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SERMON,

Preached at NEWTOWN,

DECEMBER 8th, 1773.

On Church Government and Discipline.

By ROBERT ROSS, A. M.

Pastor of the Church of Christ in Stratfield.

WITH

A PREFACE and an APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

Some Remarks on the Rev. Mr. DAVID
JUDSON's Reply to said Sermon.

1 Cor. xiv. 33. *For God is not the Author of Confusion,
but of Peace, as in all the Churches of the Saints.*

*The Apostles---had a double Power about Matters of Order
in the Church. 1. By the special Gift of the Spirit's In-
spiration, to found and stablish such Orders, as were to
continue to the End, and none that came after them, might
change, they being the Ordinances of the Holy Ghost.
2. Temporally, pro re nata, to make convenient mutable
Constitutions, in Matters left by the great Legislator to
human Providence, to be determined according to his general
regulating Laws. In this last the Apostles have Successors.
Mr. Richard Baxter's Church History P. 2:*

NEW-HAVEN:

PRINTED BY THOMAS AND SAMUEL GREEN.



P R E F A C E.

THIS sermon gained the greatest attention while it was delivered, and became the subject of much interesting disputation, for reasons well known to the numerous congregation that heard it; so that it has become necessary to publish it to the world to prevent misrepresentation, and that all may judge for themselves. It is likely it will fall into the hands of sundry, who are not acquainted with the state of things at *Newtown*, where it was preached, and which occasioned so much importunity for its publication. I shall therefore give a very brief account of such things, as appear to me necessary to lead them into some general understanding of the affair, without entering very minutely into particulars.

About a dozen years ago Mr. *Sandeman's* letters on *Theron* and *Aspasio* were introduced into this part of the country. Soon after this, the parishes of *New-Fairfield* and *Danbury*, began to be greatly uneasy with their ministers, the Rev. Mr. *Taylor* and the Rev. Mr. *White*, for deviating from their former sentiments in their preaching, and advancing the peculiar tenets of that author. At length they entered complaints against them to the association of this district, who referred them to a council, and the council of this district called the western confociation of this county to their assistance. Those two gentlemen, after the complaint was entered, renounced the ecclesiastical constitution of these churches, however the united council heard the complaints, and dismissed and deposed them. *Hinc illæ lacrymæ.*

The Rev. Mr. *Judson* of *Newtown*, and sundry other worthy gentlemen, who were members of the council, entered a protest against the judgment which was past against Mr. *White*, and he himself paid no regard to it, but immediately preached to all that would adhere to him

him, in which, it is supposed, he had the advice and approbation of sundry of the protestors. For in the run of two or three years, a number of them met at *Danbury*, and ordained a young gentleman along with Mr. *White*, over this separate party, who had set up in avowed opposition to all the churches that adopted the platform. This was certainly a very extraordinary piece of conduct, which tended to raise dissatisfaction in their parishes, and increase the suspicion that they favoured *Sandeman*.

After this, I believe, these gentlemen have seldom or never met at the stated associations with us, and this they did without ever giving us any intimation of their dissatisfaction with the constitution, or any reasons of their withdrawalment. In 1770 Mr. *Judson* published a sermon shewing the reasons, why he renounced the *Say-Brook* platform, in which he says, “ that every particular congregation, joined together to attend gospel-worship and ordinances in one place, is, in the gospel, called a Church ; and that to such particular churches, Christ has committed all that authority, which he hath given in the new-testament, for the continued, standing discipline of his house--and where Christ himself has placed it, there it must abide ; and cannot be given up by particular churches into any other hands, without betraying the trust which the Lord has committed unto them : Nor can any wrest it out of their hands, without trespassing upon the royal prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ ; who must reign till all his enemies are put under his feet.” This I take to be the plan of the independants, and asserted with a confidence formerly unusual to this worthy gentleman, considering how much has been said to prove the divine right of councils and presbyteries by some of the most learned and judicious divines, all which he has passed over without any notice.

