

P R E F A C E.

THE word of God contained in the Scriptures, is a perfect rule of faith and practice, and contains all that is important and necessary to be observed in religion. Many things are plainly and expressly pointed out, others are left to be collected from general rules, or managed according to the dictates of reason, and the light of nature. The latter, we must suppose, are not of the greatest importance; especially when doubtful or disputable. In such cases, when rules are necessary, human prudence must direct. Such are the place and hour of the day for meeting, and the order of the several parts of publick worship, &c.

Some men of learning have supposed, that Christ has not instituted or appointed any particular form or mode of church government, or left, in his word, any plan or model of a church, and it's rule of administration, which we are bound to observe. These men have too much sense and understanding to pretend, that classical presbyteries, provincial or national synods, councils or assemblies, having judicial power, are pointed out in Scripture as a mode of church government; and therefore, when such a mode suits their inclination, they countenance themselves by supposing that the head of the church has left it to the judgment and discretion of his people to manage ecclesiastical matters as time, place, and circumstances require, only having regard to some very general directions in Scripture; but we can by no means

means think that Christ has left his church in such an uncertain state. This would be to expose his people to endless impositions, according to the caprice of selfish and designing men, who love to have the preheminance, without any infallible rule in Scripture to guide them, and determine disputes. This has really been the case, and Christians have been loaded with innumerable grievous rites, ceremonies, and burdens, imposed on them by ambitious men, who yet pretended some general regard to Scripture. It may be easily shewn, that when the primitive churches departed from the plain, simple directions of God's word, and the mode of managing ecclesiastical affairs, as they were in the apostles time, and established a form of government of human invention, they gradually lost their liberty, and in time became wholly subject to the exorbitant tyranny and domination of the man of sin. Worthy of observation is the account given of this by a late eminent writer of church history*. " During a great part
 " of this (the second) century, the Christian
 " churches were independent on each other, nor
 " were they joined together by association, confederacy, or any other bonds but those of charity. But in process of time, all the Christian
 " churches of a province were formed into one
 " large ecclesiastical body, which, like confederate states, assembled at certain times to deliberate about the common interests of the whole.
 " This institution had it's origin among the
 " Greeks,

* See Mehiem's Ch. History, Vol. I. Page 144, 145.

“ Greeks, with whom nothing was more common
 “ than this confederacy of independent states;
 “ and the regular assemblies met at fixed times
 “ and were composed of each respective state.
 “ To these assemblies, in which the deputies or
 “ commissioners of several churches consulted
 “ together, the name of *synods* was appropriated
 “ by the Greeks, and that of *councils* by the
 “ Latins; and the laws that were enacted in these
 “ meetings were called canons, *i. e.* rules.

“ These *councils*, of which we find not the
 “ *smallest trace* before the middle of this century,
 “ *changed the whole face of the church, and gave it*
 “ *a new form*; for by them the ancient privileges
 “ of the people were considerably diminished,
 “ and the power and authority of the Bishops
 “ greatly augmented. The humility, indeed, and
 “ prudence of these pious prelates, prevented
 “ their assuming, *all at once*, the power with
 “ which they were afterwards invested. At their
 “ first appearance in these general councils, they
 “ acknowledged that they were no more than the
 “ delegates of their respective churches, and that
 “ they acted in the name and by the appointment
 “ of their people. But they soon changed this
 “ humble tone, imperceptibly extended the limits
 “ of their authority, turned their influence into
 “ dominion, and their counsels into laws; and
 “ openly asserted, at length, that Christ had
 “ empowered them to prescribe to his people
 “ authoritative rules of faith and manners. Ano-
 “ ther effect of these councils was the gradual
 “ abolition of that perfect equality which reigned
 “ among

“ among all bishops in the primitive times ; for
 “ the order and decency of these assemblies re-
 “ quired that some one of the provincial bishops,
 “ met in council, should be invested with a supe-
 “ rior degree of power and authority ; and hence
 “ the rights of Metropolitans derive their origin.
 “ In the mean time the bounds of the church
 “ were enlarged ; the custom of holding councils
 “ was followed wherever the sound of the gospel
 “ had reached, and the universal church had now
 “ the appearance of one vast republick, formed
 “ by a combination of a great number of little
 “ states. This occasioned the creation of a new
 “ order of ecclesiasticks, who were appointed in
 “ different parts of the world, as heads of the
 “ church, and whose office it was to preserve the
 “ consistence and union of that immense body,
 “ whose members were so widely dispersed
 “ throughout the nations. Such was the nature
 “ and office of *Patriarchs*, among whom, at
 “ length, ambition being arrived at it’s most inso-
 “ lent period, formed a new dignity, investing
 “ the bishop of Rome and his successors, with
 “ the title and authority of prince of the patri-
 “ archs.”

Such has been the effect of allowing the church
 to be modelled by human inventions ; but the
 word of God has left no room for it without con-
 tradicting it’s plain dictates. We may not sup-
 pose the gospel less perfect than the law. Moses
 was particularly required to make all things ac-
 cording to the pattern shewn him in the mount.
 Christ is accounted worthy of more glory than
 Moses.

Moses. If the latter was faithful as a servant in all God's house, the former was faithful as a son over his own house. It is unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that he has left his church, which he purchased with his own blood, without the best regulations and order. He has certainly given compleat directions how to behave in the house of God, which is the church of the living God. We believe the matter, form, and government of Christian churches are all pointed out in the word of God; a brief representation of which is attempted in the following sections; with how much success the reader will judge.

While persons do not search and examine for themselves, they will ordinarily act according to the mode of religion in which they have been educated, though it be not wholly founded in the word of God. We are swayed by education until we learn to shake off these prejudices by a candid and impartial inquiry after truth. Young men that enter into the ministry, have generally spent but little time in studying church government; it is not strange, therefore, if they often alter their sentiments after they have been some time in the ministry; especially if they then carefully examine the foundation of things.

Had every body let us alone, and none busied themselves to represent us in a disadvantageous light, we should not have added the appendix.

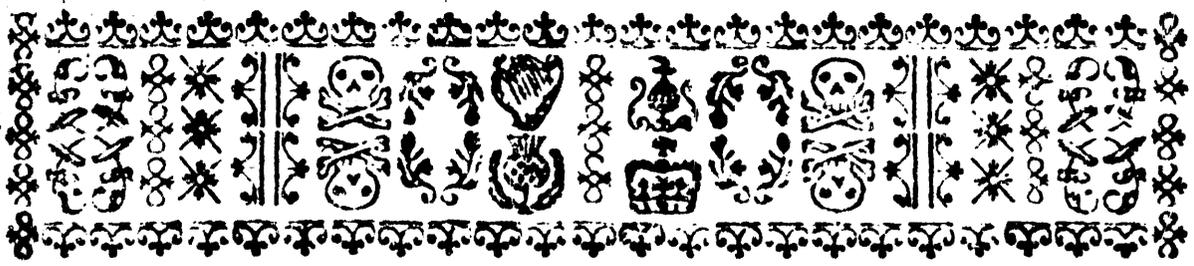
We hope there is nothing in the following pages inconsistent with that love and unity which ought to prevail among Christians, and which the gospel abundantly recommends.

We

We hope we are sincerely desirous to find the truth, and have attended to God's word as our only infallible guide. We publish our sentiments freely, according to the light we now have. We pray and hope for further degrees of knowledge in things that pertain to the Kingdom of God, and feel ourselves bound to follow the truth whenever it appears.

If any material error or defect in the following pages shall, by further consideration, appear to us, or be pointed out by others, we trust we shall feel ourselves bound, and be willing to alter our sentiments and practice in that respect.





FIRST SECTION.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE CHURCH.

THE word *church* properly signifies a collection of people, a congregation or assembly, and is seldom used in the sacred writings but in this sense; though it doth not always mean a christian assembly, or even a religious one. That unlawful assembly raised against Paul by the Craftsmen of Ephesus, Acts xix. 41. is called *ecclesia*, a church. When the town clerk had thus spoken he dismissed the church, i. e. the assembly. But the word is commonly used, and that about forty times in the New-Testament, to signify a congregation or assembly of christians; a society united by a christian profession, usually meeting together at one place to attend on divine ordinances. And sometimes the word is used to signify the assembly or body actually met, or gathered together. Thus, *when ye come together in the church*. And again, *Let your women keep silence in the churches*. Other words that signify societies are commonly used in this double sense, viz. The assembly actually met together, or those that belong to it, though not met, as is evident from the words congregation and presbytery. The people of Israel
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who came out of Egypt are called a church: *The church that was in the wilderness.* Acts vii. 38. For they were all one congregation, and had one place of worship, viz. The tabernacle, which is therefore called the tabernacle of the congregation.

The word church is used to signify the whole body of the elect, or saints both in Heaven and earth, who are united in Christ as their head, and by one spirit baptised into one body, that is the body of Christ. The congregation of God's people of old, might in a sort, be typical of their general assembly. As the Israelites all worshipped at the earthly tabernacle which was typical of Christ; so now the church of Christ, which is his body, all meet at the throne of grace, and have *boldness to enter into the holiest by his blood.* Heb. x. 19. And as all the redeemed of the Lord thus assemble spiritually in Heaven, so they form one assembly with Saints and Angels, and are said to be already come to *Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born which are written in Heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.* The church, in the last-mentioned sense, is catholic and invisible, comprehending all true believers, who being united to Christ, from him derive spiritual blessings; and though, as a society, they are to men invisible, yet *the Lord knoweth them that are his.* To this invisible church, or body of Christ, every particular church, constituted according to the gospel, visibly belongs; and the word of God gives us no idea of a visible catholic or universal church, united in or under one visible ecclesiastical government. Such a church
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of Christ has no foundation in the New-Testament, and never had an existence in the world. If ever the church in this world is spoken of in general terms, to mean more than a single congregation, it signifies those that appear to belong to the invisible church or true body of Christ, whether they are embodied in particular churches or not. The scriptural idea of a visible christian church, is that of a number of persons united in the faith and profession of the gospel, and agreeing to meet together in one place to observe all the ordinances of Christ. In this sense are churches often mentioned, as the church at Corinth, at Laodicæ, at Antioch, at Jerusalem, &c. According to this scriptural idea of a church, it is evident the word cannot be properly applied to any supposable or imaginary society or body that doth not assemble together; it is therefore never used in scripture to signify a collection or association of particular churches in a province, kingdom, or nation. In the New-Testament we never read of *a* church, or the *the* church, in a particular country, where there were evidently more than one christian assembly; but in that case we read of churches in the plural number, as the churches of Galatia, the churches of Judea, the seven churches of Asia, and the churches of Macedonia. Nor is the word *church* used in that large sense, in any of the writings of the Fathers, for above two hundred years after Christ's time, if we may credit those who have impartially searched into antiquity*; nor is there more foundation in scripture for the notion of a church representative; as some suppose the session, that is, the ruling elders,

* See King's Enquiry.

to be the church. There is no foundation in scripture for applying the word church to those who are chosen by a christian assembly to transact some affairs for them: For however advisable such a method may be in some cases, such representatives are never called a church in scripture; nor have they any power to act as the church, separate and distinct from the assembly, or body of the brethren.

