers, and by receiving any others but those, we endanger the church, for a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, and we deceive those who are enemies to God, and may lull their consciences asleep to their eternal perdition. This may show us the absurdity of what is generally spoken of under the name of *the judgment of charity;* hoping, as some say, against hope. Charity is love, and love worketh no ill to our neighbour; but can we do one a greater injury, than to receive him as a brother in Christ without endeavouring to ascertain whether this be his real character?

Some say, if a man has faith it matters not to us how he came by it. True; but the question is, Has he faith? This cannot be known without inquiring into his experience. There may be diversity in this; some have obtained precious faith, it may be, very gradually, others

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more fuddenly, and with circumstances more sensible. But every one is born spiritually blind, and if he has been brought into marvellous light, he will surely be able to give some scriptural account of it. There is no religion without experience. If a man say he believes, and has not felt the energy of the truth upon his mind, changing the objects of his pursuit, and making him a new creature, he deceives himself, and we ought not to favour the deception.

It has been taken for granted by many, without the shadow of a proof, that in the apostles days a verbal profession of faith was of itself deemed sufficient. This has been argued from the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8:21. Philip informed him, that if he believed with all his heart he might be baptized, and upon his profession baptized him. But they had had previous conversation. The eunuch showed that he was sensible of his ignorance, and desired instruction; they had travelled some distance together, and Philip had reason to judge from the manner in which he received the truth, and the remarks he made, that God had opened his understanding. The three thousand who were baptised and added to the church on the day of Pentecost gave more evidence than a mere profession. They were pricked in their heart, and relieved by the gospel; they received the word with joy. The powerful and visible effects produced by the truth on their mind, were well calculated to satisfy all,

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that when they said they believed in Christ, they spoke the language of the heart.*

But a profession of faith in the apostles days was very different from the same profession at present. By professing to believe, men at that time were subjected to many inconveniences; the profession was a reproach. With us, men are offended if their Christianity be called in question. Those even who by their writings have most decidedly opposed Christianity, take it amiss when they receive the name of infidels;† consequently a man saying he believes, ought to have little weight.

We do not mean to allege that the way of God is strictly uniform in the exercises of his people. With some the work of conversion is more rapid,

* Let it also be observed, that all these were Jews, the people of God, professing the faith of Abraham. When the gospel began to be preached, they were not unchurched, but were informed of the joyful tidings, that God had fulfilled the promise made to the fathers, in railing up Jesus again, Acts 13:33. To him they were now called to submit as their anointed king, and whosoever rejected him was cut off from the people, according to God's ancient ordinance against the disobedient. Those who believed, forfeited none of their ancient privileges; on the contrary, they were much enlarged. A profession of faith in Christ made by a Jew was therefore all that was necessary to his being acknowledged as a brother. The case was different as to Gentiles, but in either a *profession* of faith was very different from a profeflion among us.

† See Hume's Letter to Dr Blair, *apud* Campbell on Miracles, last edition.

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with others more gradual. Some may have been brought under the impression of the truth in very early years, and others may have been led so insensibly from step to step, that they may be unable to point out the precise time when they were brought to know the truth. This is not necessary. The great matter is to endeavour to ascertain if in any degree they indeed know and feel their guilty and miserable condition as sinners, and are living by faith on the Son of God. Those who profess to have known the Lord for some time, may be expected to give additional evidence, by their general conduct and conversation.

It should be our great aim not to decline in judgment to the right hand or the left, neither to make sad the hearts of those whom God has not made sad, nor to cry peace where he hath not spoken it. It must be our study to separate between the precious and the vile; we violate otherwise the divine law, Ezek. 22:26.; and to the right performance of this, as of every other duty, much prayer to the Lord is necessary.

Every new member ought to be admitted by the unanimous voice of the church. *All* are to walk in unity as brethren, they ought therefore *all* to have considence in each other as the disciples of Christ. This is in fact the bond which unites the members, and therefore the substance of the evidence which the pastors and those who have conversed with them have obtained, must

be submitted to the church,* that they may not only receive them as members, but love them for the truth's sake.

Although we are not to receive any one without satisfastory evidence of his being a true disciple of Christ, we ought to beware of injuring the character of any whom we reject, by speaking evil and circulating an unfavourable report of them. We are not accountable to the world or to man for our admissions or refusals; but when any are rejected, it is highly important to speak to them faithfully and affectionately, and to show them that our conduct proceeds from love to them, as well as from obedience to the laws of Christ.

* It may seem in theory very difficult, that a number of persons should be of the same mind concerning an individual's admission; but the difficulty does not occur in practice. Sometimes a delay may be necessary to satisfy certain of the church; but it will never be found that a Christian will be rejected through humour or caprice. Were any thing of this kind to appear, it would argue a state of mind highly improper, and would become a fit subject of discipline.

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CHAPTER VII.

OF THE OFFICES IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

SECTION I.

THE Lord Jesus, by the ministry of his apostles, not only commanded liis people to associate together, but also ordained that certain offices should subsist in their societies. We have in Scripture ample directions respecting the nature of these offices, and the qualifications necessary for discharging them.

Paul, speaking of the ascension of Jesus, and of the accomplishment of the promise that he should give gifts unto men, observes, "he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," Eph. 4:11. To the same purpose he says, "God hath set some in the church, first apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diverfities of tongues," 1 Cor. 12:28.

It is not easy, perhaps, to discriminate the va-

rious sorts of supernatural endowments mentioned in the New Testament; but of this we are certain, that some offices in the church were temporary, and others intended to continue.

We are in no danger of confounding the stated with the extraordinary offices in the apostolic churches. No directions are given respecting the choice of persons to occupy the latter. This the great Head of the church referred for himself; nor have we a particular account of the various duties to which some of them were called. This was unnecessary, as they were either guided by the immediate and extraordinary influences of the Spirit, in the conduct they were to pursue, or were under the personal inspection of the apostles.

As to the stated offices, the word of God contains minute directions to guide our choice, together with a clear account of the duties connected with them. It is to be feared, that the alleged difficulties in distinguishing between the extraordinary and stated offices, have arisen more from a desire to vindicate churches evidently unscriptural, or the adherence of individuals to these, than from any darkness in the subject itself.

Whether any miraculous gifts shall ever be restored to the church, time must determine. At all events, we are sure that the stated offices shall continue to the end. These are necessary to the proper regulation and to the wellbeing of every church, whereas the extraordinary offices seem not to have been stationary in any church,

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The ordinary offices are calculated for every situation and emergency in which the churches can be placed. The extraordinary offices did not superfede them, nor are these necessary to their existence. The extraordinary offices of which we read in the New Testament, are apostles, prophets, and evangelists.

We have already had occasion to speak of the office of the apostles, and of the deference which was to be paid to those who held it, by the moil highly favoured in the churches, 1 Cor. 14:37. They were even possessed of miraculous power to punish those members of the churches who despised their authority. Thus John threatens to punish Diotrephes, 3 John 10. They had in them a readiness to revenge all disobedience, 2 Cor. 10:6. This power Paul, once and again, assures the Corinthians he would employ, without sparing, if he found matters in the state he suspected.

It is evident, from the nature of the office itself, that the apostles can have no successors. They fully and faithfully delivered the last revelation which God shall give to man. Dr Campbell argues that the apostles could have no successors.

1. From the indispensable qualifications for the office. An apostle must be one who had seen Christ after his resurrection, 1 Cor. 9:1. 15:8. for he was ordained to be a witness of Christ's resurrection, Acts 1:22 10:41. &c.

2. The apostles were distinguished by special

prerogatives which descended to none after them, receiving their million from Christ, the power of conferring the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, and the knowledge by inspiration of the whole doctrine of Christ.

3. They were universal bishops; the whole church was their charge, and the whole earth their sphere.

4. We have full proof that no idea of succession to the office was entertained in their own age, or in the times immediately succeeding, for no one, on the death of an apostle, was ever substituted in his room, and when the original college became extinct, the title became extinct with it.

The apostles were ambassadors for Christ,* and having delivered their message, and declared the whole counsel of God, which is contained in their writings, it was unnecessary that any successors to them should be raised up. They are the twelve foundations of the church, Eph. 2:20. Rev. 21:14.

We read of *prophets* who foretold future events, as Agabus, Acts 21:10. although certainly the term *prophecy* is not confined to this

* The term *ambassadors* has been applied to ordinary ministers of the gospel, but improperly. The apostles were ambassadors in the proper sense of the word, but preachers have now only to repeat, enlarge upon, and to impress on their hearers what they taught. To give such the title of ambassadors, tends to weaken the authority of apostolic testimony.

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in the New Testament. There were also prophets in the church at Antioch, Acts 13:1. Perhaps Mark and Luke, who have written a part of the New Testament, were prophets. At any rate, it was an extraordinary office, for which men were qualified, and to which they were called by the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; and those who held it mieht say, as Paul does of his apostleship, "not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ," Gal. 1:1. It is true, prophesying seems sometimes to be put for the mutual exhortations of the brethren, 1 Cor. 14:31. "Ye may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted;" and he who prophesieth is said to speak to men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort, 1 Cor. 14:3. but it is also evident from the passages quoted above, as well as from others, that the term *prophet* is used in the New Testament to denote a person possessed of extraordinary gifts peculiar to that period, and they appear, by the manner in which they are classed, to have been next to the apostles. *Evangelists* were assistants to the apostles. Their charge was not confined to any particular church. Philip and Timothy are expressly styled evangelists. Titus, although the name is no where given him, was evidently employed in the duties of the same office. He was left in Crete to set in order the things that were wanting, and to ordain elders in every city, according to the direstions of Paul, Tit. 1:5. Timothy was left in Ephesus, not as

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an elder or bishop of the church, but to charge some to teach no other doctrine than that delivered by the apostles, 1 Tim. 1:3. He sometimes accompanied Paul, and at other times was sent by him to visit and confirm the churches. Both Timothy and Titus were superintendants under the apostles, and acted by a special commission; they were employed in visiting and setting in order various churches, and to both, directions are given respecting the characters of those who were to hold stated and ordinary offices.

The stated offices in all the churches were *elders* and *deacons.*★

It is unnecessary to spend much time in proving that bishop and elder were, in apostolic times, synonymous terms. We just mention one or two passages, which must prove this to every impartial person. Paul sent for the *elders* of the church at Ephesus, and exhorted them to take heed to themselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost had made them *bishops,* επισκοπους, Acts 20:17. 28.

Titus was left in Crete to ordain *elders* in every city, as he had appointed him. If any man, says he, be blameless, the husband of one wife; for a *bishop* must be blameless, &c. Tit. 1:5, 7.

★ Such was the judgment of Wickliffe: 'Only two orders of clerks,' said he, 'did suffice in the church, priests and deacons; neither was there any distinction in the times of the apostles, of popes, patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops. These the emperor's pride did find out.' Fox's Acts and Monuments, vol. i. p. 414, edit. 1610.

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Peter exhorts the *elders* to feed the flock of God, επισκοπουντες; doing the office of a *bishop,* not by constraint, 1 Pet. 5:2.

The apostles were often obliged to flee from the places where they preached the gospel. Their stay, in general, even while not persecuted, was usually short. We read of Paul separating the disciples, Acts 19:9. and, indeed, wherever any believed and were baptized, they would necessarily be separated from their former associates. If Jews, they were call out of the synagogue; and if Gentiles, they could no more have fellowship with demons or false gods. The two great commandments given by the apostles were, that Christians should believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and love one another. To promote faith and love, the disciples were enjoined not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. The Lord had graciously promised to be in the midst of two or three met in his name; but still they were incomplete, and not fully furnished with all requisite for their spiritual welfare, till provided with pastors or elders. To ordain such, the apostles either revisited the churches they had planted, Acts 14:21,–23. or for this end sent proper persons, such as Titus.

The business of an elder is to labour in the word and doctrine, and also to rule in the church of God, 1 Tim. 5:17. 3:5. To rule means not merely to preside in the meetings of the church, and to take care that all things are done decently

and in order, according to the will of Christ; but also to watch over the members, to admonish or reprove them, as their circumstances require. To this rule the members were bound to submit. "Obey them," says the apostle, "that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account," Heb. 13:17. "Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of the Lord," ver. 1. "We beseech you, brethren, to acknowledge them which labour among you, and are over you* in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them, very highly in love for their work's sake," 1 Thess. 5:12. Here the peace of the church is immediately connected with affectionate regard, deference, honour, and submission to the elders.

Considering the importance of this office, we might expect the qualifications necessary for the discharge of it to be clearly pointed out. Accordingly they are so, 1 Tim. 3. Tit. 1.

The name *elder* was probably borrowed from the Jews. Those advanced in age would naturally be preferred for this office, if their qualifications were in other respects equal. Age commands respect, and is usually connected with experience and wisdom. Timothy was a young man, and this might tend to prevent his receiving the respect due to the office he held. Hence

* προις ἀμενους, translated *ruleth,* Rom. 12:8. 1 Tim. 3: 4, 5, 11, 5:17.

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Paul says, "Let no man despise thy youth," 1 Tim. 4:12.

A question has arisen respecting the choice of pastors. Does this belong to the people, or did the apostles or evangelists ordain those whom they thought best qualified, without consulting them? An argument for the latter opinion has been founded on the description of the character and qualifications of elders being addressed, uot to the churches, but to the evangelists Timothy and Titus, and on their being directed to lay hands suddenly on no man.

In truth, the appointment of elders, in one view, was not left either to the apostles or to the churches. The Lord bestowed the necessary gifts upon those whom he intended for the work, and gave commandment by his apostles, that only such as possessed these gifts should be called to the office. All that was left to men, therefore, was to judge who were possessed of proper qualifications.

The epistles to Timothy and Titus treat expressly of this subject, and are of equal authority with every other part of revelation. They were intended, not merely as instructions to them, but to the churches among which they laboured, and to all Christian churches to the end of the world.

Timothy and Titus would doubtless enforce these instrustions on the consciences of their brethren; they would warn them against pleasing themselves in this as in other matters, and exhort

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them, by willing subjedion to Christ, to approve themselves to him as in every other part of their conduit. This is equally the duty of any man in the present day, by whose labours a church may be collected; and if the church refuse to-walk, by the rule of Scripture in this or in any other respect, he is called, after proper consideration and forbearance, to turn away from them, as neglecting the ordinances of Christ. But if he should attempt to impose elders upon them (although it may be persons properly qualified) without their free consent, he would manifest a spirit very opposite from that of the apostles. So far were they from trying to exclude the churches from whatever they were engaged in, that they requested and used their assistance in cases where we might imagine they would not have consulted them. After the apostasy of Judas, Peter addressed the disciples, and showed the necessity of choosing an apostle whose qualifications he described. Accordingly they nominated two, and then referred the decision to the Lord himself. The apostles did not interfere in the choice of deacons, but left this to the brethren, Acts 6:3. although they would doubtless have pointed out their error, had they chosen men not possessed of the qualifications they had shown to be necessary. When Paul went to Jerusalem with the contribution of the churches, the person who accompanied him was not chosen by himself, but ordained ξειρπτονηθεις by the churches, 2 Cor. 8:19. So careful were

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these eminent servants of God not to exercise lordship over their brethren!

That the pastoral relation between teachers or pastors and a church can only be formed by mutual consent, is not only manifest from the conduct of the apostles recorded in the Scriptures, but is necessarily implied in the nature of this relation, considered in every view. It is not less absurd to maintain, that because we have no direct example of a church chasing its elders, that this matter is left undetermined, than it would be to argue, that since the word of God has not declared that the marriage union is to be entered into by mutual choice, it is doubtful whether this be required. Such obvious principles as necessarily result from our nature and circumstances, are frequently taken for granted in Scripture. Some may take occasion from this to affirm, that it contains no precise rule for church-order, but with equal propriety they might add, that it is as deficient respecting rules for individual conduct. It is not easy to see what important purpose would have been answered by that minuteness which some appsar to deem essential to perspicuity and a divine appointment. We have already observed, that the instructions which respect moral conduct are delivered precisely in the same way as those which respect church-order. It is much to be feared, that many who at present will not admit the obligation of the practices of the first churches, as the laws of Christ for the

social worship of his people, would not have obeyed them under whatever form they might have been delivered. There cannot be a more express, perspicuous, or indisputable commandment than that delivered by our Lord, Matt. 18:15, 16, 17. yet how many Christians habitually and knowingly disobey it, and remain in situations which render obedience to it impracticable!

The elders in each church composed a prelbytery, that is, the eldership. This word (πρεσβυτεριον) only occurs once in the New Testament, l Tim. 4: 14. but when we read of the elders of a particular church, the same thing is meant. That there was in every church, when regularly set in order, a plurality of pastors, is evident. I cannot express my views better on this subject, than by quoting the following passage from an interesting narrative lately published. 'It is evident to me,' says Mr Ballantine, 'that primitive churches had a plurality of pastors, or a presbytery, in every congregation. There were *elders* in the church at Jerusalem, Acts 15:2, 4. Paul, when he was at Miletus, sent for the *elders* of the church at Ephesus, Acts 20:17. and there appear to have been several of them in that church, from his manner of addressing them on that occasion, and from the direction he gives Timothy concerning them, 1 Tim. 5:17. Again we read, Acts 14:23. "And when they had ordained them *elders in every church,* and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they be-

lieved." To the same purpose Paul writes to Titus, "Ordain *elders in every city,* as I had appointed thee," Titus 1:5. This exactly accords with what we read in the epistles to the churches, Philip. 1:1. "To all the saints who are at Philippi, with the *bishops* and deacons." Peter writes to the *elders* of the churches, 1 Epist. v. 1. James also exhorts, chap. v. 14. "Is any sick among you? let him call for the *elders* of the church." It is true, that the epistles of Peter and of James are what are called general epistles; but certainly the sick brother must be a member of a particular church, and who can the *elders* be for whom he is to send, but those of his own church? It is also worthy of remark, that those epistles which are called general, must become particular, and that every line of them must be considered as addressed to that church in whose hands they are. It is then very evident that the primitive church had an eldership, or presbytery, in each church. Indeed we read of no church in the New Testament, so far as I recollect, supposed complete, or keeping all the ordinances as delivered to them, but had a plurality of pastors. To "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city," are closely conjoined by Paul, Titus 1:5. The only passage which seems to speak another language, is Rev. chap. 2. and 3. But we are certainly to explain these passages that are dark, by those on the same subject that are clear and decisive. We know there

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were elders in the church at Ephesus, (Acts 20: 17.) although in the epistle to that church, Rev. 2:1. we read, "Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus;" the conclusion then is natural, that by *angel* (which signifies *messenger*) we are either to understand the elders of that church collectively, or each of them individually, as the *messenger* of Christ to their brethren; even as the presiding ruler in the synagogue (though we know there were more rulers than one in each synagogue) was called *Sheliah Zibbor,* that is, the *angel of the church* or *congregation.* See Prideaux's Connexions, vol. ii. p. 399. This conclusion is the more forcible, if we consider that the whole book of Revelation, the epistolary as well as prophetic parts, are written in a figurative manner. Although I by no means think, that the epistles to the seven churches are mystical prophecies of seven distinct periods, from the primitive times of Christianity to the end of the world, yet every body must admit, that these epistles partake, in a considerable degree, of the figurative language of the whole book.* And it would seem to me

* The truth of this remark of Mr Ballantine, is evident from the whule of the seven epistles. Although *angel* in the singular be used in all these epistles, yet from some parts of them it plainly appears, that a plurality of persons are addressed under that name, whether we underltand the presbytery or the church at large. Thus, chap. ii. to. "Behold the devil shall cast some of *you* (εξ υμῶν) into prison, and *ye* shall have (εξετε) tribulation," &c. In like manner, verse 14. "but unto *you,*" (υμιν δε); and verse 15. " that which *ye* have," (ἃ ἔχετε). It is true,

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equally easy to build the whole fabric of episcopacy on the word *angel,* which is here evidently used in a figurative sense, as to show from hence that there was only one pastor in each of the seven churches.

'But as every ordinance of God discovers the divine wisdom in its subserviency to the end designed, so in the present case. It is surely a rare thing to find one pastor of a church excelling in every grace and gift, and although he did, the church indeed must be few in number, before he could faithfully discharge all the pastoral duties to each of the members. If public preaching be accounted nearly the only duty of the pastoral office, which, alas! is too generally supposed and acted on as a principle, through habit and preconceived errors, it is easy to see how people may imagine that a man with gifts to edification may be pastor to as many as his voice can reach in one place, in public speaking. But take into view all the duties connected with *oversight* and *rule,* and this corrupt principle is completely overturned. 1 Pet. 5:2, 3. Heb. 13:7. When a church is so numerous (I do not mean a congregation simply so called, for a pastor can only have relation to a church of Christ) as to render it impossible for any one man to perform the pastoral duties to that church, or, which is much the same

that the style in these epistles is generally *thou* in the singular, This is very common when a collective body is addressed, but an individual could not with propriety be addressed in the plural.

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thing, to have an intimate acquaintance with each of the members, as a *pastor, ruler,* and *guide,* there is great danger of that church falling into confusion and impurity. It is vain to suppose that these may be prevented by the watchfulness and care of members one towards another, as an effectual antidote against impurity. It is granted, if members do not act in duty one towards another, the number of pastors in a church never could supply the deficiency, nor preserve purity; but if God never has ordained the duties of members to each other to be a substitute for the eldership, it is foolish for us to think they can be so. It is only a scheme devised by human wisdom, and can never answer the end. If any one should alk, Why? the answer, *God has not so ordained,* is quite satisfactory to my own mind; but if any inquire further, it might be added, No member of a church, however much he attends to duties towards his brethren, is a pastor, ruler, and guide to that church, till his brethren choose and ordain him to that office. And so hath the Lord ordained in all the churches.

'It is also reasonable, as well as scriptural, that the number of pastors in a church should bear proportion to the number of members. A mere plurality of elders would be of little consequence, unless their number and diligence answered all the exigencies of the church.

'It may be thought some churches are so small, that a plurality of pastors would be superfluous;

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but I am persuaded, that while even such churches have only one pastor, there is something wanting among them. Infant churches may indeed be so weak in grace and gifts, that a plurality cannot be obtained. If, however, they believe that a presbytery in a church is the ordinance of God, and that the treasures of grace and gifts are with Jesus; and if they add to this every exertion in the exercise of grace and gifts, there can be no doubt but the Lord will amply supply such churches. "For this is the considence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us," 1 John 5:14. But unless churches believe that a presbytery is an ordinance of God, and look, to him for it, they cannot obtain it.'*

Some have maintained that there is a distinction between preaching and ruling elders, and accordingly Presbyterians have distinguished the one by the name of ministers, and the other by that of elders. The former preach, baptize, and dispense tne Lord's supper; the latter are members of what is called the session. The former are clergymen; the latter laymen, and are usually called lay-elders. We may safely affirm, there is no hint in the New Testament of the distinction between clergy and laity. This was one of the steps of the mystery of iniquity, by which the man of sin acquired such power.†

* Ballantine's Observations on Confessions of Faith, &c. *note,* p. 90,–94. 2d edit. Edin. 1804.

† Some say the distinction is merely nominal; by the former

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Dr Campbell, to whose Lectures we have had frequent occasion to refer, ably exposes the evil and absurdity of the distinction, as well as the means by which it was established. 'Before such tenets as these, says he, which favour so much of the political views of an aspiring faction, and so little of the liberal spirit of the gospel, could generally obtain, several causes had contributed in preparing the minds of the people. On every occurrence, the pastors had taken care to improve the respect of the lower ranks, by widening the distance between their own order and the condition of their Christian brethren; and for this purpose had early broached a distinction, which, in process of time, universally prevailed, of the whole Christian commonwealth into clergy and laity. The terms are derived from two Greek words, κληρος, lot or inheritance, and λαος, people. The plain intention was to suggest, that the former, the pastors or clergy, for they appropriated the term κληρος to themselves, were selected and contradistinguished from the multitude, as being, in the present world, by way of eminence, God's *peculium,* or special inheritance.

'It is impossible to conceive a claim in appearance more arrogant, or in reality worse founded. God is indeed in the Old Testament said to be the inheritance of the Levites, because a determined

is meant those who hold offices in the church. But why then are the deacons, or the *elders* in the Presbyterian connection, who certainly hold offices, considered to be laymen?

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share of the sacrifices and offerings made to God was in part to serve them instead of an estate in land, such as was given to each of the other tribes. But I pray you mark the difference; no where is the tribe of Levi called God's inheritance, though that expression is repeatedly used of the whole nation. Concerning the whole Israelitish nation, Moses, who was himself a Levite, says in an address to God, Deut. 9:29. "They are thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power." The words in the septuagint translation deserve our particular attention. Ὑυτοι λαος σου καὶ κληρος σου οὑς εξηγαγες εκ γης Αιγυπτου εν τη ισχυι σου τη μεγαλη. The same persons are, in the same sentence, declared to be both the λαος and the κληρος. What, says the canonist, at once laymen and clergy? that is certainly absurd; the characters are incompatible; yet it did not then appear so to Moses. Now, would it be thought reasonable or just, that what was allowed to be the privilege and the glory of every Israelite, under the more servile establishment of Moses, should, under the more liberal dispensation of the gospel, be disclaimed by all those disciples of Jesus who have not been admitted into the sacred order, which they, for this reason, have called clerical.

'When we recur to the use of the term in the New Testament, we find one passage, and but one, wherein it is applied to persons. The passage is in the first epistle of Peter, the fifth chapter, and

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third verse, which is thus rendered in our version: "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." The words in the original are, μηδὸ ως κυριευοντες των αλλα τυποι γινομενοι του ποιμινου. They are part of a charge given to the presbyters, or pastors, relating to their, care of the people committed to them, who are called God's flock, which they are commanded to feed, of which they are to take the oversight, not the mastery, and to which they are to serve as patterns. The same persons, therefore, who both in this, and in the preceding verse, are styled ποιμινον, the flock, under the directions of God's ministers, the shepherds, are also called κληροι, his inheritance, over whom their pastors are commanded not to domineer. It is somewhat extraordinary, that in the choice of distinctions, which the church-rulers so soon showed a disposition to affect, they should have paid almost as little attention to the style, as they did to the spirit and meaning of the sacred books. Let it be observed then, in the first place, that this distinction, so far from having a foundation in Scripture, stands in direct contradiction, both to the letter and to the sense of that unerring standard. I am not ignorant that some expositors, jealous for the priesthood, render the term κληρος here, the church's possessions. Not to mention that this explication but ill suits the context, and annihilates the contrast between an imperious master and an engaging pattern, and supposeth an aukward ellipsis in the words, allow me to ask, What were the church's

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possessions in those days? Was fhe so early vested. with lands and hereditaments, for it is to such only that the term κληρος, when denoting property or possession, is applied? Or have those interpreters been dreaming of the truly golden age of Pope Gregory the seventh, when the patrimonies of some metropolitical and patriarchal sees were indeed like dukedoms and principalities, and the grand hierarch himself could dispose of kingdoms and empires? In the apostolic times, on the contrary, the church's patrimony consided mostly, I may say, in persecution and calumny, hatred and derision, agreeably to the prediction of her Lord.' ——'But to return to the distinction of the whole church into clergy and laity; in after ages they even improved upon their predecessors. The schoolmen (a modest race, all clergymen) thought it was doing the laymen too much honour to derive the name from λαος, populus. It suited their notions better to deduce it from λαας, lapis, a stone. Take for a specimen a few things advanced on this subject by some celebrated doctors, as quoted by Altensfaig in his Lexicon Theologicum. 'A clergyman signifies a learned man, scientific, skilful, full of knowledge, accomplished, and intelligent. A layman, on the contrary, signifies an unlearned man, unikilful, silly, and *stony.* On this account, the term *laic* or *layman* may be derived from the Greek word λαας, which in Latin is *lapis,* or a stone. And so every clerk or clergyman, in so far as he is a clergyman, is re-

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spectable; a layman again, so far as he is such, is despicable. Clergymen also are as a body justly superior, and ought to have precedency of laymen.'* To these I shall add the sentiments of Cardinal Bona, in relation to the care that ought to be taken by the clergy, that laymen may not be allowed to do themselves harm by studying the profounder parts of Scripture, which their stupidity is utterly incapable of comprehending. He kindly mentions, at the same time, the books which he thinks they will not be the worse for, and which, therefore, they may be permitted to peruse. 'Concerning laymen, in whom pride the mother of blindness reigns, so far as respects those things which regard faith and morals. For when, like idiots, they presume to explain the sacred writings, which are the most profound of all writings; and again, when they happen to possess any external accomplishment, they despise all others, and being thus doubly blinded by pride, they deservedly fall into that worst error through which they are infatuated by God, so that they know not how to discern what is good and what is evil. Wherefore, let not laymen read all the books of the sacred Scripture. For as there is

* 'Capitur clericus pro viro docto, scientifico, perito, scientia pleno, repleto et experto. E contra laicus capitur pro viro indocto, imperito, insipiente et lapideo. Unde laicus dicitur a λαας; Græce quod est lapis Latine. Et sic omnis clericus, in quantum clericus, est laudabilis; laicus vero, in quantum laicus, est v tuperandus. Clerici quoque a toto genere de jure præponuntur, et debent præponi laicis.'

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nothing so sacred, or salutary, or pious, which hath not chanced to be abused, so hath it fared with books; with respect to which the fault is not in the writers, but the wickedness is in the abuse. They are not, however, to be retrained from moral and devout works, which have no difficulty, or ambiguity, or absurdity in their translation; of which sort are the histories, lives, or legends of the saints, and also sacred meditations.'* How condescending is the good Doctor! He does not absolutely prohibit the stupid and conceited generation of laymen from reading some of the plainer books of Scripture, and indulges them freely in what is better for them, story-books and godly meditations, and the legends of the saints.'†

* 'De laicis in quibus mater cæcitatis superbia regnat, quatenus ad ea quæ sunt fidei et morum. Cum enim sicut idiotæ presumunt sacrara scripturam exponere, quæ est profundissima omnium scripturarum. Cum iterum habeant quandam honestatem exteriorem, contemnunt vitam omnium aliorum, et merito hujus duplicis superbiæ excæcantur, ut incidant in errorem istum pessimum, per quem excæcantur a Deo, ut nesciant discernere quid bonum est et quid malum. Quare non omnes scripturæ libros legant laici. Quoniam nihil est tam sanctum et salubre et pium quo non contingat abuti, sic de libris evenit, quorum non est culpa, neque scribentium, sed scœlus est in abusu: non tamen ascendi videntur ab opusculis moralibus et devotis, nullam in se difficultatem, nee ambiguitatem, nec absurditatem in translatiune gerentibus, cujusmodi sunt historiæ, vel vitæ, vel Iegendæ sanctorum, nee non meditationes sanctæ.'

† Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, vol. i. p 297, –300. 303,–305 Dr Campbell does not translate these parages; indeed it is impossible to do justice to the original.

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While no such distinction then as that of clergy and laity can be admitted as scriptural, it does not follow that there may not be a diversity of gifts among elders, nor that it is improper for each of them peculiarly to apply his mind to, and to be chiefly engaged in, that particular department of duty belonging to the office, for which he is best qualified. One man may be best qualified for labouring in public; another may be his superior in conversation, and may eminently promote the edification of the church by more private admonition and instruction. He may be very prudent and wise, well acquainted with the corruptions of the human heart, possessed of much knowledge of the word of God, well fitted for warning those who are out of the way, and comforting the feeble-minded, skilful in managing the tempers of men, while his gifts for public preaching are not so great.* This is confirmed by the word of God, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine," 1 Tim. 5:17. That by *double honour* here is meant larger temporal support, is evi-

* Dr Franklin, so justly celebrated for his wisdom and genius, seldom or never made a speech in Congress; yet such was the estimation of his judgment and penetration, that his opinion, delivered in a short sentence or two, had generally the greatest weight. Mr Addison had no talents for public speaking. Had these men been members of a church, and excelled at much in the knowledge of divine things as they did in other things, would they not have been eminently qualified for overseeing or feeding the flock of God?

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dent, not only from the frequent use of the word τιμη* in this sense, but from the reason of the precept; for, adds the apostle, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, and the labourer is worthy of his reward," ver. 18. This support is to be bestowed both on those who rule and on those who preach, although more abundantly on the latter.

Some, in order to avoid a distinction between preaching and ruling elders, consider the precept to respect those elders who are laborious in the discharge of their duty; but this implies the absurdity of the church being called to support, in a liberal manner, elders who were not laborious. The meaning of the precept seems obvious, that the elders who faithfully discharge their duty should be liberally provided for, but that this was cspecially their duty towards those who labour in the word and doctrine. Their gifts were superior, they were calculated for more extensive usefulness, they would require to devote more of their time to study and reading; and preaching the gospel, not merely in the church, but to unbelievers around them, they stood in need of more support from their brethren.

If any from this text infer that the elders who rule well are not *entitled* to preach, they must also maintain that the elders who preach are not entitled to rule; a restriction which has never

* Matt. 27:6. 9, Acts 4:34. 5:2–3. 7:16. 19:19, 28:10, 1 Cor. 6:20. &c.

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been, and is not likely to be, advanced. We have the cleared evidence that all the elders were overseers of the flock. There was no superiority of office. The gift of one might be greater, but still he was but a fellow-labourer with his brethren in the presbytery. One might be better qualified for one part of duty, another for another; and these gifts were bestowed to be used for the benefit of the whole. This would be best promoted by each attending to the particular line of duty which the Lord had pointed out, by the gifts and superior aptitude he had bestowed.

To endeavour to maintain an equality among the elders, by infilling that each should take his turn in the various duties of the office, would have been sacrificing the edification of the churches to the jealousy which might arise in the minds of the elders. We cannot conceive good men to wish, nor the Lord to permit this. The whole of the spirit, if not of the letter of the precept, Rom. 12:6,–8. applies as well to a presbytery as to a church: "Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality, (απλοτητι, see 2 Cor. 8:2. 9:11, 13.); he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with

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cheerfulness." Here again we have ruling distinguished from teaching. The same distinction is made, 1 Cor. 12:28. where both teachers and governments are mentioned. All agree that teaching and ruling officially in the church is confined to the elders. It therefore appears that some of the elders were chiefly engaged in preaching the word, and others in ruling, because these several gifts had been bestowed on them.

It is indeed true, that no one can rule in a church who is not (διδακτικος) fit to teach, for it is a rule of instrustion and persuasion, not of force. This, therefore, is an indispensable qualification in an elder, 1 Tim. 3:2. But there are various ways of teaching. Some excel in gifts for teaching more publicly; others are equally eminent, or more so, in a less public manner. Neither gift should be lost to the church. The elder who possesses the latter, will perhaps be as useful in the church as the other.

The right which those who preach the gospel have to live by the gospel, is clearly stated in Scripture. The apostle having quoted the Mosaic precept of not muzzling the ox which treadeth out the corn, says, "Does God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he that plougheth should plough in hope, and that he that thresheth in hope, should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal

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things?" 1 Cor. 9:9,–11. Again, "They which wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar; even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel," ver. 13,14. The church then who had the ability, without the inclination, to support one or more who should devote their time wholly to the work, of the Lord, would, it appears, be highly blameable. The peculiar advantages possessed by a person who gives himself wholly to the word of God and prayer, are obvious; but although this is strongly implied in Scripture, the exhortation to the elders of Ephesus to labour with their own hands, as Paul had occasionally done, Acts 20:35. removes the objection that some churches are prevented, by poverty, from enjoying the benefit of a plurality of elders. If a church be able to maintain their elders, it is their duty to do so; but however poor and incapable of this, they may have their bishops and deacons, as well as the richest.

Although women were not suffered to speak in the church, 1 Cor. 14:34. nor to teach or usurp authority over the man, 1 Tim. 2:12. yet it is evident that women were employed in instructing their own sex in private. Had not this been the case, there would not have been so many mentioned in the Scriptures as labouring in the gospel. Priscilla is thus spoken of in several places. She, with her husband, is styled a helper or fellow-labourer in Christ with Paul, Rom.

