

Worship and Order in the Church



JOHN OWEN (1616-1683)

WORSHIP AND ORDER IN THE CHURCH

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From *The Works of John Owen*, editor William H. Goold, vol. 15 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1850); originally entitled “A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God and Discipline of the Churches of the New Testament.”

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Prefatory Note

THE following catechism¹ explains the constitution and ordinances of a Christian church, and the duties incumbent² on its office-bearers and members. When it was published in 1667, the names of the author and of the printer were withheld, and no intimation even was given of the place where it was printed, lest danger should be incurred by the publication of a work advocating a form of polity³ at variance with the ecclesiastical system that the Court was at that time striving to render, as far as possible, universal in England.⁴ Dissenting congregations were, however, springing up in different parts of the country, and for the guidance of the Independents⁵ the catechism was particularly useful. It was so much appreciated that, in the same year in which it first appeared, a second edition with some slight differences and emendations was published; and hence certain discrepancies between the following version of it⁶ and the one that is given in Russell's edition of our author's works, printed from the first edition of the catechism.

It came to be known as the "Independents' Catechism"; and an angry attack was made upon it in 1669 by Benjamin Camfield, rector of Whitby, in Derbyshire, in an oc-

¹ **catechism** – instruction using questions and answers. Several catechisms on basic Christian doctrine are available from CHAPEL LIBRARY, including *Spurgeon's Catechism*, similar to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, but tailored to the Second London Baptist Confession by Benjamin Keach and updated by Charles Spurgeon for his congregation; *A Catechism for Boys and Girls* by Erroll Hulse, which is a simplified version of *Spurgeon's Catechism*; and *Gadsby's Catechism* by William Gadsby (1773-1884).

² **incumbent** – obligatory.

³ **polity** – government.

⁴ During this time, England experienced huge upheaval in its churches. The Church of England had recently separated from the Roman Catholic Church, and there was a threat of returning to Catholicism. In addition, several attempts at bringing the principles of the Protestant Reformation into the Church of England had proven difficult and heart-breaking. Three distinct groups of Dissenters from the Church of England emerged: the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists. The Presbyterians held to paedobaptism (baptism of infants) and a presbyterian polity (elders from multiple local congregations associated together for doctrinal and disciplinary decisions). The Congregationalists held to paedobaptism and a congregational polity (local churches functioned independently, possibly with loose association with other congregations). The Baptists held to credobaptism (baptism of professing believers) and a congregational polity. See *The Story of the Puritans*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY. John Owen was a leading theologian of the day and a Congregationalist. His views of the eldership are shared by Presbyterians with regard to certain functions in the local congregation, but reflect the Congregational and Baptist view with regard to the independence of the local congregation.

⁵ **Independents** – Congregationalists.

⁶ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 15 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1850).

tavo⁷ volume of 347 pages entitled *A Serious Examination of the Independents' Catechism, and therein of the Chief Principles of Nonconformity to and Separation from the Church of England*. The catechism, in the estimation of the rector, was “the sink⁸ of all nonconforming and separating principles”; and he takes Owen to task for inconsistency in holding the Scriptures to be a sufficient rule of faith and duty.

An attack conducted in this spirit only bespeaks the influence that this catechism was beginning to exert in diffusing the principles and consolidating the interests of the denomination to which its author belonged. It was the occasion of another attack upon Owen, in the shape of a frivolous and bitter pamphlet with the title, “A Letter to a Friend concerning Some of Dr. Owen’s Principles and Practices,” etc. [from] 1670. A copy of the catechism had been sent by the “friend” to the anonymous author of the pamphlet, who forthwith assailed Owen in a strain of pointless invective.⁹ The first charge against him is that, when vice-chancellor at Oxford, he had discountenanced¹⁰ some invidious¹¹ distinctions in the dress of the members of the university: “those habits and formalities by which persons of distinct qualities and degrees were distinguished in that school of learning.” It was an offense, too, that “when he was brought into Westminster Hall for his witness against Mr. Dutton, he refused to kiss the book, and professed it to be against his conscience to swear with any other ceremony than with eyes and hands lifted up to heaven.” The pamphlet closes with “An Independent Catechism,” where the views of our author are caricatured in a style that is intended to be witty.

Certain principles laid down in Owen’s catechism, in regard to the ruling elder for example, are thought to bear some traces of affinity with Presbyterianism. Encouraged especially by the doctrine taught in it—that the elders, not the body of the church, are the primary subjects of office-power—Baxter¹² wrote to Owen a long document of “theses” as the basis of a union between Independents and Presbyterians. The reply of the latter will be found in the appendix to his *Life*.¹³ “I am still a well-wisher to these mathematics,” was his remark when he finally returned the theses to their author. “This,” says Baxter, “was the issue¹⁴ of my third attempt for union with the Independents.”

There might be ground for supposing that, on terms suggested by the catechism, a coalition might be effected between the two denominations; and Owen himself, in a sub-

⁷ **octavo** – book size created by folding each printed sheet of paper into eight leaves; about 8 to 10 inches tall.

⁸ **sink** – cesspool.

⁹ **invective** – attack.

¹⁰ **discountenanced** – viewed with disfavor.

¹¹ **invidious** – stirring up envy.

¹² **Richard Baxter** (1615-1691) – Puritan preacher and theologian in the Church of England. His ministry at Kidderminster was marked by a dramatic transformation of the whole community. Well-known author of *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, *The Reformed Pastor*, *A Call to the Unconverted*, and others. Born in Rowton, Shropshire, England.

¹³ **appendix to his *Life*** – found in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1850), 119.

¹⁴ **issue** – result.

sequent work,¹⁵ indicated circumstances in which they could not have been in separation from each other without blame. Superior, however, in practical sagacity¹⁶ to his correspondent, he might see difficulties where Baxter saw none, or might feel that a formula of abstract theses was a waste of ingenuity so long as the mutual confidence was lacking, which alone could affix upon the union the seal of permanence. Too often the victim of his own ardor and acumen, Baxter was prone to believe that the difficulty of adjusting the wayward eddies of human feeling and opinion into one smooth and onward current, should yield at once to the same treatment as would suffice to work a problem or frame a syllogism.¹⁷ The consummation for which he sincerely panted—the outward unity of the church under one polity—seems as yet reserved in providence to grace distant and happier times.

—*William H. Goold, Editor, 1850*

¹⁵ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 15 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1850), 433.

¹⁶ **sagacity** – discernment.

¹⁷ **syllogism** – formal logical argument.

WORSHIP AND ORDER IN THE CHURCH

*A short catechism with an explanation
and confirmation of the answers*

Corporate Worship in the Local Church

1. God's Appointed Worship

Question 1. What doth God require of us in our dependence on Him, that He may be glorified by us and we accepted with Him?¹

Answer. That we ^aworship Him ^bin and by the ways of His own appointment.

^aMat 4:10; Rev 14:7; Deu 6:13; 10:20 ^bLev 10:1-3; Exo 24:3;
Gen 18:19; Jos 23:6-8; Zec 14:16

Explanation. By the worship of God inquired after, not what is *natural* or *moral*, which is required in the first commandment (Exo 20:3), is intended. Such is our faith and confidence in Him, our fear of Him, our subjection of soul and conscience unto Him, as the great sovereign Lord, first cause, last end, judge, and rewarder of all men. The Law whereof was originally written in the heart of man and hath been variously improved and directed by new revelations and institutions. This worship is called *natural* upon a double account:

First, because it depends on the *nature of God*, a due perception and understanding whereof makes all this worship indispensably necessary. For none can know God but it is his duty to glorify Him as God (Rom 1:21), that is, to believe in Him, love Him, trust Him, and call upon Him; which all are therefore cursed that do not (Psa 79:6; 2Th 1:8).

¹ **accepted with Him** – pleasing to Him.

And, secondly, because it was in the principle of it concreated² with the *nature of man*, as what suited, directed, and enabled him to answer the law of His creation, requiring this obedience of him in his dependence on God.

This worship is invariable, but [the worship of God we are addressing] concerneth those outward ways and means³ whereby God hath appointed that faith, love, and fear of Him to be exercised and expressed unto His glory. This kind of worship—though it depend not upon the nature of God, but upon His free and arbitrary disposal, and so was of old liable unto alterations—yet God did ever strictly require in the several states and conditions that His Church hath gone through in the world.

And this is what most commonly in the Scripture is called by the name of “the worship of God,” as that whereby all the acceptable actings of the souls of men towards Him are expressed, and the only way of owning and acknowledging Him in the world, as also of entertaining a visible intercourse⁴ with Him. This, therefore, He calls for, and requires indispensably of all that draw nigh to Him, and that because He is “the Lord our God” (Rev 14:6-7; Mat 4:10; Deu 10:12-13). For his observance hereof doth He so approve of Abraham (Gen 18:19); and sets it down as an everlasting law unto all others, that in a holy observation thereof He will be sanctified in them that come nigh Him (Lev 10:1-3). His commands, also, concerning it are multiplied in the Scripture, with the approbation⁵ of all those that attend unto them. We may not think to find acceptance with God or to inherit the promises, if, supposing ourselves to adhere unto Him in worship internal and natural, we neglect what is external and of His free appointment; for—besides that we renounce thereby our inward dependence on Him also, in not observing His commands, as Adam did in transgressing an institution—we become wholly useless unto all the ends of His glory in the world, which is not the way to come to an enjoyment of Him. Neither do we only express and profess our inward *moral-natural worship* of God hereby, by which means it becomes the principal way and instrument of faith and trust exerting themselves in our obedience, but also it is a most effectual help and assistance unto the principle of that natural worship, strengthening the *habit* of it, and exciting it unto all suitable *actings*, unto its increase and growth.

Q. 2. By what means do we come to know that God will thus be worshipped?

A. That God is to be worshipped, and that according to His own will and appointment, is a ^aprincipal branch of the law of our creation written in our hearts, the ^bsense whereof is renewed in the second commandment; but the ways and means of that worship depend merely on God's ^csovereign pleasure and institution.

^aRom 1:21; 2:14-15; Act 14:16-17; 17:23-31 ^bExo 20:4-6

^cJer 7:31; Exo 25:40; Heb 3:1-6; Joh 1:18

Explanation. These two things all men saw by nature:

² **concreated** – created together.

³ **means** – resources to accomplish something.

⁴ **intercourse** – communion.

⁵ **approbation** – approval.

1) That God, however they mistook in their apprehensions of Him, would be and was to be worshipped with some *outward solemn* worship; so that although some are reported to have even cast off all knowledge and sense of a divine Being, yet never any were heard of that came to an acknowledgment of any God, true or false, but they all consented that He was constantly and solemnly to be worshipped, and that not only by *individual persons*, but by *societies* together; that so they might own and honor Him Whom they took for their God. And thus far outward worship is required in the first commandment, namely, that the inward be exercised and expressed. When we take God for our God, we take Him to worship Him (Deu 10:12-13). Other thoughts—namely, of inward worship without outward expression, at all or any time, or in any way—are but a covert⁶ unto atheism. And,

2) This also they were led to an apprehension of by the same light whereby they are “a law unto themselves” (Rom 2:14), that God would be worshipped in the *way* and by the means that He Himself appointed and approved. Whence none among the heathen themselves undertook to appoint ways and ceremonies of worship, but still they pretended to derive the knowledge of them from the *gods themselves*; of whom they reckoned that every one would be worshipped in his own way. Because, notwithstanding this pretense, being left of God and deluded of Satan, they did invent false and foolish ways of worship—not only not appointed of God, but such as were unsuited unto those *inbred notions* that they had of His nature and excellencies—the apostle convinces and disproves them, as men acting against the *light of nature* and principles of reason (Rom 1:20-21). They might have seen that in their idolatry they answered not their own inbred conceptions of the divine power and Godhead so as to glorify him as God, and in the like manner doth he argue at large (Act 17:22-31).

But beyond this the inbred light of nature could not conduct any of the sons of men; this alone is contained in the first precept. That God was to be worshipped they knew; and that He was to be worshipped by ways and means of His own appointment they knew; but what those means were they knew not. These always depended on God’s sovereign will and pleasure; He made them known to whom He pleased (Psa 147:19-20). Although some of the ways that He doth appoint may seem to have a great compliance in them unto the light of nature, yet in His worship He accepts them not on that account, but merely on that of His own institution; and this as He hath declared His will about in the second commandment (Exo 20:4), so He hath severely forbidden the *addition* of our own inventions unto what He hath appointed, sending us for instruction unto Him alone Whom He hath endowed with *sovereign authority* to reveal His will and ordain His worship (Joh 1:18; Mat 17:5; 1Ch 16:7).

Q. 3. How, then, are these ways and means of the worship of God made known unto us?

A. In and by the written Word only, which contains a full and perfect revelation of the will of God as to His whole worship and all the concernments of it.

⁶ **covert unto** – shelter for.

Joh 5:39; Isa 8:20; Luk 16:29; 2Ti 3:15-17; 2Pe 1:19; Deu 4:2; 12:32;
 Jos 1:7; Pro 30:6; Rev 22:18-19; Isa 29:13-14

Explanation. The *end* wherefore God granted His Word unto the church was that thereby it might be instructed in His mind and will as to what concerns the worship and obedience that He requireth of us and that is accepted with Him. This the whole Scripture itself everywhere declares and speaks out unto all that do receive it, as 2 Timothy 3:15-17, with the residue of the testimonies above recited, does declare. It supposeth, it declareth, that of ourselves we are ignorant how God is, how He ought to be, worshipped (Isa 8:20). Moreover, it manifests⁷ Him to be “a jealous God,” exercising that holy property of His nature in a special manner about His worship, rejecting and despising everything that is not according to His will, that is not of His institution (Exo 20:4-6).

That we may know what is [according to His will], He hath made a revelation of His mind and will in His *written* Word, that is, the Scripture. And to the end that we might expect instruction from thence alone in His worship, and act therein accordingly,

1) He sends us and directs us thereunto expressly for that purpose (Isa 8:20; Luk 16:29; Joh 5:39), and not once intimates in the least any other way or means of instruction unto that end.

2) He frequently affirms that it is sufficient, able, and perfect to guide us therein (2Ti 3:15-17; 2Pe 1:19; Psa 19:7-9). Whereas He hath expressly given it unto us for that end, if there be any want⁸ or defect therein it must arise from hence: that either God would not or could not give unto us a perfect revelation of His will—neither of which can be imagined.

3) He hath commanded us to observe all whatsoever He hath appointed therein, and not to make any addition thereunto (Jos 1:7; Deu 4:2; 12:32; Pro 30:6; Rev 22:18-19).

4) [He hath] peculiarly interdicted⁹ us the use of any such things as are of the institution or appointment of men (Isa 29:13-14), so that from the Scriptures alone are we to learn what is accepted with God in His worship.

2. Perpetuity of the Institutions of Worship

Q. 4. Have these ways and means been always the same from the beginning?

A. No; but God hath altered and changed them at various times, according to the counsel of His own will, so as He saw necessary for His own glory and the edification of His church.

Gen 2:16-17; 17:10-11; Exo 12:3-24; 20; 25:9; Heb 1:1-2; 9:10-12

Explanation. The *external* worship whereof we speak—being, as was showed before, not natural or moral, arising necessarily from the dependence of the rational creature on

⁷ **manifests** – shows.

⁸ **want** – lack.

⁹ **interdicted** – prohibited.

God as its first cause, chiefest good, last end, and sovereign Lord; but proceeding from the mere will and pleasure of God, determining how He will be honored and glorified in the world—was always alterable by Him Who appointed it. Whereas, ever since the entrance of sin into the world, God had always respect unto the promise of the Lord Christ and His mediation¹⁰—in Whom alone He will be glorified, and faith in Whom He aimed to begin and increase in all His worship—He hath suited His institutions of the means thereof to that dispensation¹¹ of light and knowledge of Him that He was pleased at any time to grant. Thus, immediately after the giving of the *promise*, He appointed *sacrifices* for the great means of His worship; as to glorify Himself expressly by men's offering unto Him of the principal good things that He had given them, so to instruct them in the faith and confirm them in the expectation of *the great sacrifice* for sin that was to be offered by the promised Seed (Gen 4:3-4; Heb 11:4). These were the first instituted worship of God in the world after the entrance of sin.

Hereunto He next added *circumcision* as an express sign of the covenant, with the grace of it, which He called Abraham and his seed unto by Jesus Christ (Gen 17:10-11). And to the same general end and purpose He afterwards superadded the *Passover*, with its attendant institutions (Exo 12:3-24); and then the whole *law of institutions* contained in ordinances, by the ministry of angels on Mount Sinai (Exo 20; Eph 2:15; Act 7:53). So by several degrees He built up that fabric of His *outward worship*, which was suited in His infinite wisdom unto His own glory and the edification of His church, until the exhibition of the promised Seed, or the coming of Christ in the flesh, and the accomplishment of the work of His mediation (Heb 1:1-2). For unto that season were those ordinances to serve and no longer (Heb 9:10-12), and then were they removed by the same authority whereby they were instituted and appointed (Col 2:14, 18-20). So that though God would never allow that men, upon whatever pretense, should make any alteration in the worship appointed by Him—by adding unto it anything of their own, or omitting aught that He had commanded, either in matter or manner; notwithstanding that He knew that it was to abide but for a season, but commanded all men straitly¹² to attend to the observation of it while it was by Him continued in force (Mal 4:4)—yet He always reserved unto Himself the sovereign power of altering, changing, or utterly abolishing it at His own pleasure; which authority He exerted in the gospel as to all the mere institutions of the Old Testament.

While they continued He enforced them with *moral* reasons, [such] as His own holiness and authority. But those reasons prove not any of those institutions to be *moral*, unless they ensue upon those reasons alone, and are nowhere else commanded. For being once instituted and commanded, they are to be enforced with moral considerations, taken from the nature of God and our duty in reference unto His authority. So saith He, “Ye shall...reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:30), which no more proves

¹⁰ **mediation** – intervention between two parties to bring reconciliation. See *Free Grace Broadcaster* 183, “Christ the Mediator”; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹¹ **dispensation** – distribution.

¹² **straitly** – strictly.

that a moral duty than that enjoined upon the same foundation: “I am the Lord your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Lev 11:44). Not defiling ourselves with the touching or eating of creeping things is now no moral duty, since the institution is ceased, although it [was] enforced by many moral considerations.

Q. 5. Is there any further alteration to be expected in or of those institutions and ordinances of worship that are revealed and appointed in the gospel?

A. No; the last complete revelation of the will of God being made by the Son, Who is Lord of all, His commands and institutions are to be observed inviolably¹³ unto the end of the world, without alteration, diminution, or addition.

Heb 1:1-2; 10:25-27; Mat 28:20; 1Co 11:26; 1Ti 6:14

Explanation. It was showed before that all the institutions of the Old Testament had respect unto the coming of Christ in the flesh, Who was the “end of the law” (Rom 10:4); and thereupon they were subject to alteration and abolition upon a twofold account:

1. Because what they were appointed principally to instruct the church in, and to direct it unto the expectation of, was, upon His coming, accomplished and fulfilled; so that their end was absolutely taken away, and they could no more truly teach the mind and will of God—for they would still direct unto what was to come, *after* it was past and accomplished! This is what the Apostle Paul so variously proves and fully confirms in his Epistle to the Hebrews, especially in the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters.

2. The Lord Christ, during their continuance, was to come as the Lord over His whole house, with more full and ample authority than *any* of those whom God had employed in the institution of His ordinances of old were entrusted with: He “spake in time past...by the prophets,” but now “by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all” (Heb 1:1-2). “Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we” (Heb 3:6). Therefore, they were all to be at His disposal, to confirm or remove, as He saw reason and occasion. And this He did,

1) *Virtually*, in the sacrifice of Himself, or the blood of His cross, fulfilling and finishing of them all (Joh 19:30). “He...hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances...blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances...[He] took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross” (Eph 2:14-15; Col 2:14).

2) *Authoritatively*, by His Spirit in the apostles and the doctrine of the gospel preached by them (Act 15:10-11). “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Act 15:10-11). “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:24-25; Gal 5:1-4). And,

¹³ **inviolably** – without violation.

3) *Eventually* or providentially, when He caused sacrifice and offering to cease, by the prince of the people that came with an army¹⁴ making desolate, to destroy both city and sanctuary (Dan 9:26-27), according to His prediction (Mat 24:2). But now, under the New Testament, the worship that is appointed in the gospel is founded in and built upon what is already past and accomplished—namely, the death and life of Jesus Christ, with the sacrifice and atonement for sin made thereby (1Co 11:23-26), which can never be again performed; neither is there anything else to the same purpose either needful or possible (Heb 10:26). So that there is not any ground left for any new institution of worship or any alteration in those that are already instituted.

Nor, secondly, can anyone be expected to come from God with a greater and more full authority for the revelation of His mind than that wherewith His only Son was accompanied, which yet must be, if any alterations were to be made in the appointments of worship that He hath instituted in the gospel. For no inferior nor an equal authority can abolish or alter what is already appointed, so as to give satisfaction unto the consciences of men in obedience unto such alterations. Therefore, because there arose not a prophet like unto Moses under the Old Testament, there could be no alteration made in his institutions, but the Church was bound severely to observe them all until the coming of Christ. “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments” (Mal 4:4), and that because “there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deu 34:10).

Our apostle, to prove the right of Christ to alter the ordinances of the Law, lays his foundation in manifesting that He was above the angels: “Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Heb 1:4), and that because the Law was given by the ministry of angels (Heb 2:2)—and so also that He was greater than Moses. “For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house...Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant” (Heb 3:3, 5); but “Christ as a son over his own house” (Heb 3:6), because Moses was the lawgiver, and the mediator between God and man in the giving of the Law.

Now, if this be the sole foundation and warrant¹⁵ of the alteration made of Mosaic ordinances by Christ—namely, that He was greater and exalted above all those whose ministry was used in the dispensation of the Law—unless some can be thought to be greater and exalted in authority above the Son of God, there can be no alteration expected in the institutions of the gospel.

¹⁴ **prince...army** – The Roman general Titus and his army destroyed the Temple and all of Jerusalem in AD 70, after a disastrous siege of the city.

¹⁵ **warrant** – authorization.

Q. 6. May not such a state of faith and perfection in obedience be attained in this life as wherein believers may be freed from all obligation unto the observation of gospel institutions?

A. No; for the ordinances and institutions of the gospel being inseparably annexed unto the evangelical administration of the covenant of grace,¹⁶ they may not be left unobserved, disused, or omitted while we are to walk before God in that covenant, without contempt of the covenant itself, as also of the wisdom and authority of Jesus Christ.