If to the meaning of the word church, that has been given, it should be objected, that the church, in some cities, and particularly at Jerusalem, was too numerous to be only one assembly or congregation, and therefore when the church at Jerusalem is mentioned, it must comprehend a number of distinct assemblies; it ought to be well considered, that the sacred history represents them as all *meeting together*; if so, they might be one assembly. Whatever our conjectures may be, matters of fact, according to the word of God, must stand. And let us hear how expressly the inspired historian speaks: “*All that believed were together.*” Acts ii. 42. Again, “*They continued daily with one accord in the temple.*” Ibid 46. Again, Acts vi. 2. “*The twelve called the multitude of the disciples to them.*” Again, “*They were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch.*” And, Acts xxi. 22. “*The multitude must needs come together.*” In order to give the objection any force, it would be necessary to prove, that all, or the most of those that were converted at Jerusalem, were members of that church; that there was no place where the proper church of Jerusalem could assemble together as one body; that the many thousand believing Jews, mentioned Acts xxi. 20. were members of the church at Jerusalem;
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all which will not be easily proved to any one who considers that all the Jewish males from all parts were ordered to meet at Jerusalem three times in a year, at their great festivals; that it is evident, that it was at one of these festivals that those were converted who are mentioned in the beginning of the book of Acts, when the spirit was so remarkably poured out; for there were then come to Jerusalem Jews, not only from the several parts of Judea and Galilee, but there were present at that time Jews and proselytes from many nations, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphilia, Egypt, and parts of Libya and Cyrene, strangers of Rome, Cretes, and Arabians. It is probable that most of those that were converted at first, did, in a few days, depart to their own houses, when the festival was over. The many thousand believers that were at Jerusalem, as mentioned Acts xxi, was evidently at one of these festivals, as will appear to any one that looks into the history. So that there is no evidence that there remained constantly at Jerusalem more christians than could assemble in one place.

The absurdity of supposing an oecumenical, national, or provincial, church, i. e. a church united under one form of government, extended through a province, nation, and the world, will easily appear to any one that considers the nature of church government, according to the directions of the New-Testament. In such an extended church how could an offended brother obtain satisfaction, or treat the offender as an heathen man and a publican, when the offender might appeal to a neighbourhood of churches,
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represented in a presbytery, and from them to a provincial synod, and from thence to a national or oecumenical council? In all these there would necessarily be delays, so that one man's life would scarce be long enough to bring a matter to an issue. The discipline that Christ has appointed in his church, is plain, natural, and easy, and was never designed to be clogged and impeded by such appeals and delays. But the New-Testament, and our natural reason, make these things so plain, that more needs not be said.



S E C O N D S E C T I O N .

OF A PARTICULAR CHURCH CONGREGATION; OR,
CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY.

WE have already observed that a church, according to the New-Testament, is commonly a christian Assembly in or belonging to one place. We are now to consider how such a christian assembly is formed and constituted so as to be a church; and how it is, and when it is, that a person may properly be said to belong to such a church. Here then we are to consider of what such a christian church is composed, what is the matter of it, or the persons of which it consists. Therefore we observe, that such a church is composed, or consists of a number of professing baptised christians, covenanting or agreeing to meet and worship together, and to observe and submit to all gospel ordinances, according to the rules of God's word; together with
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their infant seed. And any one that joins to a church must be baptised, profess religion, satisfy the church of the credibility of his profession, and covenant to walk with the church in the observance of all gospel ordinances. Such a church is made up of visible saints, or such as, in a judgment of charity, are true believers. Visibility is the appearance of reality; visible saints are such as appear to be real saints. That the churches mentioned in the Bible were constituted or made up of those who were apparently and hopefully real saints, is so abundantly evident from the New-Testament, and has been so irrefragably proved by many eminent writers, that we need not enlarge. To receive into visible churches those whom we cannot charitably hope to be in Christ by a vital union, is inconsistent with the exercising love to the brethren according to the frequent directions of God's word. Nothing is more evident than that the members of the visible church are called the brethren; but we cannot exercise brotherly love towards those who, though admitted into the church, are evidently destitute of the image of Christ. The distinction between the church of Christ and the world, which the scriptures abundantly teach, plainly supposes that the former are to consist of those only who are friends to Christ; the latter are visibly of a different and opposite society, viz. the kingdom of satan. This distinction is clearly held out, and urged by the apostle in his directions to the church at Corinth. 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15, 16. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what concord hath Christ with Belial, and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God.*

A particular visible church is to be considered either without, or with its officers. A number of believers may be embodied or united together, and be a church of Christ, before they have any officers. So were the churches in the apostles time, Acts, xiv. 23. *They ordained them elders in every church.* Though a christian assembly may be a church, and have some power, viz. Of admitting members, and choosing all their officers, yet they are not a church compleat, and fit to exercise in parts of discipline, and attend upon all gospel ordinances, till they have proper officers, therefore are not to rest easy, but feel something much wanting until they are thus organized. Tit. i. 5. There have been many queries concerning a *church covenant*, of the necessity of it, and what it is or ought to be. There must be a church covenant, or something equivalent, expressed or implied, in order to the being of a particular visible church. Without it christians would be as loose individuals, not compacted together; like scattered sticks of timber, before they are formed into a building. A church is compared to a building; particular believers are the materials; a church covenant connects and fraims them together. When they covenant and agree with one another, they are united into a church. A church covenant needs not be large, but is best comprehended in few words. Among us, where churches are already formed, the person that proposes to join to a church *promises or covenants to submit to the watch and discipline of the church, and to walk with it in the observance of all gospel ordinances.* This is sufficient, without particularizing duties, for the word of God points out the duties of church members. When a new church is forming,

forming, the several christian brethren that propose to constitute it, *covenant and agree to meet and worship, and be a church in such a place, and observe and submit to church government, and all gospel ordinances, according to the rules of God's word.* From the nature of a church covenant and church communion, arises the following question: May a church member move away, or otherways cease to hold communion with his confederate church without their consent? This question has been thought of importance enough to be discussed by many learned men; yea, whole bodies of learned men have given it a place among their disquisitions.

This matter has been but little attended to among us of late years. If religion should revive, and churches and church members be more distinguished from the world, it would be more considered. In the view of some, the question is much the same as to ask whether a pastor may move away and leave his flock, without their consent, or a regular dismissal. The obligations between church members are mutual, as also those between church members and their pastor. Should church members generally disperse, it must break up the church, and the consequence be worse than for the pastor to leave them; for in that case they might continue to be a church. But to answer the question directly, it is to be observed that a member should not break his connection with his church, without weighty and important reasons. When church members propose to remove, or otherways break connections with their church, their reasons are generally, either, 1st, Better worldly accommodations in some other place, or 2d, Dissatisfaction with church administrations or discipline where they are. The glory of God should rule and

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sway the members that proposes to leave his church: And it should also rule and sway the church, whose consent for his dismissal may be desired. The consideration should be, where is the man most needed, where is he like to be most useful, and most promote the glory of God. Worldly interest alone, without some considerable necessity, should not make a man leave his church; yet the case of his family may be such as to require his removal. In such case the church should consider his wants, and family circumstances, and do as they would be done by. If a man should desire a liberation from his church, because he thinks he can be better edified elsewhere, he and the church ought well to consider this matter, and act without prejudice, partiality or criminal self-interest. A man ought often to deny himself for the good of others, and on account of his connections, and in order to set a good example. Many a minister, if he consulted only his own feelings, would rather go and hear another minister preach a good sermon, than to go into the pulpit himself. But ministers and church members must often deny themselves for the good of others.

When it is thought proper, and agreed that a man should be dismissed from his church, he should have a certificate or recommendation to some other church, for he ought to be in communion with some church, if practicable.



T H I R D S E C T I O N .

O F C H U R C H O F F I C E R S .

OUR ascended saviour gave extraordinary officers to the church, in primitive times, and endued them with

with miraculous gifts. He has also appointed ordinary officers that are to continue in succession to the end of the world. For the work of the ministry he gave apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers: Of these some were extraordinary, which have ceased; others were ordinary, and are to continue to the end of the world. In treating of the ordinary officers, we shall first consider those that belong to a particular church, or christian assembly, and then inquire whether there be any other which respect the church in general.

The officers of a particular church are elders and deacons. The terms pastor, bishop, and elder, are so many different words for the self same officer. He that is an elder is a bishop and pastor, and he that is a pastor is a bishop and elder. That these words are used promiscuously in the New-Testament, for the same officer, is acknowledged by the most impartial and best writers of every denomination. If there be any difference between a teacher and those other names, it is probable he is only a particular sort of elder, pastor, or bishop, according as he is employed. There is some uncertainty respecting church officers. The scripture, for wise reasons no doubt, has left the matter something in the dark. But if we will search, with unbiaſſed minds, we may discover all that is of importance to be known.

Let us then endeavour to find how the churches were organized, according to scripture, in the primitive times. And it appears that every church, though sometimes very small, so as to meet in a private house, had more than one elder. Acts xiv. 23. *They ordained elders in every church.* Titus was to *ordain elders in every*

every city. The church at Philippi had more than one bishop or elder. Phil. i. 1. *To all the saints that are at Philippi with the bishops and deacons.* Again, is any sick he has more than one elder to send to. Jam. v. 14. *Let him call for the elders of the church.* The most impartial historian give us this account of the churches in the first century. “Such was the constitution of the christian church in its infancy, when its assemblies were neither numerous nor splendid. Three or four presbyters, men of remarkable piety and wisdom, ruled these small congregations in perfect harmony, nor did they stand in need of any president, or superior, to maintain concord and order where no dissensions were known†.” These elders were all equal in office, were all pastors and overseers. So Paul addresses the elders of Ephesus; feed the flock (i. e. be shepherds or pastors to the flock, as the word feed signifies) over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers or bishops. But though they were all equal in office, yet having different gifts, they were accordingly differently employed. Rom. xii. 6, 7, 8. *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, &c.* That the elders or pastors of a particular church were thus variously employed, we have good evidence from church history. Thus Dr. Mosheim. “The rulers of the church were called either *presbyters* or *bishops*, which two titles are in the New-Testament undoubtedly applied to the same order of men. Their particular functions were not always the same; for while some of them confined their labours to the instruction of the people, others contributed, in different ways, to the edification

† Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, Vol. I. P. 84.