These things occasioned considerable uneasiness among his people, and sundry expected that some of the ministers of this district would have made some reply to his sermon. But tho' the association were far from thinking there was any difficulty in answering his sermon, yet not
looking

looking upon the matter to be of so much consequence, as the peace of that church, they forbore meddling in the affair, knowing that it was easier to kindle and spread, than to quench the flame of contention. And tho' it appears that Mr. *Judson* seems to be almost at a loss, whether our churches, who adopt the platform, ought to be acknowledged as churches of Christ, but rather looks upon us as anti-christian combinations ; yet we for our parts would not allow ourselves to have any uncharitable opinion, even of the independents, merely for their differing from us in their plan of government and discipline. Churches may subsist many years without having any special occasion for councils or presbyteries ; and so long as they are in peace and prosperity, it should seem not a very prudent thing to disturb their peace, and break them to pieces about the less important modes of church-government and discipline. One man may prefer one surgeon, and another may prefer another ; but would it be wise for them to quarrel about the matter, and each to break his own bones, that he might have a convincing proof of the superior skill of his doctor ?

Howe'ever, the association after some considerable time met on purpose, having invited all those gentlemen, and had a long conference with them, and appointed a committee to review the platform, and draw up an explanation of it. By this review and explanation, which probably the confociation of this district would have adopted, it appears that the objections which they had made, were not well founded, but proceeded in a great measure from mistake, jealousies and prejudice.

But this did not satisfy Mr. *Judson* ; from which the association supposed, they had good reason to think that nothing short of a near approach to *Sandemanian*-independency would satisfy him ; and that he was determined at all adventures to adhere to the measures he had taken, and proceed to the mark he had in view.---In a few months after this, there was a council called in a case of great difficulty at *Danbury*, to which Mr. *Judson* and his church were invited to give their best assistance ; but instead of reading the invitation to his church, and lead-
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ing them to choose a messenger, he led them to vote out the consociated connection. Now since this was a matter which affected the very constitution of the church, should not the members have had some proper notice, some due time before it was taken, that they might have had opportunity to have perused the platform, and have heard and considered in what view we acted upon it, and what could be said in its defence? Whereas in the manner in which they are said to have been called to vote, it is questionable whether one quarter part had any tolerable understanding of what they were voting about, only that it was agreeable to their pastor to renounce the consociated connection. And our people have been trained up to put confidence in their ministers ordinarily, that they do not suspect they would propose any thing which is wrong to be voted; so that it is remarkable, that in such circumstances the vote was carried by a small and trifling majority. This vote, and the method in which it was obtained, occasioned much uneasiness, disturbance and confusion in that church and society, as it shewed the great influence which a minister has to get a majority of his people to vote any thing he has a mind to propose, however inconsistent with their true christian liberty, and especially as any, who might be aggrieved, could according to the scheme their pastor was adopting have no appeal; let the sentence, judgment or vote of the church be ever so unjust and oppressive. A small majority was obtained, and when they had once voted the constitution out, it is not strange that they were wilful enough to abide by their vote for some time, as they still knew their pastor was so greatly prejudiced against it. But if there had not been pains taken to persuade them the platform was a dreadful thing, or if after they were thus frightened, they had given the consociation an opportunity to have shewed the sense in which they adopted it, and answer the objections which they had against it, who is there that believes there would have been ten persons in the church, who would have refused to have continued their connection with the consociation?

Ever since *Sandeman's* books received so much entertainment

tainment among us in this county, and the before mentioned ministers were suspended for venting many destructive errors, there have been many clamours by some against the constitution. But have these clamours and prejudices arisen first from the churches, or the pastors?--- Strange that when they were bro't up under the constitution, and acted upon it, they never discovered it was so contradictory, unscriptural and antichristian "till these books came among us!

I would not by any means suggest, that there is any necessary connection between the independent plan of church government and *Sandeman's* notions in divinity. The independents arose in England in the last century, many years before *Sandeman* was born, and some of their divines were of the first character for orthodoxy and piety. And as to the congregational ministers and churches, it is well known they are as much opposed in general to *Sandeman* as any in the country. I only mean to represent how the dissatisfaction with the platform appears to have arisen among us. For my own part the difference between moderate congregational, consociated, and presbyterian churches appears to me so small, that I could without any great difficulty comply with either of them, and practice their peculiar modes. The congregational divines, I think, have all allowed that councils were to be called in difficult cases to give their best advice at least, which amounts to much the same with what is done by our consociations. But Mr. *Judson* is against this, if I can understand him, when he says, "a consociated council convened according to platform, becomes a body invested with such horns of power, as that wheresoever the body moves, thither the horns move also, enforcing their every act, judgment COUNSEL, OPINION or ADVICE with binding authority." And hence I apprehend that Mr. *Judson* has no more love nor regard for the congregational, than for the consociated plan of government, but is attempting to introduce something nearly like the *Sandemanian* model. And hence the branding the consociational connection as antichristian, and the spirit of bitterness that seasons his performance.