Heb 3:3-6; Rom 6:3-6; Luk 22:19, 20; 1Co 11:23-26; Heb 10:25; Rev 2:5; 3:3

Explanation. All our faith, all our obedience in this life, whatever may be obtained or attained unto therein, it all belongs unto our walking with God in the covenant of grace, wherein God dwells with men, and they are His people, and God Himself is with them to be their God. Other ways of communion with Him, of obedience unto Him, of enjoyment of Him, on this side heaven and glory, He hath not appointed nor revealed. Now, this is the covenant that God hath made with His people, that He will put His laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and will be to them a God, and they shall be to Him a people; and He will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will He remember no more (Heb 8:9-12). Whatever men attain unto, it is by virtue of the grace of that covenant; nor is there any grace promised in the covenant to lead men in this life or to give them up unto a state of perfection short of glory.

Unto this covenant are the institutions of gospel-worship annexed, and unto that administration of it that is granted unto the Church upon the coming and death of Christ. Without a renunciation and relinquishment of that covenant and the grace of it, these institutions cannot be omitted or deserted. If men suppose that they have attained to a state wherein they need neither the grace of God, nor the mercy of God, nor the blood of Christ, nor the Spirit of Christ, it is not much material what they think of the ordinances of worship. Their pride and folly, without that mercy that is taught, promised, and exhibited in those ordinances, will speedily be their ruin.

Besides, the Lord Christ is the absolute Lord “over his own house” (Heb 3:3-6), and He hath given out the laws whereby He will have it guided and ruled while it is in this world. In and by these laws are His ordinances of worship established. For any persons, on whatever pretense, to plead an exemption from the obligation of those laws, it is nothing but to cast off the lordship and dominion of Christ Himself. And yet further to secure our obedience in this matter, He hath expressly commanded the continuance of them until His coming unto judgment, as in the places above quoted will appear.

¹⁶ **covenant of grace** – covenant among the persons of the Godhead, consisting of God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him. See *The Covenants of Works and of Grace* by Walter Chantry, and FGB 236, *God’s Eternal Purpose*; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

3. Our Aim in Worship

Q. 7. What are the chief things that we ought to aim at in our observation of the institutions of Christ in the gospel?

A. ^aTo sanctify the name of God; ^bto own and avow¹⁷ our professed subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ; ^cto build up ourselves in our most holy faith; and ^dto testify and confirm our mutual love, as we are believers.

^aLev 10:3; Heb 12:28-29; ^bDeu 26:17; Jos 24:22; 2Co 8:5;
^cEph 4:11-16; Jude 20; ^d1Co 10:16-17

Explanation. That we may profitably and comfortably, unto the glory of God and our own edification, be exercised in the observation of the institutions and worship of God, we are always to consider what are the *ends* for which God hath appointed them and commanded our attendance unto them, that so our observance of them may be the obedience of faith. For they are useful and effectual for whatever end God hath appointed them unto, and for no other. If we come to them for any other end, if we use them for any other purpose or with any other design, if we look for anything in them or by them but what God hath appointed them to communicate unto us, we dishonor God and deceive our own souls. This we ought diligently to inquire into, to know not only *what* God requires of us, but *wherefore* also He requires it and what He aims at therein. Some of the principal things whereof are enumerated in this answer.

It is well known how horribly many of the institutions of the gospel have been by some (especially the Papists)¹⁸ abused, by a neglect of the ends of God in them, and imposing new ends of their own upon them, unto superstition and idolatry. Grace is ascribed unto the *outward observance* of them, whereas all grace is of the promise, and the promise in the covenant is given only to the faith of the right observers. The elements in the sacrament¹⁹ of the Eucharist²⁰ are turned into a god, first worshipped and then devoured, with many the like abominations!

Q. 8. How may we sanctify the name of God in the use of gospel institutions?

A. ^aBy a holy reverence of His sovereign authority appointing them; ^ba holy regard unto His special presence in them; ^cfaith in His promises annexed to them; ^ddelight in His will,

¹⁷ **avow** – confess.

¹⁸ **Papists** – Roman Catholics.

¹⁹ **sacrament** – “A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers”—*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 92. Many Protestants today use the word “ordinances” instead of “sacraments” to distinguish from the Roman Catholic concept of sacraments as necessary for actually conferring saving grace. The Bible teaches there are two ordinances instituted by Christ in the New Testament: baptism and the Lord’s Supper, both of which are His gifts to the church by which the church is blessed in remembering Christ. The Roman Catholic Church erroneously believes its seven sacraments are meritorious for earning God’s favor.

²⁰ **Eucharist** – *Greek*: “giving of thanks”; the Lord’s Supper. Roman Catholic doctrine teaches that the bread and wine are turned literally into the body and blood of Jesus, and are venerated as such.

wisdom, love, and grace manifested in them; ^econstancy and perseverance in obedience unto Him in their due observation.

^aLev 10:3; Mal 1:6; Rom 4:11; Exo 20:6; Jam 4:12; ^bMat 28:20; Isa 59:21; Exo 29:43-45;

^cGen 15:6; Heb 4:2, 6; Exo 12:27-28; 2Co 6:16-18; 7:1; ^dPsa 84:1, 2, 4, 10; 65:4;

36:7-8; ^ePsa 23:6; 27:4; Rev 2:3, 10; Gal 6:9; Heb 10:23-25; 12:3

Explanation. This is the first thing that God requireth us to attend unto in the celebration of the ordinances of His worship: namely, that we therein *sanctify His name*, the greatest duty that we are called unto in this world. This He lays down as the general rule of all we do herein. “I will,” saith He, “be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified” (Lev 10:3). Whatever we do in His worship, we must do it that He may be sanctified, or whatever we do is an abomination to Him. Now, the principal ways how we may herein sanctify the name of God are expressed; as,

1) *Submit to God’s authority*

When in every ordinance we consider His appointment of it, and submit our souls and consciences unto His *authority* therein; which—if we observe anything in His worship but what He hath appointed—we cannot do. Not formality, not custom, not the precepts of men, not anything but the *authority* and command of God, is to be respected in this obedience. This is the first thing that faith regards in divine worship; it rests not in anything, closeth²¹ not with anything, but what it discerns that God hath commanded, and therein it eyes His authority as He requireth it. “If then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?” (Mal 1:6). “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom 14:11).

Reverence, then, unto the authority of God appointing His worship is a principal means of sanctifying the name of God therein. This was the solemn sanction of all His institutions of old: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children” (Deu 6:4-7). And the observation of them He presseth on this account, that the people might fear that “glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD” (Deu 28:58), which name He had so often engaged in His commands, saying, “Thou shalt” do it; “I am the Lord” (Lev 18:5, 6, 21, 30).

And in the New Testament, our Lord Jesus Christ proposeth His authority as the foundation of His commanding and our observation of all the institutions of the gospel: “Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach 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” (Mat 28:18-20). He is to be considered in all our obedience as the great and only lawgiver of His Church: as the “one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy” (Jam 4:12); the sovereign Lord over His “house” (Heb 3:4-6), unto Whom every knee is to bow and every conscience to be in subjection. He who heareth not His voice is

²¹ **closeth** – agrees.

to be cut off from the people of God: “It shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Act 3:23).

2) Know God’s special presence

God hath frequently promised His *special presence* in and with His instituted ordinances of old, both unto the *things* themselves and the *places* wherein they were according to His appointment to be celebrated, those places being also His special institution. Under the New Testament, all difference of and respect unto place is taken away: “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (Joh 4:21, 23). We are commanded in *all places* equally to make our prayers and supplications.

But His presence is promised and continued with the due celebration of the things themselves by Him appointed for His service: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:20). In them “the tabernacle of God is with men,” and “he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people” (Rev 21:3), the promise of Christ being that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mat 18:20). This promised presence of God, or Christ, consisteth,

a) In the power and efficacy that He by His Spirit implants upon His ordinances to communicate His grace and mercy unto His church, it being His covenant that His Spirit shall accompany His Word forever unto that purpose (Isa 59:21).

b) In the special blessing that He gives His people in those duties, both in the acceptance of them and testifying His good-will unto them: “At the door of the tabernacle of the congregation...there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory...And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God” (Exo 29:42-43, 45; Zec 2:10-11); “I will accept you with your sweet savour” (Eze 20:40-41; 43:27)—in both giving them intimate communion with Himself by Jesus Christ (1Jo 1:3). By all these He gives that special presence, unto which He requires a special reverence and regard of faith, whereby His name is yet further sanctified.

3) Faith in God’s promises

God hath given *special promises*, or *promises of His special grace*, unto them that attend upon Him in His worship in a due manner. Hereunto also belongs that sacred relation that, by virtue of divine institution, is between the sacramental elements and the special graces of the covenant that they exhibit and confirm. The mixing of these promises with faith, according as they are appropriated unto any particular institution, belongs also to the right sanctification of the mind of God.

4) Delight in the worship of God

So also doth our *delight* in them. Now, this delight in the worship of God, so much commended in the Scripture and proposed unto our example, consists not in any carnal self-pleasing, or satisfaction in the outward modes or manner of the performance of divine worship; but it is a holy, soul-refreshing contemplation on the will, wisdom, grace,

and condescension²² of God, in that He is pleased, of His own sovereign mere will and grace, so to manifest Himself unto such poor sinful creatures as we are, so to condescend unto our weakness, so to communicate Himself unto us, so to excite and draw forth our souls unto Himself, and to give us such pledges of His gracious intercourse with us by Jesus Christ. By the contemplation of these things is the soul drawn forth to delight in God.

5) *Persevere in gospel ordinances*

Lastly, whereas great *opposition* lies oftentimes against the Church's obedience unto God in this matter, and much persecution befalls it on that account—great weariness also being apt, from the remainders of unbelief, carnal wisdom, indwelling sin, weakness of the flesh in believers themselves, to arise in the course thereof, and many temptations also beset them on every hand to turn them aside from the way of truth and holiness—constancy and perseverance in the due and orderly celebration of all the ordinances of the gospel belongs unto this duty. This *perseverance* respecteth both the things themselves and the manner of their performance, both which are of the highest concernment for us diligently to attend unto.

a) As to the *things themselves*. Herein do we principally glorify God and give due honor unto Jesus Christ, when we abide in (1) our professed subjection unto Him and (2) observance of His commands against difficulties, oppositions, and persecutions. This He taketh notice of: “Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth” (Rev 2:13). And this He requireth of us indispensably if we will be His disciples, or ever hope to obtain the reward: “He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Mat 10:38-39); it is “he that shall endure unto the end” that “shall be saved” (Mat 24:13). Unto them who are “faithful unto death,” and them alone, doth He give the “crown of life” (Rev 2:10), giving us caution to “lose not those things which we have wrought,” that we may “receive a full reward” (2Jo 1:8).

b) As to the *manner of their performance*, two things are to be regarded in this duty of perseverance and the sanctification of the name of God therein:

(1) The *inward principle* of our obedience, our faith and love; which are to be preserved from decay. “I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Rev 2:4-5). “Remember...how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent” (Rev 3:3).

(2) The *outward manner* of observance, which is to be kept entire, according to the primitive²³ institution of Christ: “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” (1Co 11:23)—not admitting of²⁴ any corruptions in it, [even] to avoid the greatest trouble: “And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution?” (Gal 5:11).

²² **condescension** – lowering oneself to show kindness to inferiors.

²³ **primitive** – original.

²⁴ **admitting of** – permitting.

Q. 9. How do we in our observation profess our subjection unto the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel?

A. In that being all of them, first, *appointed* by Him as the head, lawgiver, and king of His church; and, secondly, made by Him the *ensigns*²⁵ and tokens of His kingdom and subjects; in their due observation principally consists that *profession* of Him and His name that He so often calleth us unto, and so indispensably requireth at our hands.

Mat 28:18-20; 1Co 11:23; Heb 3:6; 12:25; Joh 13:13; 8:31; 14:15, 21, 23;
15:14, 17; 13:35; Luk 9:26; Rom 10:10; 1Jo 2:3-4

Explanation. The ground and reason of this duty is evident. The Lord Jesus Christ straitly enjoins all His disciples the *profession* of His name, and lays it on them as indispensable unto salvation: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession [i.e., profession] is made unto salvation" (Rom 10:10; Joh 12:42-45). Now, this profession of the name of Christ, which is so much abused and mistaken in the world, consists in the keeping of His commandments: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Joh 15:14). So also, His disciples are to be taught to do and observe whatever He commandeth (Mat 28:20). Now, whereas He is the head and king of the church, the next immediate and special lawgiver of it, appointing unto it all His ordinances and its whole worship, as it becomes Him Who is lord of the house, the institutions of the gospel worship are His most special commands. In their observation consists that *profession* of Him that He requires of us; therein doth He call them out of the world by profession whom He hath redeemed out of it by His blood (2Co 6:15-18; Rev 5:9). In these He exerciseth His kingly or lordly power over His church (Heb 3:6). In the willing obedience of His people, gathering themselves unto the ensigns of His rule, He is glorified in the world.

Q. 10. How do we in and by them build up ourselves in our most holy faith?

A. By the exercise of that communion with God in Christ Jesus, which in their due observation He graciously invites and admits us unto, for the increase of His grace in us and the testification²⁶ of His love and good-will towards us.

Gen 17:10; Lev 26:11-12; Pro 9:5-6; Eze 36:27-28; Zec 14:16-17; Mat 26:27-28; Rom 6:3

Explanation. The next and principal ends of all instituted worship, in respect of believers, are the increase of the grace of God in them, their edification in their most holy faith, and the testification of the good-will of God unto them: "And 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: 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 stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to de-

²⁵ **ensigns** – symbols.

²⁶ **testification** – affirmation.

ceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:11-16).

Whence, also, is that prayer of the apostle for the blessing of God upon the church in the use of them: “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:16-19).

For these ends, and with a design to have them accomplished in and upon their souls, ought they to attend unto them. “Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jam 1:21). “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2). Unto the effecting of these ends, especially the increase and establishment of our faith, are they suited and appointed of God, whereon all their efficacy doth depend. In their due observation doth God give out that supply of grace that He hath promised (Eph 3:16-19). Thus also is faith exercised in a special manner, which is the only ordinary means of its growth and increase. Habits, both *acquired* and *infused*,²⁷ are increased and strengthened by frequent acts on suitable objects: “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord” (Hos 6:3). In the celebration of gospel ordinances, God in Christ proposeth Himself in an intimate²⁸ manner to the believing soul as *his God and reward*; and [He presents] *His love in Christ* in a special manner in some ordinances. So doth Christ also exhibit Himself thereunto: “Behold, I stand at the door, 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). Faith, therefore, directed by the Word to rest in God, to receive the Lord Christ in the observation of His ordinances, is excited, increased, strengthened—and that in answer unto the appointment and promises of God.

Q. 11. How are mutual love and communion among believers testified and confirmed in their observation?

A. In that they are appointed by the Lord Christ for that end, and in their own nature, as attended unto in their assemblies, are especially suited unto that purpose. Joh 13:35; 1Co 10:16-17; 11:18-19; Eph 4:3-6

Explanation. The principles of mutual, spiritual love among believers arise

(1) from their relation unto *one Father*: “One is your Father, which is in heaven” (Mat 23:9), Who giveth unto all them that believe in Christ “power to become the sons of God” (Joh 1:12); and

²⁷ **infused** – imparted by divine influence.

²⁸ **intimate** – personal.

(2) [from] their being all children of the *same family*, that family in heaven and earth that is called after the name of God, the Father of it, as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:14-15); and

(3) [from their relation] unto *Christ Jesus* as their elder brother, Who “is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb 2:11), being by Him born of God; and

(4) from their participation of *one and the self-same Spirit*, who dwelleth in them, as they are “the temple of God, and...the Spirit of God dwelleth in” them (1Co 3:16);

(5) as also in all the *fruits* of that one Spirit (1Co 12:4-8) and in that *one faith and hope* whereunto they are called: “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:3-6).

The love that is not built on these principles and foundations is not evangelical, whatever other ground it may have or occasion it may pretend unto. Communion of saints consists in their mutual love, duly exercised according to rule; and all communion is an effect of union. In union therefore must lie the springs of love, and this consists in a joint incorporation of believers into Christ. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1Co 12:12-13). And this they have by the means before mentioned, namely, their adoption, faith, and inhabitation of the Spirit.

Now, in the joint celebration of the ordinances of God’s worship, they all together make profession of these principles, and act that one faith, hope, and love jointly, whereof they are made partakers, and thereby grow up more and more into the Head “by that which every joint supplieth” (Eph 4:16). And some of them are peculiarly designed by the Lord Christ for the testification of their love and union among themselves: “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? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1Co 10:16-17).

4. Our Obligations in Worship

Q. 12. What is principally to be attended unto by us in the manner of the celebration of the worship of God and observation of the institutions and ordinances of the gospel?

A. That we observe and do all whatsoever the Lord Christ hath commanded us to observe in the way that He hath prescribed, and that we add nothing unto or in the observation of them that is of man’s invention or appointment.

Deu 4:2; 12:32; Jer 7:27; Mat 15:9, 13; 17:5; Col 2:6; Mat 28:20;
Heb 3:3-6; 1Co 11:23; Rev 22:18-19; 1Ch 16:7; Isa 29:13

Explanation. This was in part spoken to before on the third question, where it was showed that the Scripture is the only way and means whereby God hath revealed what that worship is which He will accept in and of the church. Here, moreover, as to the duty of the church in this matter, three things are asserted:

1) All things commanded by Christ

That we are to *observe and do all whatsoever the Lord Christ hath commanded us to observe*. This lies plain in the command, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mat 28:20). And we are directed unto it in the injunction given us from heaven, to “hear,” that is, to obey Him in all things (Mat 17:5), He being the prophet to Whose teachings and instructions we owe obedience, on pain of extermination from among the people of God (Deu 18:15, 18-19; Act 3:22-23). Whatever He hath appointed, commanded, [and] revealed as the will of God to be observed in or about the worship of God—that is to be kept and observed by the church inviolably; for if we are His friends and disciples, we will keep His commandments.

No *disuse*, of whatever continuance, can discharge us from the observation of [Christ’s] institutions. After the feast of tabernacles had been disused from the times of Joshua unto the return from the captivity, the restoration of it was required of God and accepted with Him (Neh 8:17).

No *abuse*, of however high a nature, can absolve us from obedience unto an institution [of Christ] (1Co 11:20-23). After the great abuse of the Lord’s Supper in that church, the apostle recalls them again unto the observation of it, according to the institution of Christ. And after the defilement of all the ordinances of the gospel under the antichristian apostasy, yet the temple and the altar are to be measured again (Rev 11:1), and the tabernacle of God was again to be raised among men (Rev 21:3).

No *opposition*, no persecution, can give the church a dispensation wholly to omit and lay aside the use of anything that the Lord Christ hath commanded to be observed in the worship of God, while we are under the obligation of that great rule, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye” (Act 4:19).

It is true, in the observation of positive institutions,²⁹ we may have regard unto rules and prescriptions of prudence as to times, places, and seasons, that by no inadvertency or miscarriage³⁰ of ours, or advantage taken by the adversaries of the truth, the edification of the church be hindered. So the disciples met with the doors shut for fear of the Jews (Joh 20:19); and Paul met with the disciples in the night, in an upper chamber, for the celebration of...the ordinances of the church (Act 20:7-8). Yet, as to the obligation unto their observation, it indispensably binds us, and that always, and that as to all the institutions of Christ whatever: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb 10:25).

To dispense with Christ’s commands practically is unlawful, much more doctrinally, most of all *authoritatively*, as the pope takes on himself to do. This, then, is the church’s

²⁹ **positive institutions** – instituted by God’s appointment rather than natural or moral necessity.

³⁰ **miscarriage** – misbehavior.

duty to search out all the commands of Christ recorded in the gospel, and to yield obedience unto them. We are not, in this matter, to take up merely with what we find in practice among others; no, though they be men good or holy. The duty of the church, and, consequently, of every member of it in his place and station, is to search the Scriptures, to inquire into the mind of Christ, and to find out whatever is appointed by Him or required of His disciples, and that with hearts and minds prepared unto a due observation of whatever shall be discovered to be His will.

2) *Way and manner commanded by Christ*

Whatever belongs unto the worship of God, in the *way or manner* whereby any of the ordinances of Christ is to be performed, comes also under the command of Christ, which is duly to be attended unto and observed. Indeed, whatever is of this nature appointed by Christ, it doth therefore belong to the worship of God; and what is not so appointed neither doth nor can be any part thereof. Of this nature is the celebration of all other ordinances with prayer, for everything is “sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1Ti 4:5); of some of them indispensably in the assemblies of the church (1Co 10:16-17; 11:20, 24-25, 33); with care in the observation of the general rules of love, modesty, condescension, and prudence, doing all things “decently and in order” (1Co 14:40; 11:33); gestures in some sacred actions (Mat 26:20, 26-28)—all which the church is diligently to inquire into, as things that belong to the pattern of the house of God, “the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and the ordinances thereof...and all the laws thereof” (Eze 43:11), promised to be showed unto it.

To attend carefully to their observation is its duty, being left at liberty as to all other circumstances, unto which no authority of man can give any real relation to the worship of God. Therein lies the exercise of that spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the mystery of the gospel that is given unto the church (Eph 1:17-18). It was the wisdom of the ancient church to do and observe all that God appointed, in the way and manner that He had prescribed for their observance: “Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me...Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding” (Deu 4:5-6).

And herein is the command of Christ kept inviolate and unblamable. The persuasion of some that the Lord hath not prescribed all things wherein His worship is concerned seems to proceed from a negligence in inquiring after what He hath so prescribed. And when once that persuasion is entertained, all further inquiry is superseded and despised; for to what end should anyone seek after what he is satisfied cannot be found?—as what is not cannot be! But this mistake will be elsewhere more fully discovered.

3) *Only what is appointed by Christ*

A principal part of the duty of the church in this matter is to take care that nothing be admitted or practiced in the worship of God, or as belonging thereunto, that is not instituted and appointed by the Lord Christ. In its care, faithfulness, and watchfulness herein consists the principal part of its loyalty unto the Lord Jesus, as the head, king, and lawgiver of His church. And to stir us up unto this, He hath left so many severe in-

terdictions and prohibitions in His Word against all *additions* to His commands, upon any pretense whatever; of which afterward.

Q. 13. Are not some institutions of the New Testament ceased as unto any obligation unto their observation, and therefore now rightly disused?

A. ^aSome symbolic tokens of moral duties, occasionally used only for present instruction in those duties, are mentioned in the gospel, without any intention to oblige believers unto the formal constant use and repetition of them; and ^bsome temporary appointments relating unto gifts in the church, bestowed only for a season on the first plantation of the gospel, are ceased. But ^cno institution or command of Christ, given unto the whole church, relating unto the evangelical administration of the new covenant, for the use and benefit of all believers, doth or shall cease to the end of the world, nor can be wholly omitted without a violation of the authority of Jesus Christ Himself.