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16:3. In the same chapter, "Salute," says he, "Tryphena and Tryphosa who laboured in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis (Περσιδα την αγαπητην) who laboured much in the Lord." "I intreat thee also, true yoke-fellow, help those women who laboured with me in the gospel," Phil. 4:3.

It appears, that where proper persons could be found in the churches of the female sex, they were employed in teaching and watching over their own sex. In 1 Tim. 5:9–10. the apostle gives directions respecting their qualifications: "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if me have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work." 'This, and the other good works,' says Dr Macknight, 'mentioned by the apostle, being attended with great expence, the poor widows who desired to be taken into the number cannot be supposed to have performed them at their own charges. I therefore suppose the apostle is speaking of *female deacons,* who had been employed in the offices here mentioned at the common expence; consequently the meaning of the direction will be, that, in choonng *widows,* Timothy was to prefer those who formerly had been employed by the church as deaconnesses, and had discharged that

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office with faithfulness and propriety. For since these women had spent the prime of their life in the laborious offices of love mentioned by the apostle, without receiving any recompence but maintenance, it was highly reasonable, when grown old in that good service, to promote them to an honourable function, which required knowledge and experience, rather than bodily strength, and which was rewarded with a liberal maintenance *.'

The same persons are spoken of Titus 2:3. "The aged women (πρεσβυτιδας, *the female elders,* as some render it) likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, that they may teach the young women,"† &c. We may easily see how useful such persons were likely to prove, especially when jealousy rendered the intercourse of men and women, usual among us, either difficult or improper. That this office continued in the Christian churches for several centuries, appears from Epiphanius, Theophylact, Theodoret, and other ecclesiastical historians. See *Suiceri Thesaur.* on the Word, II. p. 289. and *Bingham's Origines Ecclesiastic.* Book II. ch. 30. Chrysostom (as quoted by Whitby) says, that the apostle in these

* See Macknight on the Epistles, *in loc.*

† It is evident that these women were in some office, for age and character were not necessary to entitle a widow to support; this is due to every poor member. This view of these directions also explains the precept of refilling the younger widows. The cares of a family would unfit them for this work, and they might even marry heathens, and draw back to perdition.

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places speaks *of what becomes the ministry.* See Dr Whitby on 1 Tim. 3:11.

In Acts 6. we have an account of the origin of the office of deacons in the church of Jerusalem. The church at Philippi also had its deacons, Phil. 1:1. and we have the character necessary for the office, delineated with the same precision as that of elder, 1 Tim. 3. To the poor the gospel is preached. Among them it has been principally successful, and every church of Christ will have the poor ever with them; this office then must always be necessary. There were no honorary offices in the churches of Christ. The faithful discharge of the duties of any office certainly entitles a member to respect from his brethren; their design, however, was not to raise one member above another, but to promote the welfare of the whole body.

As the deacons were appointed to attend to the cases of the poor, and to distribute the alms of the church, their office necessarily called them to visit the members, especially those of the poorer sort. This also would afford them an opportunity of giving suitable admonitions, and their character, which is described to direct the churches in the choice of them, shows that they must be well qualified for this duty. It is unnecessary to insist on the advantages which must arise to a church from persons conducing themselves properly in this office, καλῶς διακονησαντες, 1 Tim. 3:14. The deacons are probably mentioned under the name

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of helps, 1 Cor. 12:28. They were indeed helps to the elders. The chief object of the latter office is the spiritual concerns of the members, without however excluding attention to their temporal necessities. The great object of the former office is the care of the temporal, but not to the exclusion of spiritual concerns.

The deacons in the apostolic church were not all of one sex. Phebe was a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea, ουσαν διακονον, Rom. 16:1. and we have directions for choosing them, as well as those of the other sex, 1 Tim. 3:2. Γυναικας ὡσαυτως σενας, "In like manner shall the *women* be grave." This is the proper verfion of the original, and not as we read it, *their* wives.*

It is very common to deem whatever is unusual to be absurd, and, to some readers, this will probably seem so. However, to show that the persuasion that such an office existed is not a novelty, I shall quote Dr Macknight's note on the verse. 'In translating Γυναικας,' says he, 'by the word *women,* I have followed the Vulgate, which hath here, *Mulieres similiter pudicas,* the women

* γυνη is always translated *woman,* unless the connection limits it to a wife. This is not the case here. A Protestant translator, in his zeal against the Romish celibacy, translated Acts 1:14. "These all continued in prayer and supplication with *their wives.*" His translation, and the common one of this passage are of equal authority. Archbishop Newcome renders it in his translation, *the female deaconesses,* as also in Rom. 16:1.

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in like manner must be modest; because I see no reason for its being made a qualification of deacons to have wives *vigilant and faithful in all things;* especially as it is not made a qualification of bishops to have wives of that character. Besides, Chrysostom, and the Greek commentators, with the mod ancient Latin fathers, were of opinion that the apostle, in this passage, is speaking both of those women who in the first age were employed in ministering to the afflicted, and of those who were appointed to teach the young of their own sex the principles of religion. As the manners of the Greeks did not permit men to have much intercourse with women of character, unless they were their relations, and as the Asiatics were still under greater restraints, it was proper that an order of female teachers should be instituted in the church for instructing the young of their own sex. Of these, I think, the apostle writes in his epistle to Titus, ch. ii. 3, 4. where he gives an account of their office, and calls them, Πρεσβυτιδας, *female elders,* because of their age. And it is believed that they are the persons called *widows,* of whose maintenance by the church the apostle speaks, 1 Tim. 5:2. and whose character and state he there describes, ver. 9–10. Farther, Clement of Alexandria reckons widows among ecclesiastical persons, Paedag. Lib iii. cap. 12. 'There are many precepts in Scripture conterning those who are chosen, some for priests, others for bishops, others for deacons, others for

widows.' Grotius tells us, these female presbyters or elders were ordained by the imposition of hands, till the council of Laodicea; and for this he quotes the eleventh canon of that council. From what is said of Euodias and Syntyche, Philip. 4:2. it is probable they were female presbyters. Perhaps also Priscilla, Tryphsena, and Tryphosa, were of the same order, with some others, whom in his epistle to the Romans he salutes, Rom. 16:3, 12. as labouring in the Lord.

'For these reasons, I think the apostle in 1 Tim. 3:11. describes the qualifications not of the deacons wives, but of the women who in the first age were employed by the church to minister to the sick and afflicted, and to instruct the young of their own sex in the principles of the Christian faith.'

The Doctor's note on Romans 16:1. is to the same purpose. 'Cornelius Nepos, in the preface to his history, speaking of the manners of the Greeks, informs us, that it was not customary with them to have free access to the company of women of virtue, unless they were their relations. His words are, 'Many things are esteemed proper amongst us, which appear shameful amongst them. What Roman is ever ashamed to introduce his wife to a feast? or what mistress of a family does not sit at the head of the table, and entertain the company? But in Greece it is very different; for there a woman is not admitted to an entertainment, unless the company consist only

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of relations of the family. They also fit in a retired part of the house, which is called *rvtumwmt,* into which only near relations are admitted*.* In Asia, the female sex were under still greater restraints. Wherefore, as the Christian religion was first spread in Asia and Greece, it is evident that such of the female sex as needed other instruction besides what was given in the public assemblies, must have received it in private from some of their own sex who were appointed to teach them. Accordingly we learn from the New Testament, and from the most ancient Christian writers, that even in the apostles' days, some women remarkable for their knowledge, prudence and piety, and of a fit age, were chosen to instrust the newly converted and the young of their own sex, and to exhort the sick and comfort the afflicted, who could not attend the public ministrations. These female teachers are mentioned under the appellation of *widows,* 1 Tim. 5:3. where also, ver. 9. their *character* and *election* are described. Farther, as the first Christians were remarkable for their love to each other, they appointed in every church men to whom they gave

* 'Pleraque nostris moribiis suut decora, quæ apud illos turpia putantur. Quem enim Romanorum pudet uxorem ducere in convivium? aut cujus mater familias, non primum locum tenet ædium, atque in celebritate versatur? quod multo fit aliter in Græcia. Nam neque in convivium adhibetur, nisi propinquorum: neque sedet, nisi in interiore parte ædium, quæ Γυναικονιτις, *gynæconitis* adpellatur, quo nemo accedit, nisi propinqua cognatione conjungitur.'

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the appellation of deacons, whose office it was to make collections for the poor, and to apply these collections in relieving widows and orphans who were destitute, the sick also, and the imprisoned for their religion, whom they visited and comforted with the greatest tenderness. In like manner, they appointed women whom they named deaconesses, to perform the same offices to the distressed of their own sex, and whom for that purpose, they supplied with money out of the church's funds. The character and office of these female deacons the apostle has described, 1 Tim. 5:9., and, verse 10. orders the widows, or female presbyters, to be chosen from among them. The deaconess is also described, 1 Tim. 3:11. and in the apostolical constitutions, lib. iii. cap. 15. Προχειρισαι δε και διακονον πιστην, και ἁγιαν, εις τας των γυναικων ὑπερεσιας. "Ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for the ministries towards the women." Ignatius likewise in his epistle ad Antiochens, No. xii. thus writes, "I salute, τας εν Χριστω διακονους, the deaconesses in Christ." Pliny too, in his famous letter to the emperor Trajan, mentions them; for he told him, that in order to get certain information concerning the Christians, he had put two maid servants to the torture, who were called among the Christians *ministra,* that is, *deaconesses,* expecting no doubt that, as they were of the weaker sex, and held an office in the church, they would be constrained to discover the secrets of their religion. His words are, 'On

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which account, I judged it the more necessary to endeavour to ascertain the truth by tormenting two handmaids, who were called *servants.*'* The office of female deacon being of such early institution, and of such utility, it is probable Phœbe held that office in the church of Cenchreæ. For she is not only called διακονον, *a deaconess,* but she is said to have performed the offices of a deaconess, ver. 2. "She hath been a helper of many, and of myself also;" at lead Origen and Chrysostom understood the apostle as speaking of a female deacon in this passage.'†

Section II.

We have feen that the apostolic churches had always, when fully set in order, a plurality of elders, or a presbytery. This, as other recorded examples, the churches are certainly bound to follow in every age, and indeed, if we consider the importance of the office, it will appear that one man is inadequate to its duties. These are so numerous, and the necessary gifts so various, that we cannot expect to find them in, or properly performed by one man. Besides, a single elder is

* Quo magis necessarium credidi, ex dnabus ancillis, quæ Ministræ dicebantur, quid esset veri, et per tormenta quærere.

† See Macknight on the Epist. *in loc.* See also Scott, Guise, Doddridge, Grotius, Hammond, Le Clerc and Whitby, on 1 Tim. 5. who all understand the passage in this sense.

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under great temptation, either to become self-willed, and to endeavour to rule according to his own pleasure, from having no equals in the church; or, on the other hand, there is a danger lest he be despised, and his opinion, being considered only that of an individual, not to be regarded so much as it ought. He will also be very apt to fall into a careless, slovenly way of carrying on the business of the church. This is almost the certain consequence of any person having too much to do. Besides, where there is but one elder, if he die or leave the church, they are in an imperfect state, and without any ruler until another be chosen.

Under a consciousness of his proneness to err, a single elder cannot but be disposed, on some occasions, to consult those on whose judgment he most relies. Through the corruption of human nature, this is apt to excite jealousy in a church, and to make the members consider themselves as in part ruled by those who are not in office. Every cause or occasion of jealousy in a church should, as much as possible, be prevented. Now there is less danger of jealousy being excited by a presbytery, than by persons not in office. Besides, we have more reason to expect that the Lord will guide those whom he sets over a church, when consulting about its affairs. If there be only one elder, and if he does not consult some of the brethren on any difficult case which may come before the church, he may fall into an error, and be the

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occasion of much sin; but in a multitude of counsellors there is safety.

Besides the example of the first churches, there are also important reasons for each church having a plurality of deacons as well as elders. It would be improper that an individual should have the charge of money matters. This might give birth to very unjust suspicions. The number of elders or deacons is not mentioned, unless in the case of the feven at Jerusalem. We must act respecting this according to circumstances. A large church? requires more than a small one. We are not prevented from exercising our judgment in the management of the churches; only we must beware left our notions of fitness and expediency set aside any ordinance of Jesus, however minute it may appear.

In the rule or oversight of the church it is evident, unless it be very small, one man can do but little. The ordinary walk and conversation of the members cannot be so well known, as when several consider this to be their peculiar care. We have seen, that although those who preach the gospel have a right to live by the gospel, the churches are not, in all cases, burdened with the support of their pastors. If, indeed, their circumstances admit of it, and they neglect it, they disregard the appointment of Christ, who commands that those who are taught communicate to their teachers in all good things. It is by no means, however, absolutely necessary that all, or even

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that any one of the elders should leave their worldly employments, unless the concerns of the church render it necessary, and they be able to provide for them. When pastors of Christian churches lay aside secular buliness, this ought not to be for the sake of obtaining worldly respectability, but because their attending to this, and to their pastoral duties, is apt to interfere. The elders of Ephesus were exhorted to labour with their hands, not merely for their own support, but that they might be able to relieve others.

It is of much importance that the elders should use their several gifts for the edification of the church; that those who chiefly excel in public preaching should thus be employed, while their brethren in the presbytery are attending to that for which they are best qualified. This is completely according to the spirit, and in no degree opposite to the letter of Scripture. The elders are all equals in office, but an equality of gifts among them is not to be expected. Where the elders and the church are of a proper temper, there will be no disputing on this head.

To require a considerable measure of gifts for public speaking, as essential to an elder, must preclude the existence of a presbytery in most, at least in many churches. As to public preaching, the number of the church is of no consequence. It is as easy to preach to five hundred as to fifty. The gifts of some are at once calculated to attract the attention of the careless, and to edify believers.

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In this country, the members of the church often form a small proportion of the assembly on the Lord's day. Ought we not to study to promote the glory of Christ in their conversion and infraction? Are not all things to be done to edification?* Is it necessary that, because the church requires several elders, they should, *in their turn,* conduct the public service? Where this has been the case, what has been the consequence in some churches? few, besides the church, have attended, and an apparent disregard about the conversion of sinners, and a disuse or neglect of the means by which it is effected, have taken place, to the great injury of the power of religion, even in the members of the church.

Every church ought diligently to seek after the conversion of others, and to cause the gospel to found out from them. If a church grow indifferent about those who are without, it is a proof that religion does not flourifh within.†

* This is a general rule, provided we never employ it to set aside or add to the ordinances of Christ.

† We know that the apostles remained in Jerusalem after elders were ordained. However well qualified these elders were, we cannot suppose them equal to the apostles in gifts for edifying the church, or for alarming the careless. In this case we may well suppose the apostles would generally preach in public, especially when unbelievers were prestnt; and yet the elders had much to attend to, in overseeing the brethren, and instructing them in private. Now, though the apostles have no successors as such, and the elders are all equal, can there be any impropriety in each using his peculiar gifts for the glory of Christ? Nay,

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The state of our own country is peculiarly favourable, in some respects, for spreading the gospel. Amidst many evils attending that indiscriminate profession which is so general, there is one advantage. Many come to hear the gospel, and such should ever be encouraged, by the best accommodations in our power, to be present at the meetings of the churches of the saints; nor should any thing be omitted to attract their attention, unless it misrepresent or corrupt the gospel, or the institutions of Christ. No stumbling-block should be put in the way of Jew or Gentile, or of the church of God. Pastors and churches should beware lest the ministry of reconciliation be blamed for their faults, errors, or weaknesses.

It seems very desirable that there should be at lead one pastor in every church, whose time shall be wholly devoted to the work of the ministry, who shall give himself wholly to reading, meditation, and prayer, 1 Tim. 4:15. A pastor supported by the church that he may be thus employed, is nowise superior to his brethren in the eldership; but if his gifts, or education, or his studies, fit him not only to edify the church, but peculiarly qualify him to affect the careless, ought not these to be employed as his strength will permit?

It is true, the apostle supposes that an unbeliever may come in when the brethren were ex-

are they not bound to do it, unless Scripture has said that each eider is to attend exactly to the same thing?

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horting one another, and be convinced and converted, l Cor. 14:23, 25. and no doubt God may, and does bless the exhortations of the brethren; but experience proves what we must reasonably expect, that where means are not used to draw the attention of the careless, few attend, and comparatively little good is done. Indeed the apparent indifference of some churches, and their neglect in using proper means for the conversion of tinners, has prejudiced many of God's people altogether against scriptural churches; giving too much reason for the charge, that their numbers have been kept up by Christians leaving other societies, while few have been brought to a knowledge of the truth amongst themselves. Surely, there must have been utterly a fault in their system, or God would have countenanced his own ordinances, not only for the edification of believers, but for the conversion of sinners. We are by no means, however, to exclude mutual exhortation in the churches. This is enjoined by the Lord, and answers many important purposes.

It is objected to elders being engaged in secular business, that they have not time for studying the Scriptures so as to teach others; but if a man's mind be spiritual, if he meditate day and night on the law of God, he will, through the grace of Christ, be fitted for instructing his brethren, provided he has suitable gifts for the work. Whether the elders of the church of Ephesus had the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit,

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we cannot tell. It is probable that they had. But extraordinary gifts did not preclude the necessity of study, for it is enjoined upon Timothy, 1 Tim. 4:13–14. who was possessed of these. A man may redeem time for study, particularly in some kinds of business; but when circumstances admit of it, let him, by all means, give himself wholly to these things, that his profiting may appear to all.

When the Waldenses and Albigenses were reproached by the church of Rome on account of their pastors being engaged in secular business, they replied, this was from necessity, not choice. They were too poor to support their pastors, but they did not consider this to be a sufficient reason for neglecting the ordinances of Christ, or for remaining in an antichristian church.

The elders must watch as those who are to give account, endeavouring, by every means in their power, to promote the power of religion in the members, by public and private exhortation and admonition from house to house. They mult visit the sick, and observe that the poor are properly taken care of; for they are overseers of the whole flock, whether deacons or others. They must manifest in their own lives, the power of the doctrines which they teach, being examples to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, bearing the infirmities of the weak, and lifting up the hands which hang down. They

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must particularly attend to any impropriety of conduct, or any erroneous opinions in any member of the church, and act according to the laws of Christ, without partiality. They are to preside in, and to rule over the church, and the brethren are required to submit themselves. Here a question may arise respecting the extent of their authority. On the one hand, they are not to be lords over God's heritage; on the other, they must let no man despise them, but rebuke with all authority, Titus 2:15. How far then, it may be asked, are the members bound to submit?

This question could not be answered were there not laws laid down in Scripture, in all respects sufficient for the governmentof the churches. But this being admitted, there is no greater difficulty in replying to it, than in ascertaining the power of a magistrate under a well regulated government, or the authority of a judge when presiding at a trial by jury. The magistrate is appointed to carry the laws of the country into effect; he has no power to *make* laws. The same holds with respect to the pastors of a church. There are certain laws by which they are to rule; if they be unacquainted with these laws, or not qualified to apply them, they are unfit for the office. They cannot require the church, or any individual member, to submit, unless they can show that the authority of Christ enjoins submission in that particular case.

Bat although the office of the magistrate and of

the pastor thus far agree, they, in some respects, materially differ. It is absolutely necessary that civil government should be maintained. Although a magistrate is liable to be afterwards called to account for an illegal exercise of power, he must, in the mean time, be submitted to. Hence, if any one under his jurisdiction refused to obey his orders, such a person would be liable to immediate imprisonment, or to some other punishment. This may be an inconvenience attending the administration of human affairs, but it is unavoidable. There would be an end of all authority, if a man might refuse to submit whenever he chose to allege that the authority of the magistrate was not supported by the laws.

But the end of all Christ's laws is to promote real religion. This must be a reasonable and willing service, and does not admit of coercion. The pastor must rule only by persuasion. By explaining and inculcating the laws of Christ, he is to commend himself to every man's conscience. He must neither require nor accept of obedience to himself. The obedience he demands must be for the King of Sion. Even the apostles, though really infallible in delivering the laws of Christ, were not lords over God's heritage.* They pro-

* Christ clearly pointed out to his disciples the difference of the government any of them were to exercise, from that exercised by civil magistrates. 'The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors; but ye shall not be so," &c. Luke 22:

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ved their apostolical authority by signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds, 2 Cor. 12:12.; but they disclaimed the idea of having dominion over their brethren, and hence we find them exercising the utmost patience, even avoiding visiting the churches until they had used every argument to rectify abuses, and given time for these arguments to have their full effect.

This could not take place in civil government. However disposed magistrates may be to mercy, they must without delay punish the disobedient for the safety of the state. But the power of Jesus is too great, and his government too strong to be shaken. If any are not reclaimed by exhortation and forbearance, their foot shall slide in due time, and in the mean time he will make the wrath of man to praise him.

It surely then becomes pastors to be jealous lest the people submit to them instead of submitting to Christ. He is the most faithful pastor who has least desire for undue personal influence, and who strives most earnestly to promote implicit subjection to the laws of Christ. This can only be attained by instrusting the people, and by not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God. However wise and pious a pastor may be, however well he may know what the church ought to do in any situa-

25, 26. He is not here speaking of tyrannical governors, but of those who were esteemed benefactors, and so called, as Ptolemy Euergetes, (i.e. benefactor) by their subjects but the authority of the apostles was to be completely of a different nature.

tion, he ought not to wish the people to walk by his light. A temporary peace may be maintained, or rather, silence may be observed in a church by their implicitly following the opinion of a pastor or a presbytery; but such peace is always deceitful, and does not rest on a solid foundation. When the members of a church are well instructed; when every act of the church is an act of obedience to Christ; although matters may go on more slowly, and much forbearance may be necessary on all sides, yet greater progress will be made, and there will be less danger of falling into, and persisting in specious errors. The wisest man may err, and I suppose there is no pastor who has been in the habit of hearing the members of a church deliver their opinions on the cases of discipline which have occurred, without receiving instruction from them.

It is of much importance to understand the nature of the subjection to the pastors of a church, enjoined by Christ. From not understanding this subject, many offences have arisen in churches. A pastor, on the one hand, is persuaded that he is to rule; on the other hand, the people know that he is not to exercise lordship; and mutual jealousies arise. He thinks he is only contending for the power committed to him, which is necessary for the good of the church. They think they are maintaining their rights, refilling encroachments which may prove very hurtful, and standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has

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made them free. He may have witnessed much confusion, strife, and debate, from the want of pastoral authority, and therefore be more jealous of losing his; while they, knowing what priest-craft has been exercised by men calling themselves ministers of Christ, may be afraid of becoming the servants of men.

But when it is clearly understood that a pastor is only to carry into execution the laws of Christ, and that with the consent and in the prefence of the church, all grounds of jealousy are removed. He has less temptation to want of forbearance, and they have ample security against gradual encroachment. Should it be thought that this leaves the churches without a government Efficiently effective for the preservation of peace amongst them, we can only answer, *No other government is warranted by Scripture;* and we have no right to lay on the churches any other burden than Christ has laid. Besides, his kingdom is purely spiritual; he reigns in the hearts of his people, and no coercive or penal laws are suited to promote his design. This is perfectly consistent with the pastors of a church receiving due respect from their brethren. They are over them in the Lord, appointed by his authority, and they must acknowledge them as their lawful rulers, and esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

As the edification of the church depends, in a great measure, on the piety, ability and faithfulness

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of elders, the members ought to bear them much on their hearts before the Lord, that like workmen who need not be ashamed, they may rightly divide the word of God; that their conduct and conversation may be holy and exemplary; and, that they may be directed in all which concerns the church. There ought also to be a degree of deference entertained for their judgment, for if they are (as they ought to be) best qualified for edifying their brethren, doubtless their judgment on any subject deserves peculiar consideration. Besides the qualifications which pointed them out to their brethren, as fit objects of their choice to the pastoral office, the office itself being the institution of Christ, there is reason to expect, on this account, that, through the prayers of their brethren, they shall have wisdom to go out and in before the people; and this consideration ought to produce a spirit of submission to them.

This spirit indeed ought also to be cherished amongst the members, one towards another. "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility," 1 Pet. 5:5. Each should esteem others better than themselves, and not be wise in their own conceit. It ought peculiarly to be cherished towards those who have distinguished themselves by devotedness to God. "Ye know," says Paul, "the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every

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one that helpeth with us and laboureth," 1 Cor. 16:15–16. This spirit of subjection to the elders, and to one another, is perfectly consident with the church not being the servants of men, and where this spirit does not subsist, religion mud be at a low ebb.

Should an elder act improperly, it is the duty of the church to admonish him. This we find expressly commanded in Scripture: "Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it," Col. 4:17. By becoming an elder, a man is not raised above the laws of Christ, and the precept, Matt. 18:15–16. is equally applicable to elders as to any others.

The deacons ought also to be highly respected in the church. They devote a portion of their time to the care of the poor, and to other good works, and their characters are such as entitle them to much consideration. Their office gives them no authority to rule* in the church, but as they are peculiarly engaged in the Lord's work, they are entitled to special regard.

Besides the support of the poor, various expences are incurred by a church. The support

* Attempts have been made to supply the want of a presbytery, by the deacons acting in some respects as elders; but this is unscriptural and disorderly. The duties of every office are clearly pointed out in the word of God, and where that word in all its parts is attended to, there will be no need of any interference.

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of the elders, the bread and wine for the Lord's supper, &c. All these come within the province of the deacons, and therefore they must be men of irreproachable character, possessing the full considence of their brethren.

Great care is necessary in the choice of pastors and deacons. This, and every thing else in a church, ought to be done with much prayer to Jesus for direction, and none are to be chosen but those who have given proof of their fidelity and ability.*

Although the same jealousy or seclusion of females does not prevail with us as it did formerly, and still does in Asia, yet the importance and propriety of such aged women as those mentioned 1 Tim. 5. for watching over and instructing their own sex, are by no means superseded. Where there are widows answering the description there given, thus employed, they must prove eminently useful. It gives less offence to the world to see women conversing with their own sex, and they are better calculated to be useful to them. The united brethren commonly called Moravians, have long employed females in this way, and have found great benefit arising from it.

Proper deaconesses may be procured in al-

* The apostle, speaking of the deacons, says, "Let these also first be proved." The elder must not be a novire, or a new convert, (νεοφυτος) but must have given proof of his fitness for the work. This was necessary also in the deacons. How little regarded is either of these precepts!

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most every church. It is as evident that this office existed in the apostolic churches as that of the deacon. It is evident how useful they maybe amongst the female members. They know better what women stand in need of when sick, they can inquire more minutely into their circumstances, and, by making known and relieving the wants of the members, they connect the church more closely, and thereby increase love, and promote all the ends of fellowship.

These offices ought certainly to be revived and adopted in Christian churches, and, like every other divine ordinance, we shall find them profitable. The world, while wearing a form of godliness, may laugh; but are they our masters? All spiritual things are foolishness to them. Custom alone prevents them from ridiculing other ordinances. Had baptism and the Lord's supper fallen into disuse, what a fund of entertainment would they have had by seeing them observed for the first time! Let us not be afraid of the reproach of the cross.

But women it is said may attend to their own sex, they may teach and instruct them, or visit the sick, without being officially employed. True; and it is also the duty of every member to look after poor brethren, and to watch over them in love; but the Lord has seen good to appoint that certain offices should subsist in his church for these purposes, while he has enjoined all to assist in the work, as far as they are able.

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We see that the apostolic churches had deaconefles and female teachers. We may be sure they were very useful; and if we follow the directions left for making a proper choice, we shall doubtless experience the good effects of it. But let us always imitate the apostolic churches, not only in their offices, but in the manner in which they obtained them. When a church was gathered, the apostles did not ordain elders and deacons immediately. They gave them time to become acquainted with the endowments of the members, and to observe whom the Lord pointed out for the work. A church might be some time without elders, nor were they to be chosen till the Lord bestowed some measure of the necessary gifts. "If any be blameless," says Paul, "the husband of one wife, having faithful children, not accused of riot, or unruly," &c. &c. Titus 1:6. This reminded the churches of their dependence on Christ, it would excite them to prayer, and would cause them with much joy to receive those persons whom he qualified, without whom they had been incomplete. In like manner let us press forward; let us never be satisfied, nor give the Lord any rest, till we come behind in no gift, and enjoy all the advantages of his institutions.

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CHAPTER VIII.

OF ORDINATION.

We have already noticed the unscriptural and pernicious distinction which has prevailed between clergy and laity. To preserve this distinction, the term *ordination,* frequently used in Scripture, has been much misapplied. In the word of God, *to ordain* means in general to appoint. We find in the New Testament it was common to lay hands on a person appointed to a particular office or work. This was probably derived from the Old Testament. Moses laid his hand on Joshua, his successor. Laying on of hands was not however confined to appointing to an office. It was observed also in healing the sick, Acts 28:8. and in communicating the Holy Ghost by the apostles.*

When Paul and Barnabas were sent by the

* It should seem that laying on hands was an ancient practice, not only among the Hebrews, but also in Greece, when blessings were pronounced, or prayers offered respecting the persons on whom hands were laid. Xenophon says that Abradates, θιγων αυτης της κεφαλης, touching or laying his hands on the head of Panthea, his wife, and looking up to heaven, prayed, 'O great Jupiter, grant me to appear worthy of such a wife, and of such a friend as Cyrus.' Cyri Institut. edit. Hutchinson, Lond. 8vo. 1765. p. 360.

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Holy Ghost to the Gentiles, the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch laid hands on them, thus solemnly separating or fetting them apart for the work, Acts 13:3. &c. This was not ordination in the sense in which that word is now commonly used, the ministry, nor a rite whereby the gifts of the Holy Ghost were communicated, Paul had been filled with the Holy Ghost long before, Acts 9:17. and there was no other apostle, properly so called, with the church. From the time of his conversion, he had been engaged in preaching the gospel, Acts 9:22, 29. 11:20. Gal. 1:17. and previous to the laying on of hands, he is reckoned among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch, Acts 13:1. This then was merely a solemn designation to a particular work which they fulfilled, Acts 14:26. When the deacons were appointed, the apostles prayed and laid hands on them, Acts 6:6. thus ordaining or appointing them to the office.* We have no express example for laying hands on the elders, but there is no doubt that it was practised. The apostle directs Timothy to lay hands suddenly on no man, 1 Tim. 5:22. and as he had just been speaking of elders, it is plain he is alluding to their appointment.

There is certainly no good reason why, in the churches of the saints in our days, we should ordain

* The laying on of hands was not, it would appear, to communicate the Holy Ghost. The deacons were to be men previously full of the Holy Ghost, Acts 6:3.

of ordination

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elders by laying on of hands, and not ordain deacons in the same way. Laying hands on one, and not on the other, fosters the common prejudice that elders are *ordained men,* and deacons not so; whereas, in fact, there is no difference between them, except in the offices to which they are appointed.

Some would set aside laying on of hands altogether, as being connected with the communication of the Holy Ghost; but this was only communicated by the laying on of the *apostles*' hands. Yet the presbytery laid hands on Timothy.* It is evident that laying on of hands was used in separating men to the ministry in the primitive apostolic churches. It was not confined to occasions on which the Holy Ghost was conferred. It was used in ordaining elders and deacons, who required only the ordinary gifts. There is nothing in the word of God letting aside this usage.

* His charge was committed to him according to the prophecies that went before of him, 1 Tim. 1:18. Hence the gift is said to be bestowed on him by prophecy, ch. 4:14. Paul laid his hands on him, and communicated to him the gift necessary for the work in which he was to be engaged, 2 Tim. 1:6. and he was besides set apart to his office by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, 1 Tim. 4:14. It is not said that the gift of the Spirit was conferred on him δια *by* or *through* the instrumentality of the laying on the hands of the presbytery, as he affirms was the case in laying his own hands on him, 2 Tim. 1:6. but it was given him by prophecy, μετα with the laying on the hands of the presbytery. The imposition of their hands in setting him apart to the ministry, accompanied, or was added to the imposition of the apostle Paul's hands whereby he received the gift.

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It ought therefore to be observed, where this can be done, according to the example given us in Scripture.

'Laying on of hands appears a solemn and proper mode of designation. The act itself may be indifferent, so is kneeling in prayer; but there are many bodily acts which, from custom, obtain a significant meaning, and it seems improper to change them when sanctioned by the word of God. The laying on of hands with prayer, is a scripture usage in the case of blessing and of devoting, or setting things or persons apart to any service or work of God to which he appoints or calls them, and can therefore be used after revelation is perfected, and after the extraordinary gifts and signs are ceased. But it is wholly without foundation in Scripture, to make the being of church officers, or of a Christian church, to depend upon such a declarative ceremony. All that can be said of such an usage is, that it ought not to be neglected where it can be done, as we ought to pray standing, or kneeling, or prostrate on the ground, and lifting up our hands; but it would be odd to say that a Christian cannot, and must not pray at all, when he is not able to put himself in such postures.'*

Ordination is at this day considered by many as conferring an indelible character.† Although,

* Glas.

† Wickliffe rejected this indelibility. *Vide* Dial. lib. IV. cap. xv. 1515.

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say they, a man may preach without being ordained, he must not baptize nor administer the Lord's supper; but afterwards, he is not only entitled to do so in his own, but in any other church. To say nothing of the impropriety of considering the dispensation of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper as superior to the preaching of the word, which plainly reverses the scriptural order, if it be improper for a man who is unordained to administer these ordinances in a church, it is equally so for a man ordained over one church, to administer them in another. A man who is ordained an elder, receives no office except that of an overseer in a particular church; just as one who is appointed a magistrate in one city, has thereby no jurisdiction in another. When a man who has been ordained gives up his charge, one would suppose he must return to his former private station; but this is not generally deemed proper. An unknown something has been communicated to him, of which he cannot be deprived without what is called deposition. 'The steps I have already mentioned and explained,' says Dr Campbell, 'advancing from presbytery to parochial episcopacy, thence to prelacy or diocesan episcopacy, from that to metropolitical primacy, and thence again to patriarchal superintendancy, together with those methods I have pointed out to you, whereby the ministers of religion distinguished themselves from their Christiau brethren, insensibly prepared the minds of the people for the notion, that in or-

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dination there was something exceedingly mysterious, and even inscrutable. It came at length not to be considered as a solemn manner of appointing a fit person to discharge the duties of the pastoral office amongst a particular flock or congregation, and of committing them to his care, but to be regarded more especially as the imprinting of a certain character, or unperceivable and incomprehensible signature on a person, a character which, though, in consequence of human means employed by the proper minister, it was conferred, could by no power less than omnipotence be removed. And though at first hearing one would be apt to imagine, that by this tenet they derogated as much from the ecclesiastic power on one hand, as they enhanced it on the other, since they maintained that the persons who gave this character could not take it away, the effect on mens' conceptions was very different. If a single ceremony, or form of words, could with as much facility withdraw as confer a gift in its nature invisible, nobody would be impressed with the conception, that any thing very wonderful had been either given or taken. The words or ceremony of ordaining would be considered as nothing more than the established mode of inverting a man with the right of exercising canonically the sacred function; and the words or ceremony used in the deposition, as the mode of dripping him of that right or privilege, so that he should no longer be entitled to exercise it. In this way he would be

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under the same canonical incapacity he lay under before his ordination, which answers to what was for many ages called in the church, reducing a clergyman to lay-communion. There would be nothing more extraordinary here, than the creating of a lord high steward, for instance, by certain solemnities accompanying the delivery of a white baton into his hands, and placing him on an eminent seat, and his putting an end to his office, by publicly breaking the baton, and coming down from his seat. Whereas for a man to do a thing, which nothing less than Omnipotence can undo, and which even that, in fact, will never be employed in undoing, to imprint a character, a something which, in spite of angels, men, and devils, shall to eternity remain indelible, appears the result of a power inconceivable indeed, and little less than divine.