The Apostles did not withdraw from the Jewish church before they had used their utmost endeavours to convince them. And *Luther*, and the other reformers did not renounce the church of *Rome*, till many repeated endeavours shewed that the case was désperate. Why then have these confociated churches been renounced without any means being used to convince us of our mistakes? Are we worse than Jews and Papists? However let our brethren think as bad of us as they please, and proceed as disorderly as they will, this is no rule for us to follow. We look upon ourselves bound to do all things decently, and in order.

The first confociation, after the church at *Newtown* had voted out the platform once and again, as *Mr. Judson* has related at large in his book, met at *Ripton* for an ordination there, Octo. 27th 1773; and taking the conduct of *Newtown* in rending themselves off from us into consideration, tho't it was expedient to appoint a committee to go to *Newtown*, and endeavour to bring them back, if possible, to the constitution, or prepare the way for an orderly dissolving the relation on our part.

For tho' the association had conferred with the pastor at large, yet no measures had ever been taken with the church; and the confociation as such had never taken any measures at all about the matter; and it was not only trifling, but troublesome and expensive, to send letters to the pastor and church of *Newtown* to attend our councils, which yet we were obliged to do by the constitution until the confociated relation was regularly dissolved on our part as well as theirs. There were a large number of those who adhered to the constitution, who entred a complaint against their pastor at this time, and earnestly prayed for relief, so that on various accounts it was necessary for the confociation to take the steps they did; and since they tho't best to appoint a committee, it was evidently right and reasonable to notify *Mr. Judson* and his church of this matter. I can as freely appeal to the World as *Mr. Judson*, whether the confociation in all this have not treated him and his church with all christian decency and regard, notwithstanding the heavy complaints

plaints he has made. But truly it is very difficult to please this good gentleman of late, or to keep him in tolerable good humour with some of those whom he is pleased to call leading members of the consociation. For it seems from the account he has published that he reflects upon the Rev. Mr. *Bartlet*, for saying nothing, and upon me for sending him merely a proper notification.

A church meeting was held at *Newtown* Nov. 17th 1773, and Mr. *Judson* and his church drew up those papers, which he has printed, in which, among other things, he says, "that he had given the reason for his renouncing the platform in public print, to which no fair reply hath been made." It is not strange that his warm adherents should, after this his declaration, boast of his sermon as unanswerable. But if they had read with candour and attention the late Mr. *Hobart's* last piece, they might have seen, that besides the tenderness of the consociation, which prevented their making remarks upon it, as already mentioned; there was nothing in it but had been fully confuted by that learned and accurate writer, to all which he has made no fair reply.

After this church meeting, information was sent to me, and a desire, that I would prepare a discourse on church government, and discipline to preach at *Newtown*, which, if it answered no other end, might shew them, that the plan which they had adopted, was not so clearly founded on scripture, nor so unexceptionable as they imagined. And this being represented as the opinion of my Brethren in general, I was prevailed with, tho' not very zealous about the matter, to make the following draught of my first tho'ts on the subject, in which I have not endeavoured to explain nor defend the platform at all, as Mr. *Judson* justly observes in page 26, but to attack the independent scheme of church government. How this gentleman could appear to mistake my design throughout almost all the rest of his reply, I leave to him to explain, since he tho't this worthy special remark, and I had plainly declared what I had in view, at the close of my sermon, to prevent all mistakes.

When I had composed and reviewed my sermon,

knowing that if it should be preached, it might become the subject of controversy, and that my worthy neighbour, the late Mr. *Hobart*, had attended to every thing relating to the platform with that coolness, diligence and accuracy, for which he was so greatly distinguished, I took an opportunity, and gave him the perusal of my notes, and took his opinion about preaching and printing them if desired; who, after he had leisurely perused them, freely declared that he tho't it might be of good service to the churches. By his death a few days after this, these churches have received a very great loss.---I therefore preached the sermon just as it was, and have never transcribed it, and have inserted only such interlineations as were necessary to complete the sense. Whatever has been tho't necessary to rectify Mr. *Judson's* mistakes, or obviate some of his objections is included in [].