^aJoh 13:12-15; Rom 16:16; 1Co 16:20; 1Ti 5:10; ^bMar 6:13;

Jam 5:14; ^cMat 28:20; 1Ti 6:14; 1Co 11:26

Explanation. Mention is made in the Scriptures of various things practiced by the Lord Christ and His apostles that, being then in common use among men, were occasionally made by them symbolic instructions in moral duties. Such were washing of feet by one another, the holy kiss, and the like. But there being no more in them but a sanctified use directed unto the present civil customs and usages, the commands given concerning them respect not the outward action, nor appointed any continuance of them, being peculiarly suited unto the state of things and persons in those countries; as “After he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (Joh 13:12-15). It is evident that it is the moral duty of brotherly love, in condescension and mutual helpfulness, to be expressed in all necessary offices as occasion doth require. That is what Jesus Christ here enjoineth His disciples and leads them to by His own example in an office of love then in use in those parts. The same is to be said of the “holy kiss” (Rom 16:16), which was a temporary, occasional token of entire love, which may, in answer thereunto, be expressed by any sober usage of salutation among men to the same purpose.

But the things themselves were not instituted for any continuance, nor do represent any special grace of the new covenant, which is inseparable from every institution of gospel worship properly so called. *Common usages* or practices, therefore, directed to be used in a due manner and unto a proper end, where they are used, make them not institutions of worship. Neither have they in them, as so commanded or directed, any one thing that concurs to the constitution of a gospel ordinance; for neither had they their rise in the authority of Christ, nor is any continuance of them enjoined, nor any promise annexed unto them, nor any grace of the new covenant represented or exhibited in them.

Besides, there were in the first churches, continued for a while, certain *extraordinary gifts*, that had their effects visible on the outward senses of men, and tended not immediately unto the edification of the churches in their faith, but unto the conviction of others, and vindication of the authority of them by whom the gospel was preached and propagated. Such was that *gift of healing* the sick; which, being a special effect of the Holy Ghost for the advantage of the church in those days, in some places it was accompanied by anointing with oil. But this being no universal practice, and used only in the exercise of a gift extraordinary, whose use and being has long since ceased, it never was appointed nor intended to be of continuance in the church, which is not tied by the Lord Christ to the empty signs and shadows of things whose substance is not enjoyed. Besides, no spiritual grace of the covenant was ever intimated, sealed, or exhibited by that usage of anointing with oil. The first mention of it is Mark 6:13, where its practice is reckoned among the effects of that extraordinary power that the Lord Christ committed unto His twelve disciples on their first sending out, and is referred unto the same series of miracles that they wrought in pursuit and by virtue thereof: "They cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." By what is there recorded, the subsequent mention of it in James 5:14 is to be regulated.³¹

But now, unto a real evangelical institution of worship, it is required,

1) That it be a command of Christ, manifested by His Word or example proposed unto our imitation (Mat 28:20);

2) That it be given and enjoined unto the whole church, with the limitation of its administration expressed in the Word (1Co 11:25);

3) That, unto the due performance of it, gospel grace be required in them that attend unto it;

4) That it teach, represent, seal, or improve some grace of the covenant, and have a promise of acceptation annexed unto it.

And whatever is thus appointed, the church is indispensably to continue in the observation of unto the end of the world.

Q. 14. May not the church find out, and appoint to be observed, such religious rites as, being adjoined unto the celebration of God's instituted worship, may further the devotion of the worshippers and render the worship itself in its performance more decent, beautiful, and orderly, as the appointing of images, and the like?

A. All acceptable devotion in them that worship God is the effect of faith, which respects the precepts and promises of God alone. The comeliness and beauty of gospel worship consisteth in its relation unto God by Jesus Christ, as the merciful High Priest over His house, with the glorious administration of the Spirit therein. The order also of it lieth in the due and regular observation of all that Christ hath appointed. Therefore, all such inventions are in themselves needless and useless, and, because forbidden, [are] unlawful to be observed.

³¹ Arthur W. Pink presents a differing viewpoint on James 5:14 in his *Divine Healing: Is It Scriptural?* pages 24-31. Available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Rom 1:21; 14:23; Heb 4:2; 11:4, 6; Deu 13:4; 27:10; 30:2, 8, 20; 11:27; Mat 17:5;
 Isa 29:13; Eph 2:18; 2Co 3:7-11; Heb 10:19-22; Joh 4:21-23; 1Co 14:25;
 Mat 28:20; Exo 20:4; Deu 4:2; Mat 15:13; Deu 12:32; 17:3

Explanation. Three things are usually pleaded in the justification of the observance of such *rites* and ceremonies in the worship of God: first, that they tend unto the furtherance of the *devotion* of the worshippers; secondly, that they render the worship itself *comely* and beautiful; thirdly, that they are the great preservers of *order* in the celebration thereof. And therefore on these accounts, they may be instituted or appointed by some and observed by all. But things are indeed quite otherwise: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Joh 4:24). No devotion is acceptable unto Him, but what proceedeth from and is an effect of faith; for “without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb 11:6). And faith in all things respects the commands and authority of God; for saith He, “In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mat 15:9). He rejecteth all that honor that is given Him by those whose fear towards Him or worship of Him is “taught by the precept of men” (Isa 29:13).

1) Men’s inventions are without authority.

These things, therefore, being utterly destitute of divine authority, they can no way further or promote the *devotion* of the worshippers. What natural or carnal affections may be excited by them, as men may inflame themselves with idols (Isa 57:5), or what outward, outside devotion they may direct unto or excite, is uncertain. But that they are no means of stirring up the grace of God in the hearts of believers, or of the increase or strengthening of their faith—which things alone God accepts in gospel worship, seeing they are not appointed by Him for any such purpose—is most certain. For to say that anything will effectually stir up devotion—that is, excite, strengthen, or increase grace in the heart towards God—that is not of His own appointment, is on the one hand to reflect on His wisdom and care towards His church, as if He had been wanting towards it in things so necessary, which He declares against. “What,” saith He, “could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isa 5:4). So on the other [hand], it extols the wisdom of men above what is meet³² to ascribe unto it.

Shall men find out what God would not, or could not, in matters of so great importance unto His glory and the souls of them that obey Him? Yea, and it cannot be but that attendance unto them and their effects must needs divert the mind from those proper spiritual actings of faith and grace that is its duty to attend unto. This is evidently seen in them who, indulging to themselves in their observation in multiplied instances, as in the church of Rome, have changed the whole spiritual worship of the church into a theatrical, pompous show of carnal devotion!

2) Beauty does not depend upon men’s inventions.

The *comeliness* and beauty of gospel worship doth not in the least depend upon them nor their observation. The apostle doth in several places expressly compare the spiritual

³² **meet** – suitable.

worship of the gospel with that of the Law while the Church had a worldly sanctuary and carnal ordinances (Heb 9:1)—although it [is] most evident that the worship of the Old Testament (for the glory and ornaments of outward ceremonies and the splendor of their observation) did far exceed and excel the worship that God commands now as suitable unto the simplicity of the gospel.

Yet doth the apostle prefer this for glory, comeliness, and beauty, unspeakably above the other; which manifests that these things can have no respect unto outward rites and ceremonies, wherein the chief admirers of them can no way vie³³ for glory with the old worship of the Temple. So the apostle, “If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious” (2Co 3:7-11). He compareth the two ministrations and the different worships of the Law and gospel, preferring this unspeakably above the other, sufficiently manifesting that the glory of it consisteth not in any pompous observance of outward ceremonies.

And elsewhere he declareth that indeed it doth consist in its relation to God in Christ, with the liberty and boldness of the worshippers to enter into the holy place unto the throne of grace, under the ministry of their merciful and faithful High Priest, being enabled thereunto by the Spirit of adoption and supplications; for therein, “through him [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18); as it is expressed, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:19-21).

This is the glory of gospel worship and the beauty of it. When the minds of men are diverted from the consideration of this glory, to look for beauty in the outward preparation of ceremonies, they lose the privilege purchased for believers by the blood of Christ. Instead, then, of furthering the beauty and comeliness of gospel worship, they are apt to lead men into a dangerous error and mistake—namely, that the beauty and excellency of it consists in such things as, upon a due consideration, will appear to be mean³⁴ and carnal, and far beneath those ceremonies and ordinances of the Old Testament, which yet, in comparison of the worship of the gospel, are called “worldly,” “carnal,” “beggarly,” and are said to have “no glory” (Heb 9:1; 9:10; Gal 4:9; 2Co 3:10).

³³ **vie** – compete.

³⁴ **mean** – inferior.

3) *Men's inventions do not preserve true order.*

They do not in the least tend unto the preservation of due *order* in the celebration of divine worship. All *order* consists in the due observation of *rule*. The rules of actions are either natural or of His special appointment. Both these take place in religious worship. The institutions or commands of Christ containing the substance thereof, in their observation principally consists the order of it. Whatever is of circumstance in the manner of its performance—not capable of special determination, as emerging or arising only occasionally, upon the doing of what is appointed at this or that time, in this or that place, and the like—is left unto the rule of *moral prudence*, in whose observation their order doth consist. But the superaddition of ceremonies, necessarily belonging neither to the institutions of worship nor unto those circumstances whose disposal falls under the rule of moral prudence, neither doth nor can add anything unto the due order of gospel worship; so that they are altogether needless and useless in the worship of God.

Neither is this the whole of the inconvenience wherewith their observance is attended. For although they are not in particular and expressly in the Scripture forbidden—for it was simply impossible that all instances wherein the wit of man might exercise its invention in such things should be reckoned up and condemned—yet they fall directly under those severe prohibitions that God hath recorded to secure His worship from all such *additions* unto it, of whatever sort. Yea, the main design of the second precept³⁵ is to forbid all making unto ourselves any such things in the worship of God to add unto what He hath appointed; whereof an instance is given in that of *making and worshipping images*—the most common way that the sons of men were then prone to transgress against the institutions of God.

And this sense and understanding of the commandment is secured by those ensuing prohibitions against adding anything at all unto the commands of God in His worship: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God” (Deu 4:2). “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deu 12:32; 17:3). To the same purpose were the places before mentioned (Matthew 15:9, etc.), as also is that severe rule applied by our Savior unto the additions of the Pharisees: “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Mat 15:13).

And there is yet further evidence contributed unto this intention of the command, from those places where such evils and corruptions as were particularly forbidden in the worship of God are condemned, not on the special account of their being so forbidden, but on that more general, of being introduced without any warrant from God's institutions or commands. “They have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I com-

³⁵ **second precept** – second of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exo 20:4-6).

manded not, neither came it into my heart” (Jer 7:31). “They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt-offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind” (Jer 19:5). These things were particularly forbidden; but yet God here condemns them as coming under the general evil of making additions unto His commands—doing what He commanded not, nor did it ever enter into His heart.

The Papists say, indeed, that all *additions* corrupting the worship of God are forbidden, but such as further adorn and preserve it are not so. This implies a contradiction, for whereas every *addition* is principally a *corruption* because it is an addition, under which notion it is forbidden (and that in the worship of God which is forbidden is a corruption of it), there can be no such preserving, adorning addition, unless we allow a preserving and adorning corruption! Neither is it of more force what is pleaded by them, that the additions that they make belong not unto the *substance* of the worship of God, but unto the *circumstances* of it. For every circumstance observed religiously, or to be observed in the worship of God, is of the substance of it—as were all those ceremonious observances of the Law, which had the same respect in the prohibitions of adding with the most weighty things whatsoever.

Q. 15. Whence may it appear that the right and due observation of instituted worship is of great importance unto the glory of God and of high concernment unto the souls of men?

A. This is fully taught in the Scriptures; as, ^aGod would never accept in any state of the church, before or since the Fall, moral obedience without the observation of some institutions as trials, tokens, and pledges of that obedience. And ^bin their use and signification by His appointment they nearly concern³⁶ the principal mysteries of His will and grace; and ^cby their celebration is He glorified in the world. And, therefore, ^das He hath made blessed promises to His people to grant them His presence and to bless them in their use; so, ^ebeing the tokens of the marriage relation that is between Him and them, with respect unto them alone He calls Himself “a jealous God,” and ^fhath actually exercised signal³⁷ severity towards the neglecters, corrupters, or abusers of them.

^aGen 2:16-17; 4:3-5; 17:9-11; Exo 12:21; Exo 20; Mat 28:19-20; 26:26-27; Eph 4:11-12; Rev 1:13; 21:3
^bGen 17:10; Exo 12:23-24; Rom 6:3-5; Mat 26:26-28; 1Co 11:23-26 ^cSee questions eight and nine. ^dExo 29:42-43, 45; Deu 14:23-24; Psa 133:3; Mat 18:20; Rev 21:3 ^eExo 20:5; Deu 4:23-24; Jos 24:19; Eze 16
^fLev 10:1-2; Num 16:1-40; 1Sa 2:27-34; 2Sa 6:6-7; 2Ch 26:16-21; 1Co 11:30

Explanation. For the most part, the instituted worship of God is neglected and despised in the world. Some are utterly regardless of it, supposing that if they attend, after their manner, unto moral obedience, that neither God nor themselves are much concerned in this matter of His worship. Others think the disposal and ordering of it to be so left unto men that, as to the manner of its performance, they may do with it as it

³⁶ **nearly concern** – closely relate to.

³⁷ **signal** – remarkable.

seems right in their own eyes. And some follow them therein, as willingly walking after their commandments, without any respect unto the will or authority of God.

But the whole Scripture gives utterly another account of this matter. The *honor* of God in this world, the *trial* of our faith and obedience, the *order* and beauty of the church, the *exaltation* of Christ in our professed subjection to Him, and the *saving* of our souls in the ways of His appointment,³⁸ are therein laid upon the due and right observance of instituted worship. They who are negligent about these things, whatever they pretend, have no real respect unto anything that is called religion.

1) Ordinances of worship as tests of faith

Therefore, in every state and condition of the Church, God hath given His ordinances of worship as the touchstone³⁹ and trial of its faith and obedience; so that they by whom they are neglected do openly refuse to come unto God's trial. In the state of innocence, the trial of Adam's obedience, according to the law of nature, was in and by the institution of the *tree of life, and of the knowledge of good and evil*: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). This was the first institution of God, and it was given unto the church in the state of innocence and purity. In our first parents' neglect of attending thereunto, did they transgress the whole law of their creation, as failing in their duty in what was appointed for their trial in the whole: "Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" etc. (Gen 3:11).

And the church in his family after the Fall, built upon the promise, was tried also in the matter of instituted worship. Nor was there any discovery of the wickedness of Cain, or approbation of the faith of Abel, until they came to be proved in their *sacrifices*—a new part of God's instituted worship, the first in the state and condition of sin and the Fall into which it was brought. "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (Gen 4:3-5). The ground whereof the apostle declares, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts" (Heb 11:4). In the observation of that first institution, given to the church in the state of the Fall, did Abel receive a testimony of his being justified and accepted with God.

Afterward, when Abraham was called and peculiarly separated to bear forth the name of God in the world, and to become the spring of the Church for future ages, he had the institution of *circumcision* given him for the trial of his obedience; the law and condition whereof was that he who observed it not should be esteemed an alien from the covenant of God and be cut off from his people. "God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep

³⁸ **saving of our souls in the ways of His appointment** – God often uses elements of biblical worship, especially the preaching of the Word, to bring souls to conviction and conversion (1Pe 1:23).

³⁹ **touchstone** – criterion.

my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised” (Gen 17:9-10). “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant” (Gen 17:14).

And in like manner, so soon as ever his posterity were to be collected into a new church state⁴⁰ and order, God gave the ordinance of the *Passover*: “Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever” (Exo 12:24), and that upon the same penalty with that of circumcision (Num 9:13). To these He added many more on Mount Sinai (Exo 20), all as the trials of their faith and obedience unto succeeding generations. How He hath dealt with His Church⁴¹ under the New Testament we shall afterward declare.

In no state or condition of the Church, then, did God ever accept of moral obedience without the observation of some instituted worship, accommodated in His wisdom unto its various states and conditions. And not only so, but, as we have seen, He hath made the observation of them, according unto His mind and appointment, the means of the trial of men’s whole obedience, and the rule of the acceptance or rejection of them. And so it continues at this day, whatever be the thoughts of men about the worship that at present He requires.

2) Ordinances of worship as means of instruction

Besides, God hath appointed that His ordinances of worship shall be an *effectual means*, as to instruct us in the mysteries of His will and mind, so of communicating His love, mercy, and grace unto us; as also of that communion or intercourse with His holy Majesty, which He hath graciously granted unto us by Jesus Christ. And this, as it is sufficiently manifested in the Scriptures quoted in answer unto this question, so it is at large declared in the writings of those holy and good men who have explained the nature of gospel ordinances; and therefore, in particular, we need not here insist much in the further proof of it.

Thus, Abraham was instructed in the nature of the covenant of grace by *circumcision* (Gen 17:10)—which is often explained in the Old Testament by applying it in particular to the grace of conversion, called the “circumcision of the heart” (Deu 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4), as also in the New Testament (Col 2:11). And by the *Passover* were the people taught not only the mercy of their present deliverance (Exo 12:23-24), but also to look for the Lamb of God, Who was to take away the sin of the world (Joh 1:29), the true Passover of the people of God, which was sacrificed for them (1Co 5:7). How our insi-

⁴⁰ **church state** – condition of being a church.

⁴¹ **Church** – invisible or universal Church of all the elect children of God who are regenerated and comprise the true Bride of Christ. In this edition, Chapel Library has attempted to capitalize the word *church* when the context clearly refers to the Church universal, and leave it in lower case when it may be understood as a reference to a local assembly of believers, since Owen’s instruction is to the local churches.

tion⁴² or implanting into Christ is represented and signified by our *baptism*, the apostle declares (Rom 6:3-5); as also our communion with Him in His death by the *supper of the Lord* (Mat 26:26-27; 1Co 11:24-25).

And all these graces that they teach, they also exhibit, and are the means of the communication of them unto believers. Moreover, the experience of all believers who have conscientiously waited upon God in their due observance may be produced in the confirmation of it. The instruction, edification, consolation, spiritual strength, courage, and resolution that they have received in and by them, have been witnessed unto in their lives and ends. They to whom these things are not of the greatest importance do but in vain pretend a regard unto God in anything whatever.

3) *Ordinances of worship as means of glorifying God*

Furthermore, God hath appointed our duty in the observation of His instituted worship to be the means of our *glorifying Him* in the world. Nor can we otherwise give glory to God but as we own His authority over us, and yield obedience to what He requires at our hands. And what we do herein is principally evident in those duties that lie under the eye and observation of men. Some duties of obedience there are that the world neither doth nor can discern in believers; such are their faith, inward holiness, purity of heart, heavenly-mindedness, [and] sincere mortification of indwelling sin. Some [there are] whose performance ought to be hid from them, as personal prayer and alms (Mat 6:2-6). Some there are that are very liable to misconstruction among men, as zeal, in many of the actings of it.

But this conscientious observation of instituted worship, and therein avowing our subjection unto the authority of God in Christ, is what the world may see and take notice of, and what, unless in case of persecution, ought not to be hid from them, and what they can have no pretense of scandal at. Therefore, God hath appointed that by this means and way we shall honor and glorify Him in the world—which if we neglect, we do evidently cast off all regard unto His concernments in this world.

Herein it is that we manifest ourselves not to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, of Him and His words, which He so indispensably requireth at our hands. For, saith He, “whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mar 8:38). Hereby do we keep the commandments of Christ as His “friends” (Joh 15:14), for these peculiarly are His commands (and if we suffer for them, then we do most properly suffer as Christians, which is our glory), that, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1Pe 4:14-16). A happy and a blessed thing it is to suffer for the observation of the special commands of Christ.

⁴² **insition** – grafting.

4) Ordinances of worship as means of God's presence

Further, to encourage us in our duty, the holy, faithful God hath given us many great and precious promises that He will graciously afford unto us *His special, sanctifying, blessing presence* in our attendance on His worship according to His appointment. For as He promised of old that He would make glorious “the place of his feet,” or abode among His people (Isa 60:13)—that He would meet them in His sanctuary, the place of His worship, and there dwell among them, and bless them, and be their God (Exo 29:42-45; Deu 14:23-24)—so the Lord Jesus Christ hath promised His presence to the same ends and purposes unto all them that assemble together in His name for the observation of the worship that in the gospel He hath appointed. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mat 18:20). And therein is the tabernacle of God, His gracious dwelling-place, with men (Rev 21:3). Now, when God offereth unto us His presence—His gracious, blessing, sanctifying, and saving presence—and that in and by promises that shall never fail, what unspeakable guilt must we needs contract upon our own souls if we neglect or despise the tenders⁴³ of such grace!

5) Ordinances of worship expressing loyalty in covenant

But because we are apt to be slothful, and are slow of heart in admitting a due sense of spiritual things, which fall not in with the light and principles of nature, to stir us up unto a diligence in our attendance unto the will of God in this matter, He hath declared that He looks upon our obedience herein as our *whole loyalty* unto Him in that *conjugal covenant* that He is pleased in Christ Jesus to take believers into with Himself. “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will *bring you to Zion*: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:14-15). Coming unto Zion—in the worship of God, under the leading and conduct of pastors according to the heart of God—is our answering the relation wherein we stand unto Him as He is married unto us.

And thereupon He teacheth us that as a husband He is jealous of our discharge of our duty in this matter, accounting our neglect of His worship, or profanation of it by inventions and additions of our own, to be spiritual disloyalty, whoredom, and adultery, which His soul abhorreth—for which He will cast off any church or people, and that forever (Exo 20:5; Deu 4:23-24; Jos 24:19; Eze 16). Whatever He will bear with in His church, He will not bear with what His jealousy is exercised about. If it transgress therein, He will give it a bill of divorce. This repudiated condition is the state of many churches in the world, however they please and boast themselves in their meretricious⁴⁴ ornaments and practices.

6) Judgment upon disobedience in worship

To give yet further strength unto all these considerations, that we may not only have rules and precepts, but examples also for our instruction, God hath given many signal

⁴³ **tenders** – offers.

⁴⁴ **meretricious** – gaudy.

instances of His *severity* against persons who, by ignorance, neglect, or regardlessness, have miscarried in not observing exactly His will and appointment in and about His worship. This was the case of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron (Lev 10:1-2); of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16:1-40); of the sons of Eli, a sin not to “be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever” (1Sa 2:27-34; 3:14); of Uzzah in putting the ark into a cart, when he should have borne it upon his shoulders (1Ch 13:7-10); of Uzziah the king, in offering incense contrary to God’s institution, that duty being appropriated unto the priests of the posterity of Aaron (2Ch 26:16-21).

These are sufficient intimations of what care and diligence we ought to use in attending unto what God hath appointed in His worship. And although now, under the New Testament, He doth not ordinarily proceed to the inflicting of temporal judgments in the like cases of neglect, yet He hath not wholly left us without instances of His putting forth tokens of His displeasure in temporal visitations on such miscarriages in His church. “For this cause,” saith the apostle, “many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep” (1Co 11:30). From all this it appears of what concernment it is unto the glory of God, and the salvation of our own souls, to attend diligently unto our duty in the strict and sincere observation of the worship of the gospel; for He lets us know that now a more severe punishment is substituted against such transgressions in the room of what He so visibly inflicted under the Old Testament (Heb 10:25-29).