“fication of the church*.” Their particular and distinct business is not clearly pointed out in the word of God, and probably was not precisely determined by the practice of those primitive churches, nor was it necessary since all the gifts in a church were subject from time to time, to the regulation and direction of the body. See 1 Cor. xiv. It is probable they all ruled or presided, were all apt to teach, publicly or privately, and were all exhorters: And yet one might be especially a ruler, having gifts suited to that employment, and so directed to rule with diligence; another might be especially a teacher, whose business it was to wait on teaching; another an exhorter, as being best calculated for that employment, and so it was his duty to wait on exhortation. This distribution of pastoral work is very natural, and seems very agreeable to the passage in Romans just quoted, where these several employments are distinctly mentioned. From this account of the matter we may learn what those elders were, that laboured in word and doctrine; viz. Those who were especially teachers, and employed their time and study chiefly or wholly for and in that exercise; and that therefore particular attention should be paid to their support, according to the apostolic direction. * Tim. v. 17. *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.* And this affords a natural and easy explanation of that text, without the supposition of an order of ruling elders distinct from teachers. We cannot learn from scripture that there were two sorts of elders distinct in office, though they might be differently employed. That there were none

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two distinct sorts, we offer the following reasons: 1st, The apostle Paul writes to Timothy on purpose, that he might know how to behave in the house or church of the living God, gives him directions how to furnish the churches with officers, and mentions their qualifications, but points out only two sorts, viz. Bishops and deacons. Now had there been another sort of elders, beside the bishops, we cannot account for the apostle's omitting them. 2d, When the apostle writes his epistle to the church at Philippi, he directs it to *all* the saints there, with the bishops and deacons. And if they had another sort of church officers, we think the apostle would not have omitted them. 3d, Timothy was left at Ephesus, as may be seen 1 Tim. i. 3. And it was to him residing there, that the apostle said let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. Now we know the elders of Ephesus were bishops, overseers, and pastors. Paul called the elders of Ephesus and charged them to feed the flock as pastors, and calls them bishops or overseers. Which seems to make it evident that the elders that ruled well, which he mentions to Timothy at Ephesus, were all pastors and overseers, though they might not all labour in word and doctrine as publick teachers.

The several officers in a church, were no doubt somewhat differently employed; but whether precisely such a distribution of the pastoral work, as has been before mentioned, took place, or not, we do not pretend to assert: Yet it plainly shews how pastors or bishops of different gifts, may be variously yet harmoniously, and advantageously employed for the edification

fication of the people of their charge. It is easy to see that ruling, teaching, and exhorting, comprehends every part of the business that belongs to the pastoral office, exercised according to scripture, in the churches of the saints. And as there is abundant reason to think that this work was in primitive times divided among several pastors, in some such manner as has been represented, so it appears to us that such a method, and such a disposition of officers, shews the wisdom and goodness of the great head of the church. Such an eldership, or presbytery in every church;—several elders or pastors equal in office, but having gifts differing, and accordingly differently employed, seems exceedingly well adapted to answer the ends of the ministry, and the exercise of church discipline. And was this method generally pursued it would greatly tend to promote the interest of religion. We are sensible the external form, and the management of our churches, considerably differs from that which was used and directed in the apostles time: And many among us would be alarmed at the introduction of that primitive mode. Should religion revive, and gospel simplicity and integrity take place of pride, external pomp, and secular schemes, we might easily return to the apostolic plan. But how far it may be proper in our churches, prejudiced as they are, to attempt the introduction of that primitive method, we do not pretend to determine. But it deserves the serious attention of those that wish well to Zion. We do not think, on the whole, that such a plurality of elders, is absolutely necessary for the work of the ministry and the exercise of discipline. One elder may be so far qualified to rule, teach, and exhort, that, with the assistance

assistance of other brethern, according to their gifts, the pastoral work may be performed to good purpose. And it is plainly agreeable to reason and scripture, that all spiritual gifts should be diligently improved in a church, whether or not it should be so compleatly furnished with officers, as might be desired, and ought to be attempted. That the gifts which are granted to the members of a church, whether pastors by office, or not, ought all to be improved for edification, is abundantly evident from 1 Cor. 12. and many other passages of scripture. The time, manner, and degree of the exercise of the gifts that are found among the common brethern, should be under the direction of the pastors and the churches where they are found. See 1 Cor. 14. Any church therefore, for the assistance of their pastor, or pastors, and for the edification of the body, may, when they think proper, desire and advise any of their members, whom they think qualified, to pray, visit, exhort, catechise or teach, either occasionally or stately, as will be best. But it would be imprudent and irregular, for any member of a church, to set himself up as a publick leader, instructor or exhorter, without the consent of his brethern.

Beside the officers mentioned, it is expedient that every church should have one or more deacons, ordinarily more than one : The church at Philippi had bishops and deacons. The office, and the qualifications of deacons, are clearly held out in scripture, but it is by no means evident, what their work and business was. The word deacon signifies one that ministers or serves, but in what he is to minister, the scripture is silent. It is generally supposed that they are to take care of the temporalities of the church, and serve tables. And

it is thought, that those seven, mentioned Acts vi. 5. were deacons, and appointed to that office; but they are no where in scripture called deacons: Nor does the word any where intimate, that their business was that which deacons are appointed for. But it is probable, on the whole, that their business was to take care of the church's poor, provide for the Lord's table, and the pastor's support, at the expence of the church. Ancient history gives us this account of the deacons of the primitive churches. Those that would see more upon this subject, may read Dr. Watts's discourse, delivered at the setting apart two deacons to their office.

We come now to inquire, whether there be any officers that respect the church in general, not having the charge of a particular flock. The apostles and prophets, workers of miracles, and gifts of tongues, which God formerly gave to the church, are long since ceased. God also appointed evangelists, differing from common pastors and teachers. The evangelists travelled in various parts, gospellizing the heathen world, gathering and settling churches, ordaining elders, baptizing converts, and assisting christians that had not stated pastors, and even occasionally where they had. And it appears to us, that the evangelists were not extraordinary, but ordinary officers; not an order that was to cease with the apostles, prophets, and other extraordinary gifts, but were to continue for the good of the church in all ages. The reasons why we think evangelists have not ceased, but still continue, are these:

1st, There is no intimation in scripture, that this was an office that was to cease. There is nothing in

scripture from which we can gather such an opinion. There is no intimation that they were extraordinary officers. If they had extraordinary gifts, this was no more than many ordinary ministers then had, and even common church members; as appears by the church of Corinth, where those gifts abounded. 2d, There is nothing in the nature of things; nothing in their business and employment, that is a reason that they should cease, as was the case with the apostles, prophets and workers of miracles, but the contrary. The apostles were extraordinary witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and must have seen him after he arose. *Am I not an apostle, have I not seen Christ Jesus the Lord?* Says Paul. The prophets, and workers of miracles, were to predict future events, confirm gospel truths, and complete the canon of scripture, and when that was done, those extraordinary gifts ceased: But there is no such reason for the cessation of the evangelists. For, 3d, Their office and business is always needed in the church of Christ. They are to travel from place to place, to gospelize the heathen, to preach in large tracts of a gospellized country, where are no settled pastors; to baptize, and assist christians, scattered abroad far from any settled pastors; to gather and form churches, and, occasionally, labour in churches already formed which are destitute of officers. For these purposes evangelists have always been needed in the world, and are now much needed in our land. 4th, Stated pastors, and overseers of particular flocks, cannot do all the work and business that evangelists properly may. Those that have taken the oversight of a church, are in a covenant relation to them, and are to feed their flock, and are chiefly devoted to their service;

service; and their duty lies so within a particular charge that they cannot do what may be needful at a distance; though they may do good as they have opportunity to all, and may occasionally act as evangelists to those that are without their flock. Therefore, 5th, If there be no evangelists, it seems as if Christ has left no officers to labour in a great part of his harvest. There is often a great door, and effectually opened, for ministerial labours, and the conversion of souls, where there are no settled pastors. The Lord has carried on such a work many a time; and evangelists are proper persons to labour in such places. And we cannot suppose Christ would leave his cause to suffer in such cases for want of proper labourers.

The evangelists have nothing higher, in their offices than common pastors and teachers; the difference is, that the former are not limited to a particular flock, as the latter are. Evangelists of old, being appointed to ordain elders or pastors, is no evidence that they were extraordinary officers. It doth not appear that Timothy or Titus, though evangelists, ordained ministers without the assistance of other elders, though they might lead, and have the principal management of the affair. It is not certain that a single apostle ordained without other elders. Paul mentions his laying hands on Timothy; but we learn from another passage that the hands of the presbytery were also laid upon him. Paul left Titus in Crete to ordain elders in every city; but it is not likely that Paul left that island without some elders ordained in some of the cities, as there were an hundred in that island; the cities being contiguous, the elders that Paul left ordained, might join with Titus in the ordination of others. We have on

to observe here, that as there is nothing more in the office of an evangelist than in that of a pastor or teacher of a particular flock ; any common teaching elder in a church may, with the consent of his church, and especially if to this is added the advice of neighbouring churches, be dismissed from his particular charge, and become an evangelist, when the interest of religion, in distant parts, requires it. An evangelist also may become a stated pastor or teacher of a particular flock, if called thereto, and the general interest of religion requires it. When a pastor is dismissed from his particular charge, not for scandal or deficiency, but in good standing, he is to be considered as an evangelist, with liberty, and a right to labour in the vineyard of Christ, wherever he is properly called. No evangelist has a right to encroach upon, or intermeddle in a flock of any stated pastor. And every stated pastor when providentially at a distance from his flock, may and ought to be considered, and to act occasionally, as an evangelist, as he has opportunity, so that he does not intrude or interfere in the business of any stated pastor. We think this view of church officers, which appears to be scriptural, will easily answer some questions that have by many been supposed to be difficult, viz. What power a pastor has out of his own flock? And whether he is to be considered as a minister of the gospel when dismissed from the pastoral charge of a particular flock. &c.

F O U R T H

FOURTH SECTION.

OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND DISCIPLINE.