'Whence ideas of this kind originated, ideas that do not seem to quadrate with the so much boasted power of the keys, which implies, alike, that of opening and that of shutting, admitting and excluding, binding and loosing; ideas of which the apostles and evangelists have no where given us the slightet hint, and of which it is plain they had not themselves the smallest apprehension, is a matter of curious inquiry, and closely connected with the subject: of the hierarchy. I shall therefore endeavour briefly to trace the rice and progress of so strange a doctrine.

'Ecclesiastical degrees were not instituted ori-

ginally under the notion of dignities, pre-eminencies, or honours, as they became afterwards, but as ministries, charges, and what the apoflle Paul called εργα, works, 1 Tim. 3:1. "If a man desire the office of a bishop," says he, "he destreth a good work." Consequently, if in any thing denominated the office of a bishop, there be no work to do, it cannot be the office whereof the apostle speaks; for the misapplication of the name can never alter the nature of the thing. The persons accordingly possessed of such offices were styled, both by our Lord and by Paul his apostle, εργατας, labourers, workmen. "The labourers are few," says the former, "and the workman is worthy of his meat." The latter recommends it to Timothy to acquit himself as "a workman that needeth not be ashamed."

'For some time, indeed, it could hardly enter into the mind of any man to think himself entitled to decline executing personally, whilst able to execute, a trust solemnly committed to him, and which he had himself undertaken. For the terms *ordination* and *appointment to a particular pastoral charge,* were perfectly synonymous. If one, however, in those truly primitive times, (which but rarely happened) found it necessary to retire from the work, he never thought of retaining either the title or the emoluments. And though the ministers were of two kinds, the one called anciently the ministry of the word, and, in later times, the cure of souls, and the other a ministry

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in things temporal, for the support and relief of the poor and infirm, as was the deaconship, those in both offices were equally held bound to personal service.* Nor would any one have thought, in the earliest ages, of serving by a deputy, unless for a short time, and on account of some remarkable and unavoidable impediment; much less would he have accepted another charge that was incompatible with his former one. But to be made a bishop, and in being so to receive no charge whatever, to have no work, to execute, could have been regarded no otherwise than as a contradiction in terms.

'Indeed the name of the office implied the service, without which it could not subsist, that is, without which there was no office. The name bishop, as I have observed, means overseer, and this is a term manifestly correlative to that which expresses the thing to be overseen. The connection is equally necessary and essential as between father and child, sovereign and subject, husband and wife. The one is inconceivable without the other. Ye cannot make a man an overseer to whom ye give no oversight, no more than ye can make a man a shepherd, to whom ye give

* The word *ministry,* like that of ordination, has been much misapplied. It is generally confined to those who labour in the word of doctrine. The view given of it by the Doctor is perfectly just. Pastors have a particular ministry or service to perform, and deacons one of a different hind. Both are *ministers* in the church.

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'the charge of no sheep, or a husband to whom ye give no wife. Nay, in fact, as a man ceases to be a husband, the moment that he ceases to have a wife, and is no longer a shepherd than he has the care of sheep, so in the only proper and original import of the words, a bishop continues a bishop only whilst he continues to have people under his spiritual care. These things, indeed, are so plain, that one is almost ashamed to attempt to illustrate them. Yet the changes that too soon ensued, have turned matters so entirely off their original bottom, that propositions which, in the age of the apostles, must have appeared self-evident, require a careful developement to us moderns; so much is the import of names and phrases altered in the course of some successive centuries.'*

Dr Campbell proceeds to show how the primitive idea of ordination was perverted by the practice of ordaining men without a charge, and afterwards by the fiction of an indelible character being communicated by ordination. He considers this to be equally absurd as to make a man a king without a kingdom, or a husband without a wife, and inquires, if unmeaning words will satisfy, why may not the mystical, invisible, indelible character of husband be imprinted by such a marriage as well as that of priest or bishop by such an ordination?

* Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, vol i. p. 336, –341.

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It is to be regretted that such unscriptnral sentiments are not yet exploded. Some missionaries, when going abroad, are *ordained.* They are then clergymen, and entitled to the appellation of *Reverend,* while they are accompanied by so many lay-brethren, who are also intended to preach the gospel. What is meant by this distinction? Doubtless, all missionaries ought to be commended to the grace of God for his support and assistance; that is, *ordained* to the work in which they are engaged.

As to rank in civil society, Christianity leaves the officers of churches just as it finds them, neither raising nor lowering them in the smallest degree. It does not interfere with worldly titles and distinctions giving honour to whom honour is due, but it does not bestow such on any religious account, which are always an evident token of its corruptions. There are indeed various services so be performed in a church of Christ, and these give rise to different offices, to the discharge of whose duties some of the members must be called. But it is of importance to remember, that all distinction created by holding such offices, is wholly of a religious nature, confined entirely to the relations in which those who hold them stand to their brethren in the church, and do not, in the smallest degree, affect any of the relations of civil life. A separate and distinct order of men in society, created by official situation in a church of

Christ, is something entirely foreign to the nature and spirit of the New Testament dispensation.

The distinclion of clergy and laity has however been eagerly maintained, and this has been kept up by peculiarity of dress, and by certain titles. It may seem trifling to notice these, but circuinstances, insignificant in themselves, have more influence in the world than many suppose: 'Men are but children of a larger growth.' It has been observed that the world is ruled by names, and experience shows that there is much truth in the remark. The Lord did not think the subject too insignificant to speak on. He once and again notices the dress of the Scribes and Pharisees. "They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments; they desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets," Matt. 23:5. Luke 20:46. Connected with their dress, he mentions their love of titles, and forbids his disciples to receive such. "Be not ye called Rabbi." To say that the title of Reverend is a matter of no consequence, is to charge this precept with being too trifling to be observed; and to assume or receive that, or any of similar import, is a direct violation of its spirit and purpose. It seems very obvious, that in this passage the Lord Jesus expressly prohibits the use of all honorary, exclusive titles of distinclion in his kingdom, as entirely incompatible with its nature. They have a tendency, not only to puff up those on whom they are conferred, but also to create

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a false respect and veneration in the minds of others; and they introduce a worldly influence, destructive, as far as it goes, of Christian principle. To violate this rule, then, is not so light a matter as many seem to suppose. Those who are acquainted with human nature, and with the importance which many poor deluded votaries of Rome attach to the garments and titles of their priests, will be convinced of this. Indeed these have had no small influence in maintaining that sort of worldly distinction between ministers and people, which has been so anxiously contended for.

As to titles, Dr Campbell justly observes, that in proportion as real religion declined, these were multiplied. The only object of titles or of peculiarity of habits, must be to procure respect for ministers, by working on the prejudices and weaknesses of mankind. But neither Jesus nor his apostles ever fought honour by such means. They are human inventions, very necessary, it may be, in the kingdoms of this world, but can never prove of real benefit to religion. Let ministers of the gospel, by all means, avoid contempt; let them study to maintain the greatest respectability. The word of God shows them an excellent way to obtain it: "Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity," 1 Tim. 4:12.

Elders and deacons, we have seen, ought to be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the

presbytery. Thus was Timothy set apart to the work of the ministry, 1 Tim. 4:14. In a church newly formed, where there are no elders, or indeed where there are, it seems very proper That elders and others, as messengers from neighbouring churches, should assist at their ordination; but this can by no means be said to be indispensable. Yet it tends to promote love and union among the churches, which is of much importance; for although they are completely independent of one another, and responsible for their conduct to Christ alone, they ought, as serving the same Master, and associated for the same purposes, by mutual good offices to cultivate brotherly love.

The apostles ordained elders by prayer and falling. This is recorded for our imitation, and certainly ought not to be omitted, considering the importance of the office, and that all depends on receiving the Lord's blessing on the service. It is worthy of remark, that while so many disputes have taken place as to the mode and validity of ordination, on which the Scriptures are in a great measure silent, so little attention should have been paid to the character and qualifications of the persons to be ordained, which areamply described in the word of God. It is strange, too, that even as to the mode men have so generally departed from the Scriptures; for falling upon such occasions has fallen into general disuse.

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CHAPTER IX.

OF THE ORDINANCES OBSERVED BY THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

THE apostles not only taught the disciples to assemble together, and to choose elders and, deacons, but also to observe certain ordinances. Some of these are mentioned in the account of the church of Jerusalem, Acts 2:42. "And they continued stedfastly in the *apostles' doctrine,* and the *fellowship,* and in *breaking of bread,* and in *prayers,*" all of which they observed regularly on the first day of every week or Lord's day. We find the church also, when assembled, singing the praises of God and engaged in fasting.

SECTION I.
Of the Apostles' Doctrine.

THE apostles received a commandment from Christ, to *preach* the gospel to every creature. Κηρυσσω, *to preach,* properly signifies to perform the office of a herald, to make proclamation. Thus Jonah prcached to Nineveh, Jon. 3:4. See-also Matt. 3:1. 4:17. 10:7. Mark 15:15. Acts 10:42.&c. To *preach* the gospel always signifies to make known by proclamation the glad

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tidings of salvation. It does not mean in Scripture an explanation of or a comment on a doctrine, or any chain of reasoning, but a proclamation of facts, and of truths connected with these facts.*

It was by the preaching of the gospel that churches were gathered, and as we are ever prone to let the saving truth slip from our minds, it is necessary that the churches be constantly put in. remembrance of it. Thus Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I *preached* unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein-ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain: for I delivered unto ycur first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures," 1 Cor. 15:1,–4. Upon this glorious truth the apostles founded every exhortation which they delivered to the churches.

But preaching is not exclusively a church ordinance. Those who labour in the word and doctrine, ought to account it their duty and privilege to publish, wherever they have opportunity, the glad tidings of salvation; to be instant in season out of season. Nor ought others who have talents for this to consider themselves at liberty

* See the Preliminary Dissertations to Campbell's Translation of the Gospels, Dissert, vi. part 5.

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to hide these in a napkin. Every Christian, as he hath received the gift, ought to minister the same as a faithful steward of the manifold grace of God. Churches ought to observe the various endowments of their members, and to excite them to diligence in the use of these. They must provoke one another to love and good works. One end of their association is to prevent any of the talents committed to them as individuals from being lost, neglected or abused.

Wherever we meet with men who are ignorant of the gospel, the law of love requires that we should make known to them the way of falvation, and call upon them to repent and believe the gospel. Some have given up preaching to and addressing or entreating sinners altogether, alleging that we have no warrant to do so.* But the duty is so obvious, it comes so expressly under the precept of loving our neighbour as ourselves, and of doing as we would be done by, that before we could vindicate our neglecting to preach the gospel as we have opportunity, it would be necessary to show that God in his word has directly prohibited it.

Some, who have not carried matters quite so

* This objection arises from our having no express commission except that given to the apostles; but was not this evidently intended for all ages? The objection is exactly the same as that made against the directions to the first churches being designed for these in all ages, that we have only the rules designed for the *apostolic* churches. Those who see the weakness of the reasoning in the one case, may clearly perceive it in the other.

far, have yet used no means to induce sinners, even those whom perhaps they might easily influence, to come to hear the gospel. Their worship is conducted solely with a view to the edification of the church. Our doors, say they, are open; any one may come in and hear the testimony of the gospel, they may also hear us exhort one another, and thus may be convinced and converted. But is this acting properly? Had the apostles so learned Christ? Do their writings breathe such a spirit? or do we find that churches are less edified where greater zeal is discovered for the conversion of sinners, and where suitable and scriptural means are employed for this purpose? Zeal for the general diffusion of the gospel will always keep pace with the success of the work of God in a church.

We have already seen that the elders who are qualified for it, are to labour in the word and doctrine. It is not only necessary that the gospel should be preached for quickening the dead in trespasses and sins, but that the disciples should be *taught* to observe all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded. *Teaching* includes instruction in all the ordinances of Christ, the explanation of their nature and end, as well as directing them in the due performance of all personal and relative duties. It comprehends every kind of instrustion for informing the ignorant, confuting gainsayers, and leading believers from the first principles of Christianity through all the intermediate steps,

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to the perfect knowledge of all the revealed will of God in the Scriptures.* In the epistles to Timothy and Titus, we have ample information with regard to that teaching which is necessary in the churches of the saints. Timothy was to commit the instrustions which he had received from Paul, to faithful men who should be able to teach others; and it is absolutely necessary that an elder be fit to *teach* these, and to open the sacred Scriptures.

Intimately connected with teaching, although not precisely the same, is *exhortation*. It means to excite, by words spoken, to any duty. It comprehends entreaty, consolation, expostulation and rebuke. Teaching means pointing out what is duty, exhortation enforces the practice of it. Thus the apostles *exhorted* the believers to continue in the faith, Acts 14:21. and Barnabas *exhorted* chem all, that, with purpose of heart, they should cleave unto the Lord, Acts 11:23.

Teaching and *exhortation* are important parts of the duty of elders, but are not to be confined to them. The members of a church are bound to teach and admonish one another, Col. 3:16. The apostle was persuaded of the Romans, that they were full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to admonish one another, ch. 15:14. He informs the Corinthians that they might all prophesy, 1 Cor. 14:31. and takes notice of

* See an essay on the means by which the gospel was preached in the world, Miss. Mag. Vol. I. pag. 5.

the good effects likely to arise from it. In the commandment that women should keep silence in the churches, it is implied that the men were at liberty to speak, and he commands the believers to *exhort* one another daily while it is called today, Heb. 3:13. One great end for which Christians are commanded to assemble, is, that they might have stated opportunities of mutual exhortation. "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but *exhorting one another.*" Thus ought all the gifts possessed by the members to be turned to account.

Christians in this country have experienced the good effects of mutual exhortation in their fellowship meetings. In consequence of not being connected with churches of Christ, they were deprived of this and various other advantages, and to supply the deficiency, they met together in private. But a church of Christ furnishes all the means of grace within itself, and although it does not prevent the members from meeting more privately, it does not oblige them to do so in order to enjoy the benefit of mutual exhortation.

Under the head of the apostles' doctrine we must not omit another important appointed means for the edification of the churches—*reading* the Scriptures in their public assemblies. The reading of Moses and the prophets was long practised in the Jewish synagogues. Of this mention is made in the New Testament. At a very early

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period after our Lord's ascension, the apostles began to write and to publish the Scriptures of the New Testament, and it was intended that these writings should be publicly read, as is evident from the injunctions delivered to the churches. Thus Paul, in writing to the church at Colosse, "When this epistle is read amongst you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea," ch. 4:16. The same exhortation is elsewhere very strongly enforced: "I charge you by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren," 1 Thess. 5:27. Reading was not an occasional duty, and the writings which were occasionally addressed to the churches by the apostles, were not those only which were read. It seems to have been a stated exercise, and no doubt was extended to all those parts of Scripture which were then in existence. Timothy is enjoined to discharge with diligence and conftancy this part of duty: "Till I come, give attendance to *reading,* to exhortation, to doctrine." That this refers to public reading, seems probable from the consideration that the apostle's design is to instruct Timothy, and through him, the ministers of Christ in all ages, how he and they ought to behave in the house of God: reading, also, is here connected with teaching and exhortation.

Indeed when we consider, that, through the goodness of God, his whole revelation is contained in a small volume, nothing appears more

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reasonable than that a part of it should constantly be read in the churches of the saints, that their views of divine truth may be enlarged, and that the word of Christ: may dwell in them richly.

The word of God enjoins *all things to be done to edification;* but let not this direction be abused to set aside any of the Lord's ordinances. As no order or form of proceeding on the Lord's day is prescribed or related in Scripture, and as many besides the church frequently attend, we ought to have in view the benefit of all who hear, and to conduct the services in such a manner that this, as well as the edification of the church, may also be promoted.

Section II.
Of the fellowship or Contribution.

We have already considered what is meant by the church at Jerusalem having all things in common, απαντα κοινα. Hence is derived κοινῶια, fellowship or communion. As it was the duty of every church to assist its poor members, and as this assistance was bestowed by the voluntary contributions of all the members, the term came into general use. Thus Paul writes, "It hath pleased them of Macedonia to make a certain *fellowship,*" Rom. 15:26. The same word occurs, 2 Cor. 9:13. your liberal *fellowship,* and in various other places. The Greek fathers use ελεημοσυνη, *alms,*

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as a synonymous term. Justin Martyr informs us, that, in his time, after the ordinance of the supper, every one that was able and willing, gave according to his ability, and what was gathered was committed to the care of the bishop, who relieved therewith the orphans and widows, the sick and distressed, prisoners, strangers, travellers, and, in a word, all that had need thereof.*

It is evident then that by the fellowship in which the disciples fledfastly continued, Acts 2: 42. is meant the contribution jointly made by the church for the relief of the poor; and this is an additional argument to prove the communion of all things in the church at Jerusalem to have been what was before set forth. Every church ought to consider this to be an important ordinance, and the members ought to give liberally, as the Lord has prospered tliem in this life, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus how he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This ordinance has a powerful influence in promoting love in a church, and in leading the members to view themselves as one family. It shows that the Lord has at once made provision for the spiritual and temporal wants of his people, when associated according to his will, and observing his commandments. The apostle seems to refer particularly to this ordinance, Heb. 13:10. τῆς δὲ εὐποιΐας και κοινωνίας μη επιλανθάνεσθε, *do not for-*

* Lord King's Inquiry, Part II. cli vi. See alio the account of κοινωνια, Suiceri Thesaurus, Vol. II. p. 1:5.

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get the doing of good and the fellowship, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

With a view of supporting the poor, some have thought of laying up a fund, a part, or the interest of which, is to be employed for this purpose; but this is improper, and is calculated to defeat one great end of the ordinance of the fellowship. In appointing this ordinance, the Lord, it would seem, not only had in view the supplying the wants of his people, but the advancement of brotherly love and tenderness of heart in Christians to each other. This end will be best attained by a supply constantly ministered, according to the necessities of the saints at the time they occur. This prevents money being taken out of the hands of the Lord's people, who should employ it as his stewards, until it be needed. It may be urged, that, without a fund, there will be danger of a deficiency. Let it be remembered, that the Lord will have a seed to serve him for ever, that the silver and gold are his, and that we have reason in this, as in other things, confidently to expect that, as our day is, so shall our strength be. Let us, to the utmost of our power, then, support our poor brethren today, and let us not be afraid of tomorrow.

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Section III.

Breaking of Bread, or the Lord's Supper.

This is another ordinance appointed by Christ to be observed in the churches. It was observed by the church of Jerusalem, Acts 2:42. Paul delivered this ordinance to the church of Corinth by revelation from the Lord: "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me," 1 Cor. 11:23, 24.

The Lord's supper is a social ordinance. When observing if, we profess our faith in the death of Jesus, as the only ground of our hope. By thus showing forth or commemorating his death, we declare our considence of his resurrection and his second coming, 1 Cor. 11:26. We also profess our union one with another, as many members of the one body of Christ, 1 Cor. 10:17. Under the law, when a sacrifice of peace-offering was offered, after certain parts had been burnt on the altar, and others given to the priest, the offerer feasted with his family on what remained. This represented his fellowship with God, and the satisfaction enjoyed in this fellowship. Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. He is our peace-offering, and we ought to observe the Lord's sup-

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per, joying in God through Jesus Christ, by whom we have also received the atonement. Eating and drinking of the emblems of his sacrifice, represents this.

We have the same evidence that this ordinance was a stated part of the worship of the churches every Lord's day, as that they statedly observed the day at all by assembling together. In Acts 2: 42. we read, "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers." It is evident the ordinance of the supper is here intended by the breaking of bread; for surely an account of their common meals would not be introduced between the different parts of God's worship; and it seems equally plain, that they were as constant in breaking bread, as in attending on the apostles' doctrine and public prayer. It formed a part, then, of their stated worship.

We have an explicit testimony to the same purpose, in Acts 20:7. "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together *to break bread,* Paul preached unto them." The church at Troas was probably planted by Paul. We learn in this chapter, that while *hasting* to spend the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem, he passed through Troas, where he arrived on the day called by us Monday, and, notwithstanding his haste, tarried with them seven days, evidently waiting for the first day of the week, that he

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might give suitable exhortation to the whole church. On the first day of the week, they assembled, and we learn that the object of their coming together was to break bread. Doubtless Paul had met with some of them before; we may be sure he was not idle during the six days, but he had not an opportunity of meeting the whole church, till the first day of the week.* Paul's anxiety to be gone is very evident, for he preached till break of day, and then departed on his journey, ver. 11.; and yet he waited a whole week for the purpose of commemorating the death of Jesus, and preaching to the whole church, none of whom he knew would omit the observance of this ordinance on the Lord's day.

It was also the custom for the disciples at Corinth to come together into one place, 1 Cor. 14:20. and this meeting was upon the first day of the week, 1 Cor. 16:1. When they met, they did eat and drink, professing to observe the Lord's supper. The apostle, however, informs them, that they abused it so much that their observance did not deserve the name, ver. 20. and they had better not meet at all. He then proceeds to point out the manner of worthily observing the ordinance, ver. 23. 29. He does not say they did it too often or too feldom, but that

* This exactly agrees with the testimony of Justin Martyr, who lived in the year 155, who says, that on the day called Sunday the bishop's whole diocese, both of the city and the country, met together, when the bishop gave them the eucharist.

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they did it unworthily. Can there be a doubt as to the frequency of their observing it? Surely not. They came together in one place on the first day of the week, and the only object of their meeting on that day *here mentioned,* is to eat the Lord's supper. This they must have been taught to do by the apostles, who appointed the same ordinances in every church; so that an account of the order settled in one, is the account of the whole.

No one can show clearer evidence from Scripture, for observing every first day of the week instead of the Sabbath, than has been here given for partaking of the Lord's supper on that day. Some subsidiary arguments may indeed be brought for them: the honour, *e.g.* put on the first day of the week, by the Lord appearing on it cnce and again to the apostles; the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which happened on that day; its being called the Lord's day, Rev. 1:10. &c. But all these would be inefficient to justify our practice, and to render the neglect of the first day of the week a sin, exclusive of the custom of the apostolic churches, recorded in the word of God for our imitation. Corroborating arguments may also be brought for observing the ordinance of the supper weekly; the Lord, it may be said, has not limited us in the words of the institution, "*As oft* as ye eat," &c. therefore we are not guilty of sin, in frequently attending to this command. The ordinance was instituted on pur-

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pose to display the love of Christ; and if we love him because he first loved us, surely we cannot too often bring under our review the greatness of his love, and, by this ordinance, have Christ crucified evidently set forth before our eyes. There seems also a peculiar propriety, as we commemorate the resurrection weekly, at the same time to remember his death; but however reafsonable such arguments may show our worship to be, the question must be decided by the revelation of God, from which, if we once depart, there is no saying where we shall stop. Departing from Scripture is the foundation of all will-worship; but if we hearken to what the Spirit faith unto the churches, whether by precept or by approbation of their practice, we cannot err.

The practice of the first ages is just what we might expect from the word of God. This ought not altogether to be overlooked; for though we pay no respect to the authority of the fathers, as they are called, their testimony is certainly to be regarded respecting such a matter of fact as the frequency of administering the ordinance of the supper.

'Consider,' says Mr Randal, 'antiquity in what view you please, the elder or the later accounts;—consider it among enemies or friends;—view it in its truth or in its lies;—in its simplicity or in its superstitions;—consider all the accounts which all sorts of men have given, take the evidence from as diftant corners of the world,

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and as opposite characters in it as you please, from those who have no bias but to the truth, or from such whose opinions and interests would lead them to give this fact a colour if it could bear it, —and all with one voice shall declare, that to come together on the first day of the week, to break bread, was from the beginning, and for many ages, the custom, the uninterrupted, unquestioned, indisputed practice of all Christian churches:—as much so, as it was their practice to sanctify the Lord's day, or to pray, praise, and preach the apostles' doctrine upon it:—that as this was the most distinguishing part of their worship, so was it what they and their worship was described by, (Pliny's letter), and the action by which, among themselves the Lord's day was known, (*dies panis*), what consequently they would least and last of all have omitted, while any degree of the purity of the gospel remained among them. How strongly then does all this place this matter before us! how clearly does this appear as the light from the Scripture! And when all antiquity reflects it too, in so direct a manner to us, what can we do, but confess it as a part of the truth coming from Christ, that it is his will, and our duty, to *continue stedfastly in the breaking of bread, often doing this in remembrance of him.*' *

Dr Erskine shows, that during the three first centuries no canons were made to enforce frequent

* Randal on the Lord's supper, p. 31.

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communion, but that after the eslablishment of Christianity, many laws were necessary. History, says he, informs us, that weekly communions were generally kept up till the year 450. The churches which first of all neglected the ordinance weekly, and justified this by a certain ancient tradition, were those at Rome and Alexandria.*

The reformers were fully aware of the apostolie practice respecting the Lord's supper. Calvin thus expresses his views: 'Every Lord's day the table should be spread in the church, and though none should be constrained, all should be exhorted to the repast, the infrequency of observing which was Satan's contrivance.'† Eminent men of the church of Scotland have avowed the same sentiments.

Dr Erskine observes, 'We are told that introducing frequent communion is an innovation, and that all innovations are dangerous. But it is an innovation in no other sense, than the doctrine of justification in the days of Luther. The truest and purest antiquity is on our side; whereas, our present practice is a plain defection from the primitive pattern.'

It seems strange indeed, as we have already

* Dr Erskine, having quoted Socrates the historian for this fact, and observing that probably Alexandria had followed Rome in this matter, concludes, We see then *to what we owe the neglect of weekly communions, even to the pretended traditions of the church of Rome.* Theolog. Dissert. p. 270.

† Institut. Rel. Christ. lib. iv. cap. 17. § 45, 46.

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said, to separate the ordinances of the first day of the week and the Lord's supper, the one intended to commemorate the death, the other the resurrection of Jesus; and one consequence of doing so is, that many professors, and perhaps even some Christians, almost forget that the first day of the week is observed in commemoration of our Lord's resurrection.*

One great end of the Lord's supper is to represent the union of Christians with one another, through their union with their Lord. "The cup of blessing which we bless,† is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? As (there is) one bread, we (being) many are one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread," 1 Cor. 10:16. Here we find, that the unity of those who join in observing the ordinance, is represtnted by their all

* Dr Doddridge observes, that it plainly appears from the most credible account of the primitive church, that the Lord's supper was used much more frequently among them than with us, and that it made a part of their public worship every Lord's day. He refers on this subject to Pearce on the Euch. p. 174,–177. Erskine on Frequent Communion, *passim*. Richard Baxter's works, vol. i. p. 470–475 Calv. Instit. lib, iv sect. xvii. § 44,–46. Witsii Econ. Faed, lib. iv. c. xvii. § 33. See Doddridge's Lectures on Divinity, &c. Prop. civ.

† Some would here supply δια for "which we bless," or rather for "which we give thanks." At all events it is evident, by the account of the institution, that God was blessed, or thanks given to him, and that the blessing does not refer to the bread and wine, or to what has been called their consecration.

partaking of one bread. This clearly shows us, that the church should all communicate at the same time, and not at different times, as is the custom with many in Scotland. This ordinance is much calculated to promote mutual love, and to represent the complete separation which the gospel makes between Christians and the world. It is a sign or witness to those who look for him, that the Lord will come again without sin unto salvation, and is thus intended to strengthen their faith and hope.

No ordinance has been more generally or grossly perverted and misunderstood than this. It was changed at Corinth into a common entertainment; afterwards the elements came to be worshipped; and still superstition and a spirit of bondage in regard to it, which have no foundation in Scripture, too much prevail. Some will not partake, they are so unworthy: are not these seeking justification, as it were, by the works of the law? Does Christ receive only the worthy? In such words and thoughts there wanteth not sin, although attired in the garb of humility. Is not their language exactly that of the slothful servant, "I knew thee that thou art an hard man?" He was too humble, too diffident of his abilities to make use of his talent, and some are too diffident if themselves to sit down at the table of the Lord; but they are not aware that this arises in fact from distrust in Christ, from pride and self-righteousness, i. e. from unwillingness to submit to

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the righteousness of God, and to receive mercy as guilty finness, totally independent of their own worthiness.

It is a similar error which has produced the objection that weekly communion will destroy all solemnity. Does frequency in prayer make us less solemn in the duty? Does the weekly return of the Lord's day destroy its solemnity? Should we be more solemn at family-worship, if we only attended to the duty once a-month? But the Lord's supper, it is said, is more solemn than any other duty. Where do we learn this? Not in Scripture.* We must not believe every spirit, but try the spirits by the testimony of God. It may seem as if we argued against solemnity; but we only argue against attaching such a degree of solemnity to one ordinance, as tends to make us tremble to observe it with due frequency, and diminishes our reverence for others appointed by the same authority. We do not argue *against* the solemnity of this ordinance, we argue *for* the due solemnity of every ordinance.†

* Some think that this is implied in the precept to examine ourselves in connection with this ordinance, 1 Cor. 11:29. But this caution was rendered necessary by the abuse of the ordinance.

† For a more particular account of this ordinance, see Randal and Erskine on Frequent Communion. Also a Letter, by the Author, to the church of Christ assembling in the Tabernacle Edinburgh, with Miscellaneous Observations.

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Section IV.
Of Prayer and Praise.

We have taken notice of the gracious promise which the Lord has made to his disciples, to be in the midst of two or three assembled in his name. This not only implies that it is his will that they should assemble together, it also teaches the assemblies of his people to expect his superintendance and blessing. Yet for all the blessings he bestows, he will be enquired of by them. Prayer is an expression of our dependence, on God. It implies a sense of our own insufficieiicy, and confidence in God as the giver of every good and perfect gift. It is therefore an important duty in members of the same church, to bear one another on their hearts before God. But we now speak of prayer as an ordinance of God for his people when assembled.

He has said, that where two agree on earth touching what they shall ask, he will do it for them, Matt. 18:19. Whenever any emergency occurs in a church, any difficulty, for instance, or case of discipline, it is the duty of a church to be earned in prayer. In their ordinary and stated meetings, this ought also to form an important part of their exercises. In proportion as religion prospers in a church, will a spirit of grace and supplication make this manifest.

Praying in the church ought not to be confined

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to the elders. The brethren ought to account it their duty and privilege, when called upon, to lead the worship. We find the brethren at Corinth reproved for the abuse of miraculous gifts, by praying in an unknown tongue in the church, and they are directed to pray so as to be understood, 1 Cor. 14:14. As to the posture of prayer, we find in Scripture that both standing and kneeling were practised.

Praise is another delightful part of instituted worship. It most nearly resembles the worship of Heaven, where they praise God day and night. Paul exhorts us to sing in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, Col. 3:16. The Psalms, chiefly composed by David, are a most beautiful and useful part of Scripture. Jesus is no where more plainly predicted, nor could there be a more suitable directory for the praises of the Old Testament church; but certainly, as we pray in New Testament language, we ought also to praise in the same, and not always sing of the salvation of Christ in prophecies, types, and figures. Can we sing too plainly concerning him who was dead and is alive? At the same time, many of the Psalms are so evidently descriptive of the sufferings of Christ, and his glory which followed, that they are excellently adapted for the edification and comfort of believers. This inspired collection, therefore, ought by no means to be laid aside. But surely that zeal is merely the effect. of prejudice, and not according to knowledge,

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which would exclude New Testament language from the fougs of New Testament churches; nor can there be any good reason why other passages should not be used in praise as well as the psalms. We are not limited to these by the word of God.

Praise is an expression of joy. Is any man joyful, (ευθυμει)? let him sing psalms, James 5:13. As praise is an immediate address to God, it is certainly proper, that the posture in which this part of worship is frequently performed by Christians should be altered. Sitting while singing the praises of God, is equally improper with sitting in prayer. We may pray or sing, indeed, in any posture; but still we ought, even in the posture of our bodies, to express our reverence for God.

We have no instance in Scripture of an assembly sitting while singing the praises of God. Israel was exhorted to *stand up* and bless the Lord their God, Neh. 9:5. In the temple they *stood* and sang the praises of God, Psal. 134:1. 135:1,–3. This too is the posture in which the saints before the throne are represented, Rev. 7:9.

Section V.
Of Fasting.

We noticed fasting as another ordinance to be observed by the churches.

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A religious fast is a season of peculiar humiliation before God. It supposes abstinence even from lawful and ordinary enjoyments.* It may. be observed, either with the view of promoting spirituality of mind and deadness to the world, or when we are desirous that some calamity should be averted with which we are threatened; or in the time of calamity to confess we are punished less than our iniquities deserve, and to pray for mercy. It was practised in the church of Antioch, Acts 13:3. it was joined with prayer at the ordination of elders, Acts 14:23.

Fasting on extraordinary occasions is evidently an important duty. The great day of atonement was a solemn fast when Israel was to afflict their souls and confess their sins. It was much practised by the people of God, and much countenanced by him under the Old Testament. He calls to the duty on particular occasions: "Blow the trumpet in Sion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet; let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen

* Although it is so evident from the word of God, that fasting implies abstinence from food, there are many Christians who deem this unnecessary strictness, if not legal bondage.

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should rule over them; wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" Joel 2:15,–17. Jesus gives us directions how to perform it: "Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and warn thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly," Matt. 6:16,–18. He informs us also of its efficacy; "Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," Matt. 17:21. He indeed told the Pharisees, that it would be improper in his disciples to fast while he was with them; but that when he left them, then they would fast. That it is the duty of Christians to fast, is clearly implied in various other passages of Scripture. Thus, "Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to *fasting* and prayer," 1 Cor. 7:5.

It is no objection to this being a church ordinance that our Lord gives directions to avoid ostentation in private fasting. The same would hold against prayer, almsgiving, &c. We have no precept respecting the frequency or the exact manner of observing a religious fast. No man therefore has a right to prescribe to another on this head. Circumstances must be attended to;

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we must consider what our constitutions can bear, and what our situations will admit. We are not called to injure our health. We may say of fasting, as our Lord said of the Sabbath, "it was made for man, not man for it." Fasting is an ordinance for his benefit, and much of the advantage we have reason to expect from it depends on observing it in a proper manner, whither in public or private.

It is highly proper that a contribution for the poor should be connected with fasting. If we be under the influence of a covetous spirit, we are but mocking God. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" Isa. 58:5, 6, 7. The Lord does not here disapprove of *outward* humiliation, but expresses his contempt of the outward appearance, while the heart is not right with him.

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Section VI.

Sanctification of the first day of the Week.

God from the beginning sanctified the seventh day. On that day, he rested from his works; and no other account can be given of his blessing and sanctifying it, than that he intended man to set apart that day for religious worship.* Indeed, it appears that God spent six days in the work of creation, and rested on the seventh, because he intended that man should follow the same order.

We have no account of the observance of this day before the children of Israel left Egypt; but this no more proves that it was not previously observed, than the silence of Scripture proves that there were no meetings before that time for religious purposes, or that the sabbatical year was never observed in Israel, or that circumcision was neglected from Joshua's time to John the Baptist's. We have strong presumptive evidence of its observance, from days being reckoned by sevens by the patriarchs, and this appears to be the origin of the perfection attributed to that number, and from the period of *weeks,* which seems before that a common mode of computing time.

* Dr Kennicott would interpret Gen. 2:3. "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made; and God caused (man) to bless and worship on the seventh day, and ordered him to sanctify it." Two Dissert. on the Tree of life, &c. Oxford, 1747. p. 126.

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God gave to Israel his sabbaths, commanding them to observe them, and to do no work thereon. This was to believers a sign of their entering into his rest, and ceasing from their works as he did from his. It also reminded them that the God of the whole earth had given them rest from Egyptian bondage. The redemption of Israel was a figure of the redemption of the people of God. The rest from Egyptian bondage was a shadow of the rest which believers obtain. Hence the Jewish sabbath is called a shadow of things to come, Col. 2:16. and when Christ (who was the body) came, this, as other shadows, fled away.