As this sermon gained very extraordinary attention from the hearers, so it has met with very extraordinary treatment since it was preached. It has not only been greatly praised and blamed, but it has received a large answer from the press before it was printed. It seems it made great impressions on sundry of the hearers, and exceedingly alarmed Mr. *Judson*, otherwise he would not have ventured to publish an answer to the world to a discourse he never had any opportunity to peruse. By the prodigious hurry in which he has published his pretended reply, he has represented in a striking manner, that rhetorical figure called *Hysteron-proteron*, or as it is more vulgarly expressed, of putting the cart before the horse. For common sense and reason would say, that he ought to have waited till he had an opportunity to have perused the sermon before he attempted to answer it. But since I had appeared in behalf of common-sense and reason, and if he had any design, he must have designed among other things to confute them in his answer, it must be allowed, he could not proceed in a more proper method. And indeed whoever will peruse his piece with attention and candour, may easily discover that it is executed agreeable to such a design, since there is scarcely any appearance of reasoning in it, but many mere assertions and exclamations. He

He has charged the leading proposition with many dreadful things, as leading to deism, and as opening the gap thro' which at first entered, and by which there is great danger of being again introduced, all the superstitions, rites and fooleries of the church of *Rome*; because that I give it as my opinion, that church government and discipline are to be managed according to the general rules of the word, and the rules of common sense, reason and christian prudence. Does this gentleman really think that deism and popery are more agreeable to common sense and reason, than christianity and protestantism? If he does, I hope, there is no other christian and protestant divine will venture to avow such an opinion.

But indeed he himself does not seem to have been always very certain, that the leading proposition was wrong, tho' he has represented it in such a bad light, since he has, so far as I can judge, allowed it to be true once and again. 'By this proposition,' says he, p. 6, 'that Christ hath given laws sufficient for the government of his church, is not meant, you must observe, that Christ hath given rules in his word in all respects so explicit, as not to leave room for the use of a discretionary prudence in the church, respecting circumstances of time, place, &c.' For what is a discretionary prudence different from common sense and reason, as I have repeatedly expressed myself? And who can tell, since he has not explained himself, how far this, &c. which he has subjoined to the circumstances of time and place may extend? I have read of an *et cætera* oath, which made a great deal of disturbance; and of an inventory of the cargo of a vessel that was taken, containing some few things, &c. which *et cætera* was represented in a law-suit which followed, to be worth several thousand pounds sterling. Thus, &c. may contain more than all I have yet pled for, in my sermon. Whether Mr. *Judson* meant to grant it in this private way, while he professedly denies it in other parts of his performance, he can tell best. But this I dare venture to affirm, without being bold, that no man in the world can tell whether he differs in sentiment from the leading proposition in my sermon or not, from any thing

he

he has advanced in his piece. If he would make out a difference, and shew what the difference is, he must condescend to express himself with more exactness and consistency than he has done.

The great thing which I have enlarged upon is, what he has quoted with approbation from the confession of faith, which, I believe, is in this agreeable to the confessions of all the reformed churches, viz. ‘ There are some
 ‘ circumstances concerning the worship of God, and go-
 ‘ vernment of the church, common to human actions and
 ‘ societies, which are to be ordered by the light of na-
 ‘ ture, and christian prudence, according to the general
 ‘ rules of the word, which are always to be observed.’ And he has taken a great deal of pains to shew, that if they meant to support the platform by direct and immediate proof from scripture, the texts this wise and venerable synod have quoted, are very impertinent to the purpose. But he has not attempted to shew, that these articles of discipline are contrary to the general rules of the word, and the principles of reason and common sense. Thus he has in fact endeavoured to support my opinion instead of opposing it. But he has bro’t no proof at all, that this wise, learned and venerable council at *Say-Brook* were of opinion, that every thing relating to government and discipline is particularly prescribed in the gospel, since they expressly refer us to the light of nature and christian prudence, and the general rules of the word. And I cannot but be of opinion, they might be as consistent as Mr. *Judson*, in supposing that the platform in having the countenance of these, was sufficiently supported. But if after what has been quoted from the confession, and after finding no more direct proofs from scripture than they have produced, which Mr. *Judson* says are impertinent, they did really suppose they had found immediate divine warrant for every punctilio, I am not obliged to be inconsistent, and take up with impertinent proof and imagination because they did thro’ a mistake.---What I have tho’t rather necessary by way of remarks may be seen in the appendix.