Q. 16. Is there yet any other consideration that may stir up believers to a holy and religious care about the due observation of the institutions of the gospel?

A. Yea; namely, that the great apostasy of the Church in the last days, foretold in the Scripture, and which God threateneth to punish and revenge, consists principally in false worship and a departure from the institutions of Christ. Rev 13:4-5; 17:1-5

Explanation. That there is an apostasy of the Church foretold in the book of the Revelation is acknowledged by all who with sincerity have inquired into the mind of God therein. The state of things at this day, and for many ages past in the world, sufficiently confirm that persuasion. Herein several things in general are obvious unto every sober consideration thereof:

1) The horrible evils, troubles, and confusions that are to be brought into and upon the world thereby.

2) The high guilt and provocation of God that is contained in it and doth accompany it.

3) The dreadful vengeance that God in His appointed time will take upon all the promoters and obstinate maintainers of it. These things are at large all of them foretold in the Revelation. Therein the apostasy itself is set forth as the cause of all the plagues and destructions that, by the righteous judgment of God, are to be brought upon the world in these latter days. Now, as God doth earnestly call upon all that fear Him not to intermeddle nor partake in the sins of the apostates, lest they should also partake in their judgments—“I heard another voice from heaven, 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)—so He doth plainly declare wherein the apostasy and sin itself should principally consist; and that is in the corrupting and contaminating of the ordinances of His worship, or the introduction of false worship, joined with the persecution of them who refused to submit thereunto.

For this cause is the sin itself set out under the name of “fornication” and “whoredom,” and the church that maintains it is called “the mother of harlots” (Rev 17:5). That by fornication and whoredom in the church the adulterating of the worship of God—and the admission of false, self-invented worship in the room thereof, whereof God is jealous—is intended, the Scripture everywhere declares. It is easy, then, to gather of how great concernment unto us it is—especially in these latter days, wherein this so heinous and provoking sin is prevalent in the world—carefully to attend unto the safe, unerring rule of worship, and diligently to perform the duties that are required therein.

Q. 17. What are the principal institutions of the gospel to be observed in the worship of God?

A. ^aThe *calling*, gathering, and settling of churches, with their officers, as the seat and subject of all other solemn instituted worship; ^b*prayer*, with thanksgiving; ^c*singing* of psalms; ^d*preaching* the Word; ^eadministration of the *sacraments* of baptism and the supper of the Lord; ^f*discipline* and rule of the church collected and settled; most of which have also various particular duties relating unto them, and subservient unto their due observation.

^aMat 28:19-20; Act 2:41-42; 1Co 12:28; Eph 4:11-12; Mat 18:17-18; 1Co 4:17; 7:17;
Act 14:23; Ti 1:5; 1Ti 3:15 ^b1Ti 2:1; Act 6:4; 13:2-3 ^cEph 5:19; Col 3:16
^d2Ti 4:2; Act 2:42; 1Co 14:3; Act 6:4; Heb 13:7 ^eMat 28:19; 26:26-27;
1Co 11:23 ^fMat 18:17-19; Rom 12:6-8; Rev 2-3

Explanation. These things, being all of them afterward to be spoken unto severally and apart, need not here any particular explanation. They are the principal heads where-in gospel worship consisteth, and whereunto the particular duties of it may be reduced.

Q. 18. Whereas some of these things are founded in the light and law of nature as requisite unto all solemn worship, and are, moreover, commanded in the moral law, and explanations of it in the Old Testament, how do you look upon them as evangelical institutions, to be observed principally on the authority of Jesus Christ?

A. Neither their general suitableness unto the principles of right reason and the dictates of the light and law of nature, nor the practice of them in the worship of God under the Old Testament, does at all hinder them from depending on the mere institution of Jesus Christ, as to those special ends of the glory of God in and by Himself, and the edification of His church in the faith that is in Him whereunto He hath appointed them—nor as unto that special manner of their performance that He requireth. In these respects they are to be observed on the account of His authority and command only.

Mat 17:5; 28:20; Joh 16:23-24; Heb 3:4-6; Eph 1:22; 2:20-22; Heb 12:25

Explanation. The principal thing we are to aim at, in the whole worship of God, is the discharge of that duty that we owe to Jesus Christ, the king and head of the church: “Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we” (Heb 3:6). “That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (1Ti 3:15). This we cannot do unless we consider His *authority* as the formal reason and cause⁴⁵ of our observance of all that we do therein. If we perform anything in the worship of God on any other account, it is no part of our obedience unto Him, and so we can neither expect His grace to assist us, nor have we His promise to accept us therein—for that He hath annexed unto our doing and observing whatever He hath commanded, and that because He hath commanded us: “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” (Mat 28:20). This promised presence respects only the observance of His commands.

Some men are apt to look on this authority of Christ as having the least influence into what they do. If in any of His institutions they find anything that is suited or agreeable unto the light of nature—as ecclesiastical societies, government of the church, and the like, they say, are—they suppose and contend that that is the ground on which they are to be attended unto, and so are to be regulated accordingly. The interposition of His authority they will allow only in the *sacraments*, which have no light in reason or nature. So desirous are some to have as little to do with Christ as they can, even in the things that concern the worship of God! But it would be somewhat strange that—if what the Lord Christ hath appointed in His church to be observed in particular, in a special manner, for special ends of His own—hath in the general nature of it an agreement with what in like cases the light of nature seems to direct unto. Therefore, His authority is not to be considered as the sole immediate⁴⁶ reason of our performance of it. But it is evident,

1) That our Lord Jesus Christ being the king and head of His church (Eph 1:22; 5:23), the lord over the house of God, nothing is to be done therein but with respect unto His authority: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Mat 17:5). “Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16). Ye are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:20-22).

⁴⁵ **formal cause** – *philosophy*: the reason a thing takes its actual form, as opposed to another configuration of its parts according to their nature. Our reason for all we do in the church must be out of regard for Christ’s authority, even if there might be other reasons to consider any part important.

⁴⁶ **immediate** – direct, without an intermediary cause.

2) That, therefore, the suitableness of anything to right reason or the light of nature is no ground for a church observation of it, unless it be also specifically appointed and commanded by Jesus Christ.

3) That being so appointed and commanded, it becomes a special institution of His, and as such is to be observed. So that in all things that are done, or to be done, with respect unto the worship of God in the church, the authority of Christ is always principally to be considered, and everything to be observed as commanded by Him. Without this consideration it hath no place in the worship of God.

Church Order

Leadership, Practice, Discipline, and Fellowship in the Local Church

5. The Local Church

Q. 19. What is an instituted church of the gospel?

A. A society of persons called out of the world, or their natural worldly state, by the administration of the Word and Spirit, unto the obedience of the faith, or the knowledge and worship of God in Christ, joined together in a holy band, or by special agreement, for the exercise of the communion of saints, in the due observation of all the ordinances of the gospel.

Rom 1:5-6; 1Co 1:2; 4:15; Heb 3:1; Jam 1:18; Rev 1:20;
1Pe 2:5; Eph 2:20-22; 2Co 6:16-18

Explanation. The church whose nature is here inquired after is not the *catholic* Church¹ of elect believers of all ages and seasons, from the beginning of the world unto the end thereof, nor of any one age, nor the *universality of professors* of the gospel; but a *particular church*, wherein, by the appointment of Christ, all the ordinances of the worship of God are to be observed and attended unto according to His will. For although it be required of them of whom a particular church is constituted that they be true believers—seeing that unless a man be born again He cannot enter into the kingdom of God—and so on that account they be members of the Church catholic, as also that they make *visible profession* of faith and obedience unto Jesus Christ. Yet moreover it is the will, command, and appointment of Christ that they should be joined together in particular societies or churches, for the due observation of the ordinances of the gospel, which can alone be done in such assemblies. For as the members of the catholic Church are not known unto one another merely on the account of that faith and union with Christ that make them so—whence the whole society of them is, as such, *invisible* to the world, and themselves *visible* only on the account of their profession, and therefore cannot, merely as such, observe the ordinances of the gospel, which observation is their profession—so the visible professors that are in the world, in any age, cannot at any time assemble together; which, from the nature of the thing itself, and the institution of Christ, is indispensably necessary for the celebration of various parts of that worship that He requires in His Church.

¹ **catholic Church** – universal Church; not a reference to the Roman Catholic Church.

And therefore particular churches are themselves an ordinance of the New Testament, as the *national church* of the Jews was of old. For when God of old erected His worship, and enjoined the solemn observation of it, He also appointed a church as His institution for the due celebration of it. That was the people of Israel, solemnly taken into a church relation with Him by covenant; wherein they took upon themselves to observe all the laws, ordinances, and institutions of His worship: “Speak thou with us, and we will hear” (Exo 20:19). “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do” (Exo 24:3). “All that the LORD our God shall speak unto thee...we will hear it, and do it” (Deu 5:27). God accordingly appointed them ordinances to be observed by the whole congregation of them together, at the same time, in the same place: “Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD” (Exo 23:17). “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose” (Deu 16:16).

Neither would God allow any stranger, anyone not of the church so instituted by Him, to celebrate any part of His instituted worship, until he was solemnly admitted into that church as a member thereof. “All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof” (Exo 12:47-48).

To the same end and purpose, when the knowledge of God was to be diffused all the world over by the preaching of the gospel, and believers of all nations under heaven were to be admitted unto the privilege of His worship (Eph 2:13-18)—the national church of the Jews with all the ordinances of it being removed and taken away—the Lord Christ hath appointed *particular churches*, or united assemblies of believers, among and by whom He will have all His holy ordinances of worship celebrated. This institution of His, at the first preaching of the gospel, was invariably and inviolably observed by all that took on them to be His disciples, without any one instance of questioning it to the contrary in the whole world—or the celebration of any ordinances of His worship among any persons, but only in such societies or particular churches. And there is sufficient evidence and warranty of this institution given us in the Scripture; for,

1) They are appointed and approved by Christ: “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. 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. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mat 18:15-20).

Such a church He supposeth and approveth as His disciples had relation unto, and as any one of them could have recourse unto, as a brother, in obedience to His commands and directions. This could not be the church of the Jews, neither in its whole body nor in any of its judicatories;² for as at that time there was a solemn decree of excommunication against all and every one that should profess His name: “The Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue” (Joh 9:22). [This] was executed accordingly upon the man that was born blind (verse 34), which utterly disabled them from making any use of this direction, command, or institution of His for the present. So afterward the chief business of the rulers of those assemblies, from the highest court of their Sanhedrin to the meanest judicatory in their synagogues, was to persecute them and bring them unto death: “They will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues” (Mat 10:17; Joh 15:20-21).

And it is not likely that the Lord Christ would send His disciples for direction and satisfaction in the weighty matters of their obedience unto Him, and mutual love towards one another, unto them with whom they neither had, nor could, nor ought to have anything to do with. And if they were intended, they were all already made as heathens and publicans, being cast out by them for refusing to hear them in their blasphemies and persecutions of Christ Himself. Such a society, also, is plainly intended as whereunto Christ promiseth His presence by His Spirit, and whose righteous sentences He takes upon Himself to ratify and confirm in heaven.

Moreover, such a church doth He direct unto as [that] with which His disciples were to have familiar, brotherly, constant converse and communion, with whom they were so to be joined in society as to be owned or rejected by them according to their judgment, as is apparent in the practice enjoined unto them, and without relation whereunto no duty here appointed could be performed. As, therefore, the very name of the church and nature of the thing bespeak a society, so it is evident that no society but that of a particular church of the gospel can be here intended.

2) These churches He calls His “candlesticks” (Rev 1:20), in allusion unto the candlesticks of the Temple, which, being an institution of the Old Testament,³ doth directly declare these churches to be so under the New. And this He speaks in reference unto those seven principal churches of Asia, every one of which was a candlestick or an institution of His own.

3) In pursuit of this appointment of Christ and by His authority, the apostles—so soon as any were converted unto the faith at Jerusalem, although the old national church state of the Jews was yet continued—gathered them into a *church* or society for celebration of the ordinances of the gospel: “They that gladly received his word were baptized...And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Act 2:41-42). “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Act 2:47). And this company is expressly called “the church

² **judicatories** – courts.

³ **Testament** – covenant.

which was at Jerusalem” (Act 8:1). This church, thus called and collected out of the church of the Jews, was the rule and pattern of the disposing of all the disciples of Christ into church societies, in obedience unto His command, throughout the world (Act 11:26; 14:23, 27).

4) They took care for the forming, completing, and establishing them in *order* according to His will, under the rule of them given and granted unto them by Himself for that purpose; all in a steady pursuit of the commands of Christ: “They...ordained them elders in every church” (Act 14:23); “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldst set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (Ti 1:5; 1Co 12:28; Eph 4:11-12).

5) They do everywhere, in the name and authority of Christ, give unto these churches rules, directions, and precepts, for the due ordering of all things relating to the worship of God, and according to His mind, as we shall see afterward in particular; for,

a) There is no charge given unto the officers, ministers, guides, or overseers that He hath appointed, but it is in reference unto the discharge of their duty in such churches. That ministers or officers are of Christ’s appointment is expressly declared: “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 4:11-12). “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers” (1Co 12:28).

These are of Christ’s institution, but to what end? Why, as they were ordained in every church (Act 14:23; Ti 1:5), so their whole charge is limited to the churches. “He sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And...said unto them...Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Act 20:17-18, 28). “The elders which are among you I exhort...feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof” (1Pe 5:1-2; 1Ti 3:15). “And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (Col 4:17). They were the churches of Christ wherein they ministered; which Christ, appointing them to take care of, manifests to be His own institution and appointment.

And this is fully declared (Rev 2-3), where all the dealings of Christ with His angels, or ministers, are about their behavior and deportment⁴ among His candlesticks, each of them [being] the candlestick whereunto He was related, or the particular churches that they had care of and presided in—the candlesticks being no less of the institution of Christ than the angels. And they were distinct particular churches, that had their distinct particular officers, whom He treateth distinctly with about His institutions and worship, especially about that of the state of the churches themselves, and their constitution according to His mind.

b) There is no instruction, exhortation, or reproof given unto any of the disciples of Christ after His ascension, in any of the books of the New Testament, but as they were collected into and were members of such particular churches. This will be evidenced in

⁴ **deportment** – conduct.

the many instances of those duties that shall afterward be insisted on. And the Lord Christ hath not left as a matter of liberty, choice, or convenience, what He hath made the foundation of the due manner of the performance of all those duties whereby His disciples yield obedience unto His commands, to His glory in the world.

6) The principal writings of the apostles are *expressly* directed unto such churches, and all of them intentionally (1Co 1:1-2; 2Co 1:1; Gal 1:1-2; Phi 1:1; Col 1:1-2; 4:16; 1Th 1:1; 2Th 1:1; Eph 1:1 compared with Act 20:17; 1Pe 5:2)—or unto particular persons, giving directions for their behavior and duty in such churches (1Ti 3:15; Ti 1:5). So that the great care of the apostles was about these churches as the principal institution of Christ, and that whereon the due observance of all His other commands doth depend. Of what nature or sort these churches were shall be afterward evinced;⁵ we here only manifest their institution by the authority of Christ.

7) Much of the writings of the apostles in those epistles directed to those churches consists in rules, precepts, instructions, and exhortations for the guidance and preservation of them in purity and order, with their continuance in a condition of due obedience unto the Lord Christ. To this end do they so fully and largely acquaint the rulers and members of them with their mutual duty in that special relation wherein they stand to each other, as also all persons in particular in what is required of them by virtue of their membership in any particular society, as may be seen at large in some of Paul's epistles. To give more strength hereunto, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the revelation that He made of His mind and will personally after His ascension into heaven, insisted principally about the condition, order, and preservation of particular churches, not taking notice of any of His disciples not belonging to them or joined with them. These He warns, re-proves, instructs, threatens, commands—all in order to their walking before Him in the condition of particular churches (Rev 2-3).

Besides, as He hath appointed them to be the seat and subject of all His ordinances, having granted the right of them unto them alone (1Ti 3:15), entrusting them with the exercise of the authority that He puts forth in the rule of His disciples in this world, He hath also appointed the most holy institution of His Supper to denote and express the union and communion that the members of each of these churches have by His ordinance among themselves. "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? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1Co 10:16-17). Also, He gives out unto them the gifts and graces of His Spirit, to make every one of them meet for and useful in the place that he holds in such churches—as the apostle discourseth at large (1Co 12:15-26; Col 2:19; Eph 4:16). It is manifest, then, that no ordinance of Christ is appointed to be observed by His disciples, no communication of the gifts of the Holy Ghost is promised to them, no special duty is required of them, but with respect unto these churches of His institution.

In the answer to this question, four things are declared tending to the explanation of the nature of a particular church or churches: 1) The *subject-matter* of them, or the per-

⁵ **evinced** – declared.

sons whereof such a church doth or ought to consist; 2) The *means* whereby they are brought into a condition capable of such a state, or qualified for it; 3) The *general ends* of their calling; 4) The *special means* whereby they are constituted a church (which last [item] will be spoken unto in the next question).

For the first, all men are by nature the children of wrath, and do belong unto the world, which is the kingdom of Satan, and are under the power of darkness, as the Scripture everywhere declares. In this state, men are not subjects of the kingdom of Christ nor meet to become members of His Church. Out of this condition they cannot deliver themselves. They have neither will unto it nor power for it; but they are called out of it. This calling is what effectually delivers them from the kingdom of Satan, and translates them into the kingdom of Christ. This work or effect, the Scripture on several accounts variously expresseth: sometimes by *regeneration*, or a new birth; sometimes by *conversion*, or turning unto God; sometimes by *vivification*, or quickening from the dead; sometimes by *illumination*, or opening of the eyes of the blind. All these are carried on by *sanctification* in holiness, and attended with *justification* and *adoption*. As these are all distinct in themselves, having several formal reasons of them, so they all concur to complete that effectual vocation or calling that is required to constitute persons [as] members of the Church.

For besides that, this is signified by the typical⁶ holiness of the church of old, into the room whereof real holiness was to succeed under the New Testament (Exo 19:6; Psa 24:3-6; 15:1-2; Isa 35:8-9; 54:13-14; 60:21; 1Pe 2:9). Our Lord Jesus Christ hath laid it down as an everlasting rule that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Joh 3:3-5), [thus] requiring regeneration as an indispensable condition in a member of His Church, a subject of His kingdom. His temple is now to be built of living stones (1Pe 2:5)—men spiritually and savingly quickened from their death in sin—and by the Holy Ghost, whereof they are partakers, made a meet habitation of God (Eph 2:21-22; 1Co 3:16; 2Co 6:16); which, receiving vital supplies from Christ its head, increaseth in faith and holiness, edifying itself in love (Eph 4:15-16).

And as the apostles in their writings do ascribe unto all the churches, and the members of them, a participation in this effectual vocation—affirming that they are “saints, called, sanctified, justified,” and accepted with God in Christ (Rom 1:5-6; 1Co 1:2; 4:15; Heb 3:1; Jam 1:18; 1Pe 2:5; 2Co 6:17-18; 1Co 6:11)—so many of the duties that are required of them in that relation and condition are such as none can perform unto the glory of God, their own benefit, and the edification of others (the ends of all obedience), unless they are partakers of this effectual calling (1Co 10:16-17; 12:12; Eph 4:16).

Add hereunto that these churches, and the members of them, are not only commanded to separate themselves, as to their worship of God, from the world—that is, men in their worldly state and condition—but are also required, when any among them transgress against the rules and laws of this holy calling above described, to cast them out of their society and communion (1Co 5:13). From all this, it appears who are the *subject-matter* of these churches of Christ; as also, secondly, the *means* whereby they

⁶ **typical** – symbolical.

come to be so, namely, the administration of the Spirit and Word of Christ; and, thirdly, the *general ends* of their calling, which are all spoken to in this answer.

Q. 20. By what means do persons so called become a church of Christ?

A. They are constituted a church, and interested in⁷ the rights, power, and privileges of a gospel church, by the will, promise, authority, and law of Jesus Christ, upon their own voluntary consent and engagement to walk together in the due subjection of their souls and consciences unto His authority, as their king, priest, and prophet, and in a holy observation of all His commands, ordinances, and appointments.

Mat 18:20; 28:19-20; Act 2:41-42; Exo 24:3; Deu 5:27;

Psa 110:3; Isa 44:5; 59:21; Eph 4:7-10; 2Co 8:5

Explanation. That the Lord Christ hath constituted such a church state as what we inquire about hath been proved already. Unto a church so constituted He hath also, by His Word and promise, annexed all those privileges and powers that we find a church to be entrusted with. This He hath done by the standing and unalterable law of the gospel, which is the charter of their spiritual society and incorporation. Neither are nor can any persons be interested in the rights of a church any otherwise but by virtue of this law and constitution. This, therefore, is first to be laid down, that the sole moral foundation of the church state that we inquire after is laid in the Word, law, and appointment of Christ. He alone hath authority to erect such a society; He is the builder of this house as well as the Lord over it (Heb 3:3-6). Neither without it can all the authority of men in the world appoint such a state or erect a church. All acceptable actings of men herein are no other but acts of pure obedience unto Christ.

Furthermore, we have declared that the Lord Christ, by the dispensation of His Word and Spirit, doth prepare and fit men to be subjects of His kingdom, members of His church. The work of sending forth the means of the conversion of the souls of men, of translating them from the power of darkness into light, He hath taken upon Himself, and doth effectually accomplish it in every generation. By this means He builds His church; for unto all persons so called He gives command that they shall do and observe whatever He hath appointed them to do (Mat 28:20), in particular, that they profess their subjection to Him and their obedience, in joining themselves in that state wherein they may be enabled to observe all His other laws and institutions, with the whole worship of God required therein. Being converted unto God by His Word and Spirit, they are to consider how they may now obey the Lord Christ in all things. Among His commands, this of joining themselves in church societies wherein He hath promised His presence with them (Mat 18:20)—that is, to dwell among them by His Word and Spirit (Isa 59:21)—is the very first (Heb 10:25). This, by virtue of that command and promise of His, they are warranted and enabled to do; nor do they need any other warrant. The authority of Christ is sufficient to bear men out⁸ in the discharge of their duty to Him.

⁷ **interested in** – invested with.

⁸ **bear men out** – vindicate men.

Being then made willing and ready in the day of His power (Psa 110:3), they consent, choose, and agree to walk together in the observation of all His commands. Hereby do they become a church, for their becoming a church is an act of their willing obedience unto Christ. This is an act of their wills guided by rule; for this also is necessary, that they proceed herein according to the rules of His appointment, afterward to be unfolded. Herein, upon their obedience unto the commands of Christ, and faith in His promises, believers, by virtue of His law and constitution, become a gospel church and are really and truly interested in all the power, rights, and privileges that are granted unto any church of Christ. For in this obedience they do these two things, which alone He requires in any persons for the obtaining of an interest in these privileges: 1) they *confess* Him, His person, His authority, His law, His grace; 2) they take upon themselves the observance of all His commands.