When he who laid the foundations of the earth appeared in our nature, and redeemed his people by his blood, he rose from the dead on the first day of the week. On that day, he rested from a greater work than that of creation. It is called the Lord's day,* Rev. 1:10. which seems exactly to coincide with the 118th Psalm, where the resurrection of Christ is prophesied of, ver. 22. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes," compared with Acts 4:11. It is immediately added, ver. 24. "This is the *day* God made; we will rejoice and be glad in it:" and probably the apostle alludes to this change of the sabbath, or rest, when he says,

* All history is a comment upon this name. However much men called Christians differed in other respects, they agreed that the first day of the week had come in place of the seventh.

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"There remains therefore, σαββατισμος, a rest for the people of God," Heb. 4:9.

Life and immortality were now brought to light. New heavens and a new earth were created, in comparison of which, the former were not to be remembered nor to come into mind, Isa. 65:17. The Lord distinguished the day on which he rose, by appearing to his disciples once and again upon it; and these appearances are recorded for our instruction.* It was not necessary to enforce the observance of the first day of the week by a positive precept in the New Testament, as the day, not the duty, itself was changed. We have also positive evidence that this day was statedly observed by the churches. Thus the church at Troas met on the first day of the week, and the church of Corinth did the same, 1 Cor. 16:1–2. Some Jewish believers, it appears, also observed the sabbath; but we have no hint of any who neglected the first day of the week, nor can we conceive this to have been a matter on which the apostle would have spoken as he did of the other, which was now grown obsolete, Rom. 16:6.

We know from Scripture that it is the will of God that the churches should assemble on this

* Surely there must be a particular reason for our being informed of the repeated appearances of our Lord on the last day of the week, Luke 24:13. John 20:19, 26. and what so natural as the supposition that he intended peculiar honour to this day?

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day. Thus we keep the feventh part of our time holy to the Lord. There is indeed a change of the day, and this we see warranted by the example of the apostolic churches. Probably the Lord alluded to the change, when he declared himself "the Lord of the Sabbath." Through his resurrection, which on that day we commemorate, we are begotten to a lively hope of entering into the heavenly rest; and observing the first day of the week in faith, we enjoy the earnest of it, Heb. 4:3. It ought then to be a day of holy joy. The churches ought upon it to assemble for the observance of the ordinances, and to enjoy fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and thus to strengthen the bond of love which knits them to Christ and to each other.

In private, Christians ought to devote this day to religious exercises. Every day they are to walk in the fear of God; but in proportion as they are spiritually-minded, they will delight in that day, and feel it their duty to exclude the world from their thoughts, and, in meditation of the glory of Christ, to anticipate the happiness of an eternal Sabbath.

We are not to observe *a* Pharisaical Sabbath, which our Lord repeatedly censures. We have no right to punish the profanation of it by temporal penalties; for the kingdom of Israel, as governed during the theocracy, is now at an end, and whatever Jewish peculiarity was added to the original institution is now abolished: but still we

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must not set aside the fourth commandment. We have a strong proof of its universal obligation in its being given amongst nine others, which are always to be observed. It is true that a circumstantial difference has been made on the commandment by divine authority, but still the precept of devoting a seventh part of our time peculiarly to God is sanctioned by the example of the apostles. Our Lord's directing his disciples to pray that their flight might not be on the Sabbath, Matt. 24:20. is a strong evidence that they were to observe a day under the Christian dispensation, although the Jewish Sabbath was abolished,* Col. 2:16.

Some pay a considerable degree of outward respect to the first day of the week, while they do not consider it to be a divine institution, or at least have not their minds fully made up on the subject. It is obvious however, that such a state of mind in regard to any part of divine truth, is hurtful; and therefore every Christian should examine the subject seriously, that his observance of the day may be an act of obedience to God, and not of compliance with custom, or the effect of education. None will observe this day so conscientiously and strictly, as those who have seen with their own eyes good grounds for their practice.

* Some would translate σαββατων, (sabbaths) in this passage, *weeks,* and suppose an allusion to be made to the weeks under the law, which were particularly holy on account of certain feasts.

Section VII.
Of Baptism.

Baptism is not a social ordinance. It is appointed for individuals. As all persons, however, who were added to the apostolic churches were baptised, it may be proper to consider it in this place.

We have various instances of its being administered in private, as in the case of the eunuch, Acts 8. the jailor at Philippi, &c. Indeed, when the apostles came to a place where there was no church, it could not be otherwise. These instances, however, do not render it improper to administer baptism in a church of Christ. Where this can be conveniently done, it may certainly be for edification, and parents ought highly to esteem the prayers of their brethren on behalf of their children, which in this case they have a peculiar opportunity of enjoying.

Baptism, like the Lord's supper, is an emblematic ordinance. God has been pleased in every age, to instruct us by sensible representations as well as by the verbal declaration of his will. These are calculated to make a deep impression on our minds, and to prevent our letting slip the truth from our memories.

When the gospel was preached to our first parents, it appears that sacrifices were appointed,

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Gen. 4:4. Thus a lively representation was given of the great sin-offering which they were taught to expect. When God made a covenant with Noah, that the earth should no more be overflowed with water, Gen. 9:11. he appointed the rainbow a visible pledge or seal of its accomplishment.

When Abraham was called to go forth from his native country, he knew not whither, he obeyed; and when it was naturally impossible that he could have a child, he believed God that his seed should be numerous as the stars of heaven. His faith was counted to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God, and constituted the father of all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, Rom. 4:10–11.

God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham, to be a God to him and to his seed after him, Gen. 17:1. Christ was the seed especially alluded to in this promise. God was peculiarly his God, and it is in virtue of our relation to him that he is our God, John 20:17. "Hence," says the apostle, "he saith not unto seeds as of many, but of one, and to thy seed which is Christ," Gal. 3:16.

While the apostle here shows that the covenant was confirmed of God in Christ, and pointedly alluded to him, he by no means affirms that it did not respect Abraham's natural offspring. This was expressly declared in the covenant, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and

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thy seed after thee *in their generations,* for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy feed after thee," Gen. 17:7. By comparing this passage with these words of the apostle, we learn, 1*st,* That the blessings of the covenant were promised to the natural feed of Abraham. 2*dly,* That these were not promised to all the natural feed, but to those who were Christ's.* The history of the Jews illustrates this. Many showed that they were not the children of Abraham, but in every age there was a remnant of his natural seed, 3*dly,* That the blessings of the covenant were not to be confined to the natural seed of Abraham, but to extend to all believers who, by union with Christ, (who is eminently Abraham's seed) were to become the children of Abraham, Gal. 3:20. Thus the Scripture foresaw that God would justify the heathen through faith, Gal. 3:8. By the preaching of the apostles, and the Gentiles receiving repentance unto life, the mystery which had been hidden from the sons of men was at length revealed, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel, Eph. 3:6. This clearly demonstrates the spiritual nature of the covenant made with Abraham. The inheritance which the Gentiles were jointly to inherit with the fleshly seed, was doubtless the heavenly Canaan. The one were the natural-

* *Christ* is sometimes used in Scripture to signify his people, who are his body, 1 Cor. 12:12, 27. Eph. 4:16.

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branches of the olive tree, and the other grafted in contrary to nature, for with God nothing is impossible. He is able of the nones to raise up children to Abraham. All spiritual blessings were, if we may so speak, exclusively entailed on his family, and it is only in virtue of their becoming members of it that the Gentiles receive these blessings.

Some allege that the covenant was of a mixed nature, alluring Abraham that his seed by Isaac Ihould inherit the land of Canaan, while his spiritual seed should obtain the heavenly inheritance. But this is not the case, else the law made the promise of none effect (Gal. 3:17.) to such of the fleshly seed as fell in the wilderness for disobedience, and breaking the Sinai covenant, and thus in direct opposition to the declaration of the Holy Ghost, the law was against the promises of God, Gal. 3:21. In this case also, the grand objection of the Antipædobaptists will meet them in all its force;* for if the land of Canaan was

* An argument much urged by them is, that if spiritual blessings were promised to the fleshly feed of Abraham, *all* the fleshly seed must obtain these. The apostle however asserts, that this was not the intention of God, "For they are not all Israel that are of Israel; neither because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children; but in Israel shall thy seed be called; that is, they which are the childien of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are accounted for the seed," Rom. 9:6, 7, 8. Here we are informed, that it was never God's intention that *all* the children of Abraham were to be blessed with him; but nothing can be

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promised to the seed of Isaac, how came it that nearly five hundred years elapsed before any of them obtained it?

That the covenant made with Abraham was the covenant ordered in all things, and sure, is manifest. It is opposed to the law, and called the covenant that was confirmed in Christ,* Gal. 3:17. It is called the gospel, Gal. 3:18.; and the Holy Ghost declares, that the oath whereby that covenant was confirmed, Gen. 22:16,–18. was designed to give believers of the gospel strong consolation, Heb. 6:18.

If it be alked why spiritual blessings were promised in language denoting temporal prosperity, the answer is obvious. From the fall until Christ, the promises of spiritual blessings were conveyed in parables. Life and immortality were *brought to light* by Jesus Christ:. Even during his personal ministry, he was pleased to teach chiefly in parables. It was not till his resurrection that he showed even his disciples plainly without a veil the doctrines of God, John 16:25. and then by opening their understandings to understand the Scriptures, he qualified

more contrary to the apostle's meaning than the view which some take of this passage, that none of Abraham's fleshly seed, as such, were blessed with spiritual blessings. Isaac was as truly a child of the flesh as Ishmael, although he was also a child of promise. God thus taught Israel not to glory in their relation to Abraham. The true Israel was never born *merely* of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.

* Compare this passage with Eph. 3:6.

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them for explaining all the parables of the Old Testament, Mark 4:13.

Many instances might be given of this manner of teaching by carnal images, which chiefly refer to spiritual things. Thus Christ, by death, destroying the devil, was promised, Gen. 3:15. under the figure of the seed of the woman bruising the head of the serpent. So also the covenant of royalty made with David, which the Holy Ghost expressly applies to Christ.* This was all David's salvation, and all his desire, at a time when earthly grandeur for children would have been disregarded, 2 Sam. 23:5. with Isaiah 5:3. Should any doubt remain as to the sense in which David understood these promises, the Holy Ghost informs us, that, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne, he seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, Acts 2: 30–31. In like manner, the promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham was but a shadow of the true accomplishment to the heirs of promise in the gift of the heavenly inheritance, just as Solomon's grandeur was a typical fulfilment and pledge of the promise to David above mentioned. That Abraham understood the inheritance to be spiritual, is manifest; for he was in nowise disappointed that he remained in the land of promise

* Compare 1 Chron. 17:11,–14. with Heb. 1:5. *See* also Psal. 139:20,–37.

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as a sojourner, dwelling in tents, looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God, Heb. 11:9–10. By confessing himself a stranger and pilgrim on earth, he plainly declared that he desired a better, that is a heavenly country, Heb. 11:13,–16.

Not only Abraham, but all the children of God, in every age, understood the promises to be spiritual. Not only did Abel, Noah, Abraham, &c. die in faith, not having obtained the promises, Heb. 11:13. but all those recorded in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, ver. 39. although many of them inherited the land of Canaan, and shared in the greatest *temporal* prosperity which God bestowed on Israel. The *resurrection of the dead* was the hope of Israel, Acts 28:20. This was the promise made of God unto the fathers, unto which promise the twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hoped to come; for which hope's sake, says Paul, I am accused of the jews, Acts 26: 6–7. with 33:6. Hence the apostle proclaims to the Jews at Antioch, the glad tidings of the accomplishment of the promise which was made unto the fathers, in the resurrection of Christ, the first fruits of those who slept, Acts 13:32–33. This promise was certainly none other than "the covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac, and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant,"

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Psal. 105:9–10.; and this establishes the view we have taken of the spiritual nature of the inheritance promised to Abraham and his seed. Indeed if this be not admitted, it is impossible to account for the general belief of the resurrection in Israel.* It would appear that the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, fell into the same mistake with those who understand the inheritance promised to Abraham to be of an earthly nature.

If any are still uncertain as to the nature of the inheritance, let them attend to the declaration of the Holy Ghost, that "it is of faith that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham," Rom. 4:16. Now surely this must respect the heavenly inheritance, for believers, as such, are not taught to expect the possession of the earthly Canaan.†

Thus we have seen that Abraham was justified

* Some, the apostle tells us, accepted not deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection, Heb. 11:35. This may be illustrated by what is recorded by the author of the book of Maccabees. He informs us, that when king Antiochus had put to death six brethren (for not eating swine's flesh), while their mother encouraged them to suffer by the hope of the resurrection, 1 Mac. vii. 13, the seventh said, "Our brethren, who now have suffered a short pain, are dead under *God's covenant of everlasting life,*" ver. 36.

† Believers are taught in the New Testament to expect the reward of the *inheritance,* Col. 3:54. alluding to the former promises.

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by faith, and we know that his justification is the pattern and pledge of the justification of all who believe, Rom. 4:2, 3. 5.; that the covenant made with him was in fact the glorious gospel of the blessed God; and that, though agreeably to the nature of God's dealings with man in former ages he spake to Abraham in parables, yet Abraham understood that by the land of Canaan was signified the heavenly country.

To this covenant God attached a visible sign, and this was a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised, Rom. 4:11. God hereby declared to Abraham his acceptance of him through faith. But he also directed this sign to be given to all the children of Abraham. It was still the seal of the righteousness of faith, whatever might be the character of the child. It was so to Isaac, and not less so to Ishmael. It did not signify to either, that they were, or should be, believers, but it was a pledge that, partaking of Abraham's faith, they should in like manner be accepted of God, and be acknowledged as the children of Abraham. If they did not believe, their circumcision* became uncircumcision, and, like every privilege which men enjoy, if abused, it aggravated their

* Much weight is attached by Antipædobaptists to circumcision leaving a visible mark, which baptism does not. But that mark could never lead the mind to the truth which it signified, without being explained; and although no mark is left in baptism, it is as capable of being explained to children as the other.

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condemnation. Accordingly when Ishmael, by mocking Isaac, manifested his unbelief, he was cast out of the household of faith. Not only Abraham's children, but those born in his house, were to be circumcised. His household was the true church of God, and none were to remain in it but the worshippers of the true God.

Many have been led to mistake the nature of the Abrahamic covenant, by confounding it with that made at Sinai 430 years afterwards. But although the latter was subservient to the former, they were perfectly distinct. The church was put under the elements of this world, Col. 2:20. as under a school-master, until Christ, the great object of faith, should come. But even under that dispensation, all who did not, by attending to the ordinances of God, profess the faith of Abraham, were to be cut off from the people of Israel; and when Christ, the great object of Abraham's faith, came, all who did not, by receiving him, profess the faith of Abraham, were cast out, and they became *the concision,* Phil. 3:2. while believers are *the circumcision.*

It is obvious then, that circumcision, the seal of the everlasting covenant, was administered to the children of Abraham *as such;* for Ishmael, as well as Isaac, was circumcised, and it will be admitted, that he neither had any title to Canaan, nor was Christ to descend from him. It is also evident that Abraham's children enjoyed many

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spiritual privileges above others.* Many indeed appear to have trusted in their descent from Abraham, and thus perverted the mercy and goodness of God. Hence they could not bear an intimation that they were equally under condemnation with the Gentiles, and immediately objected, "What advantage then hath the Jew, or what profit is there in circumcision?" To this the apostle replies, "Much every way; chiefly, that unto them were committed the oracles of God; for what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faithfulness of God of none effect?" No; he was true to his promise to Abraham, his friend. He distinguished his seed above all others, and made the privileges which they enjoyed effectual to the eternal salvation of many in every age.†

God plainly taught the posterity of Abraham, that unless they were true children of Abraham, resembling their father in faith, their descent or circumcision would profit them nothing. This

* This was common to all Abraham's children. Ishmael remained a member of his family till he apostatized. The same is true of Esau, Heb. 12:16–17.

† Had circumcision, as some imagine, been a seal of temporal blessings, it is strange the apostle did not undeceive the Jews at once, by telling them so. But on the contrary, he answers their objection, by showing that Israel always enjoyed spiritual blessings, although some ultimately received no benefit therefrom. Many err, by not distinguishing between God's bestowing spiritual blessings, and rendering them effectual. The former was the case as to all Israel after the flesh, the latter to the election of grace.

was clearly manifested by rejecting and casting but Ishmael and Esau, and by the destruction of those in the wilderness who believed not God, and trusted not in his salvation. They fell as a warning to unbelievers in every age, and after fentence was palled upon them, their children were not circumcised, Josh. 5:5–6. Having practically renounced the faith of Abraham, and being consequently excluded from the inheritance, they could not enter in because of unbelief, Heb. 3:19.

When the gospel began to be preached, it was to the Jew *first*. Our Lord confined his ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and it was *necessary* that the word of God should first be spoken to them, wherever they were scattered, Acts 3:26. and 13:46. that the faithfulness of God to his promises might appear. Peter, addreffing unbelieving Jews, says, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," Acts 3:25. and from this consideration urges them to repentance.

By the preaching of the gospel the Lord gathered in many thousands of Israel after the flesh. These were a kind of first-fruits, affording a pledge of the mercy he would afterwards show the nation, James 1:18. with Rom. 11:16. and we are assured in the most positive terms, both in the Old and New Testament, that although the natural

branches of the olive-tree are broken off through unbelief, they shall be grafted in again; that although Israel has stumbled, they have not fallen for ever; that they are beloved for their fathers sakes; that if the root be holy, so are the branches; and that at last all Israel shall be saved, Rom. 11.

All must allow that spiritual blessings, and even eternal salvation, are here promised to the seed of Abraham, *as such.* If, then, there were special promises to the seed of Abraham, the same promises must now be in force to the Gentiles, for the blessing of Abraham is come upon the Gentiles, and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. This is plainly intimated by Peter to the Jews, when he says, "The promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, (the Gentiles, Eph. 2:17.) even as many as the Lord our God shall call," Acts 2:39.

Jesus changed the outward sign of the covenant, and substituted baptism for circumcision, which is nore agreeable to the New Testament dispensation. In like manner he substituted the first for the seventh day of the week. The sanctification of the first day of the week stands upon the same footing with infant baptism, and consequently some Antipædobaptists reject both; indeed such are most consistent.* That baptism now holds the

* We have positive example for the churches meeting on the first day of the week, and consequently for the sanctification of a part of that day; but it is necessary to recur to the Old Testa-

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same place with circumcision, is evident from Gal. 3:27, 28, 29. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* They both represent the circumcision of the heart, Rom. 2:28, 29. with 1 Pet. 3:21. the putting away the filth of the flesh, the putting off the old, and putting on the new man; both, therefore, figuratively represent our salvation, although they differ according to the genius of the Old and New Testament dispensations. The one points out the necessity of God cutting off the foreskin of the heart, the other the necessity of the renewing of the Holy Ghost, Tit. 3:5. Circumcision not only represented the circumcision of the heart, but *His* coming in the flesh, by the knowledge of whom the love of God is shed abroad in the heart. In like

ment to establish the obligation of setting the whole of it apart from secular employments.

* Here the apostle expressly terms believers, Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, which clearly proves, 1. That the covenant with Abraham is still in force; 2. That the promise was not of a temporal, but an eternal inheritance: 3. That the Gentiles obtain the inheritance by becoming children of Abraham. It is also evident that baptism is here spoken of as the visible sign of our being Abraham's seed, just as circumcision was of old, for without circumcision no child of Abraham had any thing to expect from God, Gen. 17:14.

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manner, baptism not only represents the renewing of the Holy Ghost, but also that event which is the foundation of our love to him, 1 John 3:16. Thus we are buried with him by baptism into death; our crucifixion to the world is thus professed and sealed. Baptism is expressly called the circumcision of Christ, Col. 2:11.

If children were formerly interested in the covenant of grace; if they actually enjoyed spiritual blessings of old, in virtue of their carnal descent; and if the seal of the covenant was to be administered to them; if the covenant with Abraham be still in force, and if in virtue of it his seed shall yet be gathered in, Rom. 11.; if believing Gentiles are now his children—it remains for those who represent their offspring as excluded, to show by whose authority this has taken place. They must inform us where God has deprived his people of this high privilege and comfort in regard to their children. If they should enquire how we come to extend it to female children, for whom the seal of the covenant was not formerly appointed, we reply, that God has extended it by informing us that the distinction between male and female is now at an end Gal. 3:28.; and that both men and women were baptized by the apostles, Acts 7:12.* It appears, then, that in virtue of the

* Some have expressed surprise that children are not also mentioned here, but men and women include the whole human race; thus we often read of a man-child, and our Lord speaks of a *man* being born, John 16:21.

divine commandment to Abraham, every believer is bound to have his children baptized. This is our *explicit warrant;* for the commandments of God never wax old, and none can show that this was ever repealed. If Antipædobaptists object to our going back to the Old Testament, we are not careful to answer them, until they can show us that the apostle was wrong in doing so to prove justification by faith alone, and other things which might be specified.

That children enjoy spiritual blessings in virtue of their connexion with godly parents, is evident from the whole of Scripture. The descendents of Cain were rejected for the sin of their parent, and are called the daughters of men, to distinguish them from Seth's posterity, called the sons of God, Gen. 6:2. It was their mingling together which brought the flood upon the world. When the Lord was about to destroy the world, Noah found grace in the sight of God, and his children, in virtue of their relation to him, were saved in the ark. The apostle Peter informs us, that baptism is the antitype of this salvation, 1 Pet. 3:21. Ham's children were afterwards rejected for *his* wickedness, and while the posterity of Shem and Japhet have enjoyed many spiritual blessings, and thousands of them have been made partakers of faith in Christ, these have heard but little of the joyful sound. Words cannot be more express on this subject. than those of Moses. After setting before Israel the punishment which would

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come upon them for disobedience, he adds, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, *and the heart of thy feed,* to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, Deut. 30:6.* That God did not intend to alter this constitution under the gospel, appears not only from the many promises to his people concerning their offspring, in those prophecies which treat of the times of the gospel, but from his expressly characterizing the new covenant as for the good of his people, and *their children after them,* Jer. 32:39–40. Jesus explains this when he says, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven;† Accordingly the language of the apostles clearly marks the connection which subsisted under the New Testament between parents and children. Believe, said

* Antipædobaptists must admit this to be an express promise to shed abroad the love of God in the hearts of Israel. Would they approve of a Jew referring to this, and saying, 'God has promised this, and therefore it must be fulfilled to *all* the seed of Israel? I may therefore live as I please.' But do not they speak in the same manner when they affirm, that if the promise of God to be a God to Abraham and his seed, be really intended for believers of every nation, then *all* the children of believers must be saved.'

† It is alleged that Jesus did not baptize these children. True; for he had not at this time instituted baptism. But his words very strongly confirm the truth, that children, who had in every age been partakers of spiritual blessings with their parents, were not now to be rejected and deprived of the seal of their interest in the covenant to which they were admitted before the law, and from which privilege its abolition, and the commencement of the kingdom of God, was not to exclude them.

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they, and thou shalt be saved, and *thy house.* Salvation came to that house where the parents believed. This is inexplicable on the Antipædobaptist system. The commission was to preach the gospel to *every creature;* and surely if no more was meant than that the household should be saved upon believing, such a limitation of the gospel is utterly unaccountable. It is well to remember that the Scripture cannot be broken; no improper expressions are to be found in it.

The great objection made against any special promise of spiritual blessings to the children of believers is, that they do not all receive special grace. This very objection is stated and answered by the apostle. "What if some did not believe, fnall their unbelief make the faith of God of none effect?" No promises are made to believers themselves of eternal happiness, except in as much as they abide in Christ's word. "The just shall live by faith, but if *he* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." By means of the promises and threatenings, Christ's sheep are brought in, and kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. So it is with the children of believers. If they believe not what is signified by baptism, their defceut will profit them no more than that of the Israelites, who could not enter Canaan because of unbelief, and whose carcases fell in the wilderness, or than the righteousness of the righteous, if he commit iniquity, Ezek. 33:13. This is exactly the

apostle's argument when he says, "Circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law, but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision," Rom. 2:25.

Such, indeed, has always been God's manner of dealing with men. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: If that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build, and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them," Jer. 18:7,–10. Here are both promises and threatenings; faith secures the accomplishment of the one, and averts the accomplishment of the other. So it was with Nineveh; God commanded judgment to be denounced against the city: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them," Jonah 3:5. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not," ver. 10. So also it was with Eli: "Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should

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walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed," 1 Sam. 2:30. When the apostle assures the Corinthians, that God is faithful, who would not suffer them to be tempted above what they were able to bear, surely it is implied, that this was to be the case only while they lived by faith, and not that they should be kept from falling at all events. So it is with all the promises of eternal life, "if ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled." Thus also do the promises of the heavenly inheritance run to the children of believers; and, in like manner, a connection subsists between their training up their children properly, and their being partakers of like precious faith. Believers, then, had need to beware how they trifle with the special promises to their seed, and to enquire, if their children prove reprobates, whether it has not arisen from their own unbelief. This may be the case although they practise infant baptism.

On the whole, it appears that infant baptism is an ordinance of God, and thoie who deny it, and even ridicule it, because the subjects cannot at the time understand it, should remember that their ridicule equally applies to circumcision, which they admit to be an ordinance of God. Granting, for a moment, that this was a seal of temporal blessings, an infant can understand these as little as

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spiritual privileges, and therefore, according to them, it was absurd.

Although circumcision was not of Moses, but of the fathers, he enjoined it on the children of Israel, Lev. 12:3. When we consider the typical nature of that dispensation, it might well have surprised us if there had been nothing corresponding thereto under the gospel. The apostle shows, that even the precept of not muzzling the ox which treadeth out the corn, had an especial reference to the support of preachers of the gospel, 1 Cor. 9:9–10.; and in the same chapter he shows how the Lord's ordinance, that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel, corresponds with those who were at the altar being partakers with the altar. In these instances the apostle hesitates not to go back to the Old Testament, and to confirm what he says by the ancient ordinances of God.

The practice of the churches has just been what we might expect. We read of infant baptism almost from the earliest times. Pelagius, who flourished in the fifth century, and who denied original sin, was accused of denying the propriety of infant baptism; this he disclaimed, declaring that he had never heard of any heretics who did so.

Justin Martyr, who wrote about forty years after the apostles, speaks of baptism as being to Christians in the place of circumcision; and in his apology, he says, 'Several persons among us of sixty or

seventy years old were disciples to Christ in or from their childhood.' He here uses the same word employed by Christ, Matt. 18:19. disciple all nations. Irenæus, who lived very near the apostles' times, speaks of infants being regenerated to God. Clemens Alexandrinus, who lived about the same time as Irenæus, says, that regeneration is the name of baptism, and indeed it was commonly used by the fathers, as they are called, in this sense.

Origen speaks expressly and repeatedly of infant baptism, and connects the ordinance with original sin. He declares that the church had, from the apostles' time, an order to baptise infants. He was born little more than eighty years after the apostles. His father suffered martyrdom, and Eusebius informs us that his forefathers had been Christians for several generations. In the time of Cyprian, who was chosen bishop of Carthage in the year 248, a council of sixty-six bishops met to consider whether baptism should be administered immediately after birth, or be deferred till the eighth day. They determined that it ought not to be delayed, but none suggested that baptism should not be administered to infants at all.*

* See Wall's History of Infant Baptism.—It is true that in the time of Cyprian it appears that the bread and wine used in the Lord's supper were given to infants; but this was much more likely to be superadded to baptism, than that both should be human devices. Much has been said of Jewish children eating the passover, but of this there is no proof; the contrary is intimated by Moses. "When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will

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Although children are unconscious of what is taking place in baptism, yet the ordinance being afterwards explained to them, may, by the blessing of God, be very useful. Parents ought, when they come to a proper age, to set before them the nature of baptism, and to warn them, that their having been partakers of it will not avail, unless they possess the faith of their parents; that the sign, without the thing signified, will not profit; and that if, like Esau, they despise the gospel, like him they must be aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. When parents observe the ordinance in faith, it will be a great encouragement to them to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The promise of God is intended to promote this, not to render it unnecessary. It may be said, if God has promised, it must take place. It will be admitted that God did promise to Abraham to be the God of his seed, and yet Abraham's instrusting his household is mentioned as essential to the accomplishment of the promise: "I know him," said God, "that he will com-

keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let *him* come near and keep it." At all events, circumcifian and the passover were completely different. The one was given to Abraham as the seal of the covenant, and was, by divine command, to be administered to infants. Baptism, we have seen, came in the place of this. No one could partake of the passover, without being acquainted with the deliverance from Egypt, which infants could not; but their infancy was no objection to their receiving the seal of the righteousness of faith which did not depend on their understanding.

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mand his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; *that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him,*" Gen. 18:19.

Baptism is calculated to impress us with a lively sense of the original corruption of our nature, and the necessity of regeneration by the Spirit, given through the death and resurrestion of Christ. It ought to be administered only to the children of believers, who are obeying, so far as they have opportunity, all Christ's commandments. It is very unwarrantable and injurious to men, to make an exception in favour of those who statedly hear the gospel. There are but two characters in the world, the righteous and the wicked. The former are believers, and show their love to Christ by keeping his commandments. To the latter he says, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" Such only profane the ordinance of baptism. It is cruel in those who ought to know better, to be instrumental in deluding them. What are they doing when presenting their children? Are they obeying the commandment of Christ? No; they are rebels against his government. They do not choose to have him to reign over them. The Lord declares that it is the spirit which quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; out, alas, they are carnal. The things of the Spi-

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rit are foolilhness to them; they discern not the nature of the Lord's ordinances, but vainly seek, by attending to them, to work out a righteousness for themselves or their children.*

Some wish to have their children baptized, who say they are too unworthy to partake of the Lord's supper. In that case, they are equally unworthy of baptism for their children. The one ordinance is as holy as the other. This way of talking shows great ignorance of the gospel. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; and such erroneous views should not be encouraged.

Some of the Lord's people it may be, from mistaken views, may neglect the observance of the Lord's supper, while they desire baptism for their children. They ought to be otherwise instructed, and informed that the observance or omission of any of Christ's ordinances is not optional; his servants are bound to obey them all, on pain of his displeasure.

* The indiscriminate administration of this ordinance to the children of all who call themselves Christians, not only tends to lull the careless asleep, but to destroy the foundation of infant baptism altogether. It can never be pretended that any of the Gentiles are Abraham's children, but those who are Christ's; and consequently others on whom the blessing of Abraham has not come have no share in the privileges of his family. Some, to free themselves from guilt, while indiscriminately administering baptism and the Lord's supper, say, they receive men on a professor or Christianity; but what is a profession of that, or of any thing else, unless we have sufficient grounds to believe it sincere?

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One is much inclined to believe, when a person desires baptism for his children, and yet does not observe the ordinance of the supper, that he is influenced more by the opinion of the world than by regard to the authority of Christ. A person may, in this country, neglect the ordinance of the Lord's supper without being singular, but were he to allow his children to remain unbaptized, it would be thought very shocking and heathenish.

Although the children of the members cannot be considered as members of a church, being incapable of fulfilling the duties of that relation, they ought to be the subjects of much prayer in the churches; and in proportion as the ordinance of infant baptism is understood, and the ordinance observed in faith, this will be the case.

Respecting the mode of administering baptism, some have affirmed that βαπτω and βαπτιζω signify only *to dip,* or *plunge.* They add that baptism represents our being planted in the likeness of Christ's death, and rising to walk with him in newness of life; and that this can only be represented by immersion in water. To support this, they allege Rom. 6:4. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Also Col. 2:12. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

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That βαπτω and βαπτιζω do not always signify *to dip,* appears from the manner in which these words are used in the Scriptures. Βαπτισμος is used Heb. 9:10. for the washings under the law, which in general were not by dipping. The Pharisee wondered that our Lord had not washed, βαπτισθη, before dinner, Luke 11:38. Βαπτισμος is also applied to tables, Mark 7:4. which we cannot suppose to have been immersed in water. Baptism with water represents the baptism of the Holy Ghost, John 3:5. and as the Holy Ghost is said to be *poured out,* the pouring out of water more strikingly resembles it. Of this we have a noted example in Cornelius and his friends. The brethren were astonished that upon the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Ghost, εκκεχυται, was poured out, Acts 10:45. This immediately reminded Peter of the Lord's promise to *baptise* with the Holy Ghost, and thus we have a striking evidence of βαπτιζω being used to signify *pouring out,* which is of itself sufficient to show that the mode of baptism cannot be alleged to be immersion, from the term employed.

As to Romans 6. and Col. 2. it is observed that they allude to the spiritual baptism, and that, as the expression, *being crucified with Christ,* which occurs in the same place, has no allusion to any practice in baptism, there is no reason to suppose that being buried with him alludes to any particular mode. The great difference here is, whether water should be applied to the body, or the body

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to water. The former appears more conformable to the thing signified, our being baptized by one spirit into the one body of Christ.*

* 'I must say, and will make it good,' (says Dr Owen) 'that no honest man who understands the Greek tongue, can deny the word to signify *to wash,* as well as *to dip.*——The apostle, Rom. 6:3, 4, 5. is dehorting from sin, exhorting to holiness and new obedience, and gives this argument from the necessity of it, and our ability for it, both taken from our initiation into the virtue of the death and life of Christ expressed in our baptism; that by virtue of the death and burial of Christ, we should be dead unto sin, sin being slain thereby; and by virtue of the resurrection of Christ, we should be quickened unto newness of life, as Peter declares, 1 Pet 3:21. Our being *buried* with him, and our being planted together into the likeness of his death, and likeness of his resurrection, is the same with our old man being crucified with him, ver. 6. and the destroying of the body of sin, and our being raised from the dead with him, which is all that is intended in this place.

'There is not one word, nor one expression, that mentions any refemblance between dipping under water, and the death and burial of Christ, not one word that mentions a resemblance between our rising out of the water and the resurrection of Christ. Our being buried with him by baptism into death, ver. 4. is our being planted together in the likeness of his death, ver. 5. Our being planted together in the likeness of his death, is not our being dipped under water, but the crucifying of the old man, ver. 6. Our being raised up with Christ from the dead, is not our rising from under the water, but our walking in newness of life, ver. 4. by virtue of the resurrection of Christ, 1 Pet. 3:21.

'That baptism is not a sign of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, is clear from hence; because an instituted sign is a sign of gospel grace participated, or to be participated. If dipping be a sign of the burial of Christ, it is not a sign of a gospel grace participated; for it may be where there is none, nor any exhibited.

'For the *major;* if all gospel ordinances are signs and espres-

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CHAPTER X.

OF THE DISCIPLINE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

We have now considered the various ordinances appointed by Christ for the edification of Christian churches. If Christians were what they ought to be; if they always held fast the faith, and were free from sin; and if they could at all

sions of the communication of the grace of Christ, then baptism is so; but this is the end of all gospel ordinances, or else they have some other end. or are vain and empty shows.

'The same individual sign cannot be instituted to signify things of several natures. But the outward burial of Christ, and a participation of the virtue of Christ's death and burial, are things of a divers nature, and therefore are not signified by one sign.

'That interpretation, which would enervate the apostle's argument and design, our comfort and duty, is not to be admitted. But this interpretation, that baptism is mentioned here as the sign of Christ's burial, would enervate the apostle's argument and design, our comfort and duty. And therefore it is not to be admitted.

'The *minor* is thus proved; the argument and design of the apostle, as was before declared, is to exhort and encourage unto mortification of sin and new obedience, by virtue of power received from the death and life of Christ, whereof a pledge is given us in our baptism. But this is taken away by this interpretation; for we may be so buried with Christ, and planted into the death of Christ by dipping, and yet have no power derived from Christ for the crucifying of sin, and for the quickening of us to obedience.'—Dr Owen on Infant Baptism and Dipping.

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times prevent false brethren from creeping in among them, the ordinance of discipline would be unnecessary. But Christians are renewed but in part. In many things they all offend. They are apt to be seduced from, the path of duty, and having once fallen, they are in danger of growing worse and worse, and of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Christ's sheep, it is true, shall never perish, nor shall any pluck them out of his hand; but they are preserved by means, and one of the means he employs to effect his gracious intentions in regard to them, is directing them to associate together. One great end of these associations is, that they may watch over and admonish each other. By these mutual admonitions, Christians are roused from the slumber into which they are prone to fail through the deceitfulness of sin.