NO body of men in this state of imperfection can well subsist without government; and the wise and merciful redeemer has appointed one in his church that is easy to be understood and observed, and wonderfully adapted to answer the end for which it is appointed. The government and discipline that Christ has instituted, belongs to, and terminates in a particular church or christian assembly, ordinarily meeting in one place. Government in such a church, is to be considered either before, or after it is furnished with proper officers. Before it has its officers it has some power as a body; but when properly organized, its power is compleat. Before it has officers, the church has power, 1st, To choose all its officers. 2d, To admit members. 3d, To discipline its disorderly members, and even cast them out if necessary. It does not appear that there were the usual officers in the church of Corinth, when the apostle applies to the body of the church or brotherhood, to cast out the fornicator. And he seems to blame them that they had not done it before. But we are to consider the power of a church with all its officers. It is evident that Christ has appointed those in a church that are called *rulers*. *The elders that rule well. Remember them that have the rule over you* Again, *Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves*. These words for rule, in the original, signify those that guide, go before, stand foremost, and conduct the body. The elders, bishops, or pastors, are those that thus lead or rule. The power that officers have, is that
which

which Christ has appointed and directed. And when a flock choose a pastor, they choote him to all this power; and at his election or ordination they promise submission to him in the Lord. And he promises to exercise his power according to the rules and directions of Christ. The church being thus organized, the officers are to hold out the word of truth, open and explain the rules of Christ, receive complaints, and, when necessary, prepare and bring matters forward for a publick hearing and determination by the church, or body of the brethren. Our Saviour, in Matt. xviii. has given us directions how to proceed in matters of offence.

The censures of the church are admonition and excommunication. Admonition may be private or publick. The elders, as overseers, are to take notice of, and when needful inquire into matters of scandal, and heal and make up as many breaches, privately, as they can, or as the nature of the case will admit; and when that cannot be, they must be brought before the church or brethren. The body of the church, with their officers as moderators, are to judge and determine when persons are censurable, and what degree of censure is to be inflicted; and then the officers, or one of them, is to be the mouth of the church, to declare and pronounce what has been determined: And what a church thus binds, and looses on earth, according to Christ's will, shall be bound and loosed in Heaven. From the rules of God's word, and the practice of the primitive churches, it is evident that nothing of common concern was transacted without the consent of the brethren. • Paul directs the church, assembled together, to excommunicate the fornicator.

1 Cor. v. The brethern were called together to choose the overseers of their alms. Acts vi. They convened and joined with the apostles and elders in forming and determining those famous decrees sent from Jerusalem to the Gentile churches. Acts xv. The determination of the brethern with their officers, is to be decisive in ecclesiastical affairs. If an offender refuses to hear the church, he is to be as an heathen man, and a publican. No mention is made, nor is any room left in the divine precept, for any appeal to any higher power on this side Heaven. This command of Christ, Matt. xviii. 17. *If he hear not the church, let him be as an heathen and a publican*, is binding on all his disciples, and which no man, or body of men, presbytery, synod, or council, have a right to reverse. Therefore, according to Christ's direction, there is no appeal from a particular church to an higher power. We allow that if the offender seems to be aggrieved with the sentence, or determination of the church, and pleads conscience in the case, he has a right to desire, and ask to be heard by some other persons, whether presbytery, council, or any arbitrators, that may be mentioned. But the church has a right to determine whether he shall be heard or not; and if he is allowed an hearing by others, whether they shall only give their opinion, or, whether they shall determine the case. This ought to lie with the church; but no doubt where the offender seems to be in any degree consciencious, any church would be willing to hear and have the opinion of indifferent men that were judicious and pious*.

No

* If it be asked what a man shall do who, after all, cannot, in conscience, submit to the determination of the church?

No one church, or number of churches, have any power over any other particular church or churches; yet if any one church maintains damnable or pernicious doctrines or is scandalous in practice, any other church may warn and admonish them by the same rule that we are not to suffer sin upon our brother without rebuking him; and if the offending church regards not, any church or churches, aggrieved with their conduct, may withdraw communion from them, and leave them to their great Judge.

We must, in this section, observe, that as every particular church has a right to choose their own officers, so they have a right to dismiss them, if the case requires it. If the pastor or pastors, become scandalous, the church have a right and power to call them to an account, censure, and even excommunicate if necessary. Yet in all cases where there is difference between the body of a church and their pastor, it will undoubtedly be prudent to call in the assistance and advice of neighbouring elders, or churches; especially if the church has not a presbytery of its own.

Under this head of church government, it may be thought proper to inquire, who has the power or right of ordination? This matter is not clear from scripture; and it is left uncertain, for wise reasons no doubt, and among others, that we may exercise charity to one another who may be of different sentiments. Most,
if

It is answered, do as he would, after he had carried the case from the lowest judicature to the highest, on any scheme of church government, and, after all, could not acquiesce in their sentence, viz. Submit his case to God, and continue by himself, without special church privileges; unless he could find some church that would receive him.

if not all, the scripture instances of ordination, were by apostles, or by persons under extraordinary divine direction, and influence. Yet we must suppose, there is now, and always has been, a proper method for setting apart men to be watchmen on the walls of God's Jerusalem. But if we consider the nature of ordination, and the right each church has to choose it's own officers, it will appear that it is not essential by whom they are introduced, after they are elected, and have accepted the call of the church. Much has been said, and written on this subject, and much could we here say, but we shall not enlarge. Those that have a mind to see this subject handled with candour, moderation, and good sense, may read Dr. Watts upon it. We only observe, that upon the whole, it appears to us proper, that *ordination should be performed by ordained elders, with prayer and imposition of hands**.

* We think it sufficient to denominate us Presbyterians, that we hold these two things: 1st, That there is no difference between the office of a bishop and a teaching elder, or pastor of a particular flock. And, 2d, That ordination should be performed by a presbytery of ordained elders or pastors. The first of these distinguishes us from the Episcopalians, who suppose bishops are an order of officers in the church superior to teaching elders or presbyters. The second distinguishes us from the Independents, who suppose it belongs to the brethren of the church to ordain their pastors.

We can very harmoniously agree with those that are congregationalists in point of church government, if they agree with us in the doctrines of grace and qualifications for sacraments.

F I F T H S E C T I O N.

OF ASSOCIATED PRESBYTERIES, SYNODS, AND COUNCILS.

WE need say but little about that of which the word of God saith little or nothing. A presbytery, consisting of the elders or representatives of a number of churches, being a judicature, and having a constitutional power to receive and determine appeals, and decide ecclesiastical cases, is an imaginary body, for which we can find no warrant, or foundation, in scripture. *Presbytery*, which is a Greek word, properly signifies the *eldership*, or a number of elders acting in concert. It is used thrice only in the New Testament, viz. Luke xxii. 66. Acts xxii. 5. 1 Tim. iv. 14. The two first passages are, by our translators, rendered in English. In Luke xxii. 66. they translate the Greek word *presbyterion*, *the elders of the people*. In Acts xxii. 5. they translate it, *all the estate of the elders*. In 1 Tim. iv. 14. they retain the Greek word *presbytery*. The former passages refer to a Jewish council, the latter to a body of christian elders, who laid their hands upon Timothy. And as we have considered the office and business of an elder in christian churches, we must naturally and necessarily suppose that a presbytery is a company of those elders; and if there were a number of such elders in each of the primitive churches, when properly organized, then in each of those churches there was a *presbytery*. This was undoubtedly the case. And we are told, by the best human authority, that the word *presbytery* is used in no other sense in all the writings of the Fathers in the three first centuries; but is abundantly used to express

express the eldership of a particular church. King's Inquiry, page 62 and 78. Although the scriptural and ancient meaning of the word *presbytery* be that of the eldership of a particular church, yet we doubt not but a number of elders or pastors, from several neighbouring churches, associated and met together, may, without impropriety, be called a *presbytery*, as they are a number of presbyters, or elders, associated and acting together. Such a number of elders may associate, and agree to meet from time to time, to stir up, assist, and quicken one another; consult and agree upon measures to promote religion; may help, and, occasionally, afford some supplies to vacant congregations; may hear and advise in cases that may be left or referred to them, at the desire of particular churches; may ordain a pastor for a particular church when desired; and also an evangelist, when the interest of religion requires it: But such an associated presbytery, as a body, has no power over the churches any other way than their advice, or determination of particular cases may be requested by particular churches.

A synod, or ecclesiastical council, consisting of representatives from various churches, and acting authoritatively in determining matters of discipline for the churches which they are supposed to represent, has no foundation in scripture; nor can we see how their power can consist, with the right which has been proved, to belong to every particular church by our Saviour's direction, Mat. xviii. 17. Some, indeed, *suppose* that a divine pattern is found in the history of the apostles, Acts xv, for an assembly of this kind. It is true, we have there an account of a question sent from the first Gen-
 tile

tile church at Antioch to the apostles and elders
 of the church at Jerusalem, and of the apostles and
 elders determining that question with the concurrence
 of the *whole* church, under the *influence of the Holy
 Ghost*, as they declare. But how this assembly should
 be considered as a synod, is altogether unaccountable.
 Here is only an account of the meeting of one church
 and it's presbytery. And the authority which ren-
 dered their decree binding on the Gentile churches,
 was the authority of the Holy Ghost, under whose
 special influence they acted. Dr. Mosheim, a most
 approved historian, and no enemy to synods, says,
 " The churches, in those early times, were entirely
 " independent; none of them subject to any foreign
 " jurisdiction, but each one governed by it's own
 " rulers and it's own laws. Nor does there even ap-
 " pear in this first century, the smallest trace of that
 " association of provincial churches, from which
 " councils derive their origin. It was only in the
 " Second century, that the custom of holding coun-
 " cils commenced in Greece, from whence it soon
 " spread through the other provinces." And on the
 passage of scripture before us, he justly observes,
 " The meeting of the church at *Jerusalem*, mention-
 " ed in the xvth chapter of the Acts, is commonly con-
 " sidered as the first christian council. But this notion
 " arises from a manifest abuse of the word *council*.
 " That meeting was only of one church; and if
 " such a meeting be called a *council*, it will follow
 " that there were innumerable councils in the primi-
 " tive times. But every one knows that a *council* is
 " an assembly of deputies or commissioners, sent from
 " several churches, associated by certain bonds, in a
 general

“ general body, and therefore the supposition above-mentioned falls to the ground*.

A number of associated presbyteries may, occasionally or statedly, meet to consult and advise together about the most proper measures to promote the kingdom of Christ; and, by their joint consultations and endeavours, may encourage, strengthen, and edify one another. And such a society may properly be called a synod, as the word signifies a number met together. But they have no warrant or right to intermeddle, in any authoritative way, with the affairs of particular churches. It may, however, be agreeable to the general directions of scripture for churches to ask, and for such a convention of men to give their advice in some cases respecting the practice of christians and the discipline of the gospel; and perhaps, in some cases that are doubtful, or cannot be otherwise easily decided, it may be right for a particular church to refer a matter to such a body, or to any other man or body of men, who may judge the affair by way of arbitration. In this manner, it appears to us, the case was managed that is mentioned in Acts xv, and is what the light of nature, and reason, would lead any man or body of men, to do, where the matter could not without great difficulty, be decided any other way. But we observe that the assistance which churches may need from one another, in most difficult cases, is commonly best afforded by the pastors of other churches being called to act with the church that needs advice; such neighbouring elders or pastors, holding forth the light of the word, that the church may thereby be led to act understandingly, according to the divine rule

and

* Mosheim's Ch. History, Vol. I. P. 86.

and to determine their own matters. Thus it appears to us, the apostles and evangelists acted occasionally in the churches which they visited: *Not as having dominion over their faith, but as helpers of their joy.* 2 Cor. i. 24.