Thus did God take the children of Israel into a church state of old. He proposed unto them the church obedience that He required of them, and they voluntarily and freely took upon themselves the performance of it. “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do” (Exo 24:3; Deu 5:27). Hereby they had their solemn admission into their church state and relation unto God.

The like course they took whenever there was need of renewing their engagements. And the people said, We will “serve the LORD; for he is our God...And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses” (Jos 24:18-22). This was the covenant that was between God and that people, which was solemnly renewed so often as the church was eminently reformed. Now, although the outward solemnity and ceremonies of this covenant were peculiar unto that people, yet as to the substance and nature of it—in a sacred consent for the performance of all those duties towards God and one another that the nature and edification of a church do require—it belongs to every church as such, even under the gospel.

And this is the way whereby believers, or the disciples of Christ, do enter into this state, the formal constituting cause of any church; this account doth the apostle give of the churches of the Macedonians: “And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God” (2Co 8:5), before the performance of other duties. In order thereunto, they first gave themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, or took upon themselves the observance of His commands and institutions, which is the intendment⁹ of that expression.

Among these commands, one was that they should give up themselves to the apostles’ doctrine, rule, and government, in the order by Christ prescribed; that is, in church order. This, therefore, they did by the *will of God*, according to His will and appointment. This description doth the apostle give of the way whereby the believers of Macedonia were brought into churches. It was by their own obedience unto the will of God; consenting, agreeing, and taking upon themselves the observation of all the commands

⁹ **intendment** – meaning.

and institutions of Christ, according to the direction and guidance of the apostles. So did the believers at Jerusalem (Act 2:41-42). Being converted by the Word, and making profession of that conversion in their baptism, they gave up themselves to a steadfast continuance in the observation of all other ordinances of the gospel.

Besides, the church is a house, a temple—the “house of God” (1Ti 3:15); the house of Christ (Heb 3:6); the temple of the Lord (Eph 2:21-22). Believers, singly considered, are stones, living stones (1Pe 2:5). Now, how shall these “living stones” come to be a house, a temple? Can it be by occasional occurrences, civil cohabitation in political precincts, usage, or custom of assembling for some parts of worship in any place? These things will never frame them into a house or temple. This can be no otherwise done but by their own voluntary consent and disposition. “Ye are...fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:19-22). “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16).

From these and various other places, it is manifest that the way and means of believers’ coalition into a church state is their own obedience of faith, acting itself in a joint voluntary consent to walk together in a holy observation of the commands of Christ; whence the being and union of a particular church is given unto any convenient number of them by His law and constitution.

6. Elders

Q. 21. Seeing the church is a society or spiritual incorporation of persons under rule, government, or discipline, who or what are the rulers, governors, or officers therein under Jesus Christ?

A. They have been of two sorts: 1) *Extraordinary*, appointed for a season only; and 2) *Ordinary*, to continue unto the end of the world.

Q. 22. Who are the *extraordinary* officers, rulers, or ministers of the church, appointed to serve the Lord Jesus Christ therein for a season only?

A. ^aThe apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, with ^bthe evangelists and prophets, endowed with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, associated with them and employed by them in their works and ministry.

^aMat 10:2-4; Act 1:26; 1Co 12:28; Eph 4:11 ^bLuk 10:1;
2Ti 4:5; Ti 1:5; Act 11:27-28; 21:9-11; 2Co 1:1

Explanation. That the church is a spiritual corporation,¹⁰ attended with rule and government, is evident from the nature of the thing itself and testimonies of Scripture. Only, as the kingdom of Christ is not of this world or worldly, so this rule and government of the church is not merely external and secular, but spiritual. Neither doth this rule at all belong unto it merely as *materially* considered in men yielding obedience unto the call, which is the foundation of the church; nor *absolutely*, as it is formally constituted a church by the consent and agreement described; but, moreover, it is required that it be *organically* complete: with officers or rulers. Now, to the constitution of such a society or corporation there is required,

1) That the persons whereof it is constituted do *consent* together into it for the attaining of the ends that they design. Without this no society of any kind can exist. This is the form of men's coalescence¹¹ into societies, and that there is in the church such consent and agreement hath been showed.

2) That there be rules or laws for the guidance and direction of all the members of the society, in order to their pursuit of the proper ends of it. That such rules or laws are given and prescribed by the Lord Christ unto the church will afterward appear in our consideration of them in particular; so that the church is a society of men walking according unto rule or law for the attaining of the ends of the society.

3) That there be authority instituted to see to the due observation of these rules and laws of the society, which consists in this: a) That some be appointed to rule and govern in the church; b) Others to obey, and be ruled or governed; both according to the laws of the society and not otherwise. Both [of] these are eminently found in this church state, as we shall see in the ensuing questions, with their answers and explanations.

Now, that these officers or rulers should be of two sorts, both the nature of the thing itself required and so hath our Lord Jesus Christ appointed. For when the church was first to be called, gathered, and erected, it was necessary that some persons should be extraordinarily employed in that work, for ordinary officers antecedent unto¹² the calling and erection of the church there could be none. Therefore, these persons were in an extraordinary manner endowed with all the power that afterward was to reside in the churches themselves; and, moreover, with what was peculiarly needful unto the discharge and performance of that special duty and work that they were appointed unto. But when churches were called, gathered, erected, and settled for continuance, there was need of officers suited to their state and condition, called in an *ordinary* way—that is, in a way appointed for continuance unto the end of the world, and to be employed in the ordinary work of the church; that is, the duties of it that were constantly incumbent on it by virtue of the command and appointment of Christ.

¹⁰ **corporation** – group authorized to act as a body.

¹¹ **coalescence** – coming together into one body.

¹² **antecedent unto** – prior to.

Q. 23. Who are the *ordinary* officers or ministers of Christ in the church, to be always continued therein?

A. Those whom the Scripture calls pastors and teachers, bishops, elders, and guides.

Act 14:23; 20:17, 28; 1Co 12:28; Eph 4:11; Phi 1:1;
1Ti 3:1-2; 5:17; Ti 1:5, 7; Heb 13:7, 17; 1Pe 5:1

Explanation. Several names are, on several accounts—partly designing their authority, partly their duty, and partly the manner of their discharge thereof—assigned in the Scripture to the ordinary ministers of the churches. Sometimes they are called “pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11; 1Co 12:28); sometimes “bishops” or “overseers” (Phi 1:1; Act 20:28); sometimes “elders” (Ti 1:5; 1Pe 5:1; 1Ti 5:17; Act 14:23; 20:17); sometimes “guides” (Heb 13:7, 17).¹³ By all these names, and various others whereby they are expressed, the same sort, order, and degree of persons is intended. Nor is any one of these names applied or accommodated unto any, but all the rest are also in like manner; so that he who is a pastor or a teacher is also a bishop or overseer, a presbyter or elder, a guide or ruler, a minister, a servant of the church for the Lord’s sake.

Of all other names assigned to the ministers of the church, that of bishop can least of all be thought to have designed any special order or degree of preeminence among them; for whereas it is but four times, or in four places, used in the New Testament as denoting any officers of the church, in each of them it is manifest that those expressed by the other names of elders and ministers are intended. So [it is in] Acts 20:28,¹⁴ the bishops are the elders of the particular church of Ephesus (Act 20:17). [In] Philippians 1:1, there were many bishops in that one particular church, who had only deacons joined with them, that is, they were the elders of it (Ti 1:7). The bishops were the elders to be ordained (Ti 1:5), which persons are also directly intended (1Ti 3:2), as is evident from the coincidence of the directions given by the apostle about them, and the immediate adjoining of deacons unto them (1Ti 3:8)—so that no name could be fixed on with less probability to assert from it a special supreme order or degree of men in the ministry, than this of bishops.

Neither is there any mention in any place of Scripture of any such preeminence of one sort of these church officers or ministers over another, not in particular in those places where the officers of the church are in a special manner enumerated (as 1Co 12:28; Eph 4:11; Rom 12:5-8). Nor is there any mention of any special office that should be peculiar unto such officers; or of any gifts or qualifications that should be required in them; or of any special way of calling or setting apart to their office; nor of any kind of church that they should relate unto, different from the churches that other elders or pastors do minister in; nor of any special rule or direction for their trial; nor any commands for obedience unto them but what are common to all ministers of the churches of Christ duly discharging their trust and performing their duty. No intimation is given

¹³ **guides** – the Greek word translated “them that have the rule over” can also be translated “guides” or “leaders.”

¹⁴ **bishops** – the Greek word translated “overseers” in the Authorized Version in this passage is elsewhere translated “bishops” (Phi 1:1; 1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:7; 1Pe 2:25).

unto either elders or ministers to obey them, or directions how to respect them, nor unto them how to behave themselves towards them—but all these things are spoken and delivered promiscuously¹⁵ and equally concerning all ministers of the gospel.

It is evident, then, that these appellations do not belong unto one sort of ministers more than another. And for what is pleaded by some from the example of Timothy and Titus, it is said that when any persons can prove themselves to be evangelists (2Ti 4:5), to be called unto their office upon antecedent prophecy (1Ti 1:18), and to be sent by the apostles, and in a special manner to be directed by them in some employment for a season, which they are not ordinarily to attend unto (Ti 1:5; 3:12), it will be granted that they have another duty and office committed unto them than those who are only bishops or elders in the Scripture.

Q. 24. What are the principal differences between these two sorts of officers or rulers in the church—extraordinary and ordinary?

A. ^aThe former were called to their office immediately¹⁶ by Jesus Christ in His own person, or revelation made by the Holy Ghost in His name to that purpose; the latter by the suffrage,¹⁷ choice, and appointment of the church itself. ^bThe former, both in their office and work, were independent on, and antecedent unto, all or any churches, whose calling and gathering depended on their office as its consequent and effect; the latter, in both [their office and work], consequent unto the calling, gathering, and constituting of the churches themselves, [were] as an effect thereof, in their tendency unto completeness and perfection. ^cThe authority of the former being communicated unto them immediately by Jesus Christ, without any intervenient actings of any church, extended itself equally unto all churches whatever; that of the latter, being derived unto them from Christ by the election and designation of the church, is in the exercise of it confined unto that church wherein and whereby it is so derived unto them. ^dThey differ also in the gifts that were suited unto their several distinct works and employments.

^aMat 10:1; Luk 10:1; Gal 1:1; Act 1:26; 6:3; 14:23 ^bJoh 20:21-23; Gal 1:1;
Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14; Act 14:23; Ti 1:5, 7 ^cMat 28:18-20; 2Co 11:28;
Act 20:28; 1Pe 5:2; Col 4:17 ^d1Co 12:28-33

The answer hereunto is such as needs no further explanation.

Q. 25. What is required unto the due constitution of an elder, pastor, or teacher of the church?

A. ^aThat he be furnished with the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church, and the evangelical discharge of the work of the ministry; ^bthat he be unblamable, holy, and exemplary in his conversation;¹⁸ ^cthat he have a willing mind to give up himself unto the Lord in the work of the ministry; ^dthat he be called and chosen by the suffrage and

¹⁵ **promiscuously** – without distinction.

¹⁶ **immediately** – directly.

¹⁷ **suffrage** – vote.

¹⁸ **conversation** – lifestyle.

consent of the church; ^ethat he be solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer and imposition of hands unto his work and ministry.

^aEph 4:7-8, 11-13 ^bTit 1:7-9; 1Ti 3:2-7 ^c1Pe 5:1-3 ^dAct 14:23 ^eAct 13:2-3; 1Ti 4:14; 5:22

Explanation. Five things are here said to be required unto the due and solemn constitution of a minister, guide, elder, pastor, or teacher of the church. As these do all equally belong unto the essence of the call, so they are all indispensably necessary unto him that would be accounted to have taken that office upon him according to the mind of Christ; and they are plainly expressed in the Scripture.

1) Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The first is that they be furnished with the *gifts* of the Holy Ghost for the discharge of the ministry. The communication of the gifts of the Holy Ghost is the foundation of the ministry, as the apostle declares, “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men...And 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: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man” (Eph 4:7-8, 11-13). If this were not continued, if the Lord Christ did not continue to give gifts unto men for that end, the ministry must and would cease in the church, and all church order and administrations thereon.

The exercise, also, of the gifts is required in all them that are called unto sacred offices: “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1Ti 4:14). Hence, persons destitute of these gifts of the Spirit, as they cannot in a due manner discharge any one duty of the ministry, so, wanting an interest in what is the foundation of the office, are not esteemed of God as ministers at all, whatever their outward call may be: “Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me” (Hos 4:6).

2) Unblamableness and holiness

Their unblamableness and holiness of conversation is *previously required* in them that are to be set apart unto the ministry. This the apostle expressly declares, and lays down many particular instances whereby it is to be tried: “For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Ti 1:7-9). “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1Ti 3:2-7).

Not that the particulars here mentioned by the apostle are only to be considered in the conversation of the person to be called to the ministry, but that, in a universal holy conversation, these things he requires that he should be eminent in among believers, as those that have a special respect to his work and office. A failure in any of them is a just cause or reason to debar any person from obtaining a part and lot in this matter; for whereas the special end of the ministry is to promote and further faith and holiness in the church by the edification of it, how unreasonable a thing would it be if men should be admitted unto the work of it who in their own persons were strangers both unto faith and holiness! Herein are the elders of the churches seriously to exercise themselves unto God that they may be an example unto the flock, in a universal laboring after conformity in their lives unto the great Bishop and Pastor of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

3) *Willing mind*

It is required that such a person have a *willing mind* to give up himself unto God in this work: “The elders which are among you, I exhort...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1Pe 5:1-3). Willingness and readiness of mind are the things here required as a previous qualification unto any man’s susception of¹⁹ this office. Two things doth the apostle declare to be contrary hereunto:

a) The undertaking of it by *constraint*, which compriseth every antecedent external impression upon the mind of the undertaker. Such are personal outward necessities, compulsions of friends and relations, want of other ways of subsistence in the world. All these, and the like, are condemned by the apostle as bringing some constraint on the mind, which on other accounts ought to be free and willing. As also, all tergiversation²⁰ and backwardness²¹ in persons duly qualified and called, on the consideration of difficulties, temptations, straits, persecutions, is here condemned.

b) An eye and regard unto *filthy lucre*²² or profit in the world is proposed as opposite unto the readiness of mind that is required in them that are called to this work. An aim in this employment for men by it to advantage themselves in the outward things of this world—without which it is evident that the whole work and office would lie neglected by the most of them who now would be accounted partakers of it—is openly here condemned by the apostle.

4) *Election by the church*

Election, by the suffrage and consent of the church, is required unto the calling of a pastor or teacher; so that without it formally or virtually given or obtained, the call, however otherwise carried on or solemnized, is irregular²³ and defective. There are but two places in the New Testament where there is mention of the manner whereby any are

¹⁹ **susception of** – taking.

²⁰ **tergiversation** – evasion; fickleness.

²¹ **backwardness** – reluctance.

²² **filthy lucre** – money.

²³ **irregular** – in violation of rule.

called in an ordinary way unto any ministry in the church, and in both of them there is mention of their election by the community of the church—and in both of them the apostles themselves presided with a fullness of church power, and yet would not deprive the churches of what was their liberty and privilege. The first of these is Acts 6, where all the apostles together, to give a rule unto the future proceeding of all churches in the constitution of officers among them, do appoint the multitude of the disciples, or community of the church, to look out from among themselves, or to choose the persons that were to be set apart therein unto their office. This they did accordingly: “Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom...And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen,” etc. (Act 6:2-3, 5). This was done when only deacons were to be ordained, in whom the interest and concernment of the church is not to be compared with what it hath in its pastors, teachers, and elders.

The same is mentioned again [in] Acts 14:23, where Paul and Barnabas are said to ordain elders in the churches by their election and suffrage; for the [Greek] word there used will admit of no other sense, however it be ambiguously expressed in our translation. Neither can any instance be given of the use of that word, applied unto the communication of any office or power to any person or persons in an assembly, wherein it denoteth any other action but the suffrage of the multitude; and this it doth constantly in all writers in the Greek tongue. Hence it was that this right and privilege of the church, in choosing those who are to be set over them in the work of the Lord, was a long time preserved inviolate in the primitive churches, as the ancients do abundantly testify. Yea, the show and appearance of it could never be utterly thrust out of the world, but is still retained in those churches that yet reject the thing itself.

This institution of our Lord Jesus Christ by His apostles is suited to the nature of the church, and of the authority that He hath appointed to abide therein; for, as we have showed before, persons become a church by their own voluntary consent. Christ makes His subjects willing, not slaves. His rule over them is by His grace in their own wills, and He will have them every way free in their obedience. A church state is a state of absolute liberty under Christ, not for men to do what they will, but for men to do their duty freely, without compulsion.

Now, nothing is more contrary to this liberty than to have their guides, rulers, and overseers imposed on them without their consent. Besides, the body of the church is obliged to discharge its duty towards Christ in every institution of His; which herein they cannot if they have not their free consent in the choice of their pastors or elders, but are considered as mute persons or brute creatures. Neither is there any other ordinary way of communicating authority unto any in the church, but by the voluntary submission and subjection of the church itself unto them. For as all other imaginable ways may fail, and have done so, where they have been trusted unto, so they are irrational and unscriptural as to their being a means of the delegation of any power whatever.

5) Setting apart by the church

Unto this election succeeds the solemn setting apart of them that are chosen by the church unto this work and ministry, by fasting, prayer, and imposition of the hands of the presbytery before constituted in the church wherein any person is so to be set apart.

Q. 26. May a person be called to, or be employed in, a part only of the office or work of the ministry; or may he hold the relation and exercise the duty of an elder or minister unto more churches than one at the same time?

A. Neither of these has either warrant or precedent in the Scripture; nor is the first of them consistent with the authority of the ministry, nor the latter with the duty thereof, nor either of them with the nature of the relation that is between the elders and the church.

Act 14:23; 1Pe 5:2; Act 20:28

Explanation. There are two parts of this question and answer, to be spoken unto severally.

1) Only part of the duties

The first is concerning a person to be called or employed in any church in a part only of the office or work of the ministry; as suppose a man should be called or chosen by the church to administer the sacraments, but not to attend to the work of preaching, or unto the rule or guidance of the church; or, in like manner, unto any other part or parcel of the work of the ministry, with an exemption of other duties from his charge or care. If this be done by consent and agreement, for any time or season, it is unwarrantable and disorderly. (What may be done occasionally upon an emergency, or in case of weakness or disability befalling any elder as to the discharge of any part of his duty, is not here inquired after). For,

a) If the person so called or employed have received gifts fitting him for the whole work of the ministry, the exercise of them is not to be restrained by any consent or agreement, seeing they are given for the edification of the church to be traded with (Mat 25:16). "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1Co 12:7); and this he who hath received such gifts is bound to attend unto and pursue.

b) If he have not received such gifts as completely to enable him unto the discharge of the whole work of the ministry in the church wherein he is to administer, it is not lawful for the church to call him unto that work wherein the Lord Christ hath not gone before them in qualifying him for it. Yea, to do so would be most irregular; for the whole power of the church consists in its attendance unto the rule given unto it. And therefore, the office and work of the ministry being constituted by the law of Christ, it is not in the power of the church to enlarge or straiten the power or duty of anyone that is called unto the office thereof. Neither can nor ought any person that is called unto the work of the ministry to give his consent to the restraint of the exercise of that gift that he hath received, in a due and orderly manner, nor to the abridgment of the authority that the Lord Christ hath committed unto the ministers of the gospel.

As it is incumbent upon them to take care to preserve their whole authority, and to discharge their whole duty, so [it follows] that arbitrary constitutions of this nature are irregular, and would bring in confusion into churches.

2) *Multiple churches*

The second part of the question is concerning the relation of the same person to more than one church at the same time and his undertaking to discharge the duty of his relation unto them as an elder or minister. This also is irregular and unwarrantable.

Now, a man may hold the relation of an elder, pastor, or minister unto more churches than one [in] two ways: a) Formally and directly, by an equal formal interest in them, undertaking the pastoral charge equally and alike of them, being called alike to them, and accepting of such a relation. b) Virtually, when, by virtue of his relation unto one church, he puts forth his power or authority in ministerial acts in or towards another.

a) *Formal relation to more than one church*

The first way is unlawful and destructive, both of the office and duty of a pastor; for as elders are ordained in and unto the churches respectively that they are to take care of (Act 14:23; Ti 1:5), and their office-power consists in a relation unto the church that they are set over, so they are commanded to attend unto the service of the churches wherein and whereunto they are so ordained (Act 20:28; 1Pe 5:2), and that with all diligence, care, and watchfulness, as those that must give an account (Heb 13:17)—which no man is able to do towards more than one church, the same duty being at all times to be performed towards all.

And because the whole authority of the elders, pastors, or bishops of churches is ministerial²⁴ (1Co 4:1), consisting in a power of acting upon the command of Christ, they are bound in their own persons to the discharge of their duty and office, without the least pretense of authority to delegate another, or others, to act their part or to do their duty—which would be an effect of autocratorical²⁵ authority, and not of obedience or ministry.

b) *Extending authority from one church to others*

The [second] way of relation unto many churches is unwarrantable; for,

1) It hath no *warrant* in the Scripture. No law nor constitution of Christ or His apostles can be produced to give it countenance; but elders were ordained to their own churches and commanded to attend unto them.

2) No *rule* is given unto any elders how they should behave themselves in reference unto more churches than one, in the exercise of their ministerial power, as there are rules given unto every one for the discharge of that duty in the church whereunto he is related.

3) There is no *example* to give it countenance recorded in the Scripture.

²⁴ **ministerial authority** – authority to be exercised according to the terms set by the one who delegated the authority, as opposed to authority in which one is allowed to exercise his own judgment.

²⁵ **autocratorical** – holding unrestricted authority.

4) The authority to be put forth hath no foundation. a) Not in the *gifts* they have received; for the ministerial power is not an absolute ability or faculty of doing what a man is able, but a *right*, whereby a man hath power to do rightly and lawfully what before he could not do. This, gifts will not give to any; for if they did, they would do it to all that have received them. b) Not in their *election*; for they are chosen in and by that church whereunto they stand in special relation, whose choice cannot give ministerial power over any but themselves. c) Not in their *setting apart* by fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands; for this is only unto that office-work and power whereunto they are chosen. They are not chosen for one end, and set apart for another. d) Not from the *communion of churches*; for that gives no new power, but only a due exercise of what was before received.

Q. 27. What are the principal duties of the pastors or teachers of the church?

A. ^aTo be examples unto the flock in faith, love, knowledge, meekness, patience, readiness to suffer for the name and gospel of Christ, with constancy therein; ^bto watch for the souls and take care of all the spiritual concernments of the whole flock committed to them; ^cto preach the Word diligently, dividing it aright; ^dto preserve and contend for the truth; ^eto administer all the ordinances of the gospel duly and orderly; ^fto stir up and exercise the gifts they have received in the discharge of their whole work and administration of all ordinances; ^gto instruct, admonish, cherish, and comfort all the members of the church, as their conditions, occasions, and necessities do require; ^hto attend with diligence, skill, and wisdom unto the discharge of the authority that in the rule of the church is committed unto them.