Moses was faithful in all God's house, for he punctually delivered the commandments of Jehovah, king of Israel. The worldly kingdom of Israel was a figure of the kingdom of God which they were taught to expect. This kingdom is now; come, and a greater than Moses has delivered laws for its government. The laws delivered to Israel were never intended to be observed, except by one nation. The laws of the kingdom of Christ were designed for those gathered out of every tongue, kingdom and nation. The former were calculated for a community in one country, the latter for individuals in every

place. To the observance of the one, a particular form of civil polity was necessary. The other is independent of, and unaffected by any difference of external circumstances. Temporal prosperity was promised to the due observance of the statutes of the one, the other was established upon better promises. Israel was commanded to exterminate the nations in whose land they dwelt, unless they submitted to them;* the disciples of Jesus are to follow peace with all men, and not to strive even with the wicked.

Wherever the apollles preached with success, they not only enjoined the observance of those ordinances which we have already considered, but they appointed certain rules according to which the churches were to proceed in various circumstances which they knew would occur. It was of the utmost importance that these rules should be wise and proper; for on this, in a great measure, depended the recovery of backsliders, the existence of harmony amongst the members, their increase in knowledge, and eventually the propagation of the gospel in the world. Men being brought to give glory to God, in a great measure depends on feeing the good works of those who profess godliness and subjection to Christ, and in their union and co-operation in all religious observances.

While the apostles gloried in every convert to the faith, as an additional proof of the efficacy of

* See Deut. 20:10,–18. &c.

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the doctrine of the cross, they knew that such were still prone to backslide from God, and to return to the world from whence they had come out. They saw many instances of persons turning their backs on Christ. It was the object of the rules they delivered to prevent this, to promote an increasing superiority to the world, and the most stedfast submission to the will of Christ.

Jesus is represented, Rev. 1:13. as walking in the midst of the churches, observing whether his laws are attended to; and we find him sharply reproving the churches of Asia for the existence of various abuses among them, arising from the neglect of these institutions.

It is of the utmost importance, in attending to the laws of Christ which respect the discipline of Christian societies, to consider the spirit as well as the letter of these laws. The object of discipline, when exercised according to the will of Christ, must always be the glory of God, the good of the church, and the good of the party. These three are inseparably connected, and we must never lose sight of any of them. If we do, we shall act from improper motives, and more harm than good will result from our discipline. Attention to these will guard us against two extremes into which churches are apt to fall—undue lenity, and unchristian severity. It will also prevent us from acting with partiality, which can otherwise hardly be avoided. It is almost uanecessary to observe that the discipline

appointed by Christ respects only the members of his churches. "I wrote to you in an epistle, not to company with fornicators; yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no, not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without, do not ye judge them that are within?" 1 Cor. 5:9,–12.

We have seen that those only of whom it is meet (just, δικαὶον, Philip. i. 7.) for us to think that they have the Spirit of Christ, are to be united in church-fellowship. The declaration, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump, is once and again repeated, and the churches are expressly commanded to put away wicked persons.

"Offences," said Jesus, "must come." An offence, in the New Testament, means a *stumbling-block.** Whenever we act improperly, we cast

* 'The word *offend* is used above thirty times in the established translation of the New Testament into English. The original word, σκανδαλιζω, is so translated, and this is in a single place, and in that only, rendered *make to offend,* viz. 1 Cor. 8:10. In James 2:10. and 3:2. the word rendered *offend* is one, (πταω) which is elsewhere rendered *stumble,* Rom. 11:11. and *fall,* 2 Pet. 1:10. These are all the places where this word occurs. In one place, Acts 25:8. the word rendered *offend* is αμαρτανω, that which is uniformly translated elsewhere in Scripture, *to sin,* or *to trespass,* &c.

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a stumbling-block, or a snare, in the way of our brethren. Our Lord has delivered his will reflecting discipline in very few words, which however are of universal application in every case which can occur. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven," Matt. 18:15,–18. This is a short but comprehensive rule. It is a general summary of our duty as church members in regard to discipline. All the directions given in the epistles

'To offend God, properly signifies to sin against him, by breaking or violating his commandments, and thereby to displease and provoke him to anger. In like manner, in the usual acceptation of the words, *to offend a person,* whether believer or unbeliever, is to injure, displease, or provoke him.

'But in no instance in the English New Testament doth the word *offend* signify this with respect; to God, except in Acts 25. S. James 2:10. and 3:3. quoted above. *To offend,* on the contrary, *and to do iniquity,* are distinguished from each other, Matt. 13:41. In no initance hath it this signification when it respects our brethren. It then denotes *to stumble* or *ensnare* them.' See Miss. Magazine for 1802, p. 145.

are evidently founded upon this. As the subject is so very simple, we shall consider what our practice ought to be, occasionally referring to some particular directions for the application of this precept.

Love is the only bond which knits together the members of a church of Christ. Remove this, and the union cannot subsist. It is also the spring which sets all the wheels a-going, and when this is broken, all right movements cease. We may form a society connected by worldly interest, or influenced by external ties, and this may resemble a church of Christ; but it is essentially different. It resembles a church of Christ as a statue does a man; at a distance they may be mistaken, but when examined, the difference is manifest. As love is of such essential importance in a church of Christ, we may be assured that Jesus has used every precaution to preserve it. Love is a tender plant. Jesus places it in the hearts of all his people; but the heart of man is not its native foil. Hence its proneness to droop and die, and hence the necessity of the utmost watchfulness against every thing hostile to its growth and existence.

Nothing tends more to destroy love, than unkindness in those who are the objects of it. Where any thing of this sort has taken place, the Lord has appointed that proper steps should immediately be taken to prevent bad consequences. Our natural pride leads us, when we think our-

selves injured, to withdraw from the person who has done us wrong. No, says the Lord, he is thy brother. If we cannot conveniently withdraw from him altogether, we feel ourselves disposed to show him by our conduct, that we resent the ill-treatment we have met with; to behave to him with coldness and reserve; or, at least, while we profess to forgive him, to tell to others what he has done. This answers a double purpose. It gratifies our malice by exposing him, and it feeds our pride by proclaiming our own superior goodness. But if we will be Christ's servants, we mud not make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. We must neither allow the recollection of his conduct to fret in our own bosom, nor make it known even to our brethren. We must go and speak to himself, expostulating with him as a brother on the impropriety of his conduct, showing him wherein he has acted sinfully, and thus testifying our affection for him. Were this rule more exactly followed, it would prevent much contention.*

But he may be under the influence of pride, or of some other evil passion. He will not confess his sin. This tends farther to irritate us, and to show the improper state of his mind; we must not, therefore, let the matter rest here, but, for his sake as well as for our own, take with us one or

* More swellings and whisperings arise in churches from the neglect of this rule, than from anything else, perhaps more than from all other causes taken together.

two persons more, belonging to the church, that their opinion may influence him, and that he may ingenuously acknowledge his error. It would have hurt his pride less to have confessed his fault at first, but his obstinacy rendered this step necessary.

He may still remain obftinate; he cannot see wherein he was wrong, although this be manifest to the brethren who were brought to converse with him. This shows an unchristian state of mind, and may even excite doubts whether he be at all under the influence of the truth. The offence must therefore be told to the church. Those who accompanied the party offended when addressing him privately, and who are acquainted with the subject, must give their testimony; and thus in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word is established. If it appear that the person complained of is in the wrong, he is to be admonished and called to repentance; his impenitence and obstinacy having converted a private into a public offence. If he is convinced of his guilt, he ought publicly to profess his sorrow, so as to satisfy the church of the sincerity of his repentance. He not only owes an acknowledgment to the injured individual, but to all his brethren, before whom he has set such an example.

But if he still persist in vindicating his conduct, there is no higher tribunal on earth to which he is amenable. If he refuse ro hear the church, and they, after serious deliberation and prayer.

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are fully satisfied that he is acting sinfully, they are bound to put him away as one whose mind is not under subjection to the laws of Christ. He may say, indeed, how can I acknowledge my fault if I be not sensible of it? I cannot walk, by the light of my brethren. The church ought to beware of giving a rash judgment. They must not require their brother to submit to *them,* nor must they exclude him because he will not call them *Master.* They must point out from the word of God wherein he has acted improperly. The will of Christ, and not either their judgment or his, is the standard.

It is true, they may misapply the rules there delivered; but if they look to Christ for direction, and form a deliberate judgment, guarding against all prejudices and partiality, they must act upon it whether he be convinced or not. Should the case be complex and difficult, they ought deliberately to weigh every circumstance, and to take into the account every alleviating consideration. But if they are satisfied he is in the wrong, and if he continue to assert his integrity, the appeal lies to the Head of the church alone, and he will, in the day of his appearing, ratify every sentence which they have passed according to his word. It may be a small matter in the eyes of some to be excluded from a church, but if the church has acted properly, and if this ordinance, or some subsequent event, does not bring the offender to repentance and confession of his

sin, it will be no light matter to be call off in the great day, as a rebel against Jesus Christ!

There is little danger of a church of Christ forming an erroneous judgment, or even of any considerable difference of opinion arising among them respecting any case, if they are duly sensible that the laws of Christ recorded in Scripture are the only standard by which they are to judge the conduct of the members. If a person has not transgressed any of these, he cannot properly be the subject of discipline; if he has, he must be dealt with only as these laws direct.

Whenever we receive an injury, or take umbrage at the conduct of our brethren, as we value the authority of Jesus, we must take the steps he has prescribed. We are not, on the one hand, at liberty to allege that the trespass was so small it was unnecessary to notice it; nor, on the other, that it was so great that we could not look on him as a brother. We are bound, in either case, for his benefit, as well as to prevent any disgust from lurking in our own minds, to go privately to him if the offence be committed in private. If it should be of such a nature as to lead us to doubt if he be a Christian; if we are not satisfied with his acknowledgment, or have reason to think it is made merely to prevent the matter being spoken of, we ought to inform him that we are not satisfied, and that we must refer the affair to the judgment of some of

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our brethren. Every step ought to be taken with prayer for direction and success. Our desire ought to be that our brother should be led to repentance, and there ought never to exist that irritation of mind which would lead us to wish that it may go farther, in order that he may be exposed. If this be our temper, the Lord marks and condemns it.

What is said of our brother *trespassing against us,* applies to every part of his private conduct which may be improper, although we be not perfonally concerned. We must not say, Am I my brother's keeper? We must watch over one another, and so fulfil the law of Christ. We must not suffer sin upon our brother. If to our knowledge he commit sin, he trespasses against us, he dishonours our Master, and casts a stumbling-block in our way. We must go and tell him, and not leave the matter till we are either satisfied that we were mistaken, or have convinced him, or have laid the matter before the church.

By this mode of proceeding, improper members will be discovered, and if this law be properly observed, few hypocrites will long remain in a church. Where discipline is impartially administered, it will have a similar effect with the salutary severity exercised upon Ananias' and Sapphira: "Of the rest durst no man join hiinself unto them; but the people magnified them, and believers were the more added to the

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Lord, multitudes both of men and women," Acts 5:13–14.

Thus far have we proceeded in considering the express command of the Lord Jesus. Various parts of the epistles show that this was the conduct which the apostles enforced upon the churches. Besides private offences which may become public, there may be some offences in their own nature public. Such is the improper, conduct of a member of a church known to the world, or to a number of the members. When a person professing godliness falls into sin, he casts a Humbling-block in the way of the world, tempting them to believe that the doctrine of Christ is not according to godliness, or that there is no truth in religion. Worldly men endeavour to quiet their consciences while living without God, and are therefore happy to hear of any instance of improper conduct in a Christian. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Christians are apt to be infected by bad example, and therefore the Lord has appointed that public notice be taken of a public offence. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear," 1 Tim. 5:20.* In a private matter between our brother and us, if he acknowledge his fault, we are bound to forgive him from our hearts, and not to expose him.

* It is indeed highly proper, and ought to be the case, that upon hearing of any public offence in a brother, we should converse with him upon it, and use every means to convince him of his sin; but the matter must not rest here.

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But if he has sinned in a more public manner, the church must deal with him. A private acknowledgment is not sufficient. Indeed if he be duly sensible of his sin, he will esteem it a privilege and a duty publicly to acknowledge his sorrow for it. He thus removes, so far as in his power, the aspersion his conduct has call upon the gospel. He also sets before his brethren an example of cheerful submission to the laws of Christ.

Should a member, upon being dealt with and admonished for a public offence, refuse to hear the church, they must, as in the former case, withdraw from him, and not acknowledge him as a brother. But the church ought to be fully satisfied of the sinfulness of his conduct, and should consider every alleviating circumstance. They should guard against undue sevevity. A case of discipline, if not properly conducted, may degenerate into a private quarrel between the church and the individual. Each party has taken his ground, and neither will yield. While they are in such a temper, no act of discipline can be conducted in obedience to the commandment of Christ, for the church in this case is jealous of its own authority, and not of the authority of Jesus Christ.

It is abundantly evident, that no form of discipline, however scriptural, will make up for the want of real religion. Discipline, except in so far as exercised from regard to the authority of Christ, and with a view to promote his glory by increasing the purity of the members of a church,

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is a curse instead of a blessing. It tends to excite wrath, strife, divisions, and every evil work.

In all cases of discipline which may occur, it is of much importance to examine matters thoroughly, and to probe them to the bottom. We have much temptation to heal wounds nightly; to rest satisfied with saving the credit of our discipline, and of our character as a Christian church, while still allowing some root of bitterness evidently to remain in the hearts of the members towards each other, which will afterwards spring up and trouble us. This ought never to be the case. We ought not to shrink from difficulties, but to meet them fairly, trailing in the grace and power of Jesus. If we are acting agreeably to his will, he will countenance us. Difficulties may present themselves; unpleasant consequences may be dreaded; but these, however formidable, must not lead us to depart from what Christ hath commanded. He knew the consequences of obeying his precepts, and he has given us no dispensing power with regard to the least of his statutes.

When a member has acted improperly, and it is necessary to admonish him either in public or in private, it ought to be done with meekness and affection. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted," Gal. 6:1. This is not inconsistent with the precept, "Rebuke them sharply," Tit. 1:13. The circumstances of the case will of

course direct as to the manner in which rebuke should be administered. Public rebuke is very unpleasant to flesh and blood, but it must not be dispensed with when the offence is public. It is not only intended for the good of the individual but of others.

A person may be guilty of sins which demand immediate exclusion. If his conduit has been such as to convince us that he is a mere professor, having a form of godliness without the power thereof, we are to turn away from him, 2 Tim. 3:5.* Such was the decision of the apostle in regard to the incestuous person, 1 Cor. 5:13. Our Lord's commandment, (Matt. 17.) that the church should deal with a member to bring him to repentance, does not apply here. They are to call him to repentance by separating from him. Care must be taken, however, that we do not form too hasty a judgment. The conduct of a believer who has fallen into sin, is essentially different from that of a mere professor. The one was overcome by temptation; the other was acting under the influence of sin, which habitually reigns in him. They are therefore to be treated differently. Great care, and much dependence on God, is necessary when examining such a case. The former conduct of the offender, the evidence he has given of devotedness to Christ, the aggravations or the alleviations of the offence, must all be taken into view. Every case will present certain circum-

* Some render τουτους αποτρεπου, *these turn away*. It is exactly the same thing whichever translation we prefer.

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stances, which will guide us in forming a judgment in regard to it.

It is a never-failing maxim in the discipline of the churches of Christ, that the good of the church and of the offender are always united. So far from doing an unconverted person an injury when we exclude him from a church, we do him a real service. He is in a more hopeful situation after exclusion. His being inadvertently retained in the church, tended to quiet his conscience. Putting him away is a probable, it is the instituted means of bringing him to repentance.

Much has been said of the judgment of charity. All things ought to be done with charity; but *what is called* judging charitably, is often forming a judgment in diredt oppoiition to evidence. Charity is love, αγαπη. We ought to love all men. Elihu gives us an example of the true spirit of charity in judgment, when he says to Job, "I desire to justify thee," 33:32.—but he was compelled to blame him. Charity indeed thinketh no evil; but this, only when it sees and hears of none. Charity is not blind and partial affection. We have a striking instance of the violation of charity, in the suggestion of Satan that Job's religion was all hypocrisy, Job 1:9,–11. and 2:4–5. Here was harm and unfavourable judgment, in direct oppoiition to external evidence!

When a person applies to be added to a church, if we are in a proper spirit, we shall wish that he may be found qualified; but this does not

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imply that we are to judge him a Christian, without strict attention to what he professes, and to the evidence this affords of his conversion and knowledge of the truth. This will also hold when a member has committed sin. The true judgment of charity is judging according to evidence, but with an earnest desire that this evidence may be favourable. True charity in judging is always opposed to ram or censorious judgment, which springs from want of love. The world live in malice and envy, and therefore judge one another's motives without mercy. As to religion, indeed, they are all charity; that is, they are indifferent about the matter, and rather pleased that their own disregard of God should be kept in countenance by that of other men. A judge in a criminal cause who is gratified by finding a prisoner guilty, is regarded as a tyrant; but if, on the other hand, he is partial in the examination of witnesses, and evidently endeavours to screen the prisoner from justice, he is considered unfit for his office. He might tell us he was judging charitably, but we should reckon him unjust, unfaithful to the laws, and injurious to the public.

Charity will lead us to rejoice if, upon investigation, the conduct of a person be found blameless, and this temper will secure us against rash or hasty judgment. If he be in the wrong, the less sin he has committed so much the more agreeable to us, for charity rejoices not in iniquity.

James condemns an opposite temper, which leads us to wish to find a person in the wrong, that we may have the pleasure of inflicting punishment on him.

A confession of sin is not always satisfactory when there are aggravating circumstances in the case. Were we, indeed, assured of a man's real repentance, whatever had been his sin, it would be our duty to receive him again as a brother; but he may confess in order to avoid being put away from the church. It is mortifying to be excluded from any society, and an ungodly man may do many things to prevent his being separated. But if we have reason to suppose that this is the case, if his sin has been aggravated, and we have not evidence of his real repentance, we must certainly exclude him.

It is not only proper to notice any open sin in our brethren, but if we see any brother waxing cold in religion, we ought to admonish him. Were this properly attended to in private, it would prevent many open sins, and consequently many cases of discipline in a church. It is of great importance, not only to warn and admonish our brethren, but also to give them no countenance in improper conduct. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition (παραδοσις, commandment) which ye have received from us. And if any man obey not our

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word by this epistle, note that man, and have no fellowship with him, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother," 2 Thess. 3:6, 14–15. It is certainly our duty to turn away from those who show that they are not under the influence of the truth; but the above precept seems rather to direct us to testify disapprobation with the conduct of the members who are acting improperly, although there may not be sufficient ground for immediate exclusion. The apostle particularly alludes to the case of those who were idle, and consequently busy-bodies. It would be much calculated to convince such of their folly and sin, not only to admonish them, but to avoid their company, while we show regard and affection to them.

A question has been stated with regard to suspending a member from communion on account of his conduct. We have no example of such a practice in Scripture, nor does it appear proper. If a person have shown by his conduct that his profession was false, he is of course to be put away as one in whom we were deceived. It was owing to our ignorance that he was admitted. If notwithstanding the impropriety of his conduct we have reason to believe him a Christian, let him be rebuked and restored. But why suspend him? If he be in a weak and backsliding state, this is no reason for depriving him of the means of grace. His enjoying these does not prevent

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us from warning and admonishing him of his danger. Although, then, suspension, as a *punishment,* is always improper, cases may perhaps occur where it may be necessary to suspend a member. If appearances are so strong against him, that the confidence of the church in him as a Christian is destroyed, although perfect certainty be not obtained, it seems impossible to allow him to continue in fellowship, nor should he in such circumstances desire it. No time ought, in such a case, to be lost. We ought to endeavour to get to the bottom of it as foon as possible. When a man was suspected of being a leper in Israel, he was to be shut up until the matter could be ascertained, and then either restored to the congregation or excluded, Lev. 13:4, 8.

It has been asked, What will the world say if they see a man with whose sin they are acquainted fitting down at the Lord's table as a member of the church?* We are to provide for things honest in the sight of all men; but in order to this, we must not add to the ordinances of Christ, nor deprive a brother of what he is entitled to, notwithstanding his fault. If we keep close to the ordinances of Christ, there is no danger of our being justly branded with disregard to practical holiness.

* It is very proper that the world should understand, that, when a member of a church commits sin, his brethren do not confirm their love towards him till they are satisfied of his repentance.

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There are instances sometimes of members withdrawing from a church when they become subjects of discipline. In this case they must be dealt with, and, if they will not hear the church, must be to them as heathen men and publicans. When a person has been excluded, he ought to be solemnly and affectionately warned of his danger, and the members ought to avoid all familiarity with him, with a view to bring him to repentance. At the same time, that regard which we ought to feel and express towards all mankind, ought to be shown to him. We must avoid the appearance of revenge, contempt, self-preference, self-righteous distance, or even of indifference. If he should afterwards profess repentance, and if we should have good grounds to believe it sincere, we ought to receive him just as we ought to receive any one at first who gives evidence of loving the Lord Jesus. His former profession may tend to excite suspicion, but we must endeavour to judge impartially. His applying again is a hopeful symptom. If we receive him we must do it cordially, and not show suspicion and distrust.

We have a particular precept to mark them who cause divisions. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them; for they that are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the

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hearts of the simple," Rom. 16:17. When false brethren creep unawares into a church, they will ever be apt to cause divisions. Such should be avoided. They may assume an appearance of zeal, but if they disturb the peace of the church, by introducing any other doctrine than that taught by the apostles, or by striving about curious questions and strifes of words, which tend to promote parties or to stumble the disciples, 1 Tim. 6:4. they ought, after admonition, if it prove unavailing, to be put away, although there may be nothing flagrant in their conduct.

All cases of discipline should be conducted with much patience. Nothing should be hurried through. No determination should take place when there is any agitation in the minds of the members, which is apt to arise on some occasions when a matter is first mentioned. A church should ever remember, that they are assembled by Christ's authority, that he is in the midst of them, and that they are not to please themselves. Christians are apt to forget that they are not their own masters, nor at liberty to act according to their feelings. They are under the law of Christ, nor is this less binding because it is the perfect law of liberty.

Sometimes a member may take offence unjustly. He may complain of his brother without cause. In such a case, his brother ought to endeavour to satisfy him, and, if they cannot agree, to get one or two more, as in the case of a pri-

vate offence. We ought to abstain from any thing in itself indifferent which grieves our brethren, although it may gratify ourselves. But we must not abstain from what we believe to be our duty, because they disapprove of it. This would render us the servants of men. If our brethren be ill-informed, we must endeavour to instruct them, and, if necessary, seek the assistance of some others. If they be thus convinced that we are acting properly, it is well; if not, they must learn to exercise forbearance, and not endeavour to be lords of our conscience.

Nothing can be more improper than for a member who is dissatisfied with the conduct of another, to withdraw from the Lord's table. This ought to be publicly noticed. It is like the behaviour of a pettish child, and is indeed an undervaluing of the ordinances of Christ, and calling a stumbling-block in the way of others. Let them go and tell their brother his fault, and, if necessary, tell it to the church. Those who neglect this rule, ought to be seriously admonished.

Another great impropriety, an effect indeed of letting slip the gospel, consists in not sitting down at the Lord's table, because our mind is not in a proper frame. If we are conscious we are hypocrites, let us by no means profane the Lord's ordinances, either by sitting down at his table, or by remaining members of a church of Christ. If our brother have just cause of complaint against us, let us not think to make atone-

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ment for our sin by partaking of the Lord's supper. Let us confess our fault, and make all the reparation in our power. But to refuse to show forth the Lord's death because our brother has wronged us, or because we have committed sin, shows gross ignorance, and amounts to wilfully rejecting the only sacrifice, Heb. 10:26.

But how, it may be said, can we sit down, even once, at the Lord's table, when we are dissatisfied with a member? Is not our unity represented by the ordinance, and how can two walk together except they be agreed?—Have you malice against your brother? yon should by no means observe the ordinance in this temper. If you hate him, you are a murderer. But you think he is acting in a manner unbecoming the gospel. You know he is acting sinfully. After taking the previous steps, lay his conduct before the church, and let it be investigated. You may be mistaken. Some alleviating circumstances may appear, of which you are not aware. Let his conduct by all means be examined, but do not you, in the mean time, neglect the Lord's ordinance, and, in fact, withdraw from the fellowship of the church.

A church ought to exercise discipline, they ought to admonish and to exclude those who depart from any of the leading truths of the gospel, or who introduce any new doctrines. Thus Jesus and his apostles instruct us. "I would they were even cut off who trouble you," Gal. 5:12. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast

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them who hold the doctrine of Balaam. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." Rev. 2:14–15.

In all that has been said of discipline, it has been taken for granted, that by the church is meant the whole body of an assembly of Christians. The idea of a church of Christ sitting by its representatives (as the pastors or elders have improperly been called) has no foundation in Scripture. All the directions given by the apostles to the churches respecting discipline were evidently addressed to the whole church. When the church of Corinth was charged to put away the wicked person, 1 Cor. 5:13. the charge was given to the whole church, not merely to the elders; and when they are directed to refrore him, the commandment is delivered to the whole body, and the former act of discipline is called their act. Sufficient, says the apostle, to such a man is this punishment which was inflicted *of many,* 2 Cor. 2:6. When the whole church joins in an act of discipline, it is calculated more to impress the mind of the offender, to manifest the obedience of the whole to the laws of Christ, and to create a greater abhorrence of sin in the church; for thus passing sentence on another, they condemn themselves if they should ever act in a similar manner.

All will allow that much is said on the subject of discipline in some of the epistles of the New Testament. Hence the exercise of Scriptural dis-

cipline tends to throw much light on the word of God, and to lead a church constantly to appeal to Scripture, the advantage of which is manifest. It directs the attention of church members to passages to which none else think of giving heed, whereby, in fact, they make them void. Almost all the difficulties which occur in the exercise of discipline, arise from the difficulty of ascertaining the duty of individuals in particular circumstances. When this is discovered, the duty of a church is easily established.

As those only can be expected to have a competent knowledge of the administration of human laws who have attended courts of justice, so Christians become acquainted with the laws of Christ by witnessing their application in his churches. These laws are often vilified, as productive of strife and division, from being imperfeclly understood and improperly administered. This is apt to be peculiarly the case with a church newly formed, the members of which have been connected with societies where scriptural order was not known, or at least not acknowledged. Such ought to be very careful, lest, through ignorance and inexperience, they bring reproach on the name of Christ.

I conclude this chapter, by quoting a remarkable testimony to the excellence of Christian discipline by one who was not in a situation where he could practise it.

'The apostle's order to the Corinthians,' says

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Dr Macknight, 'to keep no company with widened persons, though seemingly severe, was in the true spirit of the gospel. For the laws of Christ do not, like the laws of men, correct offenders by fines, and imprisonments, and corporal punishments, or outward violence of any kind, but by earned and affectionate representations, admonitions and reproofs, addressed to their reason and conscience, to make them sensible of their fault, and to induce them voluntarily to amend. If this remedy proves ineffectual, their fellow Christians are to show their disapprobation of their evil courses, by carefully avoiding their company. So Christ hath ordered, Matt. 18:15–17. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Earnest representation, therefore, from the injured party, followed with grave admonition and reproof from the ministers of religion, when the injured party's representation is ineffectual, are the means which Christ hath appointed for reclaiming an offender; and with great propriety, because being addressed to his reason and conscience, they are calculated

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to influence his will as a moral agent, and so to produce a lading alteration in his conduct. But if these moral and religious means prove ineffectual, Christ hath ordered the society of which the offender is a member to shun his company and conversation, that he may be ashamed, and that others may be preserved from the contagion of his example. This last remedy will be used with the greatest effect, if the resolution of the society, to have no intercourse with the offender, especially in religious matters, is openly declared by a sentence deliberately and solemnly pronounced in a public assembly, (as in the case of the incestuous Corinthian), and is steadily carried into execution.

'The wholesome discipline which Christ instituted in his church at the beginning, was rigorously and impartially exercised by the primitive Christians towards their offending brethren, and with the happiest success in preserving purity of manners among themselves. In modern times, however, this salutary discipline hath been much neglected in the church; but it hath been taken up by gaming clubs, who exclude from their society all who refuse to pay their game-debts, and shun their company on all occasions as persons absolutely infamous. By this sort of excommunication, and by giving to game-debts the appellation of *debts of honour,* the winners on the one hand, without the help of the law, and even in contradiction to it, have rendered their unjust

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claims effectual, while the losers, on the other, are reduced to the necessity either of paying, or of being shunned by their companions as infamous. I mention this as an example, to show what a powerful influence the approbation or disapprobation of those with whom mankind associate have upon their conduct; and from that consideration, to excite the friends of religion to support her against the attempts of the wicked, by testifying on every fit occasion, their disapprobation of vice, and their contempt of its abettors; and more especially, by shunning the company and conversation of the openly profane, however dignified their station in life, or however great; their fortune may be.'*

CHAPTER XI.

OF FORBEARANCE.

Some churches, formed, in most things, on the model of the New Testament, have fallen into a very hurtful extreme concerning discipline. They require all to be of the same mind in all things, and do not seem to show that respect to

* See Dr Macknight's view and illustration of 1 Cor. 5.

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the rights of conscience, and that tenderness to persons of different degrees of advancement in religion, which we uniformly find insisted on in the word of God. Hence discipline is apt to degenerate into a system of terror. This tends to overawe and to prevent a member from acting as he thinks right, or from freely delivering his opinion, lest he should displease others, or even be put away from the church. It leads him sinfully to please men, and to sacrifice the authority of Christ at the shrine of the church. It may indeed produce silence and non-resistance, and the appearance of unity, but it is the silence of slaves and hypocrites. In consequence of this tyranny over conscience, undeserved reproach has been caft upon Christian discipline.

In entering on this subject I would make the following remarks.

1. There is an absolute necessity for personal conviction both respecling truth and duty. No Christian can act religioully upon the conviction of another.

2. The important duty of mutual forbearance rests not only on the precepts given to the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak, Rom. 14. and 15. but on every one considering themselves to be but learners in the school of Christ. It surely ill becomes such to act as if they were infallible.

3. The Scriptures acknowledge no man as a disciple of Christ, except one who habitually

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studies to know and to do his Master's will in all things; therefore,

4. Although the more advanced ought to bear with beginners, yet the obstinate and stationary professor has no claim, on the forbearance of a church.

We have no instance in the Scriptures of any thing in the primitive churches being decided by votes. This appears at all times unnecessary, and can be attended with no good effect. If difference of opinion should arise, much prayer and reference to the word of God should take place; if the minds of the members are not in a very improper state, unanimity will probably soon be restored; and if every individual should not be of the same mind, still the members may exercise mutual forbearance.

Churches formed on the model of Scripture, and yet not exercising forbearance, have no pope or general assembly to whom they may appeal. The power is in the church itself.* To this every member is subject, and despotism in consequence of this may be exercised to a considerable extent. It has also this peculiar disadvantage: a Roman catholic, or a member of the church of Scotland, may do many things without the pope or the General Assembly ever hearing of it.

* Yet an individual, or a few, may gradually acquire a pre-eminence in the church, and may exercise power with a higher hand and with less jealousy, that they do not nominally possess it; this ought to be guarded against.

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The discipline of these churches, such as it is, is not very strict; but a member of a church of Christ, acting on the plan now spoken of, is liable to be perpetually harassed and controlled in the path of duty. He is laid thereby under great temptation to dissimulation and hypocrisy, and his bondage keeps pace with the rigidness of their discipline. Such a system is completely unscriptural. Christ invites us to liberty, only he warns us not to use it for an occasion to the flesh; but by the disregard or denial of forbearance, a church exercises a lordship over its members which hath no place in the kingdom of Christ.

The apostles indeed inculcated unanimity on the churches. This is greatly to be desired, but the fear of the church can only produce the resemblance of it, and something greatly worse than any differences whatever. There are young men, fathers, and babes in Christ, and as their attainments in knowledge are different, in some respects they must be differently minded, and must act differently. Some things are so plain in the word of God, as to be understood by all; but there are other things of which we obtain the knowledge gradually, by examining and comparing the Scriptures. In learning a language, all the pupils must not be placed in the same class, When a boy first goes to school, he must not be set down to Virgil or Homer. In like manner, the members of a church must not all be considered as equal in capacity or knowledge.

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This is implied when we insist upon them to be exactly of one mind, and censure them if they are not; they are thus in fact trained up to be the servants of the church. If forbearance be not exercised, investigation is checked, the increase of love is prevented, party-spirit is promoted, and real unity is in fast obstructed, and placed further off.

If it can be proved by the word of God that a member is living in sin, he must be called to repentance, and if he remain obstinate, he must be put away whether he sees his error or not. This we have clearly stated from the word of God. But although we are convinced that he is wrong on some points, if he hold fast the great truths of the gospel; if he be evidently living under the influence of the fear of God, in the things he understands; if his error arise from misapprehension, and if he be willing to listen to what can be said, he ought to be treated with all long-suffering. It is impossible to state the particular cases in which forbearance ought to be exercised; but in proportion as just views are entertained of the rights of conscience, this will be a striking feature of a church of Christ; and when the Scriptures are diligently and impartially attended to, the difficulties in practice will not be great.

Individual members ought also to exercise forbearance toward a church; they are not at liberty to leave it, although there may be some differences of opinion among them. It is equally

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important for a church to act in the same manner towards individuals. It is true that ignorance in religion is often sinful, but there are different degrees of guilt. A man may be in the dark, as to some things, from the prejudices of education, of other causes and prejudices, while he is living near to God, and see king to know his will more perfectly. Scriptural forbearance does not teach us to treat the things in which we differ with others as matters of no moment. All divine truth is important.* But it is perfectly consistent with ltrift scriptural dilcipline, to hold communion with those who believe the gospel and are exemplary in their conduct, while they are ignorant on some points which we yet consider to be revealed by God.

There does not appear to be any good reason why a church should not admit to communion all who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity. Many passages of Scripture seem to teach us to do so. Paul having stated that nothing availed but a new creature, adds, "As many as walk by this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God," Gal. 6:16. In writing to Timothy he says, "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them who call on the Lord out of a

* The expression, *agreeing to differ,* in common use with many, is much calculated to mislead. It seems to reduce divine truth to a level with the uncertain speculations of philosophers. It also represents unity of sentiment, or the unity of the faith, as not only unattainable, but of little consequencc.

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pure heart," 2 Tim. 2:22. I cannot conceive words more expressly to enjoin the forbearance for which we plead, than Phil. 3:15–16. "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things." If any have attained to faith in the same Saviour, and to follow after holiness, ought they not to receive one another as Christ hath also received them to the glory of God? Rom. 15:1.

The apostle indeed beseeches the Corinthians, by the name of the Lord Jesus, that they all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions (schisms, σχισματα) among them; but that they be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment, 1 Cor. 1:10. This is most earnestly to be wished; and to this blessed state shall all Christians arrive when, they see face to face. While they are here, they ought to be diligently pressing forward towards perfection in knowledge and holiness, and the greater progress they make, the more nearly will they agree with each other; but in their present imperfect state they rnuft forbear one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, Eph. 4:2–3. and this will be necessary till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the sta-

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ture of the fulness of Christ, Eph. 4:13. When the exhortation to the Corinthians is taken by itself, it may appear to countenance the necessity of the actual existence of perfect unity of sentiment in the churches of Christ; but if we consider its connexion, we shall perceive that the exhortation is directed against strife, factions, and parties, which assuredly ought not to be permitted in a church. This will be still more manifest, if we compare it with a similar sentiment, where the apostle is inculcating mutual forbearance. Having exhorted the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak, and prayed that in this very thing (το αυτο) they might be like-minded with Christ, who pleased not himself, he adds, "that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," Rom. 15:6. Forbearance, then, is the right road to unity.