SIXTH SECTION.

SOME CASES AND QUERIES RESPECTING ECCLESIASTICAL AFFAIRS.

FIRST QUESTION. *Is there such a church censure as suspension, short of excommunication?*

ANSWER. Neither *suspension* nor *excommunication* are scripture terms, therefore none need contend for either word. The scripture speaks of *putting away the wicked person; delivering to satan; avoiding them that cause divisions; withdrawing from every brother that walks disorderly*: And directs that those who *refuse to hear or regard* the several admonitions of the church, should be treated *as heathens and publicans.* By the last mentioned passage, it seems, our Saviour leaves no medium between a person's refusing to hear the admonitions of the church, and being treated as a heathen and a publican. If, therefore, a person hears the church he is to be restored; if not, he is cut off. If by suspension is meant depriving a person of some ecclesiastical privilege for a limited time, a sort of punishment, after which he may be in good standing without any thing further done, there is

is no warrant for it in scripture, and it is contrary to reason. If by suspension is understood a person's being denied church privileges on a complaint exhibited against him, before the church hears and determines the case, this is also unscriptural and unreasonable. For the accusation may be false, or not well grounded, and a malicious accuser might, in that case, deprive conscientious people of church privileges. If a person accused be conscious of iniquity, he will ordinarily abstain from brotherly communion, until he can be properly restored. But if a person accused pleads not guilty, and claims church privileges, he must not be debarred until he is heard, and his case decided, which ought to be without delay*.

It is evident, abundantly, from scripture that persons who walk disorderly, and comply not with the commands of our Saviour, ought to be some how cut off, and separated from the fellowship of the church, whether it be called suspension or excommunication; but by what words, or in what method, this is to be done, is not so clear.

SECOND

* It has been a common mistake, among some communicants, to think that if a man is offended with a christian brother, one of the two must abstain from the Lord's table until the matter is made up or determined. It is certain that every christian brother, and every church, should accommodate such differences or difficulties as soon as possible. But in some cases there will, unavoidably, be delays, or time spent before the matter can be accommodated; and there is no reason, in general, that a church should neglect to partake of the Lord's supper during that time. Nor need, nor ought, either of the persons between whom the difficulty is, abstain from the Lord's supper, if he has done all that he properly can to bring the matter forward for an accommodation. That of our Saviour, Mat. v. 23, 24, supposes the person had not before done all he could to be reconciled.

SECOND QUESTION. *May church members be allowed to break off from church communion, or cease coming to the Lord's table, without being called to an account?*

ANSWER. No. This has been too often tollerated, but it is not agreeable to the rules of God's word. The reasons are evident. 1st, Because by proper pains taken with the delinquent, and the discipline of the church used, even to excommunication, if necessary, the offender might be awakened, convinced, and reclaimed, and thus a brother be gained. 2d, The discipline that ought to be used, in the case proposed, might be very serviceable to others; they may hear and fear, and be lead to avoid such wickedness, more than if the offender is neglected. 3d, By dealing with such persons, even to excommunication, the church will vindicate itself; whereas, by neglecting, it may be charged with tollerating unworthy, and even scandalous, persons, since it has not properly purged itself from that leaven. Persons that voluntarily break off from church communion, are commonly such as are gradually approaching to scandalous practices. But there may be a case of a different nature. The person desirous to withdraw from the communion of a church, may be a consciencious brother, offended with the conduct of the church. If the church is to blame, in that case, and will not be reformed by the remonstrances, and other proper means, which the offended brother can use, nor yet suffer him to withdraw from them, his duty is to leave them, and appeal to the judgment of the christian world, for the righteousness of his cause and conduct; and join in communion elsewhere, if he can find a church that will receive him.

THIRD

THIRD QUESTION: *How is a church to conduct toward excommunicated persons?*

ANSWER. It is very evident from scripture, that the church should treat them otherways than they do those that never belonged to their body. See 1 Cor. v. 10, 11. The language of scripture is, that *we must withdraw from them; have no company with them; not eat with them*, i. e. at common meals; and this *that they may be ashamed*. Our Saviour says, *let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican*. Now we know that the Jews would not eat or converse freely with heathens and publicans. As one design of excommunication is some hope of alarming, awakening, and reclaiming the offender, we should do all that is suitable to that purpose; and no doubt but christians avoiding common converse and dealing with them, as being most odious sinners, would deeply affect them, if there were any genuine principles, or any latent sparks of goodness to work upon; yea, it may be a means of awakening and converting them, if graceless before. The incestuous Corinthian, who was excommunicated, was affected with his condition, reclaimed, and in time restored. It seems, therefore, proper that church members should avoid buying, selling, eating, conversing, and travelling with an excommunicated person, as much as possible. There may be cases in which it

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§ It is supposed by some, that our having no company, and not eating with an excommunicated person, should be only for a space of time, viz. While there is any prospect that such conduct will do him good; as this is the design of avoiding him, viz. That he may be ashamed. And it is supposed that when there ceases to be any prospect of benefiting him by such treatment, especially if he is obstinate in sin, and despises the church and their treatment of him,

would not be practicable or proper to carry this matter to the extent. If an excommunicated person should be fallen by the way, wounded, or with his limbs broken, a church member should freely assist him; and if a church member should be in this condition, he might receive help from an excommunicated person. So if an husband should be excommunicated, and his wife belong to the church, the man might, by the laws of the state, and the authority of an husband, require his wife to live with him, and it be her duty to submit; it was not designed that positive institutions should disanul the laws of nature.

In 2 Thel. iii. 14, 15. The apostle speaks of a person whom the church was to avoid, and have no company with, *that he might be ashamed*: Yet lays he, *count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*. Some think it is difficult to reconcile this passage without avoiding, and treating excommunicated persons as has been mentioned. There are three solutions of the difficulty in this passage of scripture. 1st, Some suppose our counting him not as an enemy, and admonishing him as a brother, is previous to his excommunication, and having no company with him: That it is while the church is taking pains with him, according to the rules of the gospel; and while they are thus dealing with him, they should shew all brotherly kindness; but that this is not to be done, after they have taken the previous gospel steps, and he is obstinate, so that they are obliged to reject him, and have no company with him.

2d, Some

him, they may then cease to cast pearls before swine; cease to admonish him; and, after that, treat him as they do other scandalous sinners that never belonged to their body.

This is an opinion that deserves consideration.

2d, Some suppose the apostle is speaking of a particular case, and not of offences in general. That he speaks of one that did not regard the apostolic mission of Paul. *If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, &c.* There were some in the apostles time that professed themselves christians, that yet disputed the authority of Paul: This appears from Acts xv. and several passages in the epistles. There might be some Jewish Christians at Thessalonica, that denied Paul's apostolic mission, and might oppose some things that he directed, and so make division and difficulty in the church. Now, in such case, it might be proper for the church to avoid them as the apostle directs, and yet as they might not be immoral or scandalous in other respects, they should use means to bring them to a proper submission, to apostolic injunctions, and therefore, should admonish them in a brotherly manner, and try to win them.

3d, It may be supposed, the apostle says no more here than is to be in the case of all excommunicated persons. As excommunication is (among other things) designed for the good of the offender, he may be admonished in a friendly manner, by the church, to see if he will not consider and repent. When the apostle says *admonish him as a brother*, it may not mean that we look on the man *as a brother*, but that the admonition be in a friendly brotherly manner. This might be done at times, while the church refused to eat with him, and to deal with him in common concerns. Nor is this inconsistent with our Saviour's saying, *let him be as an heathen or a publican*, for they might, in a friendly manner, admonish an heathen and a publican. While there is any hope of reclaiming an excommunicated person, it may
be

be proper for the church once in a while to admonish him, and try to bring him to repentance.

FOURTH QUESTION. *What qualifications should the church require in such persons as have been baptised in infancy, lived free from scandal, freely submitted to the instructions and discipline of the church, who being adult, offer to come to the Lord's table?*

ANSWER. Two things. 1st, An understanding profession of religion. 2^d, A promise to submit to the watch and discipline of the church, and to walk with it, in the observance of all gospel ordinances. The elders must take care that the person has sufficient knowledge, appears to realise what it is to make a profession of religion, is observant of the duties of his place and station, and of good report. Much will depend upon the care and faithfulness of church officers, in keeping the church pure. But when a person has been baptised, brought up and lived as before mentioned, and desires to come to the Lord's table, the church ought, with thankfulness to God, to receive him.

It is probable that some may think that such candidates for church communion should give some account of a work of grace on their souls. On which we observe, that it will be very proper for the elders, or brethren, on such an occasion, to converse with the candidate on this subject. Christian experience is a thing very desirable, and the greatest part of those who are properly qualified for church communion, are both able and willing to communicate what they have experienced, of a work of grace on their hearts, to all who have a right to hear it. But the time and manner of a work of conversion is very various; and the scripture saith not one word of such an account being required or given,

as a term of church communion. And we ought not to be wise above what is written, to make that a term of communion which the scripture doth not. *True love to God* is the qualification in God's sight; and a *credible* profession of religion, or of faith in Christ, and obedience to his commands, is the principal qualification in the sight of man: And not an account of the time, way, and manner in which persons come to have love to God, and faith in Christ; however desirable it may be in itself.