^a1Ti 3:1-7; 4:12; 2Ti 2:3; Col 1:24; Phi 2:17; 3:17 ^bHeb 13:17; Act 20:28

^c2Ti 2:15; 4:2; Rom 12:6-8 ^d1Ti 6:20; Act 20:28; Jude 1:3 ^e1Co 4:1-2; 1Ti 3:15

^f1Ti 4:14-16 ^gAct 20:18-20, 25, 27; 1Th 3:5; 2Ti 2:24-25 ^hRom 12:7-8; 1Ti 5:17

The answer is full and plain.

Q. 28. Wherein principally doth the authority of the elders of the church consist?

A. ^aIn that the rule of the church and the guidance thereof, in things appertaining unto the worship of God, is committed unto them. Therefore, ^bwhatever they do as elders in the church, according unto rule, they do it not in the name or authority of the church by which their power is derived unto them, nor as members only of the church by their own consent or covenant, but in the name and authority of Jesus Christ, from Whom, by virtue of His law and ordinance, their ministerial office and power are received. So that, ^cin the exercise of any act of church power, by and with the consent of the church, there is an obligation thence proceeding, which ariseth immediately from the authority that they have received of Jesus Christ, which is the spring of all rule and authority in the church.

^aAct 20:28; Heb 13:7, 17; 1Pe 5:2; 1Co 12:28 ^b1Ti 3:5; Col 4:17;

2Co 10:4, 8 ^c1Ti 4:11; Ti 2:15; 1Pe 5:2-5

Explanation. The answer unto this question explains the power or authority of the elders of the church, from whom they do receive it, and how it is exercised by them—the

right stating whereof is of a great importance in the whole discipline of the church, and must, therefore, here be further explained. To this end we may consider,

1) That all church power is originally vested in Jesus Christ, the sole head and monarch thereof. God the Father hath committed it unto Him, and entrusted Him with it for the accomplishment of His work of mediation (Mat 28:18).

2) That He doth communicate of this authority by way of trust, to be exercised by them in His name, unto persons by Him appointed, so much as is needful for the ordering and disposing of all things in His churches unto the blessed ends for which He hath instituted and appointed them—for no man can have any power in His church, for any end whatever, but by delegation from Him. What is not received from Him is mere usurpation. And whoever takes upon himself the exercise of any rule, authority, or power in the church, not granted unto them by Him, or not rightly derived from Him, is an oppressor, “a thief and a robber” (Joh 10:1). This necessarily follows upon the absolute investiture of all power in Him alone (1Co 12:28; Eph 4:11-12).

3) The means whereby the Lord Christ communicates this power unto men is by His law and constitution, whereby He hath granted, ordained, and appointed that such and such powers shall be exercised in His church—and that by such and such persons, to be derived unto them in such a way and manner, so that the Word of the gospel, or the laws and constitutions of the Lord Christ therein, are the first recipient seat and subject morally of all church power whatever (Mat 16:19; Mat 18:17-20).

4) The way and means whereby any persons come to a participation of this power regularly,²⁶ according to the mind of Christ, is by the obedience unto and due observance of His laws and commands in them unto whom they are prescribed—as when an office, with the power of it, is constituted and limited by the law of the land, there is no more required to invest any man in that office or to give him that power than the due observance of the means and way prescribed in the law to that end. The way, then, whereby the elders of the church do come to participate of the power and authority that Christ hath appointed to be exercised in His church, is by their and the church’s due observance of the rules and laws given by Him for their election and setting apart unto that office (Heb 5:4-5; Act 14:23).

5) On this account they receive their power from Christ Himself alone, and that immediately. For the means used for their participation of it are not recipient of the power itself formally, nor do authoritatively collate²⁷ or confer it. Only the laws of Christ are executed in a way of obedience, so that though they are chosen and set apart to their office by the church, yet they are made overseers by the Holy Ghost (Act 20:28). Though they have their power *by* the church, yet they have it not *from* the church; nor was that power whereof they are made partakers, as was said, formally resident in the body of the church, before their participation of it, but *really* in Christ Himself alone, and *morally* in His Word or law. Thence is the rule and guidance of the church committed unto them by Christ (Heb 13:7, 17; 1Pe 5:2; 1Ti 3:5).

²⁶ **regularly** – in conformity to rule.

²⁷ **collate** – bestow; used for bishops giving benefices to clergymen.

6) This authority and power thus received from Christ, is what they exert and put forth in all their ministerial administrations, in all that they do as ministers in the house of God, either in His worship or in the rule of the church itself. They exercise the authority of Christ that He hath in His law appointed to be exercised in His church; and from that authority is due order given unto the administration of all the ordinances of worship. An obligation unto obedience to acts of rule doth thence also ensue, so that they who despise them despise the authority of Christ.

7) When, as elders, they do or declare anything in the name of the church, they do not, as such, put forth any authority committed unto them from and by the church, but only declare the consent and determination of the church in the exercise of their own liberty and privilege. But the authority that they act by, and that they put forth, is what is committed to themselves, as such, by Jesus Christ.

8) This authority is comprised in the law and constitution of Christ, which themselves exert only *ministerially*. And therefore, whenever they act anything *authoritatively*—which they are not enabled for or warranted in by the word of the gospel, or do anything without or contrary unto rule—all such actings, as to any spiritual effect of the gospel or obligation on the consciences of men, are *ipso facto*²⁸ null, and are no way ratified in heaven, where all their orderly actings are made valid—that is, by Christ Himself in His Word.

9) The reason, therefore, why the *consent* of the church is required unto the authoritative acting of the elders therein is not because from thence any authority doth accrue unto them anew, that virtually and radically²⁹ they had not before, but because by the rule of the gospel this is required to the orderly acting of their power; which without it would be contrary to rule, and therefore ineffectual—as also it must needs be from the nature of the thing itself, for no act can take place in the church without or against its own consent while its obedience is voluntary and of choice.

But if it be asked, “What, then, shall the elders do in case the church refuse to consent unto such acts as are indeed according to rule, and warranted by the institution of Christ?” it is answered, that they are a) Diligently to *instruct* them from the Word in their duty, making known the mind of Christ unto them in the matter under consideration; b) To declare unto them the *danger* of their dissent in obstructing the edification of the body, to the dishonor of the Lord Christ and their own spiritual disadvantage; c) To *wait patiently* for the concurrence of the grace of God with their ministry in giving light and obedience unto the church; and d) In case of the church’s continuance in any failure of duty, to seek for advice and *counsel* from the elders and brethren of other churches. All these particulars might be enlarged, would the nature of our present design and work permit it.

Q. 29. What is the duty of the church towards their elders, pastors, or teachers?

A. ^aTo have them in reverence and honor for their office and work’s sake; ^bto obey them conscientiously in all things wherein they speak unto them in the name of the Lord; ^cto

²⁸ *ipso facto* – Latin: by the fact itself.

²⁹ **radically** – fundamentally.

pray earnestly for them, that they may, and to exhort them, if need require, to fulfil the work of the ministry; ^dto communicate unto them of their temporals, for their comfortable subsistence in the world and usefulness unto others; ^ewisely to order things by their direction, so as that they may be among them without fear; ^fto abide with and stand by them in their sufferings for the gospel and service of Christ among them.

^a1Th 5:12-13; 1Ti 5:17 ^bHeb 13:17; 1Co 16:16 ^cEph 6:18-19; Col 4:3; 2Th 3:1;
Col 4:17 ^dGal 6:6; 1Co 9:14 ^e1Co 16:10 ^f2Ti 1:16-18; 4:16

Q. 30. Are there any differences in the office or offices of the guides, rulers, elders, or ministers of the church?

A. The office of them that are teachers is one and the same among them all; but where there are many in the same church, it is the will of Christ that they should be peculiarly assigned unto such special work in the discharge of their office-power as their gifts received from Him do peculiarly fit them for and the necessities of the church require.

Rom 12:4-8; 1Co 12:4-6, 8; 1Pe 4:10; 5:2

Explanation. The office of them that are to instruct the church in the name and authority of Christ is one and the same, as hath been showed before. And there are many names that are equally accommodated unto all that are partakers of it, as elders, bishops, guides. They a) are all alike elders, alike bishops, alike guides; b) have the one office in common among them, and every one the whole [office] entire unto himself.

But there are names also given unto them whereby they are distinguished not as to office, but as to their work and employment in the discharge of that office; such are “pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11), which are placed as distinct persons in their work, partakers of the same office.

1) Differing gifts

Now, the foundation of this distinction and difference lies in the different gifts that they have received; for although it be required in them all that they have received all those gifts, abilities, and qualifications that are necessary for the work of the ministry, yet as to the degrees of their participation of their gifts, some may more excel in one, others in another. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all...For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit,” etc. (1Co 12:4-6, 8). All these gifts are bestowed upon them to be exercised and laid out for the profit and benefit of the church. “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1Co 12:7). Therefore everyone is in a special manner to attend unto the exercise and use of that gift wherein he doth excel, or that tends most to the edification of the church—every man being to minister according as he hath received (1Pe 4:10).

2) Nature of the work

The nature of the work of the ministry in the church may be referred unto two heads or ends in general: a) The *instruction* of it in the knowledge of God in Christ, and the mysteries of the gospel, that it might grow in grace, wisdom, saving light, and

knowledge; b) The *exhortation* of it to walk answerable unto light received, in holiness and universal obedience.

Now, though these several ends of the ministry cannot be divided or separated, yet they may be distinguished and so carried on distinctly; that in the one, knowledge or light may be firstly and principally intended, so as to lead unto obedience; in the other, holiness may be firstly designed, as springing from gospel light or knowledge. Hence, therefore, are the elders of the church principally to attend unto the work, or the end of the ministry, that by the Holy Ghost they are most suited unto. Therefore, the church—following the intimations of the Holy Ghost in communicating His gifts in variety as He pleaseth and attending to their own edification—may and ought, among those whom they choose to the office of elders or ministers, also design them in particular unto the special work that they are especially fitted and prepared for; and this, upon their being chosen and set apart, they are accordingly to attend unto. “He that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation” (Rom 12:7-8). Their office, then, is the same; but their teaching work and employment, on the grounds mentioned, distinct and different.

Q. 31. Are there appointed any elders in the church whose office and duty consist in rule and government only?

A. Elders not called to teach ordinarily or administer the sacraments, but to assist and help in the rule and government of the church, are mentioned in the Scripture. Rom 12:8; 1Co 12:28; 1Ti 5:17

Explanation. This office of *ruling elders* in the church is much opposed by some,³⁰ and especially by them who have least reason so to do. For, first, they object against them that they are *lay*³¹ elders, when those with whom they have to do deny that distinction of the church into the clergy and laity. For although they allow the distribution of it into officers and the multitude of the brethren, yet they maintain that the whole church is God’s clergy—His lot and portion (1Pe 5:3). Again, they affirm them to be elders, and therein not merely of the members of the church, but officers set apart unto their office according to rule, or the appointment of Christ. And if by *laity* the people distinct from the officers of the church are to be understood, the very term of a *lay elder* implies a contradiction, as designing one who is and is not a church officer.

Besides, [they] themselves do principally govern the church by such whom they esteem laymen, as not in holy orders,³² to whom the principal part of its rule, at least in the execution of it, is committed; which renders their objection to this sort of church

³⁰ Owen’s distinction of two kinds of elders (roughly summarized as teaching and ruling) remains a controversial topic among conservative churches. In contrast to Owen’s position, some point to the scriptural implications of the inherent equality of all the elders to deny a *formal* distinction among them, while admitting differences among the elders of activity and responsibility due to gifting and ability.

³¹ **lay** – not ordained.

³² **holy orders** – ordination as a minister.

officers unreasonable. Others, also, have given advantage by making this office *annual* or *biennial* in those who are chosen unto it; which, though they plead the necessity of [this for] their churches—as not having persons meet for this work and duty who are willing to undertake it constantly during their lives, without such a contribution for their maintenance as they are not able to afford—yet the wisest of them do acknowledge an irregularity in what they do, and wish it remedied.

But this hinders not but that such church officers are indeed designed in the Scripture, and of whom frequent mention is made in the ancient writers; and footsteps also yet remain in most churches of their institution, though woefully corrupted. Besides that some light in this matter may be taken from the church of the Jews³³—wherein the elders of the people were joined in rule with the priests, both in the Sanhedrin and all lesser assemblies (Mat 26:3-5, 57; 27:1; Mar 14:53; Luk 22:66; Act 22:5; 24:1; 25:15)—there is in the gospel express mention of persons that were assigned peculiarly for rule and government in the church, as 1 Corinthians 12:28. And it is in vain pretended that those words, “helps, governments,” do denote gifts only, seeing the apostle expressly enumerates the persons in office, or officers, that the Lord Christ then used in the foundation and rule of the churches as then planted.

Also, “he that *ruleth*” is distinguished from him that *teacheth* and him that *exhorteth* (Rom 12:7-8) and is prescribed diligence as his principal qualification in the discharge of his duty. The words of the apostle to this purpose are express: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1Ti 5:17). For the words expressly assign two sorts of elders, whereof some only attend unto rule; others, moreover, labor in the Word and doctrine. Neither doth that word, as some would have it, “labour in the word,” intend any other labor but what is incumbent on all the pastors and teachers of the church as their constant duty (Rom 16:12; Act 20:35; 1Th 5:12). Now, can we suppose that the apostle would affirm them to be worthy of double honor whom, comparing with others, he notes as remiss and negligent in their work? For it seems that others were more diligent in the discharge of that duty, which was no less theirs, if only one sort of elders be here intended. The Scripture is not wont to commend such persons as worthy of double honor, but rather to propose them as meet for double shame and punishment (Jer 48:10; 1Co 9:16). And they are unmindful of their own interest who would have bishops that attend to the rule of the church to be distinctly intended by the elders that rule well, seeing the apostle expressly preferreth before and above them those that attend constantly to the Word and doctrine.

Besides what is thus expressly spoken concerning the appointment of this sort of elders in the church, their usefulness in the necessity of their work and employment is evident. Whereas a constant care in the church that the conversation of all the members of it be such as becometh the gospel, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ be not evil spoken of, is of great concernment and importance; and the pastors and teachers, being [called] to give up themselves continually unto prayer and the ministry of the Word,

³³ **church of the Jews** – nation of Israel functioning as God’s congregation.

cannot attend unto the constant and daily oversight thereof—the usefulness of these elders, whose proper and peculiar work it is to have regard unto the holy walking of the church, must needs be manifest unto all. But whereas in most churches there is little or no regard unto the *personal holiness* of the members of them, it is no wonder that no account should be had of them who are ordained by the Lord Christ to look after it and promote it.

The qualification of these elders, with the way of their call and setting apart unto their office, being the same with those of the teaching elders before insisted on, need not be here again repeated. Their authority, also, in the whole rule of the church, is every way the same with that of the other sort of elders; and they are to act in the execution of it with equal respect and regard from the church. Yea, the business of rule being peculiarly committed unto them, and they required to attend thereunto with diligence in a special manner, the work thereof is principally theirs, as that of laboring in the Word and doctrine doth especially belong unto the pastors and teachers of the churches. This institution is abused when either unmeet persons are called to this office, or those that are called do not attend unto their duty with diligence, or do act only in it by the guidance of the teaching officers without a sense of their own authority or due respect from the church.

7. Deacons

Q. 32. Is there no other ordinary office in the church but only that of elders?

A. Yes, of deacons also.

Q. 33. What are the deacons of the church?

A. Approved men chosen by the church to take care for the necessities of the poor belonging thereunto, and other outward occasions of the whole church, by the collection, keeping, and distribution of the alms and other supplies of the church; set apart and commended to the grace of God therein by prayer. Act 6:3, 5-6; Phi 1:1; 1Ti 3:8-13

Explanation. The office of the deacon, the nature, end, and use of it, the qualifications of the persons to be admitted unto it, [and] the way and manner of their election and setting apart, are all of them plainly expressed in the Scripture. “There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business...And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen...whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Act 6:1-3, 5-6). “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy

lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless...the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1Ti 3:8-13). These things are thus plain and express in the Scripture.

But whereas many have grown weary of the observation of the institutions of the gospel, this office hath for a long time been lost among the most of Christians. By some the name is retained, but applied to another work, duty, and employment than this to which it is peculiarly appropriated in the Scripture. Their proper and original work of taking care for the poor, they say, is provided for by others; and therefore that office being needless, another, unto another purpose, under the same name, is erected. Such are deacons that may read service, preach, and baptize when they have license thereunto. But this choice to reject an office of the appointment of Christ, under pretense of provision made for the duties of it another way, and the erecting of one not appointed by Him, seems not equal. But, whereas it is our duty in all things to have regard to the authority of Christ and His appointments in the gospel, if we claim the privilege of being called after His name, some think that if what He hath appointed may be colorably³⁴ performed another way without respect unto His institutions, that is [by] far the best.

Biblical guidance for deacons

But, omitting the practice of other men, the things that concern this office in the church are, as was said, clear in the Scripture:

1) The persons called unto it are to be of *honest report*, furnished with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially with wisdom (Act 6:3), and those other endowments useful in the discharge of their duty mentioned (1Ti 3:8-13).

2) The way whereby they come to be made partakers of this office is by the choice or *election* of the church (Act 6:2-3, 5), whereupon they are solemnly to be set apart by prayer.

3) Their work or duty consists in a daily ministrations unto the necessities of the poor *saints*, or members of the church (Act 6:1-2).

4) To this end, that they may be enabled so to do, it is ordained that every *first day [of the week]* the members of the church do contribute, according as God enables them, of their substance for the supply of the wants of the poor (1Co 16:2); and also occasionally, as necessity shall require or God move their hearts by His grace.

5) Hereunto is to be added whatever by the providence of God may be conferred upon the church for its outward advantage, with reference unto the end mentioned (Act 4:34-35).

6) These supplies of the church being committed to the care and charge of the *deacons*, they are from thence to minister with diligence and wisdom unto the necessities of the poor; that so the needy may be supplied, that there may be none that lack, the rich may contribute of their riches according to the mind of Christ and in obedience unto His

³⁴ colorably – plausibly.

command; that those who minister well in this office may “purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith” (1Ti 3:13); and that, in all, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified with praise and thanksgiving.

Duties of deacons

It belongs, therefore, unto persons called unto this office,

1) To acquaint themselves with the *outward condition* of those that appear to be poor and needy in the church, whether by the addresses of such poor ones, who are bound to make known their wants, occasions, and necessities unto them, or by the information of others, or their own observation.

2) To acquaint the elders and the church, as occasion requireth, with the necessities of the poor under their care, that those who are able may be stirred up by the elders to a free supply and contribution.

3) To dispose of what they are entrusted with faithfully, cheerfully, tenderly, without partiality or preferring one before another, for any outward respect whatever.

4) To keep and give an account unto the church, when called for, of what they have received and how they have disposed of it; that so they may be known to have well discharged their office—that is, with care, wisdom, and tenderness—whereby they procure to themselves a good degree, with boldness in the faith, and the church is encouraged to entrust them further with this sacrifice of their alms, which is so acceptable unto God.

8. Members

Q. 34. Wherein consists the general duty of the whole church, and every member thereof, in their proper station and condition?

A. In performing, doing, and keeping inviolate³⁵ all the commands and institutions of Jesus Christ, walking unblamably and fruitfully in the world, holding forth the Word of truth, and glorifying the Lord Christ in and by the profession of His name, and keeping His testimony unto the end.

Mat 28:20; Act 2:42; Phi 2:15-16; 4:8-9; 1Th 3:8; 1Pe 4:10-14; 1Ti 3:15; Heb 10:23

Explanation. Besides the general duties of Christianity incumbent on all believers or disciples of Christ, as such, there are certain special duties required of them as gathered into church societies, upon the account of a special trust committed unto them in that state and condition; for,

1) Keeping the commands of Christ

The church being appointed as the *seat* and subject of all the institutions of Christ and ordinances of gospel worship, it is its duty—that is, of the whole body, and every member in his proper place—to use all care, watchfulness, and diligence that all the commands of Christ be kept inviolate, and all His institutions observed according to His

³⁵ **inviolate** – unbroken.

mind and will. Thus, those “added to the church” (Act 2:47) together with the whole church, “continued steadfastly” (which argues care, circumspection, and diligence) “in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Act 2:42); which principal duties are enumerated to express their respect towards all. This is their “standing fast in the Lord,” that was a matter of such joy to the apostle when he found it in the Thessalonians: “For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord” (1Th 3:8-9). [And it was] that order and steadfastness that He rejoiced over in the Colossians: “For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ” (Col 2:5). Where this duty is despised, men contenting themselves with what is done by others, there is a great neglect of that faithfulness in obedience that the church owes unto Jesus Christ.

2) *Manifesting a holy walk*

The *glory* of the Lord Christ and the doctrine of the gospel, to be manifested in and by the power of a holy, exemplary conversation, is committed unto the church and all the members of it. This is one end wherefore the Lord Christ calls them out of the world, separates them to be a peculiar people unto Himself, brings them forth unto a visible profession, and puts His name upon them—namely, that in their walking and conversation He may show forth the holiness of His doctrine, and power of His Spirit, grace, and example, to effect in them all holiness, godliness, righteousness, and honesty in the world. Hence are they earnestly exhorted unto these things: “Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phi 4:8); and that to this end, the doctrine of the gospel may be adorned, and Christ glorified in all things (Ti 2:10). And those who fail herein are said to be “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phi 3:18), as hindering the progress of the doctrine thereof by rendering it undesirable in their conversation.

This also, therefore, even the duty of universal holiness, with a special regard unto the honor of Christ and the gospel, that they are called and designed to testify and express in the world, is incumbent on the church and every member of it, namely, as the apostle speaks, “that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” among whom they are to “shine as lights in the world” (Phi 2:15).

3) *Declaring the truth*

The care of *declaring* and manifesting the truth is also committed unto them. Christ hath made the church to be the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1Ti 3:15); where the truth of the gospel is to be firmly seated, founded, fixed, established, and then lifted up in the ways of Christ’s appointment, to be seen, discerned, and known by others. As this is done principally in the preaching of the gospel by the elders of the church, and in their contending “for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3), so it is also the duty of the whole church to hold “forth the word of life” (Phi 2:16) by ministering of the gift that every man hath received (1Pe 4:10), in the way of Christ’s ap-

pointment. In these and the like instances doth our Lord Jesus Christ require of His church that they express in the world their subjection unto Him and His authority and that they abide therein unto the end against all opposition whatever.

The sinful neglect of churches in the discharge of their duty herein was one great means of that apostasy from the rule of the gospel that they generally of old fell into. When the members of them began to think that they had no advantage by their state and condition, but only the outward participation of some ordinances of worship, and no duty incumbent on them but only to attend and follow the motions and actings of their guides, the whole societies quickly became corrupt, and fit to be disposed of according to the carnal interest of those that had by their neglect and sin gotten dominion over them. At all times, as the people were negligent in their duty, the *leaders* of them were apt to usurp undue authority. When the one sort will not do what they ought, the other are ready to take upon them what they ought not. It is a circumspect performance of duty on all hands alone that will keep all sorts of persons in the church within those bounds and limits, and up to those rights and privileges, that Christ hath allotted and granted unto them. Herein alone doth the order, honor, and beauty of the church consist.