The apostle, in the xivth and xvth chapters of the Romans, is express on this subjedt, and the whole tenor of the New Testament condemns that want of forbearance which some have contended for under the name of unity of faith. It is true, in these chapters he speaks particularly of the ordinances of the ceremonial law. These were in fact abolished by the death and resurrection of Christ, yet the Jewish believers continued to observe them, and were indulged in doing so. This indulgence did not arise from the indifference of the things themselves, for the same things were positively prohibited to the Gentiles, Gal. 5:2.

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It seems to have been partly owing to the reverence due to the institutions of God, and partly to his tenderness towards his ancient people, and his, unwillingness that they should perish; but neither of these causes could operate in regard to the Gentiles, to whom the law had never been delivered, and instead of lessening, it would probably have increased their prejudices against the gospel. But while God would not allow the Gentiles to be brought under the yoke of the law, he taught them to bear with, and not to despise the weak among the Jewish Christians; on the other hand, while they were indulged in keeping the law, they were not to condemn their Gentile brethren, nor such Jewish believers, like Paul, who were strong. Thus the Jews were gradually weaned from their attachment to their customs, by witnessing the liberty of the Gentiles, and even of their brethren stronger in the faith. They were farther instructed by the epistle to the Hebrews, and by the destruction of Jerusalem, an event so awfully expressive of God's displeasure with Israel, which destroyed their prejudices altogether. In opposition to this view some maintain, that the Jews were actually bound to observe the law of Moses, till the epistle to the Hebrews was written, affirming, that one revelation is necessary to set aside a former one.* This is true;

* But how do we know when the epistle to the Hebrews was written? There are different opinions respecting this. Nothing is revealed concerning it, and we cannot found truth or duty upon speculative reasoning.

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but Jesus had plainly intimated the conclusion of the old dispensation. This had been declared most clearly by his apostles, and we know assuredly that Peter had an express revelation to teach him wot only to preach to, but to eat with the Gentiles, Acts 10:28. Paul speaks of himself and of others who were strong, eating all things, while those only who were weak eat herbs, Rom. 14:2. 15:1. Now this must refer to the Jews, not to the Gentiles, to whom no such liberty of observing the ceremonial law was given. But according to the view of these chapters given by those who argue against forbearance, what they contain was merely a temporary revelation, not calculated for our instruction; the whole, however, of the New Testament is practical, and the instrustions there given for mutual forbearance, are intended for general and permanent use.

Knowledge puffeth up; and when we esteem our knowledge of church-order, &c. so great, that we cannot exercise forbearance towards the disciples of Christ who differ from us, there is reason to fear we know nothing on this subject as we ought to know, 1 Cor. 8:2. Indeed it is a great error in churches to suppose, that in every respect, even in regard to order, they are perfect. We maybe fully convinced that the constitution of our church is scriptural, and that on the whole we are followers of the apostolic churches, but still we ought to be sensible that we have more to learn.

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In proportion as real religion prevails in a church, they will be able to extend the arms of brotherly love, and embrace all who love the Lord Jesus; and in proportion, on the contrary, as the power of religion declines, they will be unable to bear any difference of opinion among their members. Let us, for instance, take the question of infant baptism. It is one which is highly important; but why may not those who differ on this point hold fellowship with one another? I baptise my children—I do it to the Lord—I believe it to be his will—If I am wrong, I should be very happy to be convinced that I am so. Another does not baptise his children—To the Lord he does it not. I am also bound to believe that he wishes to walk in the path of duty; that he wishes to be convinced if he is wrong. In other things we agree. We feel the same corruptions. We love and obey the same Saviour. We are equally begotten to a lively hope-by the resurrection of Christ; but it seems we must not be members of the same church on earth. Surely this is the spirit of error. This wisdom cometh not from above. Indeed, if a Pædobaptist and an Antipædobaptist cannot be members of the same church, or sit down together at the Lord's table, they ought not to pray together.

Want of forbearance retards us in our progress. It alienates our affections from each other. It leads us to be jealous lest we should be convinced that we are in the wrong, and is a great bar in the

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way of our embracing truth. Men must not be driven in religion. They must be persuaded and drawn by love. It may be said, Confusion perhaps might arise, if those who differed in such matters were members of the same church—It would lead to strife. But may not the unruly be warned? May not those who cause divisions be avoided, or if they will serve their own belly, and not the Lord Jesus Christ, be put away?*

Want of forbearance leads Christians to contend about churches and ordinances in an improper spirit, as if they were chiefly desirous to silence others, and to vindicate their own practice, instead of enforcing the ordinances of Christ from a persuasion how much they tend to promote holiness, spirituality of mind, and deadness to the world. The members of a church under any form of government, may degenerate into that spirit which led the Jews to say, "The temple of the Lord are these," Jer. 7:4. They may be animated by church pride as men are by national pride; valuing themselves on account of the excel-

* It is by no means intended that where there is a difference of opinion in regard to so important a matter, believers ought not to refort to separate worship. This, though the unhappy fruit of remaining ignorance in Chritrians, is not inconsistent with mutual love. But where there is no opportunity of doing this, it seems highly desireable that a church of Christ should show their love to their brethren for the truth's sake, although in some respects they may differ. It must however always be supposed, that where a few apply for fellowship with a church with which in some things they differ, that they also can make these the subject of forbearance, and not promote strife in the church.

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lence of their constitution and government, and despising others. Whenever this is the case, they are acting in a manner most displeasing to God, and instead of promoting the observance of his ordinances, are rendering them contemptible. A tree is known by its fruit, and the ordinances of Christ, if properly attended to, will manifest their own excellence by their happy effects on our minds. The want of forbearance manifested in churches, in other respects scriptural, arises, I fear, from a measure of that intolerant spirit which is so congenial to corrupt nature, and which has been so much fostered by the union of the church and the world, which cannot fail to produce persecution. It is not easy at once to get free of the bad effects of the connections in which we were educated.

While we would strongly enforce forbearance towards all who give evidence of loving Christ, let it be remembered that this never implies that we are not to act up to our views of duty, whatever offence it may give to others. We are to obey God rather than man. Christians are bound to obey all the laws of Christ. To associate with a church is not the least important of these, and it is not enough that we be connected with a society which bears that name, it must also have the same constitution, and be governed by the same laws with the churches of the New Testament.

It is of great importance that all Christians should separate from churches, the constitution

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of which is essentially different from that of the apostolic churches. Such are all in alliance with the world, and those formed on similar principles. There are Christians in these; but still they are not churches of Christ, and these Christians are not observing all his commandments. They are walking disorderly, perhaps not unlike some pious kings of Israel, whose hearts were right with God, and who yet sacrificed on the high places. But however much we disapprove of their conduct, yet, considering the prejudices of education, and other stumbling-blocks in their way, those who are truly spiritual among them, and who are not acting in opposition to their own light in continuing in such connexions, ought to be treated with great tenderness and patience. By a contrary conduct their prejudices will be more strongly rivetted.

Although Christians will probably be always called to exercise forbearance to each other in consequence of difference of judgment on some points, yet in proportion as they simply follow the word of God according to the light they have received, these points of difference will be diminishing. The idea, that the Scripture does not contain a complete and universal rule for worshipping God, the authority of great names, and the standards of established churches, tend greatly to prevent union among Christians.

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CHAPTER XII.

OF SCHISM AND HERESY.

SCHISM and heresy are branded in the Scriptures as very great evils. It is therefore proper to examine the precise meaning of the terms.

Σχισμα, which occurs eight times in the New Testament, is in our version only once translated *schism,* 1 Cor. 12:25. It signifies division, and is so translated, John 7:43. 9:16. 10:19. 1 Cor. 1:10. 11:18. Schism does not imply merely separation from a church, but any difference existing in it, *i.e.* among the members, which causes alienation of affection.

The differences of opinion between those who were weak and those who were strong in faith, lid not constitute schism, unless these differences were productive of fastion and strife, and prevented their loving as brethren. In this case, from the want of forbearance, schisms would have taken place. There might be also schisms on account of matters of greater importance. A member might deny some important truth, or refuse obedience to an important precept. This would produce schism in a church, and it could only be put an end to by his listening to the church calling him to repentance, or by his being put away.

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Although differences of opinion may exist in a church of Christ, without producing schism, yet there is always some danger lest differences in knowledge and spiritual understanding produce it, and hence the importance of Christians endeavouring to grow in knowledge. In proportion to their growth, will they be more firmly united to one another. They will be more in subjection to Christ, and less prone to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men. The divisions, or schisms, which existed among the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 1:10,11,12. arose from attachment to various teachers.

Schism hath in process of time come to signify the same as separation; all who separate from the most impure communions are branded as schismatics, and the word in this sense has been bandied about as a term of reproach amongst the different denominations of professing Christians.

Heresy, αιρετις, is used in Scripture to denote a sect or a party, whether good or bad. Sects are commonly, though not always, produced by differences in opinion, but the term is expressive of the effect, not of the cause. Thus Paul says, "After the most straitest *sect* of our religion I lived a Pharisee," Acts 26:5. The Jews, Acts 24:5. charged Paul as a ringleader of *sect* of the Nazarenes, and the apostle in reply observes, after the way which they called a *sect,* so I worship the God of my fathers. Probably their intention was to excite the governor to punish him for his

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religion, as he was not, according to them, entitled to the toleration with which the Jews were favoured. He avoids this, by declaring himself not to have forsaken the religion of his fathers. The Jews at Rome, Acts 28:22. desired to hear of Paul what he thought concerning *sect* which was every where spoken against. They neither express a favourable nor unfavourable opinion of Christians by the term.

'That there is a great affinity in their significations,' *viz.* schism and heresy, says Dr Campbell, 'is manifest, but they are not convertible terms. I do not find that the word σχισμα is ever applied in holy writ to a formed party, to which the word αιρεσις is is commonly applied. I understand them in the epistles of this apostle (Paul) as expressive of different degrees of the same evil. An undue attachment to one part, and a consequent alienation of affection from another part of the Christian community, comes under the denomination of σχισμα. When this disposition proceeded so far as to produce an actual party or faction among them, this party is termed αιρεσις.' Dr Campbell goes on to notice that this was the case even where there was not a separation. Thus the sects of the Sadducees and Pharisees all worstripped together in the temple.

A Christian church is one united body, the members of which, while possessing different degrees of knowledge, are in a sinful and inconsistent state if divided into various parties or sects. The

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unity of the body is broken by them, and therefore to charge a Christian church with splitting into sects or parties, is to charge them with corruption in what is essential to them as a society. 'Hence the difference between the word in the historical and epistolary parts of the New Testament. In the former, if any thing reprehensible or commendable be suggested, it is not suggested by the term αιρεσις, but by the words construed with it. In the latter, it is always used in a bad sense, because addressed to communities which do not admit of sects.'*

Men arose soon after these communities were formed, who loved to have the pre-eminence, to serve their own purposes, counteracting the apostolic regulations in the churches. Thus the false teachers in Galatia and at Corinth acted, and thus too acted Diotrephes, 3 John 9. They excited schisms and feels in the churches, and the apostles inform us that they knew such sects were to arise. They are frequently prophesied of in the New Testament. Thus Peter writes of false teachers, who should privily bring in damnable *heresies,* seducing men from obedience to the laws of Christ, delivered by the apostles, and through covetousness making merchandise of them, teaching the most abominable doctrines. Separating from the apostolic churches, or promoting separation, was in fact rebelling against Christ, and

* See Dr Campbell on schism and heresy, in his preliminary dissertations to his Translation of the Evangelists.

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therefore *heresy,* i.e. sect-making, is reckoned among the works of the flesh, which if men do, they shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Paul informs the Ephesian elders, that of themselves should men arise speaking perverse things, *drawing away disciples after them.* Thus they expressly denied the Lord that bought them,* 2 Pet. 2:1. He forbade his disciples to aspire after such pre-eminence. "Be not ye called rabbi, for one is your matter, even Christ, and all ye are brethren; and call no man your father upon earth, for one is your father who is in heaven; neither be ye called masters, for one is your master, even Christ," Matt. 23:8, 9, 10.

This will help us to explain the precept to Titus, ch. 3:10–11. "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and finneth, being condemned of himself." A heretic here means a man who sets himself up as the head of a sect, and consequently consents not to the words of Jesus Christ delivered by the apostles, 1 Tim. 6:3. he is subverted, he errs from the faith, and is condemned of himself, for he acknowledges. Jesus to be the Christ, and yet, by attesting dominion and making a party which look up to him as their head, he tramples on his laws.

It is no doubt a very serious matter to separate

* Denying the Lord has generally been explained of denying his divinity; but it is equally applicable to denying his authority, by teaching for doclrines the commandments of men.

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from a church of Christ. But let it be observed, that the authority of Christ requires us to separate from antichristian churches, where various unscriptural practices and terms of communion are required, where we must call some man, or some set of men, *Master,* and where we cannot observe the commandments of Christ. In many societies calling themselves churches, it is impossible to attend to the precept, Mart, 18:15,–17. Now, in such a case we virtually prefer the church above Christ, by continuing in it. Where discipline is entirely neglected, or not administered according to Scripture; where men are by birth members of a church; and where it differs not from a worldly kingdom, it is an important duty to come out from among them,—neither to remain ourselves in a situation where we cannot yield full obedience to Christ, nor to countenance men in such unscriptural practices. To quit such a church by no means subjects us to the appellation of schismatics or heretics in the scriptural sense of these words. They are truly schismatics, who, by bringing in pernicious heresies, have set aside the practices of the apostolic churches, and forsaking the laws of Jesus Christ, have substituted in the place of his mild and easy yoke, the doctrines and commandments of men. Every member of such churches is in fact condemned by himself, for while in words he admits Christ to be his Master,. he yet submits to the authority of others, even to the subversion of his laws. 'It appears,' says

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Mr Joseph Hallet, 'that the *chief heretic* now in the world is the bishop of *Rome.* He has raised and united to himself a great *party* or *faction,* who, wherever they dwell, make innumerable things parts of their worship, and necessary to communion with them, which God never required them to say or do in public. No divine command can be pretended for the submission of the whole church to the bishop of Rome, for the worship of angels, the virgin Mary, and other saints; for the worthip of images and of the host; for prayers in an unknown tongue; for making images and pictures of the invisible God; for the celibacy of the clergy; and ten thousand other things which are made as necessary to communion in the church of Rome, as love to God or faith in Christ. These human institutions in the worship of God, which are made terms of communion in that church, are the *only* cause of the division between her and the Protestants. Let her only conform her worship to the divine rule of the Scriptures, and we shall be one with her in a moment. As long as she continues to teach for doctrines the commandments of men, so long she is *heretical,* and the author of that sect which is denominated *Popish.* And most justly is it called a *heresy or sect,* because its centre of union is the greatest heretic or sectary in the world, viz. the bishop of Rome, who impiously sets up himself as the head of a faction, in opposition to the plain,

divine rules of faith and worship laid down by Christ in the gospel.*——

'The foundation,' adds he, 'of the greatest part of the herefies or sects in the church, has been the uniting several congregations under one common government. Originally, every congregation was independent of all others, and was subject to no sovreign authority. Accordingly we find, that in the New Testament the word *church* never signifies a diocesan or national church, but only the catholic church, or one single congregation. This is too plain to be disputed. This independency of congregations ought to have been maintained in all ages; and it is impossible they should have a right, since it is in itself an immorality to give it up. Every congregation has a natural and unalienable right to worship God in that manner as they really believe, after an impartial examination, to be of divine institutson, and acceptable to God. But they cannot exercise this right, if any foreigner (i.e. one not belonging to their assembly) has authority to prescribe a form of worship for them. For in this case it may easily happen, that foreign authority may forbid them to worship God in the way *they think* right, and oblige

* Mr Hallet's observations are most justly applicable to the church of Rome, but they are also applicable to all other great bodies, called churches, which pretend to legislate for themselves, and by thus practically declaring the imperfection of the laws of Christ, occasion schisms and heresies. Of this he seems aware by what follows.

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them to follow a rule which *they believe* to be difpleasing to God.'*

It is said that we have no commandment to leave a church, and that various corruptions, such as we have mentioned, do not warrant us to consider the body which practises them not to be a church. To prove this, the epistles in the Revelation to the churches of Asia are quoted; and it is observed, that the Lord did not command any of the members to separate from these. But these churches were very different, as we have already seen, from many so called in our days. It by no means appears that there was a mixed communion in any of these churches, although some of them tolerated improper members, Rev. 2:14–15. They were commanded to put these out, in other words, to separate from them. And surely the conduct of true believers in these churches, would atleast have been equally sinful if the corrupt members had been the majority, and they had continued in communion with them.

Let no Christian say, I am dissatisfied with my present connection, but where shall I join myself? I see evils among all parties; and so you would have seen in the apostolic churches, but if you had not joined them on this account, you would have rejected the authority of Christ. A church of Christ is so simple an institution, that Christians, however

* Notes on several Texts of Scripture, by Joseph Hallet, *jun* c. viii. p. 391,–305. Vol.111. London 1756.

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few, can be at no loss to observe the institution. We formerly noticed the need of forbearance. Without this a church cannot subsist. There will be endless divisions, and consequently stumbling-blocks in the way of the world. But where can we find a warrant for continuing in a society, the laws of which are essentially different from those of the churches planted by the apostles, and which hardly resemble them in any thing but the name? The members of these societies totally neglect the precepts of Christ in regard to church-fellowship. What he meant by a church was one thing, and what they mean by it is another. Have they a warrant to neglect or disobey his precepts? If not, believers ought to quit such connexions.

There may be causes which will justify our reparation from a church whose outward forms are agreeable to Scripture: if they depart from the doctrines of the gospel; if they do not attend to the spirit, as well as to the letter of the laws of Jesus Christ, and if they will not suffer exhortation on the subject, nor submit to the word of God, we shall not be profited in the connexion. But we ought to beware left we take such a step lightly, and from improper motives. Here I must advert to the conduct of some who cannot, indeed, join worldly societies, but seem indifferent about Christian communion. 'From the formation of the church at Jerusalem, there is not a single instance in Scripture of a real Christian,

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who did not, wherever he came, *essay to join himself to the disciples.*'* Surely there is something amiss in an opposite line of conduct. Let Christians seriously consider the importance of not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, and let them remember, that attending as hearers merely on the Lord's day, is not observing the spirit of this precept, nor even the full extent of it literally.

Those too are not less inconsistent, who are always talking about New Testament churches, are well acquainted with the theory of their order, and yet remain in unscriptural connections. They have at bell but a speculative acquaintance with the subject; their consciences are not impressed.

An end will never be put to schism and heresy among Christians, until they all render universal obedience to the laws of Jesus Christ, and acting on the principles of the reformers, (who are branded as heretics and schismatics by the church of Rome) reject the authority of those who in any respect have violated the constitution of his churches, or have rendered obedience to any of his precepts impracticable amongst their disciples. Then, and not till then, will that promised unity amongst the disciples of Jesus be manifested, which shall convince the world of the excellence of Christianity. Then shall the world believe that the Father hath sent his beloved Son into the world, when his disciples are all *visibly* one, John 17: 20–21.!

* Miss. Mag. for Feb. 1804. p. 61.

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CHAPTER XIII.

EXCELLENCE OF THE PLAN LAID DOWN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT FOR THE SOCIAL WORSHIP OF CHRISTIANS, AND THE ADVANTAGES ARISING FROM OBSERVING IT.

Every commandment of God, like every one of his works, bears the marks of his infinite wisdom, and is admirably adapted to the end he has in view. We may therefore be assured, that the observance of all the ordinances appointed for his people in their associated state, must be attended with great advantages.

A very striking feature in the system we have atempted to delineate, is its simplicity. This is characteriftic of all the works of God, and is a proof of his excellent wisdom: 'Nature,' says Sir Isaac Newton, 'no where employs many agents in things which can be effected by few.'* In the constitution and discipline of a church of Christ, there is no confusion of civil and religious privileges. There cannot be an approach towards persecution, except there be a complete departure from the laws of Christ. The ordinances of Christ are in a great measure independent of outward circumstances. If there be Christians in the same neighbourhood, whether they be poor or rich, learned

* 'Natura nusquam per plures quod per pauciores fieri poffit.'

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or illiterate, they may enjoy the privileges connected with a church of Christ.* Such a church may equally exist under any form of civil government. It in no shape interferes with any one, nor can, so far as it acts upon proper principles, be justly regarded as an object of jealousy to the state.† It receives indeed no laws from man in the things of God, but the subjection of the members, in all civil matters, to the powers which be, is confirmed in the strongest manner. This subjection is completely independent of the religion professed by the magistrate. He is to be submitted to, not because he is a Christian or a heathen, an episcopalian or an independent, but because in the course of providence he is set over us in the things of this life. Any deviation in a member of a church, from this obedience or honour due to the magistrate, in word or deed, is a

* It is evident that no other kind of churches than what are called *independent,* can possibly be formed in *many* situations. Such an one is practicable in *all* circumstances where there are any believers. This affords no slight argument in favour of this mode of church-order.

† Churches independent of each other, and acknowledging no head upon earth, are certainly far less formidable to civil Government than a great body comprehending thousands, it may be, in all different parts of the country, subject to an individual, or to a representative body. The former, were they hostile to Government, must alter their constitution before they could attempt any thing against the state. Had they been intended by Jesus Christ for supporting religion by force, he would have given them a different constitution; but the weapons by which his kingdom is promoted and defended, are not carnal.

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breach of the law of Christ, and consequently will become a subject of discipline, and, if not repented of, tnust infallibly issue in his exclusion from the church.

We may observe also how exactly this system corresponds with the genius and spirit of the Christian religion. The members of a church, we have seen, are governed by love. They are treated as children, not as slaves. Their obedience, is thus a reasonable and voluntary service; every one mud perceive that such obedience will be peculiarly acceptable to God. It is the necessary effect of the love of God being shed abroad in their hearts.

How well does it fait also that union which ought to subsist among brethren! The gospel is preached for the purpose of reconciling sinners to God, and consequently of uniting them to one another. A great change takes place in all who believe. They become temples of the Holy Ghost who dwells in them, and are taught of God to love one another. Still much corruption remains, and the malice and envy natural to them are apt to make their appearance. To unite them more closely in love, they are commanded to associate together. Society civilizes and improves the characters of men. Christians, as well as other men, are necessary to each other. Christian society promotes a mutual exchange of good offices, and renders this practicable. They receive much satisfaction and support from fellowship with each other, and this

tends to increase their mutual affection. Their association, however, is attended with no peculiar civil privileges, and therefore is likely to be disregarded by men who mind earthly things. This serves to promote that reparation from the world, so much insisted upon in Scripture, and evidently of so much importance to the harmony and welfare of a church. Indeed it is one distinguished excellence of a scriptural church, that it cannot be united with the world. This cuts off a great and never-failing fource of corruption.

The dispositions and characters of men are also much influenced by habit. Connection with a church renders attention necessary to various commandments given by Christ, and our being accustomed to obey, and experiencing the advantage of this, leads us to do so with greater cheerfulness.

It also cherishes a spirit of dependence on Christ. We formerly observed, that he has promised a peculiar superintendance and interposition in behalf of his churches, and that they never were intended to go on without it. Christians will have constant experience of this in a church. This promotes a spirit of prayer, and tends to keep alive deep impressions of divine things upon our minds.

It must be evident also how much the discipline which Christ has instituted is calculated to form the Christian character, and to make it appear in a proper light to the world. We are all naturally proud. Even when sensible that we are in the

wrong, we do not like this to be noticed by others, far less that they should point out the impropriety of our conduct. But Christians are to learn of Christ, who was meek and lowly. They are to be subject one to another, and to be clothed with humility. They are not to act as if they were little interested in their mutual welfare; they are to admonish each other as brethren, members of the same family. We are all apt to overlook a beam in our own eye, while we see a mote in our brother's. The Lord expressly condemns this, but has commanded us to watch over each other in love, not to suffer sin upon our brother, but in any wise to rebuke him. This at once promotes circumspection, and leads us to confess our faults one to another.

We have described the various steps to be taken with an offending brother. These, like every other part of the institutions of Christ, are none of them arbitrary. What doth the purest love dictate towards a child or a brother who by imprudent or guilty conduct is injuring himself? Doth it not impel us to reason with him on the imprudence of his conduct? Doth it not persuade him to act otherwise? If our remonstrances fail of success, doth not affection lead us to employ the influence of those friends whose opinion he values? If this prove ineffectual, and there is danger of his misleading other members of the family, do we not naturally speak to him before the whole, and endeavour to reclaim him, or at least to warn

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the rest against his example? What is this but just the law of Christ!—a law evidently founded on the most consummate knowledge of the human heart, and approved by the common sense and conduct of mankind?* While this order is thus so admirably calculated to form the character of real Christians, it will disgust hypocrites and carnal professors, and drive them out of a society where they cannot live quietly in their ungodly practices. To such, the care exercised by the members one over another, will appear officious and impertinent, and they will seek for some situation in which their profession may be maintained with less trouble. This is in itself most important; for ordinances and churches were never intended for any but the real disciples of the Lord Jesus.

It also tends to lay low those high thoughts which we are apt to carry even into religion. Christianity does not level the distinctions which tske place in civil society. If it find a man a king or a nobleman, it does not degrade him from his rank in society; at the same time it teaches

* The following circumstance lately took place in a Christian church: On the admission of some member; the pastor addressed them respecting the duties incumbent on them. He particularly insisted on our Lord's rule concerning offences, Matt. 18. A person present, so ignorant that he did not know who had given the precept, but supposing that it originated with the pastor, expressed to a friend whom he had accompanied, his approbation of the measure, and how much credit he thought the pastor deserved for laying down such a regulation.

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believers, that in Christianity "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ; is all and in all," Col. 3:11. Believers have one Master, even Christ, and they are all brethren. In a church of Christ there must be no respect of persons, James 2:9. founded on rank, fortune, or abilities; let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted, but the rich in that he is made low, James 1:9–10. The members are to be esteemed according to the grace conferred upon them, without any regard to their outward circumstances. They are entitled to respect from one another in the world according to their station in civil society, but all distinctions are swallowed up when they meet as brethren to observe the ordinances of Christ. A contrary system, however agreeable to our pride, is hurtful to our souls, and gives a very false view of the nature of the kingdom of Christ.

Another excellence of this plan is, that it tends greatly to prevent the accumulation of error. When all appeals are directly to the word of God, when the question is not what we have been accustomed to do, but what is recorded of the practice of the apostles, we are necessarily led to close and habitual examination of the Scripture, especially on the occurring of any new or difficult case. This promotes growth in knowledge, and consequent improvement, whereas, when we have devised a system of laws by which churches are to

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be governed, abuses necessarily arising from the imperfection of human laws, as well as from the execution of them, will creep in, and that tendency to degenerate which we see in all human systems, will materially affect us. "When this takes place, instead of good men studying to promote improvement, and to come continually closer to the word of God, the corruption of the mass will necessarily lead them only to guard their standards from innovation, and thus all progress is at an end.

The longer a system has been established, and the more it deviates from truth, the greater is the difficulty of reformation; whereas, in a church guided entirely by the word of God, although on particular occasions it may mistake the rule, and may act improperly, yet such deviations, it is to be hoped, will not proceed far without being discovered. When they are discovered, so far from any obstacle being presented to a change of system, every motive which can be conceived arising from the authority of Christ, consistency with their profession, and desire to promote the welfare of the church, will necessarily lead to it.

We must not omit to observe the influence which attention to scriptural order in a church will have on the spread of the gospel. This has been doubted, and has even been alleged as an objection against the independency of churches. But we have seen that churches, although independent of each other, must, and will, so far as they

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follow the word of God, co-operate. Each church will be a star in the right hand of Christ, from which the light of the gospel will issue forth. The gifts of all the members are, in such societies, habitually called into exercise, and the more religion prospers among them, the more zealous will they be to diffuse the knowledge of Christ around them.

Such of the elders as are not engaged in worldly business, and who are qualified to draw the attention of the careless, will occasionally visit the neighbourhood, and declare to sinners the great things of eternity. Where a few in a town or village are brought to know the truth, the foundation of a new church is laid, which will receive assistance from their sister church, until they are enabled, by an increase of knowledge and gifts among themselves, to spread the favour of the Redeemer's name.

It may be said, what becomes of distant parts where the people are poor, and unable to support a pastor? We have already observed, that although it is greatly to be desired that one or more pastors in a church should give himself wholly to the work, and consequently be supported, unless able to support himself, yet this is by no means indispensably necessary. Even where this was not the case, how much would the conduct of a church meeting together to observe the ordinances of the Lord, and individually maintaining a becoming conversation in their families, tend, merely

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of itself, to attract the attention of the careless! The pastors of such a church labouring with their own hands would not prevent this. Much good might be done by their assembling, even previous to their obtaining pastors. In proportion to the poverty of the neighbourhood, they would be less disgusted with homely and familiar methods of conveying divine instruction. When hearing their neighbours, with whom perhaps they formerly associated in wickedness, speaking of what God had done for their souls, is there not ground to hope, through the blessing of God, that they might be judged and convinced? 1 Cor. 14:24–25. In the late remarkable work in Breadalbane, this was literally the case. Many more have been awakened by the prayers and exhortations of a few whose hearts God had touched,. than by the preaching of the person employed to labour among them.*

If men are willing to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, if they are contented to labour in the gospel while supplied with the means of living and the comforts of life, in the same manner as formerly when engaged in business, some may, and would in mot cases be able to give themselves *wholly* to the work. It was never the intention of Jesus, that when a man became a pastor of a Christian church, he should rise to a superior rank in society, and require indul-

* See a letter, containing an account of this work of God, in the Missionary Magazine for 1803, page 268.

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gences to which he had been hitherto a stranger. An outcry may be raised about unlearned men being employed in the work of the ministry. The advantages of learning no one can dispute; but to make human learning an essential requisite for the ministry of the gospel, is adding to God's word, and virtually charging him with an omission which our wisdom has supplied. Indeed, were it not that the generality of Christians have connected themselves with worldly societies—were all believers in the world joined, as they ought to be, with scriptural churches, there would be no want of men with a competent measure of learnings who might hold offices in the churches. He who called Moses, who was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and Saul who was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, will always, by making his gospel come effectually to the hearts of some of better education, take care that his people shall not be deprived of any advantages which they can derive from learning. But at present, many such are comparatively useless, by remaining in circumstances where their gifts are unoccupied. But let us appeal to facts. When was the gospel most successful? Was it not in the beginning, during the three first centuries? a period when it had to struggle against almost every difficulty—a tyrannical government, a selfish priesthood, the prejudices of the people, and yet it triumphed over all opposition. See it taken under the care of the state! Magnificent edifices were erected,

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lofty titles devised, liberal provision made for its ministers; and what was the consequence? Real religion almost unknown, and a wretched system of superstition in its Head; and all this because men had forsaken the word of the Lord, who thus showed that their wisdom was foolishness.

It may be said, that during the first ages the churches possessed miraculous gifts, and that the fnccess of the gospel was the effect of them, together with the remarkable out pouring of the Spirit. How long miraculous gifts continued we cannot tell, but these did not necessarily insure the success of the gospel. With respect to the gracious influence of the Spirit, we have no expectation of the spread of the gospel, or of the prosperity of the churches, independent of this. But why is the Spirit withheld? Must we not suppose that he is grieved by his ordinances being slighted, and the wisdom of man depended on in preference to the power of God. When his people will not hearken to his voice, he gives them up to their own folly, and teaches them by painful experience that it is an evil and a bitter thing to depart from God. Battering-rams would have appeared much more proper for beating down the walls of Jericho than ram's-horns, but Israel would never thus have got possession of the city.

In short, whether we consider the importance of impressing upon believers and upon the world proper views of the nature of Christ's kingdom, and of preventing men under pretence of religion

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from disturbing the governments under which they are placed; whether we take into view the excellence of uniting Christians in the closest bands of love—of separating the precious from the vile—of promoting dependence upon Christ, and leading men to abound in prayer; whether we think of the duty of using fit means to confirm the Christian character, and to check our natural pride so as to strike the minds of the world, and lead men to glorify God in the day of visitation; whether we eflimate properly the importance of dealing in the most tender and affectionate manner with offenders, of preventing the accumulation of error, and of promoting growth in knowledge, and of spreading the gospel in the world—we shall find it of the utmost moment minutely to attend to the regulations of Christ concerning social religion. Were all the Christians upon earth thus united as one body under their great Captain, were they using their united influence to spread the gospel at home and abroad, what glorious things might we not expert to see? These days are approaching. The increasing regard paid to the word of God is their auspicious harbinger, and shortly, we hope, the song shall be raised, "Sing O heavens, and be joyful O earth, and break forth into ringing O mountains; for the Lord has comforted his people, and will have mercy on his afflicted!"

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CHAPTER XIV.

HINTS CONCERNING THE EVILS ARISING FROM NEGLECT OF THE SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD, ENJOINED BY JESUS CHRIST IN SOCIAL WORSHIP.

CHRIST gave himself for his own, that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. To effect this redemption, the gospel is preached to every creature. To some it is the savour of life, to others the savour of death. Some are thereby begotten again to a lively hope of eternal life, the whole tenor of their conduct is changed, Christ becomes precious to their souls, and their great aim is to live to his glory; others receive the message with indifference or contempt. Blinded by their lusts, the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them, and they hate those whose exemplary lives condemn their wickedness.

The Lord, who well knew the effefts which the preaching of the gospel would occasion, through the depravity of man, assured his disciples that he did not come to send peace on earth, but a sword; that his religion would set a man at variance with his nearest relations. Hence it is said, "If any man will come after me, let

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him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me;" and the apostle exhorts us to go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

Instead of counteracting this tendency in the gospel to separate his people from the world which lieth in wickedness, all the ordinances of Christ for his people are intended to promote it. "Come out from among them," saith the Lord, and be ye separate, and I will receive you." "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers." "What part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" Sanctification primarily signifies separation. We see from the word of God how much this must have tended to secure Christians from temptation, and to call the attention of unbelievers to the truths of God.

When Christianity was substituted for heathenism as the religion of the empire, separation was, in a great measure, counteracted. All who conformed to the established religion were considered to be Christians, and if they died in communion with the church, they were supposed to go to heaven.* This system has continued to this day in every country of Europe.

Thus all the advantages of Christian fellowship were at once given up. The union in select so-

* So every one who dies in the communion of the church of England is committed to the grave as a dear brother, of whose happy resurredtion certain hope is expressed. Although this is not the form in Scotland, yet the spirit of the constitution is the same. All are Christians, and consequently all go to heaven.

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cieties which so much tended to knit Christians together in love, and to provoke them to good works, was at an end. They might indeed associate together in private, but in the church they were mixed with the mass of mankind. What must the consequences have been? The Holy Ghost declares that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Here the whole lump was leaven, and a very few only of its parts not assimilated to the whole! We may indeed deceive ourselves. We may say, shall a wicked man, being a member of the same church, hurt me? May not I be very spiritual, although he is carnally minded? This may seem very plausible, but it contradicts Him who has said, "Be not deceived, *evil communications corrupt good manners;* awake to righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame." It was a shame for the Christians at Corinth to tolerate any among them who knew not God, and what must it be to Christians in Great Britain to be connected with a society where real Christians bear no proportion in number to ungodly men?

The apostle gives us particular directions how to act towards such a society. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent,

fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; *from such turn away,*" 2 Tim. 3:1,–5. There were some persons of that spirit in those days, who, under the name of Christians were enemies to the cross of Christ, Phil. 3:18. but the mystery of iniquity was not then completely revealed, 2 Thess. 2:8. It remained for the last days to form churches, the great bulk of whose members should be men of such characters,* while the number of believers was comparatively small.