FIFTH QUESTION. *How ought the church to treat those who, being baptised in infancy, neglect to come to the Lord's table when adult?*

ANSWER. These children are by God laid under the bonds of the covenant; or obligated to be truly for God. He seals and marks them, and, in a peculiar manner, requires them to be for him. He requires them by name to love him, to forsake other Gods, to renew or ratify their covenant, to seal it for themselves, to recognize his goodness, and come to his table. All this as a great favour, as well as duty. These children God commits to their professing parents, and to the church, to instruct them, to encourage them, to warn and regulate them. They are under discipline, and are to be called to account why they do not serve and obey God, and renew covenant as he requires. The church must call them to this account. The question or requirement is not whether they can give an account of conversion, but whether they love God and Jesus Christ, who is most amiable and worthy to be loved, and who has done so much for them. If they have not true love to God, and obey him, they shall be damned at last. If any man love not the
 Lord

Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. These persons being cut off from the church now, is but a token of their being cut off at last, and shut out of Heaven. God has as good a right to order them to be cut off from his church now, as he will have to send them to Hell for want of love and obedience. It may do them much good, to have the solemn sign of cutting off pass upon them in this world. Excommunication has done persons great good. It has a tendency to awaken. We know not how many children have continued unawakened and secure, and even perished for want of this piece of church discipline. The baptised youth, that are well instructed, have tender consciences, and walk circumspectly, should renew their baptismal covenant, make a proper profession, and come to the Lord's table. And those that are evidently, both to themselves and to others, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, and mind earthly things, are to be cut off; and they themselves should have no objection, it being a divine institution, and more likely to do them good than to be left as they were. They had much better be cut off than to come unprepared, and deal deceitfully in the covenant of their God. Persons must be on or off; God allows of no neutrality in this matter. *Why halt ye between two opinions, if the Lord be God serve him. He that is not for me, is against me.* The man that would not keep the passover was to be cut off. There are some people who plead that these youth, in a state of careless omission, if not positively scandalous, should be borne with, and not cut off: But let it be considered, that the want of love to God is a breach of the first and greatest commandment, and therefore, as sin is the transgression of the law,

law, must be the greatest sin. It is in God's account real enmity, and, in a sense, comprehends all moral evil; and where it can be known and appear, is as scandalous and censurable as any sin whatever. As a token or evidence of love, God requires us to keep his commandments; and one of the plainest commands is to eat and drink in remembrance of Christ. *If ye love me, says the Saviour, keep my commandments.* If we say we love him, and keep not his commands, we deceive ourselves. No persons ought to be tolerated in a state of careless neutrality. There is after all, one case that deserves consideration here; and that is, of a person of good behaviour, and attentive to religious matters, who is afraid he is not prepared to come, and that it may be worse for him than to abstain, yet appears desirous to wait upon God, in every thing that appears to be his duty. Such a person is to be viewed as we would one that has been in communion some years, but at length, through darkness and fears about his spiritual state, abstains lest he should come unworthily; at the same time has great concern, and anxiety about the matter. Now such persons should be enlightened. They most probably labour under some mistakes. If they had right views of things, they would probably think it as proper to renew covenant at the Lord's table, as to solemnly covenant and give themselves to God in secret prayer, which they can freely do. After all, if they cannot see their way clear to come, such conscientious persons are to be waited upon, pitied, and means used with them. The church should insist upon their attending all means that would tend to clear their case, especially the seasons of instructing communicants. The church should
also

also take care that such persons be often examined, talked with in private, and admonished. We are persuaded if churches would exert themselves, in this matter, and bring all persons to a point, one way or the other, there would not be so much doubt and uncertainty in many cases as now we fear there will be. We often imagine difficulties that will never be.

SIXTH QUESTION. Is it proper for a number of professors of religion to associate to themselves any number of unbaptised or scandalous persons, to vote with them in choosing church officers, and in disposing of the temporalities of the church? And have any unbaptised or scandalous persons a right to vote in and with a church for these purposes?

ANSWER. No person that does not belong to a body, nor is any way a member of it, has a right to vote in and with that body concerning it's important affairs. Unbaptised and scandalous persons do not belong to any church of Christ. They are not of that body. Christ's officers are given to his church; and if the world is benefited by them, it is by calling men to the privileges of the church. Christ's government of the world is for his body's sake, which is his church. *He is made head over all things for the church.* Eph. i. 19. Further, consider that pastor and flock are relative terms, or suppose the proper relation of one party to the other. The shepherd is not in a pastoral relation to any but those that are his flock; and none but such stand in relation to him as a pastor. Such a church officer has the care of a particular flock of Christ, his sheep, and lambs, not the goats. It is a great privilege for every church to choose it's own officers. This is justly and warmly contended for
by

by protestants. Some christian churches have been greatly oppressed and injured by having officers imposed upon them which they did not choose, and could not approve. Where any can avoid such imposition, they ought not to submit to it. Now if unbaptised and scandalous persons may be allowed to vote for church officers, they may in time be a majority, and may, against the privilege of professed christians, and their spiritual interest, bring in carnal ministers. The apostle guards christians against giving up their privileges, and the liberties wherewith Christ has made them free; and particularly enjoining them not to be yoked together with unbelievers, those that are apparently such. Christians, therefore, should be cautious how they associate such with themselves, in cases where the unbelievers may have an opportunity to hurt them, as surely they may in choosing officers and disposing of the properties of the church. A small body of professors had better choose and support their own officers as well as they can, than, for the sake of more support, to take in carnal persons to have the privilege of voting. And church officers had better take up with a less support than be involved with those that will cause trouble in ecclesiastical affairs. A church will often have help and assistance from those that do not belong to it, without allowing them the privilege of voting. Persons of candor and publick spirit will help a church for the sake of hearing the word preached, and being allowed a seat in the place of publick worship, leaving the church to manage it's own affairs. Many that are without the church, or not properly members, will give liberally to help support the ministry and place of publick worship.

SEVENTH

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SEVENTH QUESTION. *Has a congregation or society of unbaptised or scandalous persons a right to choose and call a man to take the pastoral care of them, as a gospel minister? And could a gospel minister, with a good conscience, or agreeable to the word of God, take the pastoral care of such a people?*

ANSWER. Those that are not of the church, have a natural and civil right to invite a man to instruct them in any thing that they think proper, whether it be to read lectures in philosophy, or to preach morality and divinity, as they shall choose. They have a right to ask an evangelist, that is gospellizing the world, to preach to them as he has opportunity. They may say as the man of Macedonia, Acts xvi. 9, *Come over and help us.* And such an evangelist may preach to them as long as he can do more good there than elsewhere. But it should be in order to fit them for, and bring them into a church state. No evangelist could, with a good conscience, agree to take the pastoral charge of them while they continue in the condition mentioned in the question, because they are not a flock of Christ; and such a teacher, so connected and covenanted, would not be a pastor according to the word of God.

We have only to observe here, that in places where the church is small, and there are many that are willing to assemble with them, hear the word, and help support; the church, in choosing a pastor, should have regard to them that are without, and choose a man that will be agreeable to those that will meet, and hear the word with them, so far as will be consistent with the interest of real vital religion. A bishop should *have a good report of them that are without.*

There

There may be two ministers of equal piety, one of whom may be more adapted to gain those that are without than the other; and this should be regarded by the church in the choice of a minister.



A SERIOUS ADDRESS TO OUR SEVERAL CON-
GREGATIONS.

WE have given you in the preceding pages some of our sentiments concerning the order and government of christian churches; which we desire you seriously to consider, and examine according to the word of God, which we profess to make our rule and directory in these matters. If what we have said be agreeable to the rules and precepts of the gospel, it must be acknowledged to be of great importance. The words of Christ are all weighty and binding upon his people; and all who do not observe them, and study conformity to them, in the exercises of their hearts, and their external conduct, are very inconsistent, and unworthy the name and character of disciples and friends to him who says, *Then are ye my disciples indeed, if ye do whatsoever I command you: And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say.* The great head of the church has instituted visible churches of the saints, to hold forth the word of life, and exemplify the religion of the gospel in the external and publick conduct of his people. To answer which purposes, it is of great importance that the rules of discipline, prescribed in his word, should

should be diligently observed and exercised. The neglect of these is doubtless a great reason of that spiritual deadness, coldness, indifferency, and conformity to the world, that prevails in such a sad and lamentable degree in our churches. God must be highly displeas'd with our carelessness and neglect. What is written to the seven churches in Asia is applicable to us. Let us read with application. *He that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches.* Let us hear, and rear, and tremble at God's word. Have we not great reason to think that the Lord will remove our candlesticks out of their places, or spew us out of his mouth, *except we repent?* We would wish you to consider that not only ministers but private brethren, have duties incumbent on them, and parts to act in promoting a reformation. *The head cannot say to the feet I have no need of you.* We ought all, unitedly and vigorously, according to our several places, capacities, and gifts, to pursue the same object, and seek the advancement of Christ's kingdom. *Let us not be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.* His eye is upon us, and he knows what we are doing, and he looketh that we bring forth fruit. You are not to consider what others have heretofore done, or left undone, in church matters, but what Christ has commanded. Those that engage in the cause of Christ must forget the things that are behind, and press forward. Our fore-fathers did wonderfully in their day; but a reformation, according to scripture, is not yet compleat, nor ever will be, so long as the churches rest in present attainments, attending to the example and practice of good men in times past, rather than to the commands of Christ.

We

We have reason to bless God for what has been done, and be zealous to improve and practise according to the light we now have, while we diligently seek after more. The affairs of Christ's kingdom, at the present time, are deposited with us who are now upon the stage of action. We are the husbandmen to whom he hath let out his vineyard, and are answerable to him how we behave in this important trust. If we are unfaithful, the word that he hath spoken shall judge us in the last day.

Are you not greatly deficient in the exercise of brotherly love, according to the directions of Christ? How abundantly is this duty recommended in the New Testament; but how little practised and manifested in our churches? We intreat you to consider how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity; and how great your obligations, according to the commands of Christ, that you love one another as he hath loved you, that ye also love one another. Are you not greatly deficient in the practice of brotherly exhortation, which is inculcated upon christians, and is a mean of provoking to love and good works? How greatly is brotherly reproof neglected, though expressly commanded by Christ? *If thy brother trespass against thee go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.* This direction, with the other steps, is absolutely necessary to be observed in churches, in order to the right exercise of discipline. In a word, how greatly is discipline in general neglected among you! It is clearly commanded; plain rules and directions are given; the want of it is greatly lamented among all that wish well to Zion. It is the grand mean of preserving the external purity
of

of the churches. How beautiful would the assemblies of the saints appear, did they, in these respects, walk according to the order of the gospel? And how great are your obligations to exert yourselves to promote true christian practice and discipline? Was this done as it ought to be, the churches would stand as cities set on an hill, and become terrible as an army with banners. Were professors engaged as they ought to be in the cause of Christ, we should have reason to expect that others, seeing their good works, would glorify the father. The set time to favour Zion, is when Christ's servants take pleasure in it's stones, and favour the dust thereof. Psal. cii. 13. 14. We know that a reformation, in these respects, however important, is not to be expected without vital heart-felt religion; and we pray you to remember and realize that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. We would, therefore, turn your attention to the state of your souls; true conformity to God, and a life of communion with him, is a matter of the greatest importance, both to your safety and comfort. The grand question is, are you friends to Jesus Christ and his kingdom, or not? Take heed lest you be dead while you have a name to live. Your visible connection with God's people will be no benefit to you without a union of heart to the only Saviour; trusting in him you may go on boldly in his cause. Marvel not if the world hate you; but they cannot finally hurt you; the kingdom of Christ will prevail, and blessed are all they that are made active instruments to promote it. *Finally, brethren, farewell; be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind; live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Amen.*

A P P E N D I X.