Church members, therefore, are to search and inquire after the particular duties that, as such, are incumbent on them; as also to consider what influence their special state and condition, as they are church members, ought to have into all the duties of their obedience as they are Christians. For this privilege is granted unto them for their edification, that is, their furtherance in their whole course of walking before God. If this be neglected—if they content themselves with a name to live in this or that church, to partake of the ordinances that are stated and solemnly administered only—what would have been to their advantage may prove to be a snare and temptation unto them. What these special duties are, in the particular instances of them, is of too large a consideration here to be insisted on. Besides, it is the great duty of the guides of the church to be inculcating³⁶ them into the minds of those committed to their charge; for the church's due performance of its duty is their honor, crown, and reward.

9. Prayer and Preaching

Q. 35. Whence do you reckon prayer, which is a part of moral and natural worship, among the institutions of Christ in His church?

A. On many accounts, as ^abecause the Lord Christ hath commanded His church to attend unto the worship of God therein; ^bbecause He bestows on the ministers of the church gifts and ability of prayer for the benefit and edification thereof; [because] ^cHe hath appointed that all His other ordinances should be administered with prayer, whereby it becomes a part of them; ^dbecause [He] Himself ministers in the holy place as the great High Priest of His Church, to present their prayers unto God at the throne of grace; ^e

³⁶ **inculcating** – impressing on the mind by frequent repetition.

because in all the prayers of the church there is a special regard had unto Himself and the whole work of His mediation.

^aLuk 18:1; 21:36; Rom 12:12; 1Ti 2:1-2 ^bEph 4:8, 12-13; Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6

^cAct 2:42; 1Ti 4:5 ^dRev 8:3-4; Heb 4:14-16; 6:20; 10:19-22

^eJoh 14:13; 15:16; 16:23, 26; Eph 3:14-15

Q. 36. May not the church, in the solemn worship of God and celebration of the ordinances of the gospel, make use of and content itself in the use of forms of prayer in an unknown tongue³⁷ composed by others and prescribed unto them?

A. So to do would be ^acontrary to one principal end of prayer itself, that is that believers may therein apply themselves to the throne of grace for spiritual supplies according to the present condition, wants, and exigencies³⁸ of their souls; ^bto the main end that the Lord Jesus Christ aimed at in supplying men with gifts for the discharge of the work of the ministry, tending to render the promise of sending the Holy Ghost, which is the immediate cause of the church's preservation and continuance, needless and useless. Moreover, ^cit will render the discharge of the duty of ministers unto several precepts and exhortations of the gospel, for the use, stirring up, and exercise of their gifts, impossible; and ^dthereby hinder the edification of the church, the great end of all ordinances and institutions.

^aRom 8:26; Phi 4:6; Heb 4:16; 1Pe 4:7 ^bEph 4:8, 12-13 ^c1Ti 4:14;

2Ti 1:6-7; Col 4:17; Mat 25:14-17 ^d1Co 12:7

Q. 37. Is the constant work of preaching the gospel by the elders of the church necessary?

A. It is so, both on the part of the elders or ministers themselves, of whom that duty is strictly required, and who principally therein labor and watch for the good of the flock; and on the part of the church, for the furtherance of their faith and obedience by instruction, reproof, exhortation, and consolation.

Mat 24:45-51; Rom 12:7-8; 1Co 9:16-18; Eph 4:11-13;

1Ti 4:15-16; 5:17; 2Ti 2:24-25; 3:14-17; 4:2

10. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Q. 38. Who are the proper subjects of baptism?

A. Professing believers, if not baptized in their infancy, and their infant seed.³⁹

³⁷ **forms of prayer in an unknown tongue** – prepared Latin mass of the Roman Catholic Church.

³⁸ **exigencies** – necessities.

³⁹ This is the view of the Congregationalists (as John Owen was) and the Presbyterians. Baptists believe Scripture teaches baptism of believers who can give profession of their faith after conversion.

“1. Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death^a and resurrection; of his being engrafted in-

Mat 28:19; Act 2:38-39; 16:33-34; 1Co 1:16; 7:14; Col 2:12-14, with Gen 17:10-12

Q. 39. Where and to whom is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper to be administered?

A. In the church, or assembly of the congregation, to all the members of it, rightly prepared and duly assembled, or to such of them as are so assembled. 1Co 11:20-22, 28-29, 33; Act 2:46

Q. 40. How often is that ordinance to be administered?

A. Every first day of the week, or at least as often as opportunity and convenience⁴⁰ may be obtained. 1Co 11:26; Act 20:7

11. Church Discipline

Q. 41. What is the discipline of the church?

A. It consists in the due exercise of that authority and power that the Lord Christ, in and by His Word, hath granted unto the church for its continuance, increase, and preservation in purity, order, and holiness, according to His appointment. Mat 16:19; Rom 12:8; 2Co 10:4-6; Rev 2:2, 20

Explanation. Several things are to be considered about this discipline of the church, as,

1) The *foundation* of it, which is a grant of power and authority made unto it by Jesus Christ as mediator, head, king, and lawgiver of His church. All discipline being an act of power, and this being exercised in and about things internal and spiritual, no men can of themselves, or by grant of any others, have any right or authority to or in the exercise thereof. Whoever hath any interest herein or right hereunto, it must be granted unto him from above by Jesus Christ, and that as mediator and head of His church. As all church power is in a special manner, by the authority and grant of the Father, vested in Him alone (Mat 28:18; Eph 1:20-23), so the *nature* of it, which is spiritual, the *objects* of it, which are the consciences and gospel privileges of believers, with the *ends* of it—

to him; of ^bremission of sins; and of ^cgiving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life. (^aRom 6:3-5; Col 2:12; Gal 3:27; ^bMar 1:4; Act 22:16; ^cRom 6:4)

“2. Those who do actually profess ^drepentance towards God, faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ, are the only proper subjects of this ordinance. (^dMar 16:16; Act 8:36-37; 2:41; 8:12; 18:8)

“3. The outward element to be used in this ordinance ^eis water, wherein the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (^eMat 28:19-20; Act 8:38)

“4. Immersion, or dipping of the person ^fin water, is necessary to the due administration of this ordinance. (^fMat 3:16; Joh 3:23)” (Second London Baptist Confession, 29).

See also *Baptism: A Burial* by Charles Spurgeon, and *Baptism: The Heaven-Drawn Picture* by Peter Masters; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁴⁰ **convenience** – suitability.

namely, the glory of God in Christ, with the spiritual and eternal good of the souls of men—do all manifest that it can have no other right nor foundation. This in the first place is to be fixed, that no authority can be exercised in the church but what is derived from Jesus Christ; as was spoken before.

2) The *means* whereby the Lord Christ doth communicate this power and authority unto His church is His Word, or His law and constitution concerning it in the gospel, so that it is exactly limited and bounded thereby. No power or authority can be exercised in the church but what is granted and conveyed unto it by the Word, seeing that Christ communicates no power or authority any other way. Whatever of that nature is beside it or beyond it is mere usurpation and null⁴¹ in its exercise. Herein is the commission of the guides and rulers of the church expressed, that they are not to exceed in anything. Herein are bounds and limits fixed to the actings of the whole church, and of every part and member of it.

3) This power or authority, thus granted and conveyed by Jesus Christ, is to be exercised, as to the *manner* of the administration of discipline, with skill and diligence (Rom 12:8; 1Co 12). The skill required hereunto is a gift or an ability of mind, bestowed by the Holy Ghost upon men to put in execution the laws of Christ for the government of the church in the way and order by Him appointed, or a spiritual wisdom, whereby men know how to behave themselves in the house of God in their several places for its due edification in faith and love (1Ti 3:15). This ability of mind to make a due application of the laws of the gospel unto persons, times, and actions, with their circumstances, is such a gift of the Holy Ghost as whereof there are several degrees, answering to the distinct duties that are incumbent on the rulers of the church on the one hand, and the members on the other. Where this skill and wisdom is wanting, there it is impossible that the discipline of the church should be preserved or carried on. Hereunto also diligence and watchfulness are to be added, without which ability and power will never obtain their proper end in a due manner (Rom 12:6-8).

4) The *end* of this discipline is the continuance, increase, and preservation of the church, according to the rule of its first institution (1Co 5:7). This power hath Christ given His church for its conservation, without which it must necessarily decay and come to nothing. Nor is it to be imagined that where any church is called and gathered according to the mind of Christ, He hath left it destitute of power and authority to preserve itself in that state and order that He hath appointed unto it. What was one principal cause of the decays of the Asian churches⁴² was the neglect of this discipline, the power and privilege whereof the Lord had left unto them and entrusted them with, for their own preservation in order, purity, and holiness. Therefore, for the neglect thereof, they were greatly blamed by Him (Rev 2:14-15, 20; 3:1-2); as is also the church of Corinth by the apostle (1Co 5:2); as they are commended who attended unto the diligent exercise of it (Rev 2:2; 3:9). The disuse, also, of it hath been the occasion of all the defilements, abominations, and confusions that have spread themselves over many churches in the world.

⁴¹ **null** – invalid.

⁴² **Asian churches** – churches of Asia Minor mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3.

Q. 42. Unto whom is the power and administration of this discipline committed by Jesus Christ?

A. As to the authority to be exerted in it, in the things wherein the whole church is concerned, unto the elders; as unto trial, judgment, and consent in and unto its exercise, unto the whole brotherhood; as unto love, care, and watchfulness in private and particular cases, to every member of the church.

Mat 24:45; Eph 4:11-12; Act 20:28; 1Ti 3:5; 5:17; Heb 13:7, 17; 1Pe 5:2;
1Th 5:12; Gal 6:1-2; 1Co 4:14; 5:2, 4, 5; 2Co 2:6-8; 2Ti 4:2

Explanation. It hath been showed that this power is granted unto the church by virtue of the *law* and constitution of Christ. Now, this law assigns the means and way whereby any persons do obtain an interest therein, and makes the just allotments to all concerned in it. What this law, constitution, or Word of Christ assigns unto any, [is] such, that they are the first seat and subject of [it], by whatever way or means they come to be entrusted therein. Thus, that power or authority that is given unto the elders of the church doth not first formally reside in the body of the church unorganized or distinct from them, though they are called unto their office by their suffrage and choice; but they are themselves, as such, the first subject of office-power, for so is the will of the Lord Christ. Nor is the interest of the whole church in this power of discipline, whatever it be, given unto it by the elders, but is immediately granted unto it by the will and law of the Lord Jesus.

1) In this way and manner, the authority above described is given in the first place, as such, unto the *elders* of the church. This authority was before explained in answer unto the 28th question, as also was the way whereby they receive it. It is that power of office whereby they are enabled for the discharge of their whole duty, in the teaching and ruling of the church, called the power of the keys (Mat 16:19). This expression, being metaphorical⁴³ and in general liable unto many interpretations, is to be understood according to the declaration made of it in those particular instances wherein it is expressed. Nor is it a twofold power or authority that the elders of the church have committed unto them, one to teach and another to rule, commonly called the power of order and of jurisdiction; but it is one power of office, the duties whereof are of several kinds, referred unto the two general heads, first of teaching, by preaching the Word and celebration of the sacraments, and secondly of rule or government.

By virtue hereof are they made rulers over the house of God (Mat 24:45), stewards in His house (1Co 4:1), overseers of the church (Act 20:28; 1Pe 5:2), guides unto the church (Heb 13:7, 17). Not that they have a supreme or *autocratorical* power committed unto them, to enable them to do what seems right and good in their own eyes, seeing they are expressly bound up unto the terms of their commission *to teach men to do and observe all and only what Christ hath commanded* (Mat 28:19-20); nor have they by virtue of it any dominion in or over the church—that is, the laws, rules, or privileges of it—or the consciences of the disciples of Christ—to alter, change, add, diminish, or bind

⁴³ **metaphorical** – figurative.

by their own authority (1Pe 5:3; Mar 10:42-44). But it is a power merely *ministerial*, in whose exercise they are unto the Lord Christ accountable servants (Heb 13:17; Mat 24:45), and servants of the church for Jesus' sake (2Co 4:5). This authority, in the discipline of the church, they exert and put forth by virtue of their office—and not either as declaring of the power of the church itself, or acting what is delegated unto them thereby, but as ministerially exercising the authority of Christ committed unto themselves.

2) The body of the church, or the multitude of the brethren—women being excepted by special prohibition⁴⁴ (1Co 14:34-35; 1Ti 2:11-12)—is, by the law and constitution of Christ in the gospel, interested in the administration of this power of discipline in the church, so far as,

a) To consider, try, and make a judgment in and about all persons, things, and causes, in reference whereunto it is to be exercised. Thus, the brethren at Jerusalem joined in the consideration of the observation of Mosaic ceremonies with the apostles and elders (Act 15:23); and the multitude of them to whom letters were sent about it likewise did the same (Act 15:30-32); and this they thought it their duty and concernment to do (Act 21:22). And, they are blamed who applied not themselves unto this duty (1Co 5:2-6). Thence are the epistles of Paul to the churches to instruct them in their duties and privileges in Christ, and how they ought to behave themselves in the ordering of all things among them according to His mind. These are directed unto the churches themselves, either jointly with their elders, or distinctly from them (Phi 1:1). The whole preservation of church order is, on the account of this duty, recommended unto them. Neither can what they do in compliance with their guides and rulers be any part of their obedience unto the Lord Christ, unless they make previously thereunto a rational consideration and judgment, by the rule, of what is to be done. Neither is the church of Christ to be ruled without its knowledge or against its will, nor in anything is blind obedience acceptable to God.

b) The brethren of the church are entrusted with the privilege of giving and testifying their consent unto all acts of church power, which, though it belong not formally unto the authority of them, is necessary unto their validity and efficacy; and that so far forth as that they are said to do and act what is done and effected thereby (1Co 5:4-5, 13; 2Co 2:6-8). They who have this privilege of consent, which hath so great an influence into the action and validity of it, have also the liberty of dissent when anything is proposed to be done, the warrant whereof from the Word and the rule of its performance not [being] evident unto them.

Q. 43. Wherein doth the exercise of the authority for discipline committed unto the elders of the church consist?

A. ^aIn personal, private admonition of any member or members of the church, in case of sin, error, or any miscarriage known unto themselves; ^bin public admonition in case of offenses persisted in, and brought [in an] orderly [way] to the knowledge and considera-

⁴⁴ **women...prohibition** – Many churches today disagree with Owen's application of these texts to the activity of voting, permitting women to participate.

tion of the church; ^cin the ejection of obstinate offenders from the society and communion of the church; ^din exhorting, comforting, and restoring to the enjoyment and exercise of church privileges such as are recovered from the error of their ways—all according to the laws, rules, and directions of the gospel.

^aMat 18:15; 1Th 5:14; 1Co 4:14; Ti 1:13; 2:15; 2Ti 4:2 ^b1Ti 5:19-20; Mat 18:16-17
^cTi 3:10; 1Ti 1:20; Mat 18:17; 1Co 5:5; Gal 5:12 ^d2Co 2:7-8; Gal 6:1; 2Th 3:15

Q. 44. May the church cast any person out of its communion without previous admonition?

A. It may in some cases, where the offense is notorious and the scandal grievous, so that nothing be done against other general rules. 1Co 5

Q. 45. Wherein doth the liberty and duty of the whole brotherhood, in the exercise of discipline in the church in particular, consist?

A. In a meek consideration of the condition and temptations of offenders, with the nature of their offenses, when orderly proposed unto the church; in judging with the elders, according to rule, what, in all cases of offense, is necessary to be done for the good of the offenders themselves, and for the edification and vindication of the whole church, in their consent unto, and concurrence in, the admonition, ejection, pardoning, and restoring of offenders, as the matter shall require.

Gal 6:1-2; 1Co 5:2, 4-5, 12; 6:2; 2Co 2:6-8

Q. 46. What is the duty of private members in reference unto the discipline appointed by Christ in His church?

A. It is their duty, in their mutual watch over one another, to exhort each other unto holiness and perseverance; and if they observe anything in the ways and walk of any of their fellow-members not according unto the rule and the duty of their profession, which, therefore, gives them offense, to admonish them thereof in private, with love, meekness, and wisdom; and in case they prevail not unto their amendment, to take the assistance of some other brethren in the same work; and if they fail in success therein also, to report the matter, by the elders' direction, unto the whole church. Mat 18:16-18; 1Th 5:14

Explanation. In these questions, an inquiry is made after the exercise of discipline in the church, as to that part of it that belongs unto the reproof and correction of miscarriages according to the distribution of right, power, and privilege before explained.

The first act hereof consists in *private admonition*; for so hath our Lord ordained, that in case any brother or member of the church do in anything walk disorderly and not according to the rule of the gospel, he or they unto whom it is observed, and who are thereby offended, may and ought to admonish the person or persons so offending of their miscarriage and offense. Concerning this is to be observed,

1) Prior requirements

What is previously required thereunto; and that is,

a) That in all the members of the church there ought to be love “without dissimulation.”⁴⁵ They are to “be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love” (Rom 12:9-10); which, as they are taught of God, so they are greatly exhorted thereunto (Heb 13:1). This love is the bond of perfection⁴⁶ (Col 3:14), the most excellent way and means of preserving church order and furthering the edification thereof (1Co 13). Without [this love] well seated and confirmed in the hearts and minds of church members, no duty of their relation can ever be performed in a due manner.

b) This love is to exert and put forth itself in tender care and watchfulness for the good of each other; which are to work by mutual exhortations, informations, and instructions—according as opportunities do offer themselves, or as the necessities of any do seem to require (Heb 3:13; 10:24).

2) Shared responsibility of all members

This duty of admonishing offenders privately and personally is common to the elders with all the members of the church; neither doth it belong properly unto the elders as such, but as brethren of the same society. Yet, by virtue of their office, the elders are enabled to do it with more authority morally, though office-power properly be not exercised therein. By virtue, also, of their constant general watch over the whole flock in the discharge of their office, they are enabled to take notice of and discern miscarriages in any of the members sooner than others. But as to the exercise of the discipline of the church in this matter, this duty is equally incumbent on every member of it, according as the obligation on them to watch over one another and to exercise special love towards each other is equal; whence it is distinguished from that private pastoral admonition, which is an act of the teaching office and power, not directly belonging unto the rule or government inquired after. But this admonition is an effect of love; and when it proceedeth not from thence, it is irregular (Mat 18:16-18; Rom 15:14).

3) Required of all members

This duty is so incumbent on every member of the church that, in case of the neglect thereof, he both sinneth against the institution of Christ and makes himself partaker of the sin of the party offending. He is also guilty of his danger and ruin thereby, with all the disadvantage that will accrue to the church by any of the members of it continuing in sin against the rule of the gospel. They have not only liberty thus to admonish one another, but it is their express and indispensable *duty* so to do; the neglect whereof is interpreted by God to be “hatred of our brother,” such as wherewith the love of God is inconsistent (Lev 19:17; 1Jo 3:15; 4:20).

4) Conditions whereby several may go initially

Although this duty be personally incumbent on every individual member of the church, yet this hinders not but if the sin of an offender be known to more than one at the same time, and they jointly take offense thereat, they may together in the first instance admonish him. [This is] yet still but the first and private admonition; which is

⁴⁵ **dissimulation** – hypocrisy.

⁴⁶ **perfection** – maturity; fullness.

otherwise when others are called into assistance who are not themselves acquainted with the offense but only by information, and join in it, not upon the account of their own being offended, but of being desired according unto rule to give assistance to them that are so.

5) With biblical care

The way and manner of the discharge of this duty is that it be done with prudence, tenderness, and due regard unto all circumstances; whence the apostle supposeth a spiritual ability to be necessary for this work: “Ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Rom 15:14). Especially four things are to be diligently heeded:

a) That the whole duty be so managed that the person *offending* may be convinced that it is done out of love to him and affectionate, conscientious care over him, that he may take no occasion thereby for the exasperation⁴⁷ of his own spirit.

b) That the persons admonishing others of their offense do make it appear that what they do is in obedience unto an institution of Christ, and therein to preserve their own souls from sin, as well as to benefit the offenders.

c) That the admonition be grounded on a rule, which alone gives it authority and efficacy.

d) That there be a readiness manifested by them to receive satisfaction, either (1) in case that, upon trial, it appeareth the information they have had of the miscarriage whence the offense arose was undue or not well grounded; or (2) of acknowledgment and repentance.

6) Goals

The ends of this ordinance and institution of Christ are,

a) To keep up love without dissimulation among all the members of the church; for if offenses should abide unremoved, love, which is the bond of perfection, would not long continue in sincerity, which tends to the dissolution of the whole society.

b) To gain the offender by delivering him from the guilt of sin, that he may not lie under it and procure the wrath of God against himself (Lev 19:17).

c) To preserve his person from dishonor and disreputation, and thereby to keep up his usefulness in the church. To this end hath our Lord appointed the discharge of this duty in private, that the failings of men may not be unnecessarily divulged and themselves thereby exposed unto temptation.

d) To preserve the church from that scandal that might befall it by the hasty opening of all the real or supposed failings of its members. And,

e) To prevent its trouble in the public hearing of things that may be otherwise healed and removed.

7) In case these ends are obtained

In case these ends are obtained—either a) by the supposed offending persons *clearing of themselves* and manifesting themselves innocent of the crimes charged on them

⁴⁷ **exasperation** – provocation.

(as Jos 22:21-29; 2Co 7:11), or b) by their *acknowledgment*, repentance, and amendment—then this part of the discipline of the church hath, through the grace of Christ, obtained its appointed effect.

8) In case these ends are not obtained

In case the persons offending be not humbled nor reformed, nor do give satisfaction unto them by whom they are admonished, then hath our Lord ordained a second degree of this private exercise of discipline: that the persons who, being offended, have discharged the foregoing duty themselves according unto rule, shall take unto them others—two or three, as the occasion may seem to require—to join with them in the same work and duty, to be performed in the same manner for the same ends with that before described (Mat 18:15-17). And it is the duty of these persons so called in for assistance,

a) To judge of the crime, fault, or offense reported to them, and not to proceed unless they find it to consist in something expressly contrary to the rule of the gospel, and attested in such manner and with such evidence as their mutual love doth require in them with respect unto their brethren. They are to judge of the testimony that is given concerning the truth of the offense communicated unto them, that they may not seem either lightly to take up a report against their brother or to discredit the testimony of others.

b) In case they find the offense pretended not to be a real offense, indeed contrary to the rule of the gospel, or that it is not aright grounded as to the evidence of it, but taken up upon prejudice or an over-easy credulity,⁴⁸ contrary to the law of the love that is required among church members—as described [in] 1 Corinthians 13, and commanded as the great means of the edification of the church and preservation of its union—then to convince the brother offended of his mistake, and with him to satisfy the person pretended to be the offender, that no breach or schism may happen among the members of the same body.

c) Being satisfied of the crime and testimony, they are to associate themselves with the offended brother in the same work and duty that he himself had before discharged towards the offender.