THE SERMON.

2 COR. X. 7, 8.

“ If any man trust to himself, that he is Christ's, let
 “ him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ's,
 “ even so are we Christ's. For tho' I should boast some-
 “ what more of our authority, which the Lord hath gi-
 “ ven us for edification and not for destruction, I should
 “ not be ashamed.”

My Brethren,

TIS very grievous to me, and I believe, to all your
 neighbouring churches to view the unhappy divi-
 sions and contentions, that have arisen among you about
 the form of government and the right of discipline. The
 consociation, with which you have been connected from
 your first formation into a church, and under whose in-
 fluence you have lived many years in love and peace,
 might long since have met and enquired into the reasons
 of some parts of your conduct. But they were not dis-
 posed to boast of their authority, but to exercise the
 greatest lenity and forbearance till the last extremity, and
 even complaints from a large number of you, and earnest
 application for help, has made it absolutely necessary to
 come and endeavour, if possible, to heal your unhappy
 divisions, and prevent your utter ruin. 'Tis not the
 consociation, nor any power grasped at or claimed by us,
 that has broken you to pieces: Yourself have done this.

When divisions and contentions arise in any church,
 it would have an excellent tendency to remove them, if
 the several contending parties, and especially those who
 are dissatisfied with the common customs of the churches
 where they live, would lay aside all self-conceit and pride,
 and be clothed with humility and candour. If such as
 are most zealous and forward for a separation from the
 ecclesiastical constitution & communion of these churches
 are honest and sincere, they should be candid enough
 to allow, that their brethren whom they forsake may
 have

have sense and integrity as well as themselves.* It is hardly consistent with modesty to arrogate all sense, understanding and goodness to themselves. However if any should set up such high pretensions, we may be allowed, after the example of the apostle, to put them in mind of the common relation we, as well as they, bear to our Lord Jesus Christ. "If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ's, even so *are* we Christ's." For tho' this might be asserted by this great apostle by way of eminency, considering his very remarkable conversion, extraordinary labours and successes in the gospel; yet it is true in a lower sense of all christian churches and ministers. They all bear a common relation to Jesus Christ our common Lord, and should therefore be candid and charitable to one another, and love ~~one~~ another as children and brethren of the same family. There is nothing which the great King and Head of the church has more repeatedly and earnestly recommended to his followers than this, which if it was duly cultivated and practised, would either prevent controversies and breaches in churches, or soon heal them if by any means they should arise.

The apostle was very sensible, that such a desirable temper and state of things was far from taking place in the christian church even in his time. He beheld with grief the sad effects of corruption, ignorance and pride in various divisions and contentions. And hence he was obliged to assert the authority with which he was invested for the accommodation and decision of such controversies, and the inflicting of proper censures on obstinate offenders. He was far from being fond of exerting this authority. The ministers of Christ, while they act in their proper character, do not grasp at power, they have no desire of lording it over God's heritage; of ruling the people committed to their charge with rigour and tyranny. They are compassionate and merciful, and govern them with prudence and gentleness, and would be very glad,

* Must not this be the temper of those who take upon them to call our churches anti-christian?

glad, that there were no occasion to exercise any discipline, or inflict the censures of the church upon any. It is not to aggrandize themselves and manifest their authority, that the ministers and churches of Christ, when convened in councils give their assistance in dispensing discipline, but for the spiritual good of those persons and churches, that fall into great and distressing difficulties and scandals; and that others may take warning, and avoid such destructive measures. And thus the glory of God is manifested, and good order, government and purity is maintained in the church. Government and discipline are therefore of importance in this imperfect state of the church, where so many of her members on one account and another, refuse to practise the law of love and kindness, but will follow their own corrupt imaginations, and bring reproach on the church by their disorderly conduct, and of necessary consequence the church must be furnished with sufficient authority for these salutary purposes. For to suppose that government and discipline are to be exercised, and yet that none have authority for this purpose, is an evident absurdity.