A P P E N D I X.

BEING A FAIR REPRESENTATION OF THE CASE AND
CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESBYTERY
OF MORRIS COUNTY.

WE are sensible we have been represented in an unfavourable light, and, we think we may say we have, in some respects, been misrepresented. We are willing and desirous to appear, in a true light, in our proper character. We are willing the world should see and judge of us as we are. Concerning the nature of a gospel church, and of church government, we take the Bible for our rule and guide, according to the best light we have, with the assistance of all the human helps that we have been able to obtain; and, indeed, the gospel method of church government is so natural, easy, and agreeable to reason, and so well adapted to answer the ends of it's institution, that we think but few unbiaſſed minds, few that have not, by education, been prepoſſeſſed, could well miſs the ſubſtance of it. Dr. Watts has ſhewn this eaſy ſcriptural method of church government, in a moſt agreeable and convincing manner, in his excellent diſcourſe concerning a *christian church*. Though our judgment and choice avails nothing in the caſe, we can ſcarce forbear thinking that the mode of church government which we have adopted, is ſo agreeable to ſcripture and reaſon, that it will force itſelf upon the judgment of moſt of thoſe who, deliberately and impartially, conſider the ſubject.

We muſt ſuppoſe that every man has a right to
chooſe

choose his religion, and to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, after taking proper pains to be enlightened. Every man has a right to choose for himself at any period of his life, as well as in his youth, and to alter his sentiments and mode of worship whenever scripture and reason lead him to it. To be denied this, would be of dangerous consequence; to be denied this, would cut off all attempts for reformation. It would, heretofore, have prevented reformation; and would, in time to come, prevent the increase of light and purity in the christian church. We have lately claimed a right to worship and manage church affairs for ourselves, in a method that appears to us agreeable to scripture. This right we have claimed with the utmost care not to disturb or injure others in their modes of worship. As we have thought ourselves obliged in duty and conscience to alter, in some measure, from the mode and the connections which we have heretofore been in, we have endeavoured, to the utmost, to do it with as little ostentation and noise as possible, and with as little breach and division, and with as much friendship and brotherly affection toward those that are of different sentiments as could be consistent with our thinking and acting for ourselves. If any thing contrary to such a peaceable declaration has been laid to our charge, as we think there has, we are persuaded it must arise from mistake, misinformation, or prejudice. We choose to be a body associated by ourselves, in a voluntary manner, to promote the interest of religion, and to assist one another to manage ecclesiastical affairs in our several churches. In order to this, we supposed it needful to withdraw from the

synod

synod of New-York and Philadelphia, and from the presbytery that we had belonged to ; as there were some things in our mode and manner of church government inconsistent with their's ; or at least so much as to interrupt that harmony which is desirable in such connections. We had each of us our particular reasons for withdrawing, but those that we could all give as a body we shall presently mention. Being withdrawn, we thought proper to form into a voluntary associated presbytery. What we did on that occasion is as follows :

“ Hanover, May 3d, 1780.

‘ We, ministers of the gospel, viz. Jacob Green,
 ‘ Amzi Lewis, Joseph Grover, and Ebenezer Brad-
 ‘ ford, for various reasons, which we think sufficient to
 ‘ justify ourselves, have withdrawn from the presbyte-
 ‘ ry of New-York, and from the synod of New-
 ‘ York and Philadelphia ; and, without desiring or
 ‘ designing to make any unscriptural or uncharitable
 ‘ breach or separation among ministers and churches,
 ‘ think proper to form ourselves into a voluntary so-
 ‘ ciety for promoting the interest of religion. And as
 ‘ we consider ourselves presbyterians, in a scriptural
 ‘ sense, we agree to call ourselves and be known by the
 ‘ name of *The Presbytery † of Morris County*. And
 ‘ as it may be expected that we should give some
 ‘ reasons why we have withdrawn, we think the fol-
 ‘ lowing sufficient :

‘ As every one ought, so we not only choose, but
 ‘ feel ourselves bound to be on a plan, or scheme of
 ‘ religion and church government, as agreeable to

H

‘ scripture

† We did not, for some reasons, use the word *associated* when we first formed, yet then supposed it proper in itself, and have since concluded to add it when we mention ourselves as a presbytery.

' scripture as possible, and cannot be cramped by any
 ' human power, so as to prevent our serving God,
 ' and doing good to mankind, according to the best
 ' light we have. And we think that the presbyteri-
 ' anism of the church of Scotland, and of the synod of
 ' New-York and Philadelphia, is not wholly founded
 ' on scripture; but that it takes the power too much
 ' out of the hands of the brethren of the church, and
 ' gives an unscriptural and unreasonable power to the
 ' elders, so that if they are corrupt they will tyrannize
 ' over the churches of Christ. We find the synod
 ' has made many rules, canons, or orders, which we
 ' think very inconsistent with the liberties of christian
 ' churches, which rules or orders now stand on their
 ' records; and we have found ourselves cramped and
 ' restrained by these rules or orders of synod, so that
 ' we could not, in some instances, do what we thought
 ' ought to be done for the interest of religion. And
 ' though we do not mention our different sentiments
 ' concerning the qualifications for sacraments†, as a
 ' sufficiens

† We cannot agree with those who (upon Mr. Stoddard's prin-
 ciples) admit persons to sacraments without a profession of that
 which implies true grace, and whom neither they themselves,
 nor the church suppose to have grace. We cannot admit persons
 to either sacrament, nor to obtain baptism for their children, un-
 less they make a credible profession of religion. They must pro-
 fess that which implies sincere love and regard to God; must un-
 derstand the nature of their professions, and evidence or make cre-
 dible what they profess. Therefore we baptise children for none
 but such as view themselves fully in the church, and have come,
 or engage and fully design to come, to the Lord's table the first op-
 portunity. The admitting to baptism by what some call an half-
 way covenant, or an half-way practice, is in our view an human
 invention, full of absurdity, contrary to scripture, and the excellent
 Westminster catechism, that says, "Baptism is not to be admini-
 stered.

‘ sufficient reason to withdraw from our brethren, yet
 ‘ as we have other reasons that are sufficient, we must
 ‘ say that this is a corroborating one; and we withdraw
 ‘ with much more freedom, when we consider that we
 ‘ who withdraw are agreed in our sentiments respecting
 ‘ qualifications for church privileges, and can, without
 ‘ jarring sentiments, join together in promoting the
 ‘ order and discipline which Christ has appointed in his
 ‘ churches.

‘ And we being now met for the purpose of forming
 ‘ ourselves into a presbytery, and having united in
 ‘ solemn prayer to God for wisdom, direction, and
 ‘ assistance, do think proper, in order to promote the
 ‘ interest of religion, to come into the following friend-
 ‘ ly and prudential agreements, viz.

‘ I. That the presbytery will ordinarily meet twice in
 ‘ a year, and oftener, if it appears needful, to consult
 ‘ and agree upon the most expedient measures to pro-
 ‘ mote religion, and to give the churches opportunity
 ‘ to apply to us for the advice and assistance that it is
 ‘ proper for an associated presbytery to afford them.

‘ II. We agree to invite each church to send an
 ‘ elder or delegate to attend this presbytery, at each
 ‘ session, and join with us in our endeavours to promote
 ‘ the Redeemer’s kingdom.

‘ III. As we design to proceed regularly at our meet-
 ‘ ings, and endeavour to promote religion, we agree
 ‘ that a moderator shall be chosen, at each stated pres-
 ‘ bytery, and a clerk to minute the most material trans-
 ‘ actions; and that we will begin and conclude with
 ‘ prayer.

‘ IV. We

stated to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess
 their faith in Christ, and obedience to him.” If therefore they
 profess obedience to him, it must include obedience to that com-
 mand, *take, eat, drink, do this in remembrance of me.*

‘ IV. We agree that this presbytery, as a body, shall never assume, or claim, any jurisdiction over the churches, or authoritatively intermeddle with their affairs, any further than they shall apply to us, and request our advice or other assistance.

‘ V. This presbytery shall make no rules that shall be authoritative; and all agreements shall be alterable as circumstances shall require.’

As we have been desired to reconsider our declination, and see if we could not return, that there might not appear to be a breach or schism, the following proposals have been made and read before the presbytery of New-York,

‘ *Proposals by the associated presbytery of Morris county respecting their union and communion with the synod of New-York and Philadelphia.*

‘ The Morris county presbytery freely offer to return and belong to the synod of New-York and Philadelphia, on rational gospel principles of liberty, and freedom to act according to their consciences. The substance of which is contained in the three following particulars :

‘ I. That as the New-York presbytery is numerous, and that of Morris county already formed, they shall continue to be a distinct presbytery, which, since it is their choice, they have a right to.

‘ II. That they shall have an unrestrained liberty to licence and ordain, for the gospel ministry, any persons whom they shall think proper.

‘ III. That they will meet in synod as a voluntary society, to consult and endeavour to promote the interest of religion, receive applications from, and give assistance to particular congregations as they shall be desired, and as occasion may require. ‘ *Several*

‘ Several observations we must make on each of these particulars.

‘ As to the first, which respects our continuing a distinct presbytery, we observe, that as the form and bond of union, of a particular church, should not be by local bounds, but by a proper covenant agreement, so an associated presbytery should not be determined by particular bounds of land, but by a suitable, friendly, gospel agreement; therefore a number of ministers and churches, that desire it, and agree together for that purpose, have a right to be an associated presbytery. The forming or constituting presbyteries cannot be the business of a synod, because presbyteries are antecedent to a synod, and form or make up that body. A synod is only a voluntary human society, not mentioned in scripture, or pointed out there, any other ways than as we are to do good as we have opportunity, whether by associating together or other ways; but a presbytery has foundation in scripture, and cannot depend upon a voluntary human society; therefore as the Morris county presbytery choose to be and continue such a body, the synod ought not to oppose it, or try to prevent it.