Where Christians, under the influence of the gospel, watch over and admonish one another, liveliness and spirituality are promoted; but in a society where real Christians have no more connection with each other than with the ungodly, how much must such duties be neglected, and consequently formality prevail? Christians in such connections are rarely exhorted to the peculiar duties which members of a church of Christ owe to each other, and of which the epistles are full, such as peculiar affection, mutual exhortation, watching over and admonishing each other. At

* These churches are ruled by worldly men, the great bulk of the teachers preach another gospel, while a few godly men make a feeble and ineffectual opposition to the current. Instead of stemming it, they themselves are borne down, led into many snares, and often induced to act in a manner unbecoming their profession.

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lead these duties are never, and cannot be urged upon them towards one another, as church members.

The union between the church and the world directly tends also to promote worldly-mindedness. The very existence of a church of Christ, separated from the world, counteracts this; whereas, the other fosters and cherishes it. All discipline, except for gross crimes, is necessarily at an end in such an establishment. The removal of this check tends to lower the standard of Christianity, especially when considered in connection with our being taught to consider all those to be Christians who remain members of the church. Not only is discipline neglected, but prejudices against it are excited, even in real Christians. This is not surprising; whatever truth we do not confess, whatever religious ordinance we do not practise, we naturally disregard more and more, and that in proportion to the measure of light we once had on the subject.

In such a connection, Christians have great temptation to want of tenderness of conscience. There may be some practices which they dislike, but every thing is fixed and regulated by law. There must be no deviation. Hence even good men often ridicule scruples of conscience on those subjedts, and speak with contempt of those who entertain them. The person who admits them is accounted weak and foolish, and other Christians use their influence to persuade such to act in

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opposition to these scruples. How different this from the commandment of Christ! He enjoins us to avoid whatever we cannot practise in faith, and declares a thing lawful in itself to be sin to the man who is not fully persuaded of this in his own mind, Rom. 14. It is a common sentiment, even among good men, that if things in general be right, particulars are not to be too minutely canvassed. Nothing can be more hardening to the conscience, than dealing in this wholesale manner in religious ordinances. Each particular observauce ought to be attended to from regard to the authority of Christ.

By this connexion, a great check, is imposed upon growth in knowledge. Every established church has its confessions or articles. It is not enough that a member of this church judges a thing to be scriptural. Unless he would be deemed a heretic, he must make it coincide with the standards of the church. Where this cannot be done, a man has great temptation to remain silent, or to bring forward his opinion in such a way as shall prevent its being fully understood.* The union between church and state also greatly tends to alienate the minds of Christians from each other, and to promote party-spirit. Members,

* Confessions of faith of human composition, it is true, promote an appearance of unity, but they do not produce the reality. They tend to discourage the people from searching the Scriptures, by inducing a belief that these are too difficult for the unlearned, and that their *summaries* contain whatever is valuable in them.

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and especially the clergy of the established church, are apt to look upon such as have separated from it with a jealous eye. In the true spirit of monopoly, they consider the people as all belonging to them, and account every one who leaves them a deserter. This naturally excites a spirit of opposition in others, who are tempted to endeavour to make reprisals, and to proselyte persons to their party from improper motives.

Dissenters who do not see the evil of the connection between the church and state are led to look with a jealous eye on the loaves and fishes of which they are deprived. While those who understand the doctrine of Scripture on this head, and cannot but decidedly condemn the opposite practice, are regarded as censorious and troublesome, and destitute of meekness and forbearance. But in fact nothing tends so much to promote want of forbearance, as the connection between church and state, for it confounds and mixes religion and the world together. In the former, it is always a great duty to exercise forbearance. In the latter, it is often impossible, because it may be dangerous to society. When the two are mixed together, the intolerance which may be very necessary in civil matters is insensibly transferred to religion.

That there are Christians in such societies, who are spiritually-minded, whose conversation is in heaven, and who associate much with real Christians, I mod readily admit; but still their situa-

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tion is unfavourable, and if they adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, it is in spite of many hindrances connected with their situation, and their neglect of many important ordinances, the observance of which should at once be considered as a test of our regard to his authority, and as the appointed means of our growth in grace. We know who has said, "Lead us not into temptation," and indeed we see the unhappy effects of neglecting this caution in the conduit of many connected with such establishments, of whom we have ground to entertain a favourable opinion.

Ministers, who ought to be examples to the flock, are peculiarly exposed to temptation from the mixture of the church with the world. They often acquire in such connections, by their office, a certain rank in society which raises them above those with whom they were formerly on a level. This is not only unscriptural, but tends to prevent, in a great measure, that intercourse with their people which is calculated to be so useful. It lays them also under great temptations to court the favour of the higher classes of society, and to show that respect of persons *in the church,* which is so severely condemned in Scripture. Our natural pride leads us to affect the society of those who are most honourable in the world, and we have no need of any incentives to this. But candidates for offices in an established church are, in some measure, obliged to study to recommend themselves to their superiors. They know too well that faith-

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fulness and reparation from an ungodly world are not the bed recommendations, and they are thus induced to adopt other measures. A more unfavourable situation for being prepared to act as faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, cannot be conceived.

Ministers are also too much led by their situation to intermeddle with politics.* They in fact hold offices under government, and must fulfil the duties expected of them. No one supposes that any government will support a religious establishment except for political purposes. The ministers are paid with the public money, and must be expected to do something in return. 'Who doesnot see,' says Mr Locke, 'that these good men; are indeed more ministers of the government than ministers of the gospel.'† They are apt to be made tools of, and their zeal for religion to be diverted into improper channels. This is exempli-

* When Archbishop Leighton was connected with a presbytery, an order had been given that the ministers should attend particularly to preaching to the times. Leighton contented himself with preaching the gospel, and was called to account for disobedience. He enquired if he was the only offender? Being informed he was, he said, if so many had been preaching to the times, surely one brother might remind the people of eternity.

† Letter on Toleration, p. 197 Glasgow edition, 1757.—The late Dr Robertson, on its being urged that the people had a divine right to choose their own ministers, admitted this in its fullest extent, but observed in the General Assembly, that the ministers of the established church were not the people's ministers; they were appointed and paid by Government, and consequently She people had no right to choose them.

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fied in the defcription Mr Samuel Rutherford gives of the church of Scotland, during what are reckoned its purest times. 'When our land and church were thus contending for that begun reformation, these in authority did still oppose the work; and there was not then wanting men from among ourselves, men of prelatical spirits, who, with some other timeserving courtiers, did not a little undermine the building; and we, doting too much upon found parliaments and lawful general assemblies, fell from our first love to self-seeking, secret banding, and little fearing the oath of God.

'Afterwards our work in public was too much in fequeftration of estates, fining and imprisoning, more than in a companionate mournfulness of spirit towards those whom we saw to oppose the work. In our assemblies we were more to set up a state opposite to a state; more upon forms, citations, leading of witnesses, suspension from benefices, than spiritually to persuade and work upon the conscience by the meekness and gentleness of Christ. The glory and royalty of our princely Redeemer and King was trampled on, as any might have seen in our assemblies. What way the army, and the sword, and the countenance of the nobles seemed to sway, that way were the censures carried. It had been better had there been more days of humiliation and failing in assemblies, synods, presbyteries, congregations, families; and far less adjourning commissions, new

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peremptory summonses, and new drawn up processes; and if the meekness and gentleness of our Master had got so much place in our hearts, that we might have waited on gainsayers and parties contrary minded, and we might have driven gently as our Master, Christ, who loves not to over-drive, but carries the lambs in his bosom.'*

Ministers in the circumstances we speak of, are under the greatest temptations to violate the dictates of their consciences, and the excuses which they form for subscription to what they do not *bona fide* believe, are calculated to produce the most dreadful consequences. There are good men who do not hesitate to admit that they do not believe, in its plain and obvious import, what they have in the most solemn manner professed and subscribed; and they quibble upon expressions, in direct opposition to the obvious meaning and spirit of their subscription, in order to quiet their consciences. Their danger in this respect will keep pace with their knowledge. An hundred years ago men were more in the dark reflecting toleration, the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, the power of the magistrate in religion, and various other subjects, than they are at present; and consequently their vows and their subscription of the standards, which remain the same, were less sinful, and these, we may add, are daily becoming more and more sinful.

* Rutherford's Testimony, at the end of his Letters, p. 522. Glasgow edition,

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Another great evil is the association of good and bad men as ministers of the same church. They meet together in their courts; and consult as brethren. They acknowledge one another as such in public, while in private the one brands the other as fanatics or designing men, merely courting popularity, and they in their turn speak of their brethren in private, though they may not publicly avow this, as men who are destitute of the truth. Thus do they, themselves being judges, *fit in council with the ungodly,* professedly consulting with them about the order of Christ's house. This carries its own punishment along vith it, for the party which is generally the strongest, seem to rack their ingenuity to stretch the consciences of their brethren to the utmost, by obliging them to take part in matters which they have repeatedly declared they cannot engage in with a good conscience. What effect must their submission have upon their hearers? They preach to them to despise all consequences in comparison of offending God, and they say well. But on receiving an order from their superiors, they quietly submit, or timidly excuse then selves, although they formerly appeared and declared themselves to be determined on the contrary. But they must quit a great sphere of usefulness if they hold out: What does this resemble, but doing evil that good may come? It is a delusion for any man to suppose that he shall be more useful by not fully acting up to the light of his own mind. John

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Huss, and Jerom of Prague, might have continued to preach the gospel; they might, and doubtless would have seen sinners converted to God by means of it; but they preferred the flames to this sphere of usefulness, and thus were eminent forerunners of the Reformation. It will be seen, I doubt not, in the day of God, that they have been far more useful than if they had left thousands of real converts, and had themselves died in the communion of the church of Rome. A man's usefulness is not confined to his life-time. Those who appear most useful while they live, will, perhaps in many instances, be found to have been really inferior in usefulness to others who gave up apparently important situations for conscience sake. Let us recollect, that *while we do good in individual instances, the general tenor of our conduct may be very hurtful, and the latter may far exceed the former in its consequences.* Let us also remember, that God has no need of us to carry on his work. He hates robbery for burnt-offering. The way to be useful, is diligently to study the Scriptures with much prayer, and to follow wherever they lead us.

But in this country the plea of usefulness comes with a bad grace from any zealous ministers of Christ for continuing in connexion with the national church. How are their hands tied up? What general exertions can they make to be useful? They may indeed labour in their own parish, but here they must stop.——

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Conscientious men are not only placed in very unpleasant circumstances when connected with an establishment, but the doctrines of Christ are, by means of them, blasphemed as making men troublesome. It is not possible that they can be so compliant as mere time-servers. The latter serve only one matter, they consult alone the wish of men in power; the former have, besides, the authority of Christ to attend to. When a statesman has any business for the clergy, he will find the one ready to obey, the other are more scrupulous. They do not feel the yoke sit quite easy. They are apt to wince, they serve two masters, and hence are denominated wild, disaffected, &c.*

It appears then that these good men, instead of being necessary to the existence of such churches, are in fast troublesome members of them, in proportion as they have any share in their management. Conscience leads them to endeavour to correst abuses. The consequence is, jarring, strife

* The following epithets are most liberally bestowed on the evangelical clergy of the church of England, in a well known periodical work:—WOLVES in sheep's clothing, who have, most insidiously crept into the established church; Pretenders to superior illumination, SEPARATISTS, SCHISMATICS, SECTARIES, SECEDERS, DECEIVERS.—See Antijacobin Review, Criticism on Mr Cadogan's Discourses, &c. The clergy of the established church of Scotland are less acquainted with this treatment, from their closer connexion with their unenlightened brethren, from their conformity to the world, and from that want of decision, zeal and activity in preaching the gospel, and in measures in promote the salvation of linners, which distinguish so many exellent men of the church of England.

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and evil passions are manifested on both sides, and, after a fruitless struggle, they are left in a minority.

If these things indeed be so, and if the connection of church and state be so much calculated to injure Christians, it is evident how much it must obstruct the spread of the gospel. This in a great measure depends upon the holy and consident conduel; of those whom Christ calls the light of the world. But the success of the gospel is also affected by this system in various other ways. It leads the great bulk of the inhabitants of a country to suppose themselves real Christians. All the ordinances are dispensed to them, if not grossly immoral, and that even by good men. There is not, I suppose, one child born in Scotland, who has not been baptized. This indiscriminate administration of ordinances counteracts, in a great measure, the most faithful preaching. In the latter, the minister separates between the precious and the vile; in the former he confounds them together. By this he warns hypocrites of their danger; by that he cries peace, peace. In the one he warns them to escape from the wrath to come; in the other he says, to you belong the privileges of the disciples of Jesus.

It may be said those are inexcuseable who impose on themselves under faithful preachers. This is true. Every man's blood, whatever be his circumstances, will be on his own head. But does not the man who indiscriminately administers

ordinances favour the delusion? The ungodly hear themselves condemned in the sermon, but they comfort themselves that nobody is perfect, that in the main they are Christians, and that the minister thinks them such. Thus the consciences of many are lulled asleep, who could not be easy without obtaining what they call *Christian privileges.*

We have remarked the bad effect which the system is calculated to produce on ministers as individuals, but we may add that it also greatly affects their ministerial exertions. A minister sees a whole district of country destitute of the gospel, but he dare not proclaim therein the joyful sound. What effect must this have upon him? Must it not damp his zeal, which, like every other benevolent passion, is increased by exercise, and decays by lying dormant? This deficiency may, in some measure, be supplied by men unconnected; with the establishment, but the system tends, as we have seen, to prejudice the people against dissenters. Not only is the offence of the cross to be overcome, but they must also contend with the *established* prejudices of the people.

These observations, respecting the effect of this situation in repressing zeal for the diffusion of the gospel, apply to all the members of such churches, as well as to ministers. Although a man could afford to support a dozen of preachers where the gospel is not heard, he cannot do it while remaining in the establishment, without following divi-

sive or sectarian courses. This situation even affects the style of preaching by godly men. Many of those who are truly pious, by no means describe the marked distinction between Christians and the world, with the plainness and decision they ought. On particular occasions they indeed preach on alarming subjects, yet the application, instead of being so pointed as the sentiments of these good men would naturally lead to, is often very general, and if the text be addressed to Christians, a stranger would imagine that the minister considered the great bulk of his hearers to be of that description.

We cannot omit to mention the concern which, good men have in the introduction of ungodly men into the ministry, an evil which necessarily flows from a civil religious establishment. That ungodly men may unawares creep in, in all situations, is undoubtedly true. There were some in Paul's time, men who preached Christ of envy and strife. But it is obvious how much regular salaries and a certain rank in society, affixed by Government to the office, must tend to increase the evil. This leads men to bring up their children to be ministers, just as they breed them to other professions. It matters not whether the livings are great or small. In the one case, as in the church of England, families of rank and opulence will bring up their children for the church; in the other, as in the church of Scotland, the lower ranks. In both cases, nothing can be ex-

pected but that, in general, they shall be destitate of religion.

It is a matter of fact, that the hypocrisy and immorality of the clergy in every age has been a strong-hold of infidelity. The character of ministers of Christ is fully described in the word of God. What a contrast to this does the conduct of very many clergymen present! This is too notorious to be denied by the most partial. The following eloquent extracts from the charge of a dignitary in Ireland to his clergy, will show us what kind of exhortations he thought necessary to be addressed to them. 'Behold him in the desk, the organ and the voice of God's people; their intercessor before the throne of grace, offering up in their name, and in their behalf, prayers and praises, (applications and thanksgivings, sighs of repentance, and cries for pardon. Hear him in the pulpit, rehearsing some happy effusion of piety and zeal, which he has copied (if he takes the trouble even of copying it) from the works of some worthy minister, whose talents and acquirements have been all directed to the instruction and edification of the faithful. I will not divert your attention to consider, in the desk, his distracted thoughts, his wandering looks, his irreverent attitudes, his careless, hasty, unintelligible recitation; I will not divert your attention to consider, in the pulpit, with what a cold and icy tongue he chills the divine ardour that probably glows in every line of the original he has

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copied. In what sleepy tones and palsying accents he repeats expressions of irresistible force and energy when accompanied by the spirit that originally dictated them, and which, coming *from* the heart, are so calculated to make their way *to,* the heart. What I now chiefly wish you to contemplate is the conscience and feeling of such a man in such a situation. Can he repeat a prayer in the name of the people, and not feel that they must consider it as a mockery both to heaven and to themselves? Is there a duty he can recommend, with the breach of which he must not feel that some of his hearers must be at that moment; condemning him? Is there a virtue he can enforce, which his too faithful memory must not place some hearer before him who knows him to have outraged? Is there a vice he can stigmatize, with which some guilty associate or indignant witness must not reproach him? To what face can he look, on which he must not expect to see a sneer or a frown? What eye can he meet, inwhich he must not expect to read either scorn or indignation? Now, I beseech you, what can we suppose so humiliating, so tormenting, as the mind of such a man so circumstanced? Under what excruciating restraint must he discharge his public functions?

'There is, indeed, a point where he may enjoy a fatal calm. We may indeed suppose him arrived at that deplorable stage of degeneracy, when the frequency of those mortifying reflections has

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rendered his heart callous. When tired of the combat between his conscience and his passions, between the sense of shame and the violence of vicious propensities, he becomes so determined and barefaced in his contempt of whatever is decent and consistent, that he sets all public opinion at defiance, and even ridicules what, if he practised them, we might almost call the *virtues* of hypocrisy and dissimulation. If this picture, when taken altogether, be too strongly drawn for any general application, as I trust it is, yet it will be essential towards our present object to consider it in its different parts and shades. Happy are they to whom, in no instance, and in no degree, it can present their own likeness.'——

'Are these descriptions drawn from fancy? Are they the exaggerations of a morose, splenetic, and censorious mind? of the accuser of his brethren, or one who would countenance their accusers? *Would to God that this horrible thing was not to be seen in our Jerusalem!* That there are so many exceptions to them is, and I hope ever will be our consolation, our stay, and our support. Should the general character of our clergy ever link into the extreme of degeneracy, he knows nothing of his religion who would not tremble in the conviction that, like the Jewish priests of old, and perhaps like others of mere recent date, we were to be *made base and contemptible before the people, and were to feed ourselves no more. In* vain should we hope that a few characters, pre-

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serving themselves untainted and blameless, should, by their intercessions, their prayers, or their exertions, avert the terrible calamity. *Though Moses and Samuel stood before God,* yet his mind could not be towards such a description of clergy. *Were Noah, Daniel, and Job among them, they should deliver but their own souls by their own righteousness.* He would not hear them, nor would he spare the rest for *their sakes.*'*

Christ undertook that the gates of hell should not prevail against the church; that a seed should serve him in all generations. This has been fulfilled, and is a proof of his almighty power; but infidels ascribe this to human influence, and to the operation of ordinary causes. Governors have employed Christianity, say they, as a state-engine, and hence it has been preserved. At the same time, many who profess to believe the divine origin of Christianity seem to be of the same mind, and speak as if its continuance in the world depended on the fostering care of civil government.

It is obvious how much all this tends to obstrust the success of the gospel. Christianity, planted and supported by the almighty power of Jesus, is lost sight of, and a political system is substituted in its Head, about which the men of this world contend. What shall we say of the profaning of religious ordinances as a qualification

* Sermons and Charges, by Dr O'Beirne, Lord Bishop of Meath, p. 298,—300, 290. Lond. 1750,

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for civil employments, of the Lord's supper being the necessary tell of our fitness to be magistrates or soldiers? If Christianity be not merely a state engine, if it be not, as infidels have had too much encouragement to call it, a fable cunningly devised by politicians and priests, can we think that the jealous God will wink at such things?

But are there no advantages attending a civil religious establishment? Does religion gain nothing by the support of government? Does it not give respectability to religion and to its ministers? Alas! this it does communicate in the eyes of worldly men, but by means of this it only lays a stumbling-block in their way, and leads them to mistake its nature. It adds indeed to the sanctions of religion, sanctions which are better calculated to affect mankind, while they do not believe the gospel. But such sanctions, however necessary to civil laws, ought to have no place, for they can have no good effect in religion. Let us see how Christianity was originally propagated in the world: "Therefore, seeing we have this ministry," say the apostles of Christ, "as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds

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Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. 4:1–2, 10:4–5. Here is the example we ought to follow, and no other means will ever recommend or advance the religion of Jesus. 'If to make proselytes by the sword,' says Dr Campbell, 'is tyranny in rulers, to resign our understanding to any man, and to receive implicitly what we ought to be rationally convinced of, would be on our part the lowed servility. Now, *tyranny* and *sertility,* how much soever adapted to the genius of worldly domination, are by no means suited to the heavenly character of Christ's kingdom. The only means the gospel permits us to employ for promoting this spiritual power is *persuasion,* which operates upon the understanding, and by it upon the will and affections. The great engine of secular dominion is *force,* which, without regarding understanding, will or affections, lays hold of the body. The language of our Lord to his hearers was, *If any man* WILL come under my guidance, Ει τις ΘΕΛΕΙ οπισω μου ελθειν. Nothing is obtruded or forced upon the unwilling. Now, as the great source of the infidelity of the Jews was a notion of the temporal kingdom of the Messiah, *we may justly say that the great source of the corruption of Christians, and of their general defection foretold by the inspired writers, has been an attempt to render it in effect a temporal king-*

dom, and to support and extend it by earthly means. This is that spirit of Antichrist which "was so early at work, as to be discoverable even in the days of the apostles.'*

'When the secular powers,' says the same author, 'had changed sides, and were now come to be on the side of Christianity, this was the manner on the subject of religion in which some men among the clergy began to argue. Princes ought to be considered in a twofold capacity; one is, that of Christians, the other, that of princes, in both which characters they are bound to serve God; as Christians, by observing the divine commandments, like every other disciple of Christ; as princes, by purging the church of all schisms, heresies and blasphemies, punishing all transgressors of the divine precepts, but more especially those who, by the transgressions above mentioned, violate the first table of the decalogue; for as those sins are committed more immediately against God, they are much more heinous than theft, adultery, murder, or any sins committed against our neighbour. Now under the general denomination of sins of the first table, every sect (were their verdicts to be severally taken) would comprehend almost all the distinguishing tenets of every other sect. And though, in support of their plea, they might have many specious things

* Preface to Dr Campbell's Translation of the Four Gospels, Vol. I. p. lviii. 8vo. Aberdeen edit.

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to advance, they would all be found to lean on a false hypothesis.

'First, it is false that the concerns of the soul and eternity fall under the cognizance and jurisdidtion of the magistrate. To say that they do, is to blend the very different and hardly compatible characters of magistrate and pastor in the same person; or, which is worse, to graft the latter upon the former, the sure method of producing a most absurd and cruel despotism, such as obtains in all Mahometan countries. Nor is that much better which prevails more or less in popish countries, especially in the ecclesiastical state, and in Spain and Portugal, where the magistrate is grafted on the pastor, or rather on the priest.

'Secondly, it is false that spiritual concerns, if they did fall under the cognizance of the magistrate, are capable of being regulated by such expedients as are proper for restraining the injuries of violence and fraud, and preserving tranquillity and good order in society. Though, by coercion, crimes which are outward and overt acts may effectually be restrained, it is not by coercion that those inward effects can be produced, conviction in the understanding, or conversion in the heart. Now these in religion are all in all. By racks and gibbets, fire and faggot, we may as rationally propose to mend the fight of a man who squints or is purblind, as by these means to enlighten the infidel's or the heretic's understanding, confute his errors, and bring him to the belief of what he dis-

believed before. That by such methods he may be constrained to profess what he disbelieves still, nobody can deny or even doubt. But to extort a hypocritical profession, is so far from being to promote the cause of God and religion, that nothing, by the acknowledgment of men of all parties, can stand more direclly in opposition to it. 'Nothing is so voluntary as religion,' says Lactantius, 'in which, if the mind of the worshipper is constrained the service is nothing.'*

Mr Locke speaks the same language. 'This,' says he, 'being not a proper place to enquire into the marks of the true church, I will only mind those that contend so earnestly for the decrees of their own society, and that cry out continually, 'the church, the church,' with as much noise, and perhaps upon the same principle as the Ephesian silversmiths did with their Diana—This, I say, I desire to mind them of, that the gospel frequently declares that the true disciples of Christ must suffer perfecution; but that the church of Christ should perfecute others, and force others by fire and sword to embrace her faith and doctrine, I could never yet find in any of the books of the New Testament.'†

Experience should have taught men ere now, that all persecution for religious opinions is im-

* Nihil est tarn voluntarium quam religio, in qua, si animus sacrificantis aversus est, jam sublata, jam nulla est.—Campbell's Lectures on Ecclesiastical History, vol. ii. p. 289,–292.

† Locke on Toleration, p. 50– 51,

proper. One very obvious consequence of admitting it in any case is, that it is fully as likely to be employed in favour of error as of truth; witness the thousands who have died as martyrs for Jesus. The inconsistency of those who have employed force in religion, is abundantly manifest. Their zeal has ever been directed against those who separated from their communion, while they have tolerated the most flagitious conduct in such as adhered to them. This is very properly reprobated in the following quotation from Mr Locke. Since his days a great change for the better has taken place, but still the spirit he condemns exists in a certain degree.

'Though the divisions that are amongst sects should be allowed to be never so obstructive of the salvation of souls, yet nevertheless "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, and such like things, cannot be denied to be works of the flesh;" concerning which the apostle has expressly declared, that "they who do them shall not inherit the kingdom of God," Gal. 5. Whosoever therefore is sincerely solicitous about the kingdom of God, and thinks it his duty to endeavour the enlargement of it amongst men, ought to apply himself with no less care and industry to the rooting out of these immoralities, than to the extirpation of sects. But if any one do otherwise, and whilst he is cruel and implacable towards those that differ from him in opinion, he be indulgent to such iniquities and

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immoralities as are unbecoming the name of a Christian, let such a one talk never so much of the church, he plainly demonstrates by his actions that it is another kingdom he aims at, and not the advancement of the kingdom of God.——

'If any one maintain that men ought to be compelled by fire and sword to profess certain doctrines, and conform to this or that exterior worship, without any regard had unto their morals; if any one endeavour to convert those that are erroneous unto the faith, by forcing them to profess things that they do not believe, and allowing them to practise things that the gospel does not permit, it cannot be doubted indeed but such a one is desirous to have a numerous assembly joined in the same profession with himself; but that he principally intends by those means to compose a truly Christian church, is altogether incredible. It is not therefore to be wondered at, if those who do not really contend for the advancement of the true religion, and of the church of Christ, make use of arms that do not belong to the Christian warfare. If, like the Captain of our salvation, they sincerely desired the good of souls, they would tread in the steps, and follow the perfect example of that Prince of peace, who sent out his soldiers to the subduing of nations, and gathering them into his church, not armed with the sword, or other instruments of force, but prepared with the gospel of peace, and with the exemplary holiness of their conversation. This was his method.

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Though if infidels were to be converted by force, if those that are either blind or obstinate were to be drawn off from their errors by armed soldiers, we know very well that it was much more easy for him to do it with armies of heavenly legions, than for any son of the church, how potent soever, with all his dragoons.'*

In answer to all the objections against such establishments, we are reminded of the state of Israel of old. There has been a great propensity in men to turn back to the weak and beggarly elements of the Jewish system, an error often condemned in the New Testament. Arguments drawn from the Jewish economy are indeed less frequent now than formerly. We are told, however, that under the gospel it is predicted that kings should be the nursing fathers, and queens the nursing mothers of the church, Isa. 49:23. To fey nothing of the figurative language of prophecy, and of the frequent allusion to Jewish customs when gospel times are described, the obvious meaning of this passage, taken in its connection, is, that the subjects of the Gentile princes, *i.e.* those nursed by them, should augment the number of the true worshippers of God. But if any choose to maintain it to mean that the increase of the church is to be the consequence of the piety and zeal of kings and queens, I do not see that it will affect our argument. Supposing a king to arise, *e.g.* in Spain, who, to just views of the nature of

* Locke on Toleration, p. 19,21, 22–25.

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Christ's kingdom, and eminent piety, added an ardent zeal for the success of the gospel, and a great and comprehensive genius. He abolishes the inquisition—circulates the Scriptures throughout the country, encourages schools, and patronises learning. By the wisdom of his civil government he ameliorates the state of the people, and thus excites the spirit of inquiry. By adorning the doctrine, and himself submitting to every ordinance of Christ, he makes his light to mine before men, and, as a zealous Christian, encourages every scriptural exertion for the spread of the gospel. Might not such a king be called a nursing father to the church? and yet there is nothing done by him which resembles any civil religious establishment upon earth; there are here no new regulations made for churches, no civil pains or penalties, no disqualifications for office, no confounding the character of a man as a Christian and as a citizen. All the influence a Christian ought to enjoy in such a situation is employed, while civil authority is never introduced in matters of religion.

But we are told, that the Lord has not left established churches, that he has still his people in them, and blesses his own word among all denominations. This is true of the Roman catholic denomination as well as of other established churches; and if it prove any thing it will prove too much for those who usually allege it. God has had his people in that church which is the mother of abo-

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initiations, in every age. It appears from Scriptture, that some of his people will continue in the most corrupt societies, as Lot did in Sodom, till the very eve of their destruction. It is written, just before the destruction of Babylon, There was a voice, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues," Rev. 18:4.

God does indeed countenance his own word; but does God therefore countenance the corruptions of every society in which individuals may proclaim his word, or a part of it? for in corrupt societies they cannot proclaim the whole. The reformers were converted while members of the church of Rome, but did this afford a reason why they should not separate from it? A man being converted by the preaching of the gospel, is no evidence that the preacher is a member of a church of Christ, nor is it an evidence that he is an approved minister of the gospel. It is an evidence that he preached some part of the truth of God, but not that those who heard him, and who believed, ought to remain in the same corrupt, connection in which he is.

But the effect of the union of church and state is not only hurtful to Christians, and unfavourable to the success of the gospel, but is extremely pernicious to civil society. The contrary has often been boldly asserted, and civil governments have been alarmed, commonly by the calumnies of clergymen, in opposition to the enemies of

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civil religious establishments; but if impartially considered, it will appear incontestable. The genuine tendency of the doctrine of Christ, is to make men quiet and peaceable subjects even under grievous oppression. This is manifest in the conduct of the first Christians, as well as from the positive precepts of Scripture upon the subject. All that the followers of Jesus desired, in the first ages, was to lead quiet and peaceable lives under those whom God had set over them, and whom they reckoned the ministers of God to them for good, Rom. 13:4. and for whom they accordingly gave thanks. They would not indeed be drawn into idolatry; they would rather part with their substance, or lose their lives. Whenever obedience to magistrates implied rebellion against God, they were ready to resist unto blood, striving against sin, Heb. 12:4.*

It was not till Constantine converted Christianity into a state-engine, that professed Christians began to make religion a cloak for sedition and rebel, lion against Government. How successfully it has since that been employed to produce revolutions and civil wars in almost every country where it has been established by civil authority, may be seen by perusing their history. The change which took place in the views of Christians concerning subjection to Government, after its establishment, is thus described by Dr Middleton. 'Julian's death was foretold by visions and divine revelations, as the ecclesiastical writers inform us, to

* This does not mean to fight, but to suffer for their religion.

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several other saints and holy men, in different parts of the world, who were severally addressing their prayers to God for his destruction. Whence we cannot but observe what a total change there was, both of principles and practice, between the fathers of the fourth century, and those of the preceding ages; or between the church when persecuted, and when established in power and authority. For in the earlier times, under the very worst of the heathen emperors, and the cruelest persecutors of the church, when the Christians were treated every where as traitors to the government, all their apologists, through the three first centuries, declare with one voice, that they were obliged, by the precepts of their religion, to be of all men the most loyal to their princes, and that it was their daily practice, to put up their united prayers for their prosperity. 'We pray,' says Tertullian, 'for every emperor;, that he may have a long life, a secure reign, a safe house, strong armies, a faithful senate, honest people, a quiet world, and whatsoever else, man, or Cæsar himself can wish.' Yet, after the church had gained a firm establishment, its temper was quite altered; and the emperors no sooner began to give them any disturbance, than their prayers were turned into curses, and the divine vengeance confessedly implored to destroy them.'*

Archimedes said he could move the world, if he had but a situation on which to place his

* Middleton's Inquiry, p. 156–157.

lever. The invisible world, so clearly revealed in the gospel, afforded the emperor, as has been justly observed, what the philosopher had desired; but the priests foon got possession of the mighty engine, and in every country where Christianity has been professed, revolutions and convulsions have been the effect of the struggle for what has absurdly enough been termed, spiritual power. Hence, notwithstanding the effect of the gospel upon individuals, and its tendency, when genuine and uncorrupted, to promote the present welfare of society, governments have been more exposed to danger since its promulgation than before. Nor is this to be wondered at. The sword has not only been employed to make converts, but an order of men has been raised up in every country, claiming privileges independent of the civil magistrate, who, if not taken into alliance with him, have, by their intrigues working on the superstition of the people, disturbed or overturned his government. That such should be the effect of Christianity being established by civil authority, is what we might have expected. If the church has obtained certain civil privileges by being incorporated with the state, she will naturally be jealous of her prerogatives. Should any other religion, or any different modification of the same religion, prevail, it may in its turn be adopted by the state, and consequently care must be taken to preserve the superiority which the established church has acquired.

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We have seen how unacquainted the reformers were with the true principles of toleration, and where these are not understood, good men will be led to wifh for the overthrow of any government, by which, in their view, an improper system is established. If indeed such establishments were agreeable to the mind of Christ, and compatible with the nature of his kingdom, it would be our duty to desire to see them carried into effect, and if an improper form of Christianity was established unfavourable to religion, or not so favourable as another, a zealous Christian could not but contemplate with complacency a revolution which should set things on a better footing. This perhaps may be exemplified in the following extract from the life of Mr *Boston, fen.* written by himself. 'From that time (1704) I had little fondness for national churches, strictly and properly so called, as of equal latitude with the nations, and wished for an amendment of our own church, as to the constitution thereof.' Again he writes, 'Having been, almost ever since my entering into the ministry, dissatisfied with several things in our constitution, especially the manner of admitting to the Lord's table and planting of churches, I embraced that opportunity to endeavour to get such things rectified; and accordingly I did, sometime after, apply myself closely to consider of these overtures, and wrote several remarks on them, together with new overtures for admission to the Lord's table, and debarring from

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it; the which are to be found among my papers, App. No. 3. Howbeit the synod did not call for them. Nevertheless, by order of our presbytery, they were laid before the commission, or their committee appointed to receive such remarks; but the matter was dropped, and, for any thing I know, no more infilled on since that time. And I apprehend the malady will be incurable till the present constitution be violently thrown down.*

The connexion of this worthy man with an establishment, it thus appears, led him to look forward to a political convulsion as the only cure for the disorders of the church of Scotland. In this, perhaps, he was right. But had he taken his views of a church of Christ entirely from the New Testament, a revolution in the state would neither have appeared necessary nor desirable for the interests of religion. Christianity prospered much under a most despotic government, administered by the worst of men, which proves what we already noticed, that its prosperity does not depend upon external circumstances.

Toleration is now better understood, but laws for toleration in religion are, in fact, a cure for a disease which we ourselves have induced. Did lawgivers and magistrates confine themselves to the province assigned to them by God, laws for toleration in religion would be unnecessary. The following sentiments of Mr Locke on this subject, well deserve the attention of the reader. 'Now,

* Memoirs of Mr Bolton's Life, &c. p. 177, 351. Edin. 1776.

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that the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to these civil concernments; and that all civil power, right, and dominion, is bounded and confined to the only care of promoting these things, and that it neither can, nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls, these following considerations seem unto me abundantly to demonftrate.