9) How often

Because there is no determination how often these private admonitions are to be used in case of offense, it is evident from the nature of the thing itself that they are to be reiterated, first the one and then the other, while there is any ground of hope that the ends of them may be obtained, through the blessing of Christ: the brother gained, and the offense taken away. Neither of these, then, is to be deserted or laid aside on the first or second attempt, as though it were performed only to make way for somewhat further; but it is to be waited on with prayer and patience, as an ordinance of Christ appointed for attaining the end aimed at.

⁴⁸ **over-easy credulity** – gullibility.

10) Final step: reported to the church

In case there be not the success aimed at obtained in these several degrees of private admonition, it is then the will of our Lord Jesus Christ that the matter be reported unto the church, that the offended may be publicly admonished thereby and brought to repentance; wherein is to be observed,

a) That the persons who have endeavored in vain to reclaim their offending brother by private admonition are to acquaint the elders of the church with the case and crime, as also what they have done according to rule for the rectifying of it. [The elders], upon that information, are obliged to communicate the knowledge of the whole matter to the church. This is to be done by the elders, as to whom the preservation of order in the church and the rule of its proceeding do belong, as we have showed before.

b) The report made to the church by the elders is to be: (1) Of the *crime*, guilt, or offense; (2) Of the *testimony* given unto the truth of it; (3) Of the *means* used to bring the offender to acknowledgment and repentance; (4) Of his *deportment* under the private previous admonitions, either as to his rejecting of them, or as to any satisfaction tendered—all in order, love, meekness, and tenderness.

c) Things being proposed unto the church, and the offender heard upon the whole of the offense and former proceeding, the whole church or multitude of the brethren are, with the elders, to consider the nature of the offense, with the condition and temptation of the offender, with such a spirit of meekness as our Lord Jesus Christ, in His own person, set them an example of in His dealing with sinners, and which is required in them as His disciples (Gal 6:1-2; 2Co 2:8).

d) The elders and brethren are to judge the offense and the carriage of the offender according to rule; and if the offense be evident and persisted in, then,

e) The offender is to be *publicly admonished* by the elders, with the consent and concurrence of the church (1Th 5:14; 1Ti 5:20; Mat 18:17). This admonition consists of five parts: (1) A *declaration of the crime* or offense, as it is evidenced unto the church; (2) A *conviction of the evil of it*, from the rule or rules transgressed against; (3) A *declaration of the authority* and duty of the church in such cases; (4) A *rebuke of the offender* in the name of Christ, answering the nature and circumstances of the offense; (5) An *exhortation unto humiliation*, repentance, and acknowledgment.

11) Cutting off communion

In case the offender despise this admonition of the church and come not upon it unto repentance, it is the will and appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ that he be *cut off* from all the privileges of the church and cast out from the society thereof, or be excommunicated;⁴⁹ wherein consists the last act of the discipline of the church for the correction of offenders. Herein may be considered,

a) Nature

The *nature* of it, that it is an *authoritative act*, and so principally belongs unto the elders of the church, who therein exert the power that they have received from the Lord

⁴⁹ See *Church Discipline* by John Owen; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Christ, by and with the consent of the church, according to His appointment (Mat 16:19; 18:18; Joh 20:23; 1Co 5:4-5; Ti 3:10; 1Ti 1:20; 2Co 2:6). And both these, the authority of the eldership and the consent of the brethren, are necessary to the validity of the sentence, and that according to the appointment of Christ and the practice of the first churches.

b) Effect

The *effect* of it, which is the cutting off or casting out of the person offending from the communion of the church, in the privileges of the gospel, as consequently from that of all the visible churches of Christ in the earth by virtue of their communion one with another; whereby he is left unto the visible kingdom of Satan in the world (Mat 18:17; 1Co 5:2, 5, 13; 1Ti 1:20; Ti 3:10; Gal 5:12).

c) Ends

The *ends* of it, which are,

- (1) The *gaining* of the party offending, by bringing him to repentance, humiliation, and acknowledgment of his offense (2Co 2:6-7; 13:10);
- (2) The *warning* of others not to do so presumptuously;
- (3) The *preserving* of the church in its purity and order (1Co 5:6-7)—all to the glory of Jesus Christ.

d) Causes

The *causes* of it, or the grounds and reasons on which the church may proceed unto sentence against any offending persons. Now, these are no other but such as they judge, according to the gospel, that the Lord Christ will proceed upon in His final judgment at the last day. For the church judgeth in the name and authority of Christ, and are to exclude none from its communion but those whom they find by the rule that He Himself excludes from His kingdom—and so what they bind on earth is bound by Him in heaven (Mat 18:18). Their sentence herein is to be declared as the declaration of the sentence that the Head of the church and Judge of all will pronounce at the last day—only with this difference, that it is also made known that this sentence of theirs is not final or decretory,⁵⁰ but in order to the prevention of what will be so unless the evil be repented of. Now, although the particular evils, sins, or offenses that may render a person obnoxious unto⁵¹ this censure and sentence are not to be enumerated, by reason of the variety of circumstances that change the nature of actions, yet they may in general be referred unto these heads:

- (1) *Moral evils*, contrary to the light of nature and express commands or prohibitions of the moral law, direct rules of the gospel, or of evil report in the world among men walking according to the rule and light of reason.⁵² In cases of this nature, the church may proceed unto the sentence whereof we speak without previous admonition, in case the matter of fact be notorious, publicly and unquestionably known to be true, and no

⁵⁰ **decretory** – issued by decree.

⁵¹ **obnoxious unto** – liable to.

⁵² Obviously, where “the rule and light of reason” concurs with the law of God.

general rule (which is not to be impeached⁵³ by particular instances) lie against their procedure (1Co 5:3-5; 2Ti 3:2-5).

(2) Offenses against that *mutual love* that is the bond of perfection in the church, if pertinaciously⁵⁴ persisted in (Mat 18:16-17).

(3) *False doctrines* against the fundamentals in faith or worship, especially if maintained with contention to the trouble and disturbance of the peace of the church (Gal 5:12; Ti 3:9-11; 1Ti 6:3-5; Rev 2:14-15).

(4) *Blasphemy* or evil speaking of the ways and worship of God in the church, especially if joined with an intention to hinder the prosperity of the church or to expose it to persecution (1Ti 1:20).

(5) *Desertion*, or total causeless relinquishment of the society and communion of the church; for such are self-condemned, having broken and renounced the covenant of God that they made at their entrance into the church (Heb 10:25-31).

e) *Timing*

The *time* or season of the putting forth the authority of Christ in the church for this censure is to be considered, and that is ordinarily after the admonition before described, and that with due waiting, to be regulated by a consideration of times, persons, temptations, and other circumstances; for,

(1) The church, in proceeding to this sentence, is to express the patience and long-suffering of Christ towards offenders, and not to put it forth without conviction of a present resolved impenitency.

(2) The event and effect of the preceding ordinance of admonition is to be expected; which, though not at present evident, yet, like the Word itself in the preaching of it, may be blessed to a good issue after many days.

f) *Relation to the offender*

The person offending thus cut off, or cast out from the present actual communion of the church, is still to be looked on and accounted as a brother, because of the nature of the ordinance that is intended for his amendment and recovery. “Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2Th 3:15)—unless he manifest his final impenitency by blasphemy and persecution: “Whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1Ti 1:20).

g) *Church’s duties*

The church is, therefore, still to perform the duties of love and care towards such persons,

(1) In *praying* for them, that they may be converted from the error of their way (Jam 5:19-20). “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death” (1Jo 5:16).

(2) In *withdrawing* from them even as to ordinary converse, for their conviction of their state and condition (1Co 5:11): “With such an one no not to eat” (2Th 3:14).

⁵³ **impeached** – violated.

⁵⁴ **pertinaciously** – obstinately.

(3) In *admonishing* him: “Admonish him as a brother” (2Th 3:15), which may be done, [1] *Occasionally*, by any member of the church; [2] *On set purpose*, by the consent and appointment of the whole church; which admonition is to contain *1st*) A *pressing of his sin* from the rule on the conscience of the offender; *2dly*) A *declaration* of the nature of the censure and punishment that he lieth under; *3dly*) A *manifestation* of the danger of his impenitency, in his being either hardened by the deceitfulness of sin or exposed unto new temptations of Satan (Heb 3:13).

h) In case of repentance

In case the Lord Jesus be pleased to give a blessed effect unto this ordinance, in the repentance of the person cut off and cast out of the church, he is,

(1) To be *forgiven* both by those who in a special manner were offended at him and by him, and by the whole church (Mat 18:18; 2Co 2:7).

(2) To be *comforted* under his sorrow (2Co 2:7), and that by, [1] The *application of the promises* of the gospel unto his conscience; [2] A *declaration of the readiness* of the church to receive him again into their love and communion.

(3) *Restored*, [1] By a *confirmation* or testification of the love of the church unto him (2Co 2:8); [2] A *re-admission* unto the exercise and enjoyment of his former privileges in the fellowship of the church—all with a spirit of meekness (Gal 6:1).

12. Adding New Members

Q. 47. The preservation of the church in purity, order, and holiness being provided for, by what way is it to be continued and increased?

A. The way appointed thereunto is by adding such as, being effectually called unto the obedience of faith, shall voluntarily offer themselves unto the society and fellowship thereof. Act 2:41; 2Co 8:5

Explanation. The means appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ for the continuance and increase of the church are either *preparatory* unto it or *instrumentally efficient of it*.

1) The principal means subservient or *preparatory* unto the continuance and increase of the church is the preaching of the Word to the conviction, illumination, and conversion of sinners, whereby they may be made meet to become living stones in this spiritual building, and members of the mystical body of Christ. This is done either a) *ordinarily*, in the assemblies of the church, towards such as come in unto them and attend to the Word dispensed according to the appointment of Christ among them: “If...there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God” (1Co 14:24-25); or b) *occasionally*, among the men of the world (Act 8:4).

2) The *instrumentally efficient cause* is what is expressed in the answer, namely, the adding in due order unto [the church] such as, being effectually called unto the obedience

of the faith and profession of the gospel, do voluntarily, out of conviction of their duty and resolution to walk in subjection to all the ordinances and commands of Christ, offer themselves to the society and fellowship thereof, whereby they may be laid in this spiritual building as the stones were in the Temple of old, which were hewed and fitted elsewhere.

Q. 48. What is required of them who desire to join themselves unto the church?

A. ^aThat they be free from blame and offense in the world; ^bthat they be instructed in the saving truths and mysteries of the gospel, ^csound in the faith; ^dthat, the Lord having called them unto faith, repentance, and newness of life by Jesus Christ, they give up themselves to be saved by Him, and to obey Him in all things; and, therefore, ^eare willing and ready, through His grace, to walk in subjection to all His commands, and in the observation of all His laws and institutions, notwithstanding any difficulties, oppositions, or persecutions that they meet with.

^aPhi 1:10; 2:15; 1Co 10:32; 1Th 2:11-12; Ti 2:10 ^bJoh 6:45; Act 26:18; 1Pe 2:9;
^c2Co 4:3-4, 6 ^d1Ti 1:19-20; 2Ti 4:3-4; Ti 1:13; Jude 3 ^eEph 4:20-24 ^f2Co 8:5

Q. 49. What is the duty of the elders of the church towards persons desiring to be admitted unto the fellowship of the church?

A. ^aTo discern and judge by the rule of truth, applied in love, between sincere professors and hypocritical pretenders; ^bto influence, direct, comfort, and encourage in the way, such as they judge to love the Lord Jesus in sincerity; ^cto propose and recommend them unto the whole church, with prayers and supplications to God for them; ^dto admit them, being approved, into the order and fellowship of the gospel in the church.

^aAct 8:20, 23; Ti 1:10; Rev 2:2; Jer 15:19 ^bAct 18:26; 1Th 2:7-8, 11
^cAct 9:27-28 ^dRom 14:1

Q. 50. What is the duty of the whole church in reference unto such persons?

A. To consider them in love and meekness, according as their condition is known, reported, or testified unto them; to approve of and rejoice in the grace of God in them; and to receive them in love without dissimulation. 1Co 13

Explanation. What in general is required, unto the fitting of any persons to be members of a visible church of Christ, was before declared; and that is what the Lord Jesus hath made the indispensable condition of entering into His kingdom, namely, of being "born again" (Joh 3:3, 5). This work, being secret, hidden, and invisible, the church cannot judge of directly and in its own form or nature, but in the means, effects, and consequents of it; which are to be testified unto it, concerning them who are to be admitted unto its fellowship and communion. It is required, therefore, of them,

1) That they be of a conversation free from blame in the world; for whereas one end of the gathering of churches is to hold forth and express the holiness of the doctrine of Christ, and the power of His grace in turning men from all ungodliness unto sobriety, righteousness, and honesty, it is required of them that are admitted into them that they answer this end. And this the principle of grace, which is communicated unto them that believe, will effect and produce; for although it doth not follow that everyone who hath

attained an unblamable honesty in this world is inwardly quickened with a true principle of saving grace, yet it doth [follow] that they who are endowed with that principle will be so unblamable. Although they may on other accounts be evil spoken of, yet their good conversation in Christ will justify itself.

2) Competent knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel is another means whereby the great qualification inquired after is testified unto the church; for, as without this no privilege of the gospel can be profitably made use of nor any duty of it rightly performed, so saving light is of the essence of conversion and doth inseparably accompany it. “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co 4:6). Where this is wanting, it is impossible for any person to evidence that he is delivered from that blindness, darkness, and ignorance that all men are under the power of in the state of nature. Such a measure, then, of light and knowledge, as whereby men are enabled to apprehend aright of the person and offices of Christ, of the nature of His mediation, the benefits thereof, and the obedience that He requires at the hands of His disciples, is expected in them who desire to be admitted into the fellowship of the church.

3) Hereunto is to be added soundness in the faith; for the unity of faith is the foundation of love and all the duties thereof, which in a special manner are to be performed towards the church, called, therefore, “the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). There is among the members of the church “one faith” (Eph 4:5); the “common faith” (Ti 1:4); “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3); which is the “sound doctrine” (1Ti 1:10), which those that will not endure must be turned from (2Ti 3:5); the “faithful word” that is to be held fast (Ti 1:9; 1Ti 1:19), and which we are to be “sound in” (Ti 1:13); contained in a “form of sound words” as to the profession of it (2Ti 1:13).

This soundness in the unity of faith—as it should be improved unto oneness of mind and oneness of accord in all the things of God (Phi 2:2), though it may admit of some different apprehensions in some things, wherein some may have more clear and distinct discoveries of the mind and will of God than others, which hinders not but that all may walk according to the same rule (Phi 3:15-16)—so it is principally to be regarded a) in the fundamental truths of the gospel, in and by the faith whereof the church holdeth on the head, Jesus Christ (Col 2:19), and b) in the fundamental principles of gospel worship. The joint celebration whereof is the next end of the gathering the church, for without a consent of mind and accord herein, no duty can be performed unto edification, nor the peace of the church be preserved. These principles are those that we have explained.

4) It is required that these things be testified by them unto the church, with the acknowledgment of the work of God’s grace towards them and their resolution, through the power of the same grace, to cleave unto the Lord Christ with full purpose of heart, and to live in all holy obedience unto Him. They come to the church as disciples of Christ, professing that they have learnt the truth as it is in Jesus, which what it infers the apostle teacheth at large (Eph 4:20-24; Act 11:23; 14:22). And this by themselves [is] to be testified unto the church,

a) That they may be received in love, without dissimulation, as real partakers in the same faith, hope, and salvation with themselves, as living members of the mystical body of Christ.

b) That on all ensuing occasions they may be reminded of their own profession and engagements, to stir them up thereby unto faithfulness, steadfastness, and perseverance. Hereupon are the elders of the church to judge by the rule of truth, in love and meekness, concerning their condition and meetness to be laid as living stones in the house of God; so as that they may,

(1) Reject false, hypocritical pretenders, if in or by any means their hypocrisy be discovered unto them (Act 8:20-23; Ti 1:10; Jer 15:19).

(2) Direct and encourage in the way such as appear to be sincere, instructing them principally in the nature of the way into which they are engaging—the duties, dangers, and benefits of it (Act 18:26; 14:22; 1Co 3:22-23).

(3) Propose their condition, their desires, [and] their resolutions unto the church, after their own expressions of them, to be considered in love and meekness (Act 9:26-27). Whereupon, those that are approved do give up themselves (a) unto the Lord, to walk in the observation of all His commands and ordinances; and (b) to the church for the Lord's sake (2Co 8:5), abiding in the fellowship thereof whereunto they are admitted (Act 2:41-42).

13. Interchurch Relations

Q. 51. Wherein doth the special form of a particular church, whereby it becomes such and is distinguished as such from all others, consist?

A. In the special consent and agreement of all the members of it to walk together in the observation of the same ordinances numerically; hence its constitution and distinction from other churches doth proceed.

Exo 19:5, 8; 24:3, 7; Deu 26:17; 2Co 8:5; Act 14:23; 20:28; Heb 13:17

Explanation. It before hath been declared what special agreement or covenant there ought to be among all the members of the same church, to walk together in a due subjection unto and observance of all the institutions of the Lord Christ. This is what gives it its special *form* and distinction from all other churches. In the general nature of a church, all churches do agree and equally partake. There is the same law of the constitution of them all; they have all the same rule of obedience, all the same Head, [and] the same end. All carry it on by the observation of the same ordinances in *kind*.

Now, besides these things, that belong unto the nature of a church in general and wherein they all equally participate, they must also have each one its proper difference, what doth distinguish it from all other churches; and this gives it its special form as such. Now, this cannot consist in anything that is accidental,⁵⁵ occasional, or extrinsical⁵⁶

⁵⁵ **accidental** – nonessential.

unto it, such as is cohabitation⁵⁷ (which yet the church may have respect unto, for convenience and furthering of its edification); nor in any civil or political disposal of its members into civil societies for civil ends, which is extrinsical to all its concernments as a church; nor doth it consist in the relation of that church to its present officers, which may be removed or taken away without the dissolution of the form or being of the church. But it consisteth, as was said, in the agreement or covenant before mentioned. For,

1) This is what constitutes them a *distinct body*, different from others; for thereby, and no otherwise, do they coalesce into a society, according to the laws of their constitution and appointment.

2) This gives them their *special relation* unto their own elders, rulers, or guides, who watch over them as so associated by their own consent, according unto the command of Christ. And,

3) From hence they have their mutual special relation unto one another; which is the ground of the special exercise of all church duties whatsoever.

Q. 52. Wherein consists the duty of any church of Christ towards other churches?

A. ^aIn walking circumspectly, so as to give them no offense; ^bin prayer for their peace and prosperity; ^cin communicating supplies to their wants according to ability; ^din receiving with love and readiness the members of them into fellowship in the celebration of the ordinances of the gospel, as occasion shall be; ^ein desiring and making use of their counsel and advice in such cases of doubt and difficulty as may arise among them; ^fin joining with them to express their communion in the same doctrine of faith.

^a1Co 10:32 ^bPsa 122:6; Eph 6:18; 1Ti 2:1 ^c2Co 8:1-15; Act 11:29-30; Rom 15:26-27

^dRom 16:1-2; 3Jo 1:8-9 ^eAct 15:2, 6 ^f1Ti 3:15

Explanation. Churches being gathered and settled according to the mind of Christ ought to preserve a mutual holy communion among themselves, and to exercise it in the discharge of those duties whereby their mutual good and edification may be promoted; for whereas they are all united under one head, the Lord Christ (Eph 1:22-23), in the same faith and order (Eph 4:5), and do walk by the same rule, they stand in such a relation one to another as is the ground of the communion spoken of. Now, the principal ways whereby they exercise this communion are the acts and duties enumerated in the answer unto this question; as,

1) Careful walking, so as to give no offense unto one another; which, although it be a moral duty in reference unto all, yet therein special regard is to be had unto other churches of Christ, that they be not in any thing grieved or tempted. "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1Co 10:32).

2) In constant prayer for the peace, welfare, edification, and prosperity one of another (Rom 1:9; Col 1:9; Eph 6:18); and this because of the special concernment of the name and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in their welfare.

⁵⁶ **extrinsical** – external.

⁵⁷ **cohabitation** – being together in the same place.

3) In communicating of supplies for their relief according unto their ability, in case of the outward wants, straits, dangers, or necessities of any of them (Act 11:29-30; Rom 15:26-27; 2Co 8:1-15).

4) The receiving of the members of other churches to communion in the celebration of church ordinances is another way whereby this communion of churches is exercised (Rom 16:1-2; 3Jo 8-9). For—whereas the personal right of such persons unto the ordinances of the church and their orderly walking in the observation of the commands of Christ are known by the testimony of the church whereof they are members—they may, without further inquiry or satisfaction given, be looked on *pro tempore*⁵⁸ as members of the church wherein they desire fellowship and participation of the ordinances of Christ.

5) In desiring or making use of the counsel and advice of one another in such cases of doubt and difficulty, whether *doctrinal* or *practical*, as may arise in any of them (Act 15:2, 6). From hence it follows that, in case any church, either by error in doctrine, or precipitation,⁵⁹ or mistake in other administrations, do give offense unto other churches, those other churches may require an account from them, admonish them of their faults, and withhold communion from them in case they persist in the error of their way. [This is] because, in their difficulties and before their miscarriages, they were bound to have desired the advice, counsel, and assistance of those other churches; which, being neglected by them, the other are to recover the end of it unto their utmost ability (Gal 2:6-11). Hence, also, it follows that those that are rightly and justly censured in any church ought to be rejected by all churches whatever; both because of their mutual communion, and because it is and ought to be presumed, until the contrary be made to appear, that in case there had been any difficulty or doubt in the procedure of the church, they would have taken the advice of those churches with whom they were obliged to consult.

6) Whereas the churches have all of them one common faith, and are all obliged to hold forth and declare it to all men as they have opportunity (1Ti 3:15), to testify this their mutual community, their interest in the same faith and hope, for the more open declaration and proposition of the truths of the gospel that they profess, and for the vindication both of the truth and themselves from false charges and imputations, they may, and, if God give opportunity, ought, to join together in declaring and testifying their joint consent and fellowship in the same doctrine of faith, expressed in a “form of sound words” (2Ti 1:13).

⁵⁸ *pro tempore* – Latin: temporarily.

⁵⁹ **precipitation** – haste.

14. Ends of the Church

Q. 53. What are the ends of all this dispensation⁶⁰ and order of things in the church?

A. The glory of God, the honor of Jesus Christ the Mediator, the furtherance of the gospel, the edification and consolation of believers here, with their eternal salvation hereafter.

Rev 4:9-11; 5:12-13; 1Co 3:22-23; Eph 4:11-16



⁶⁰ **dispensation** – arrangement.