‘ The second particular is, *That this presbytery shall have an unrestrained right to ordain, &c.*

‘ A presbytery have, according to scripture, a right to ordain and introduce men into the ministry; and there is not the least shadow of reason, from scripture, or the nature of things, that there should be an higher power on earth, respecting ordination, than a presbytery. Each presbytery in this matter must be accountable to Christ Jesus, their Great Lord and
 ‘ Master,

' Master, and to him only; yet we grant that a
 ' neighbouring presbytery or a synod, may endeavour
 ' to offer conviction, and may admonish a presbytery,
 ' which they think introduces and ordains improper
 ' men; and, if need be, may withdraw communion
 ' from them on this account; but there can be no
 ' power on earth to controul a presbytery in this
 ' respect, or reverse what they do. The associate
 ' presbytery of Morris county are very sensible of the
 ' importance of a learned ministry, and are determined
 ' not to introduce unsuitable men; but of the degree
 ' of learning necessary, and of other qualifications,
 ' they must judge for themselves; yet hope they
 ' shall ever be willing to hear and pay a suitable re-
 ' gard to what rational men may say on that subject.

' *The third particular respects our meeting in synod.*

' We think that a friendly, voluntary meeting of a
 ' number of ministers or elders of churches (from
 ' distant parts) which may be called a synod, may be
 ' very useful to the churches. Such an annual meet-
 ' ing may give congregations opportunity to apply to
 ' them for direction, or advice about candidates for
 ' the ministry, and many other matters that may be
 ' referred or left to them as arbitrators; but they
 ' have no authority over the churches or presbyteries,
 ' and no power to judge and determine cases, unless
 ' they should be desired by a church, or churches, to
 ' do so in particular cases.

' Every member shall endeavour to attend the an-
 ' nual meeting of the synod when he can, but shall be
 ' obliged to give no other reason of his absence, than
 ' that his circumstances were such at that time that, on
 ' a serious view of the case, he did not think it his
 ' duty to attend.

' Any

Any presbytery, when desired in a christian manner,
 shall be willing to shew their minutes, concerning
 any particular transaction, or give an account of any
 part of their conduct; but the synod shall have no
 power to examine and correct presbytery minutes in
 course.

If any presbytery, or number of ministers, or
 churches, shall hold and propagate pernicious doc-
 trines, or give into irregular practices, subversive of
 gospel order, the synod, or any particular presbytery,
 may expostulate with, and warn them, and, when
 necessary, withdraw communion from them, and
 leave them to their Great Judge.

If any one, or a number of ministers, or an asso-
 ciated presbytery, should choose to withdraw from a
 synod with which they have been associated, they
 have liberty to do it, and not be thought schismatical
 or disorderly, if it be done in a quiet and peace-
 able manner.

If these proposals, or something equivalent, should
 be complied with, we shall be very glad to find such
 agreement in sentiment, and such friendliness among
 the ministers who compose the synod; and if they,
 or something equivalent, are not complied with, the
 world will judge whether we could, without discord
 and grief, have continued with them; and whether
 our peaceably withdrawing, and associating by our-
 selves, was not the most likely method, harmoniously
 and successfully, to promote religion, especially in
 the discipline of the churches under our care. Nor
 can we help thinking the present to be a proper time
 to endeavour to settle the externals of religion, upon
 a free and liberal plan. This is a time in which civil
 and

and religious liberty is attended to, is contended for, and, we trust, is about to take place, if not to be established. It is a time in which a spirit of liberty prevails; a time in which the externals of religion may properly be new modelled, if needful, and fixed upon a gospel plan. The United States have lately formed their several systems of civil government, so as to leave religion free, leave it to stand upon it's own bottom, not embarrassed with civil restraints, or impositions upon conscience; and we have reason to hope religion will flourish when civil powers leave it freely to be propagated, and practised according to it's own free nature. The plan of church government which we have chosen, and we think derived from scripture, is a plan for liberty; the land we live in is a land of liberty; the time we live in is, especially, a time of liberty; and we cannot but desire, and even expect, that many others, within the bounds of the synod, and elsewhere also, will revise their ecclesiastical principles, and see if they do not want something to make them fully consistent with christian liberty.



We think proper to add the following letter, written by one of the associated presbytery, as it contains matters pertinent to the design of this publication.

DEAR SIR,

I TAKE kindly the letter you sent me, and pay particular attention to that part of it that respects the gospel ministry, and the conduct of myself and my brethren. The subject is not new. I have often considered

considered and weighed it with all the attention of which I have been capable. I realize that I must be answerable to my Great Judge. I think I can say I act disinterestedly in this matter. We have no worldly interest in view; we have no secular schemes to promote; we hope we regard the cause of religion; we guard against a party spirit; we endeavour to make the word of God our rule; we are very sensible of the importance of a learned, and, especially, a pious ministry; and such a ministry we determine to promote to the utmost of our power. Nor are we unmindful of the danger of enthusiasm. I have, according to your desire, paid attention to the separations, errors, and extravagancies that were in New-England and other parts, about forty years ago, and since; and, according to your suggestion, we consider ourselves so far intrusted by Christ, as to do what we can to introduce fit men into the churches; but we do not think ourselves so intrusted with this matter as to take it out of the hands of the churches to provide pastors for themselves when they have opportunity; and we fear that many ministers do this in a blameable degree, while they assume a power to licence all candidates before the churches may choose any; whereby hundreds of assemblies are destitute of preachers, since there are not licenced candidates for them to elect, and ministers will not licence for want of some qualifications which yet the scripture does not mention or point out as necessary. It is a view of the wants and cries of destitute churches of Christ, of the trust committed to us, and the account we must give to our Lord and master at last, that leads us to

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propose

propose and do what we do.* We know not how to answer it to the great head of the church, if we see many congregations destitute of teachers, and are acquainted with men that might be brought to labour to advantage in the vineyard of Christ, and yet forbear to do what we can to introduce them. We could wish some ministers well to consider whether many will not cry against them in the day of judgment, for preventing the preaching of the gospel, by restraining men from the ministry that might have been a means of enlightening, convicting, and edifying precious souls. How many might have been instructed and edified by a ministry as suited and profitable to them as if their teachers had had a greater acquaintance with dead languages, and some other less important branches of literature. I would guard against enthusiasm and unqualified teachers. I hope we shall be enabled to do it. We have a subtle adversary, and we need to be upon our guard; we may be caught unawares; but I think I have not been supposed to be much inclined to enthusiasm. I wish I had more of that which some call by that name. I have heard Dr. Watts called an enthusiast; and I believe a considerable

* The practice or method here referred to, is our introducing some men into the ministry without a college education, and with less learning than is commonly obtained by those who spend three or four years at publick seminaries of learning.

The qualification which we think, in some cases, may be omitted, is that of an acquaintance with the dead languages; we are however very sensible of the importance of this, where it can conveniently be obtained; and are therefore exerting ourselves in teaching the learned languages to all the children and youth who can be procured for that purpose.

siderable part of that which, by some ecclesiastical writers in the several ages of the church, has been called fanaticism was true religion and zeal for godliness though often tinged with imprudence and wild-fire, much increased by the opposition of those who should have regulated, instructed, and encouraged those zealous persons, instead of suppressing and anathematizing them. I am persuaded that, in the remarkable season about forty years ago, which some call *The New-Light time*, there would have been much more religion, an happier reformation, and more lasting good effects, if the exhorters and zealous persons had been properly regulated, instructed, and encouraged, instead of being opposed and condemned. The violent opposition they met with, drove them to irregularities, separations, and bitter censoriousness; and their being destitute of the encouragement, instruction, and other assistance, that they ought to have had, was the occasion of their running into many more errors and wild notions than they would, if they had been favoured, instructed and encouraged, in propagating true religion, as many of them might. I speak not of all; I know some of them were deluded, and fit instruments to serve satan; but this was not the case in general. Their zeal and fervour was like a torrent which, if dammed up and opposed, will overflow and do damage; but by being allowed a proper channel to flow in, may be very beneficial. There will be some irregularities attending most methods that can be pursued, and most men that can be employed; but we must not cut off a beneficial stream, because it may some times a little flash over, where it should not.

You

You know what an *outcry* and opposition there was about that time to the conduct of the T——ts, and the new B——ck p——y. What hideous representations of unqualified men? What reproaches for taking men from the last and the loom, and other employments, and putting them into the ministry with so little learning? But that party, and those men, have been the chief instruments of carrying on and supporting true vital religion, and propagating it in the S——th——n parts. Many souls have reason to bless God that such men were put into the ministry. A number of those that were introduced, with but little learning, being studious, and having a taste for knowledge and books, became men of note among men of learning; and none of them, as I can recollect, disgraced the ministry, as too many have done who had more learning. I wish for another such season, and more men, thus qualified, to be employed in God's work. I believe there were at that time more than an hundred in America, men of true love and zeal for God, who might have been put forward, and with a little learning, which might easily have been obtained, would have been eminently instrumental of promoting religion, and our vacancies supplied, and not in such a destitute deplorable condition as at present. We are now justly left without teachers, there being near a thousand vacancies, in these United States, that are destitute of pastors; and the Anabaptists, with illiterate teachers, carrying away great part of the people. May not our destitute circumstances be, in a measure, a judgment upon us for neglecting those that we ought to have employed. While we keep to the rules of
 God's

God's word, respecting qualifications, my brethren and I think the method we take does not tend to introduce unfit men into the ministry. We are very sensible of the great importance of learning among the ministers of the gospel; but it is not necessary that every man that ought to be encouraged to be a pastor of a flock of Christ, should be endowed with the highest degrees of learning. It is necessary there should be some ministers of acute natural parts, and good learning, who may be able to encounter the learned adversaries of Christianity; but if one in five, or even in ten, be thus qualified it may be sufficient. If we view the ministry and churches heretofore, we shall not find more than one minister in ten fully qualified to take up and maintain the necessary controversies, and, with propriety and success, oppose the learned adversaries of religion, while the other nine-tenths might be very useful pastors of Christ's flocks. I must here observe that the credit and support of religion never did, nor ever will, so much depend upon learned disputes, as upon the simplicity, integrity, love, meekness, and, in every respect, the holy lives of ministers and other professors of religion. Where ministers and churches are benevolent, prudent, and live according to the simplicity of the gospel, they will be more respected, and better defended against the enemies of religion, than where the defence is principally by learning and art. The case of very many congregations in our land is deplorable; as sheep without a shepherd, none to break the bread of life to them. I wish all ministers would well consider the case. We, in this associated presbytery, dare not withhold

withhold our utmost endeavours to supply them with scriptural pastors; and being in Christ's vineyard, we are determined to act, in this respect, as under his eye, and as we may secure his approbation in the day of judgment.

F I N I S.

ERRATA.—Page 2, line 11, for *their* read *this*. P. 6, l. 12, for *church congregation* r. *church, congregation*. P. 12, l. 6, for *hizerian* r. *historians*. P. 19, l. 8, for *effectually* r. *effectual*. P. 19, l. 15, for *offices* r. *office*. P. 34, l. 18, for *without* r. *with our*. P. 42, l. 18, for *evangelist* r. *gospel minister*,