'First, Because the care of souls is not committed to the civil magistrate, any more than to other men. It is not committed unto him, I say, by God; because it appears not that God has ever given any such authority to one man over another, as to compel any one to his religion. Nor can any such power be vested in the magistrate by the 'consent of the people;' because no man can so far abandon the care of his own salvation, as blindly to leave it to the choice of any other, whether prince or subject, to prescribe to him what faith or worship he shall embrace; for no man can, if he would, conform his faith to the dictates of another. All the life and power of true religion consists in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and faith is not faith without believing. Whatever profession we make, to whatever outward worship we conform, if we are not fully satisfied in our mind that the one is true, and the other well-pleating unto God, such profession and such practice, far from being any furtherance, are indeed great obstacles to our salvation. For in this manner, instead of expiating

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other sins by the exercise of religion;* I say, in offering thus unto God Almighty such a worship as we esteem to be displeasing unto him, we add unto the number of our other sins those also of hypocrisy, and contempt of his divine majesty.

'In the second place, The care of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, because his power consists only in outward force; but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which nothing can be acceptable to God. And such is the nature of the understanding, that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force. Confiscation of estate, imprisonment, torments, nothing of that nature can have any such efficacy, as to make men change the inward judgment that they have framed of things.

'It may indeed be alleged, that the magistrate may make use of arguments, and thereby draw the heterodox into the way of truth, and procure their salvation. I grant it; but this is common to him with other men. In teaching, instrusting, and redressing the erroneous by reason, he may certainly do what becomes any good man to do. Magistracy does not oblige him to put off either humanity or Christianity. But it is one thing to persuade, another to command; one thing to press with arguments, another with penalties. This

* We would not be understood to adopt this language, nor the sentiment it expresses. There is but one expiation for sin, the blood of Jesus Christ.

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the civil power alone has a right to do; to the other, good-will is authority enough. Every man has commission to admonish, exhort, convince another of error, and by reasoning to draw him into truth; but to give laws, receive obedience, and compel with the sword, belongs to none but the magistrate. And upon this ground I affirm, that the magistrate's power extends not to the establishing of any articles of faith, or forms of worship, by the force of his laws. For laws are of no force at all without penalties, and penalties in this case are absolutely impertinent, because they are not proper to convince the mind. Neither the profession of any articles of faith, nor the conformity to any outward form of worship, (as lias already been said) can be available to the salvation of souls, unless the truth of the one, and the acceptableness of the other unto God, be thoroughly believed by those that so profess and practise. But penalties are no ways capable to produce such belief. It is only light and evidence that can work a change in mens opinions; and that light can in no manner proceed from corporal sufferings, or any other outward penalties.

'In the third place, The care of the salvation of men's souls cannot belong to the magistrate, because, though the rigour of the laws, and the force of penalties, were capable to convince and change men's minds, yet would not that help at all to the salvation of their souls. For there being

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but one truth, one way to heaven, what hope is there that more men would be led into it, if they had no other rule to follow but the religion of the court, and were put under a necessity to quit the light of their own reason, to oppose the dictates of their own consciences, and blindly to resign up themselves to the will of their governors, and to the religion which either ignorance, ambition, or superstition had chanced to establish in the countries where they were born? In the variety and contradiction of opinions in religion, wherein the princes of the world are as much divided as in their secular interests, the narrow way would be much straitened. One country alone would be in the right, and all the rest of the world would be put under an obligation of following their princes in the ways that lead to destruction. And that which heightens the absurdity, and very ill suits the notion of a Deity, men would owe their eternal happiness or misery to the places of their nativity.

'These considerations, to omit many others that might have been urged to the same purpose, seem unto me sufficient to conclude, that all the power of civil government relates only to mens civil interests, is confined to the care of the things of this world, and hath nothing to do with the world to come.'——

'You will say, 'By this rule, if some congregations should have a mind to sacrifice infants, or,' (as the primitive Christians were falsely accused)

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'lustfully pollute themselves in promiscuous uncleanness, or practise any other such heinous enormities, is the magistrate obliged to tolerate them, because they are committed in a religious assembly?' I answer, No. These things are not lawful in the ordinary course of life, nor in any private house; and therefore neither are they so in the worship of God, or in any religious meetings But indeed if any people, congregated upon account of religion, should be desirous to sacrifice a calf, I deny that that ought to be prohibited by a law. Melibaeus, whose calf it is, may lawfully kill his own calf at home, and burn any part of it that he thinks fit; for no injury is thereby done to any one, no prejudice to another man's goods; and for the same reason he may kill his calf also in a religious meeting. "Whether the doing so be well-pleasing to God, or no, it is their part to consider that do it. The part of the magistrate is only to take care that the commonwealth receive no prejudice, and that there be no injury done to any man, either in life or estate. And thus what may be spent on a feast, may be spent on a sacrifice. But if, peradventure, such were the state of things, that the interest of the commonwealth required all slaughter of beasts should be forborne for some while, in order to the increasing of the stock of cattle that had been destroyed by some extraordinary murrain, who sees not that the magistrate, in such a case, may forbid all his subjects to kill any calves, for any use whatsoever? Only

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it is to be observed, that in this case the law is not made about a religious, but a political matter; nor is the sacrifice, but the daughter of calves, thereby prohibited.'——

'But, to come to particulars, I say, first, No opinions contrary to human society, or to those moral rules which are necessary to the preservation of civil society, are to be tolerated by the magistrate. But of these, indeed, examples in any church are rare; for no sect can easily arrive to such a degree of madness, as that it should think fit to teach, for doctrines of religion, such things as manifestly undermine the foundations of society, and are therefore condemned by the judgment of all mankind; because their own interest, peace, reputation, every thing, would be thereby endangered.

'Another more secret evil, but more dangerous to the commonwealth is, when men arrogate to themselves, and to those of their own sect, some peculiar prerogative, covered over with a specious flicw of deceitful words, but in effect opposite to the civil right of the community. For example, we cannot find any sect that teaches expressly and openly, that men are not obliged to keep their promise, that princes may be dethroned by those that differ from them in religion, or that the dominion of all things belongs only to themselves. For these things, proposed thus nakedly and plainly, would soon draw on them the eye and hand of the magistrate, and awaken all the care

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of the commonwealth to a watchfulness against the spreading of so dangerous an evil. But, nevertheless, we find those that say, the same things in other words. What else do they mean who teach, 'that faith is not to be kept with heretics?' Their meaning, forsooth, is, that the privilege of breaking faith belongs unto themselves; for they declare all that are not of their communion to be heretics, or at lead they declare them so whensoever they think fit. What can be the meaning of their averting, 'that kings, excommunicated forfeit their crowns and kingdoms?' It is evident that they thereby arrogate unto themselves the power of deposing kings; because they challenge the power of excommunication as the peculiar right of their hierarchy. 'That dominion is founded in grace,' is also an assertion by which those that maintain it do plainly lay claim to the possession of all things; for they are not so wanting to themselves as not to believe, or at least as not to profess themselves to be the truly pious and faithful. These, therefore, and the like, who attribute unto the faithful, religious and orthodox, that is, in plain terms, unto themselves, any peculiar privilege or power above other mortals in civil concernments; or who, upon pretence of religion, do challenge any manner of authority oversuch as are not associated with them in their, ecclesiastical communion: I say, these have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate, as neither, those that will, not own and teach, the duty of to-

lerating all men in matters of mere religion. For what do all these and the like doctrines signify, but that those men may, and are ready, upon any occasion, to seize the government, and possess themselves of the estates and fortunes of their fellow-subjects, and that they only ask leave to be tolerated by the magistrate so long, until they find themselves strong enough to effect it?'*

Such are the wise and upright reasonings of this great man. But it must be owned that he did not pursue them to their consequences. He would have seen, if he had done so, that intolerance, in some degree, necessarily proceeds from religious establishments, and that these cannot fail to cherish it, both in states and in individuals. Have not we ourselves seen instances in this country of persons being turned out of their farms for not adhering to the established church—and of the most slanderous reports being propagated respecting the disaffection to Government, of loyal subjects, purely because they could not in conscience remain in it?† These proceedings

* Locke on Toleration, p. 30,–39, 119,–122. 162,–167.

† As might be expected, those who have not only separated from the establishment, but also from all bodies resembling it, have in the most explicit manner maintained the duty of Christians to obey and honour the Government on scriptural grounds. The more excellent we esteem our civil constitution to be, the more grateful to God we will be for it. But obedience to our governors stands upon a different foundation; namely, the express commandments of God, which are equally binding on every Christian under every, form of government, These, like many

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are indeed inconsistent with the mild and just spirit of our happy government, but they are the necessary effects of a civil establishment of religion.

The feuds and contentions excited by the union of church and state, are well described by Mr Locke. 'Let us therefore,' says he, 'deal plainly. The magistrate is afraid of other churches, but not of his own, because he is kind and favourable to the one, but severe and cruel to the other. These he treats like children, and indulges them in wantonness; those he uses as slaves, and how blamelessly soever they demean themselves, recompenses them no otherwise than by gallies, prisons, confutations- and death. These he cherishes and defends; diofe he continually fcourges and oppresses. Let

other of Christ's precepts, are absurd in the eyes of worldly men, and of not a few professed Christians. They seem to imply indifference about good government; but this is by no means the case. Christians may and must feel the difference between a good and a bad government, but under both they are to submit, or quietly leave the country. Although this sentiment secures the subjection of Christians, so far as they are influenced by the authority of God, yet it is often not very agreeable, even to governors, because it pays them no compliment, but submits equally to the evil and the froward as to the gentle and the good. It will be found, however, to be the only steady principle of obedience. Nothing is so fluctuating as human opinion. The man who admired the constitution today, may, through some disgust he has conceived, abhor it tomorrow. If the precept to obey governors only regards those who are good, the word of God may be quoted at all times in vindication of sedition and rebellion, for no one rebels against a government which he thinks good—See Mr Ewing and Mr Braidwood's Sermons, and Address on Political Opinions by Mr R. Haldane.

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him turn the tables, or let those dissenters enjoy but the same privileges in civils as his other subjects, and he will quickly find that these religious meetings will be no longer dangerous; for if men enter into seditious conspiracies, it is not religion that inspires them to it in their meetings, but their sufferings and oppressions that make them willing to ease themselves. Just and moderate governments are every where quiet, every where safe; but oppression raises ferments, and makes men struggle to cast off an uneasy and tyrannical yoke. I know that seditions are very frequently raised upon pretence of religion; but it is as true, that for religion subjects are frequently ill-treated, and live miserably. Believe me, the stirs that are made proceed not from any peculiar temper of this or that church or religious society, but from the common disposition of all mankind, who, when they groan under any heavy burden, endeavour naturally to make off the yoke that galls their necks. Suppose this business of religion were let alone, and that there were some other distinction made between men and men, upon account of their different complexions, shapes, and features, so that those who have black hair, for example, or grey eyes, should not enjoy the same privileges as other citizens, that they should not be permitted either to buy or fell, or live by their calling; that parents should not have the govern, ment and education of their own children; that they should either be excluded from the benefit of

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the laws, or meet with partial judges—can it be doubted but these persons, thus distinguished from others by the colour of their hair and their eyes, and united together by one common perfection, would be as dangerous to the magistrate as any others that had associated themselves merely upon the account of religion? Some enter into company for trade and profit; others, for want of business, have their clubs for claret; neighbourhood joins some, and religion others. But there is one only thing which gathers people into seditious commotions, and that is oppression.

'You will say, 'What! will you have people to meet at divine service against the magistrate's will?' I answer, Why, I pray, against his will? Is it not both lawful and necessary that they should meet? Against his will, do you say? that is what I complain of. That is the very root of all the mischief. Why are assemblies less sufferable in a church than in a theatre or market? Those that meet there are not either more vicious or more turbulent than those that meet elsewhere. The business in that is, that they are ill-used, and therefore they are not to be suffered. Take away the partiality that is used towards them in matters of common right, change the laws, take away the penalties unto which they are subjected, and all things will immediately become safe and peaceable. Nay, those that are averse to the religion of the magistrate will think themselves so much the more bound to maintain

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the peace of the commonwealth, as their condition is better in that place than elsewhere; and all the several separate congregations, like so many guardians of the public peace, will watch one another, that nothing may be innovated or changed in the government; because they can hope for nothing better than what they already enjoy, that is, an equal condition with their fellow-subjects, under a just and moderate government. Now, if that church which agrees in religion with the prince be esteemed the chief support of any civil government, and that for no other reason, as has already been shown, than because the prince is kind and the laws are favourable to it, how much greater will be the security of a government, where all good subjects, of whatsoever church they be, without any distinction upon account of religion, enjoying the same favour with the prince, and the same benefit of the laws, shall become the common support and guard of it, and where none will have any occasion to fear the severity of the laws but those that do injuries to their neighbours, and offend against the civil peace.'——

'We must therefore seek another cause of those evils that are charged upon religion; and if we consider right, we shall find it to consist wholly in the subject that I am at present treating of. It is not the diversity of opinions, which cannot be avoided, but the refusal of toleration to those that are of different opinions, which might have been

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granted, that has produced all the bustles and wars that have been in the Christian world upon account of religion. The heads and leaders of the church, moved by avarice and infatiable defire of dominion, making use of the immoderate ambition of magistrates, and the credulous superstition of the giddy multitude, have incensed and animated them against those that dissent from themselves, by preaching unto them, contrary to the laws of the gospel, and to the precepts of charity, that schismatics and heretics are to be rooted out of their possessions, and destroyed. And thus have they mixed together, and confounded two things that are in themselves most different, the church and the commonwealth. Now, as it is very difficult for men patiently to suffer themselves to be stripped of the goods which they have got by their honest industry, and, contrary to all the laws of equity, both human and divine, to be delivered up for a prey to other mens violence and rapine, especially when they are otherwise altogether blameless, and that the occasion for which they are thus treated does not at all belong to the jurisdiction of the magistrate, but entirely to the conscience of every particular man, for the conduct of which he is accountable to God only: What else can be expected, but that these men, growing weary of the evils under which they labour, should in the end think it lawful for them to resist force with force, and to defend their natural rights, which are not forfeitable upon ac-

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count of religion, with arms, as well as they can? That this has been hitherto the ordinary course of things, is abundantly evident in history, and that it will continue to be so hereaster is but too apparent in reason. It cannot indeed be otherwise, so long as the principle of persecution for religion shall prevail, as it has done hitherto with magistrate and people, and so long as those that ought to be the preachers of peace and concord shall continue, with all their art and strength, to excite men to arms, and found the trumpet of war.'*

I am persuaded no apology is necessary for enriching these pages with extracts from a work which first gave to this country the tone of moderation, the fruits of which we enjoy, and for which we have abundant cause to be thankful. Whether then we consider the effect of religious establishments upon Christians—on the success of the gospel—or upon the peace of society, we shall see reason to conclude, that, as they are unscriptural, they are also hurtful. The quietness and peace which we have so long enjoyed in this country, have arisen in a great measure from the ample toleration with which we are favoured. When we look forward, the prospect is pleasing; Christians seem daily to be increasing in the knowledge of the Scriptures respecting this subject, and many of them see it their duty and privilege to withdraw from a situation so unfriendly to their growth in grace.

* Locke on Toleration, pp. 177,–185. 192,–157.

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Our rulers need not be alarmed by this defection. Those who follow the word of God will never endeavour by violence or intrigue to overturn the religious establishment, however much they may difapprove of it. Even politicians seem to be more and more persuaded of the impropriety of interfering with men about religion, and the more they act upon this principle, the better opportunity will they have to observe the happy effects of the gospel on society.

Magistrates have acted over again the fable of the hen which laid the golden eggs. The boy, not satisfied with an egg a day, killed the hen that he might receive the whole treasure at once, and thus lost all. Had the rulers of the world left religion to itself, they would have reaped the advantage of it; but grasping at too much—attempting to employ it as an engine of state, it has recoiled upon themselves, and filled the world with bloodshed and misery.

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CONCLUSION.

HAVING thus attempted to state the account in the word of God of the social worship and ordinances observed by the first Christians, I cannot conclude without addressing a few words to my brethren in Christ. How beautifully simple are all the ordinances of Jesus! How much adapted to every situation in which we can be placed! We may consider them as so many channels through which the Lord communicates spiritual blessings to his people. Our obligation to observe them, however, does not rest on their suitableness, or on the benefit which we are likely to receive from them. They are all enjoined by the Lord, and if we observe them from regard to his authority, we shall experience the blessings connected with them. "If a man love me," said Jesus, "he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him," John 14:23. Thus has he connected our growth in grace and our experience of his power to save, with obedience to his commandments. Let us never forget then that all the ordinances of Christ are instituted for our good; that we may be more delivered from the power of sin; that our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; that

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we may be more weaned from the world, and prepared for the inheritance of saints in light. If these important confederations be not habitually kept in view, we shall be in danger of perverting and abusing the ordinances; they will become a mere bodily service, and we shall consequently derive little or no benefit from them.

This publication may fall into the hands of some Christians who are connected with churches of a very different complexion from those delineated in the foregoing pages. I am far from wifhing you, my brethren, to walk, by my light. I only request you to enquire "what saith the Scripture?" It is unworthy your character, as believers, to treat any thing connected with religion with indifference. We ought ever to tremble at the word of God, and to remember that it is our duty to listen with the most serious attention to whatever our great Lawgiver has condescended to teach. A distinction of greater and less amongst the commandments of Christ has been admitted to a certain extent. This is supported by the word of God; but how much has it been abnfed by men—how much has it been misapplied even by the disciples of Jesus? What are called his lesser commandments have been treated as matters of indifference, deserving neither attention nor serious regard. Let us remember however that they are all greatly important, that they all deserve our most serious considera-

tion, and that the wilful neglect of any of them is rebellion against the Lord.

Under the law, presumptuous sins might be committed in things not in themselves of any importance. To have neglected wilfully any of the purifications prescribed by Moses, which could only sanctify to the purifying of the flesh, would have been to despise the word of the Lord, and that soul would have been cut off. We are under a better and more excellent dispensation, by which we receive not the spirit of bondage unto fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father; but our God is also a consuming fire, and it is needful for us to worship him with reverence and godly fear:

Ye are not ignorant, beloved, of Satan's devices, nor of the deceitfulness of your own hearts. Ye know how apt we all are to impose upon ourselves and to omit or neglect whatever duty our circumstances render peculiarly disagreeable. So far as I can judge from my own observation, few Christians who have examined the subject of the foregoing pages with any attention, are fully satisfied in their minds, while continuing in unscriptural churches. Although the form of these churches remains the same as it was two hundred years ago, the degree of information possessed by believers connected with them is very different. Formerly they thought they did God service in fighting with the sword against error and heresy. Ye know that the weapons of our warfare are not

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carnal. They considered toleration as a crying sin; ye condemn persecution for religion, and yes many of you continue members of churches, which instead of holding forth in their standards the form of sound words, declare that the magistrate hath authority, and ought to suppress all heresy.* They considered classical presbytery as almost essential to Christianity; many of you are persuaded that the word of God gives it no countenance, and yet ye remain in churches under such jurisdiction.

Let me intreat you seriously to consider the effects of your conduct. Beware of resisting conviction, of trifling with light on matters of everlasting importance to yourselves and others. Candidly examine the subject by the unerring word of prophecy. Ye say, perhaps, that 'you cannot perceive any distinct and positive rules on this-subject in the Scriptures: it would have been more clearly delineated, if God had intended us to walk by it.' But consider, in what temper have you searched for it? Was it under the influence of prejudice, and a desire to be established in your preconceived opinions? Was it while acting in some respects contrary to your convictions of duty? Was it under the impression of the fear of man, or the dread of losing your friends, your respectability, your usefulness,† or

* See Confession of Faith, chap. xxiii.

† The idea of maintaining our *usefulness* at the expence of any part of duty, is perhaps the most subtle mode in which self-

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your emoluments? If so, It is not to be wondered at that ye can perceive no rule for the social worship of believers in the word of God. He who hesitates between God and the world will necessarily, whatever his fufpicions concerning duty may have been, be unliable in all his ways. Let not that man expect to receive wisdom from the Lord. He doth not afk in faith. But if it be your desire to know the will of Christ, be the consequences what they may; if ye are determined to go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach; if ye disregard the honour which cometh from men, when compared with the honour which cometh from God only; if in this temper ye will search the Scriptures, with prayer to the Father of lights, ye shall find new cause to admire the faithfulness of him of whom Moses, in this and every other respect, was but the shadow.

Ye will see by what goes before, that the charge of party-spirit, when endeavouring to lead men to obey the truth, gives me no uneasiness on my own account. Consistent believers in Jesus

righteousness works. It discovers at bottom much unbelief and want of confidence, both in the wisdom and power of the Lord, and it is a dreadful deception we put upon our own minds, and highly derogatory to the honour of God whenever we act on the principle that the plans of his government will be best promoted by dispensing with any of his laws. Yet the plea of usefulness in excuse for adhering to Antichristian connections, and retaining Antichristian situations, is the last resort of many a galled conscience.

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must ever be a party spoken against by the world lying in wickedness, and their zeal for the conversion of sinners, or for the edification of their Christian brethren, must ever be deemed party-spirit. Nor must they expect altogether to escape the censure of Christians, while Christians remain, so much conformed to the world in religion, as well as in other respecls.

I have, throughout, endeavoured to show how much scriptural order and discipline promote the experience and power of religion in the hearts of believers, and how absurd, and even impious, is the idea of Christ's lesser commandments interfering with his greater. No; like a well constructed building, where every part mutually strengthens and supports the rest, the commandments of Christ are a consident whole, and where one is neglected, the force of all upon the heart is proportionally weakened. This should excite us to live nearer to God, to study with more earnestness his blessed word, to cry after wisdom, and lift up our voice for understanding; thus shall we, more and more, see wondrous things in his law, and our hearts be more enlarged to run in the way of his precepts.

We are all but too apt to fall into the spirit of the world, to allow our hearts to be overcharged with the cares, the pleasures, and the entanglements of this life. In proportion as we view eternal things in their reality and importance, the things of time will appear small, and comparatively in-

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significant, and when they acquire an undue ascendency, they draw away our hearts from God, produce a careless and lukewarm state of mind, and lead us to trifle with the authority of God our Saviour.

It is incalculable of how much comfort and enjoyment we are deprived, by forgetting the exhortation which speaketh to us as to children, "My son, give me thine heart;" that is, by forgetting the first and great commandment of the law. Jesus frequently upbraided his disciples with their unbelief. What cause have we to lament that this sin so easily besets us! To what else is it owing, that notwithstanding all his kindness and care, we are ever so prone to distrust him, and to shrink from what we at least suspect to be the path of duty, by saying, "there is a lion in the way, I shall be slain in the streets?" Let us trust in the Lord and do good, and so shall we dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you. Let us more decidedly count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus. Let us hear him saying, He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and in observing them, let us work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in us, to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Perhaps you will say, 'We see imperfections in

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all churches, and therefore we do not think it necessary to leave that church with which we are connected. Purity of communion is indeed desireable, but experience proves it is not attainable.' It would be indeed strange if you did not see imperfections in churches composed of imperfect and sinful men. You may see also imperfections in their mode of administering some of the laws of Christ. But they acknowledge no imperfect standard; their standard is the perfect word of God. They are not tied down by precedents to perpetuate error. They profess to be sensible, that they still need instruction, and that they are ready, in all things, to submit to it, and you have no reason to doubt the truth of their profession. Point out to them wherein they are deficient; show them the more excellent way contained in the Scriptures. If they reject the authority of Christ, have no fellowship with them, but remember, their obstinacy will not justify you in continuing where there are still greater abominations.

Do not say that purity of communion is impracticable. There was such, so far as we plead for it, in the apostolic churches; there is such in every church of Christ attending to his voice. False brethren may unawares creep in, but by the wholesome discipline of Christ's house, they shall, from time to time, be made manifest and put away; and thus the believers, so far from

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being injured, shall be warned and profited by their exclusion.

But what shall we say of those who are ever ready to exclaim against the order of the churches with which they are themselves connected, and to approve of others with which they have no fellowship? Is this to tremble at the word of God? Is this to confess Christ as your Lord and Master? Surely this ought not so to be. Brethren, let me beseech you to consider the importance of attending to all the ordinances of Christ in purity. This is much connected with your own progress and comfort, and with the success of the everlasting gospel. Beware then of treating them lightly. Beware of using arguments to convince others of the futility of which ye yourselves are convinced. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. Let us walk as children of light. Let us not handle the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commend ourselves to every man's confidence in the sight of God. Let us cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, earnestly desiring to follow God fully ourselves, and to lead others to be like-minded. In order to do so, we must take up the cross. We must become aliens perhaps to our mother's brethren, as the Lord became for our sakes; but greater is he that is with us, than all who can be against us. If we forsake houses, or lands, or friends, for Christ's sake and the gospel's, we shall in the present time receive an hundred fold, and

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in the world to come life everlasting. Many difficulties often present themselves to hedge up our way, and to prevent us from walking in the path of duty; but these are only trials of our faith. Yet such is the deceitfulness of the human heart, that we are apt to interpret what is disagreeable to flesh and blood, as if it were the voice of providence intimating to us that we ought, notwithstanding our scruples, to remain in our present situation.

There is no doubt that many plausible things may be said, and have been said against the order of a church as recorded in the Scriptures. The plainest subject may be perplexed by subtle disputants, and by a multitude of words. This is peculiarly the case in whatever respects religion. Man is naturally prejudiced against the whole revelation of God. Although he may appear to approve of some doctrines and precepts delivered in the Scriptures, and so far to be of one mind with God, there is always an essential difference between the true meaning of the doctrines as delivered by God, and their import as apprehended by the natural man. We are ingenious in devising objections against what we dislike. While man is so flow in understanding the truth, that nothing short of the Almighty power of God can make him receive it, he is proportionally acute in discerning whatever is opposed to it; and hence the Lord warns his disciples, that except they become as little children, they shall not enter the

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kingdom of heaven; and again it is written, If any man will be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. One of the effects of the gospel on the heart, is to cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth. itself against the knowledge of God. The more that we have experienced this, the more doubtful shall we be of our own reasonings, and consequently the less liable to be tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, wherehy they lie in wait to deceive.

But, be it so that the precise order of Christian churches may be deemed ambiguous and disputable, let us at least be consistent in our practice. The ordinances which ye, brethren, observe are equally liable to be disputed with many you neglect. I will venture to say, that as strong evidence has been brought forward for various ordinances which you do not observe, as you can bring for those you do. While you condemn popish tradition in words, you thus justify it by your practice, for it is only the sanction of the Romish church which gives various ordinances to which you attach the greatest respect, a superiority over others which you deem to be merely strifes of words, and undeserving serious regard. Such indeed is the prejudice against them, that those who observe them are considered by many Christians as only occupied about the outworks of religion, or perhaps as merely affecting singu-

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larity. Thus, brethren, do ye call a stumbling-block in their way, and tempt them to trifle with, the conviclions of conscience. How often are our Lord's words misapplied! "Ye pay tithe," said he to hypocritical professors, "of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Had they neglected tithing these things, it would have been highly sinful; yet this text is often used to expose attention to what are called smaller matters in religion, as if this were the mark of a weak and superstitious mind.

Let us always remember, that although we are placed under a very different dispensation from the Jewish, so far from our being permitted to trifle with any of the commandments of Jesus, we are assured that the guilt of this is most aggravated, and the punishment most exemplary, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctined an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" Heb. 10:28–29. I admit that this refers, in the first place, to direct apostasy from the profession of the gospel, but it also undoubtedly applies to the contempt of any of the commandments of Jesus;

for by our obedience we testify our love to him, and confess his name before men.

False reports, the most absurd and ridiculous, are often propagated respecting those churches who observe scriptural order. Their sentiments and practice are grofsly misrepresented, and this, I doubt not, tends not a little to prejudise many against them. But remember that Christ was blasphemed as stirring up the people, and it was affirmed that his apostles said, "Let us do evil that good may come." Men too often justify their neglect of the commandment of Christ, to turn away from such as have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof, 2 Tim. 3:5. by representing the fellowship of scriptural churches also as impure; but if this were the case, it would only prove their inattention to the laws of Christ, and would by no means justify others in neglecting his authority. While listening to or repeating such reports, however, beware lest ye be actuated by improper motives, and lest ye have fallen into the spirit of the world, which hates the disciples of Christ, because they testify against them that their deeds are evil.

Permit me now to address those who are members of those churches, whose great and professed object it is in all things to form themselves on the apostolic model. Brethren, ye have felt the yoke of Christ to be easy and his burden light. Your views of the wisdom of God displayed in the Scriptures have been increased by your attend

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tion to all his ordinances. Ye have felt the Benefit of them in your own experience, and, in consequence of observing them, you are, I trust, more desirous of cleaving to the Lord with purpofe of heart. Let me remind your however, that ye have not yet attained, nor are already perfect. Ye have much to learn. Perhaps there are still some ordinances which you neglect, and certainly ye do not perceive the full glory of those which ye do observe.

I cannot forbear calling your attention, my brethren, to what has been already adverted to in these pages respecting the pastoral office. So long as churches are depending on any academies or other human though useful institutions for pastors, so long the work, of Christ must be much impeded. Of old, the Lord raised up pastors in the churches in answer to the prayers of his people. But many have no idea of earnest and continual prayer on this account. This arises from remaining darkness in the minds of the children of God. But, brethren, ye have appealed to the word of God. Do not forsake it, and it will prove a lamp to your paths, and a light to your feet. Be not afraid of being missed, by imitating in all things the apostolic churches. From the time you meet together as a regular religious assembly, let it be your prayer to the great Head of his; people to supply you with all which he has appointed in his word for the edification of his people. Offer this prayer in the

faith of his promises. Observe the gifts of the members. Let none remain uncultivated and unoccupied; let all be called into action. Look out among yourselves for holy men of God, answering the description he has given, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1. When you have found them, let such take the oversight of you in dependence on the grace of Jesus. Give them what assistance in temporal things is in your power, that they may devote their time to meditation on the word of God, and to every thing which may increase their knowledge of it, and enable them to communicate it to you. Do not imagine, my brethren, that this will interfere with the general success of the gospel. By promoting the edification, and increasing the numbers of the churches, it will greatly advance it. I would not be understood as dissuading you from seeking after, and wholly supporting a pastor or pastors who have received education, and who may be qualified thereby for attracting careless sinners. The two objects are by no means incompatible. Liberal education may give a preacher of the gospel great advantages. Seminaries of learning are excellent in themselves when properly conducted; but if they prevent churches from calling to the pastoral office those who have not been educated in these, if they lead them to undervalue the experience and knowledge of advanced disciples of Christ, and to call novices* to the ministry of the gospel, and to the

* By novices I mean young men, or others, lately in the pro-

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oversight of the churches, they may be productive of much evil. But this arises only from the abuse of them.

Be contented, brethren, to be learners in the school of Christ. The greater progress we make in religion, the lower shall we be in our own eyes. When you look around you, you must see the difference which God has made between you and a world lying in wickedness, and when you perceive so many believers in Christ still intoxicated with the poison, and fettered in the bondage of Babylon, you muil be grateful that you are delivered. But be not high-minded. Blessed is the man that feareth always. Every part of divine truth is calculated to humble us in the dust; but such is the corruption of our hearts, that we are ever in danger of being puffed up by reflecting, on what we know, and this, if indulged, will blast our comfort, and. progress. While you esteem all the commandments of Christ concerning all things to be right, beware of driving for them with a controversial or dictatorial spirit. Beware of haughty, contemptuous, self-sufficient or angry treatment of those who oppose the order you observe. Neither the pride nor the wrath of man worketh the righteousness of God, and therefore the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness indrafting those who oppose themselves.

session of the truth, without that growth, maturity or trial which, can only, usually, be obtained by time.

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There is one way, beloved, by which you may powerfully recommend the institutions of Christ. Shew by your conduit, the happy effects they have had on you. Show how much they have taught you to bridle your tongues, to speak evil of no man, to be ready to every good work. Be exemplary in your conduct and conversation in all the various relations in which you stand, and show that you are indeed waiting for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God our Saviour. Let it be evident that you are not under the dominion of party-spirit, that you act under the influence of habitual subjection to our Lord. If you are reproached either by Christians or the world, render not railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.

Remember that the ordinances of Christ may be attended to in an improper temper and spirit. Some of old preached Christ even of envy and strife; but believers are represented as cast into the mould of the gospel. All the ordinances are intended to perfect the new creation. When a sinner first hears the voice of the Son of God, he may be compared to a block of marble rudely cut into the figure of a man. Many strokes of the chissel are still necessary to give to all the parts their just proportions. Under the hand of the artist it gradually advances, and his skill appears in the perfection of the resemblance when the whole is finished. Thus the Lord quickens men dead in trespasses, nor does he for-

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sake the work of his hands till they are like him, bearing the image of the heavenly Adam. To this end are all his ordinances directed. The dispensations of his providence promote the same object, and he treats us as friends informing us what he has in view, thus encouraging us to work out our own salvation with considence as well as with fear and trembling. Let us never forget then the importance of manifesting the spirit of Christians, and of showing how much we profit by the means we enjoy.

Let even part of your conduct in the churches be an act of worship and obedience to Christ. Without this, the ordinances will do you no good. The ordinances themselves may be perverted to please the flesh. When properly attended to, they beautifully harmonize with the great doctrines of the gospel. They are in fact these doctrines embodied, and therefore the more close we keep to the ordinances as delivered by Jesus, the more harmonious and just will the representation be which we give of these doctrines, the better shall we understand them, and the more may we expect that by the blessing of God they shall be useful to these around us. In so far as we depart from the simplicity of the ordinances, so far we darken the counsel of God, and draw away the attention of men to our own devices, perplexing the minds of those who are beginning to think of eternal things, and equally injuring our own souls.

Let me intreat those who are called to the

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pastoral office diligently to study the word of God, that they may rightly divide it, giving to all a portion in due season. See to it, my brethren, that in all respects ye exemplify the power of the doctrines of Christ, in raising you above this present world. Some of you have many temptations to receive those whom the word of God doth not allow you to admit into the churches. The support you receive, it may be, is often scanty. It may be insufficient to maintain you, and an increase of the church, were you to regard temporal things, might be very deniable on this account. This may lead us to shut our eyes when persons apply for admission, and to be too desirous to admit them. But, brethren, be not greedy of filthy lucre. Be faithful in the Lord's vineyard, and you shall not want. The labourer is worthy of his hire. He feeds the ravens that cry, and he will also feed you. Be not ashamed, if necessary, to follow his example who said, "Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak; and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive," Acts 20:34–35. Do not say the churches will sink altogether. No; the Lord will protect and preserve them. He may try your faith, but he will not forsake you. We admire those who have died for Jesus, and shall we refuse to en-

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dure hardness for him? I know that many object to the strictness enjoined in the word of God, that by such conduct we should cut off the support of ministers altogether, that we could have only illiterate men for pastors, and so forth. But all our wisdom will not promote the kingdom of Christ. I hesitate not to maintain, that if well educated ministers can be procured only by neglecting one of the plain injunctions of Christ, we had better be without them. But this is not the case; they may receive a proper education, and if they are men of a right spirit they will patiently endure afflictions as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, not seeking great things for themselves, not counting their lives dear, that they may finish, their course with joy, and the ministry they have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Attention to the admission of members not only belongs to the elders, but to all the holy brethren. Let all the churches look diligently to this matter, for on this their peace, harmony and prosperity depend.

Throughout this publication, the distinction between the obedience which we owe in religion only to Jesus, and that which, by his authority, we are bound to give to our civil rulers, has been uniformly supposed. Brethren, the conduct of Christians in this matter is apt to be misunderstood. Let us be careful to show, that while in religion we call no man, father, we are among the peace-

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able and quiet of the land, being in subjection to our rulers, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake. Let us show that our refusal to acknowledge any human authority in religion does not proceed from pride and dislike of subordination, but from a sense of duty. Let our obedience to the powers ordained of God be cheerful and exemplary; let us obey, honour, and give thanks for magistrates, and be ready to every good work. Let us be thankful for the privileges we enjoy. Let us pray for the peace and welfare of our country, and thus, by well-doing in every respect, put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

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THE END.

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Erratum omitted.—Page 153. line 19. for *members* read *numbers.*