It is well known, that there have been many different opinions and animated debates about the persons or court who are invested with this authority, and very different practices have obtained in different churches, which would take up too much time so much as to mention at present, and would be of no service to you, since you have no concern in them. Leaving these things in general to the consideration of those whom they may concern, I shall confine myself to two points which appear to affect the peace and happiness of this church, viz.

I. Whether the Lord Jesus Christ, the great King and Head of the church has PARTICULARLY prescribed in the gospel all the rules of government and discipline, and the PRECISE methods in which it is to be managed?

II. Whether the authority, right or power of government be committed and LIMITED to a particular church or worshipping congregation?

As to the first of these I must declare myself at present on the negative side of the question, for the following reasons.

1. It

1. It was not needful that there should be such a system of particular rules and directions for every thing relative to government and discipline delivered in the gospel, since the churches are composed of persons endowed with reason and conscience, who by due consideration can of themselves, or by applying to their neighbouring churches, discover what is for their edification as to many of these matters. It is readily allowed that the scriptures are a perfect rule of faith and practice in all things, where there was any necessity for a rule. But it does not detract from the perfection and excellency of the gospel, that it does not contain directions, nor prescribe injunctions in those matters to which it was not designed to refer; or where there were other means sufficient to instruct men. Would it be reasonable to accuse the scriptures of deficiency because they do not contain a compleat system of surveying or navigation,* or teach men when seed time and harvest come? And thus with regard to that government and discipline which is needful for the edification of the church, if the reason and consciences of men, especially of the wiser part of the members, together with some general out-lines or directions, which are to be found in the gospel, be sufficient to shew us in sundry respects, how they should be managed and carried into execution, what need could there be of giving a large body of ecclesiastical canons and disciplinary laws to prescribe every particular measure and step of proceeding?

2. Where government is exercised, whether in church or state for any considerable time, and many cases tried, necessity obliges the court, or whoever decides the matters in controversy, to fall upon some regular method of proceeding, and to bring them to a regular issue. Now the Jewish church and nation had been under government for many generations, even from the time of Moses, and had their courts and fixed and regular modes of proceeding in all matters civil and ecclesiastical before that

Christ

* It would be very difficult for the state or church to subsist without surveying and navigation. But this is not quite so evident, but that some very worthy and learned divines, as well as civilians have called it in question.

Christ came, and gave any hints about the gospel-church. These methods of managing cases of discipline, were in general agreeable to reason and common sense, as indeed the methods of proceeding in all courts are generally good, if they be carefully followed without partiality. These methods were well known to the apostles, and the church at Jerusalem, and they were strongly prepossessed, as was natural, in favour of the law of Moses and the customs which their civil and ecclesiastical courts had adopted from time immemorial. It appears from some accounts which we have in the new testament, that the apostles and Jewish christians thought it best and most expedient to observe the law of Moses, and temple-worship, during that period. When the apostle Paul had related to them the great success of his ministry among the Gentiles, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, "Thou
 " seest, brother, how many thousands of the Jews there
 " are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law :
 " And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all
 " the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake
 " Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise *their*
 " children, neither to walk after the customs. What
 " is it therefore ? the multitude must needs come togeth-
 " er : for they will hear that thou art come. Do
 " therefore this that we say to thee : We have four men
 " which have a vow on them : them take and purify
 " thyself with them and be at charges with them, that
 " they may shave their heads ; and all may know
 " that those things whereof they were informed con-
 " cerning thee are nothing, but that thou also walkest
 " orderly and keepest the law." Thus all the apostles
 and Jewish christians walked after the customs which they had received, which doubtless comprehended their modes of government and discipline. They saw no necessity of departing from them. And tho' the ceremonial institutions were abolished of course after the destruction of Jerusalem, yet it does not appear that the rules of their discipline, or their methods of dealing with offenders were ever laid aside, or any others appointed in their room. They were not immediately of divine
 C institution,

institution, not being minutely prescribed in the law of Moses; but they had the sanction of reason and long experience, and therefore were not entirely peculiar to the Jews, but in some measure common to all civilized nations, and of consequence can never be repealed, 'til reason and common sense be laid aside.

It was not a new-church entirely different from that under the old-testament, which was erected under the gospel. It was still the same church for substance, continued with some little variation. There was need of purity in the members of the old-testament church, as well as in those of the new, and discipline was maintained for this important purpose. And why then should not the methods which the wisdom and experience of many ages had discovered, and which God approved by his owning them as his people, still answer under the new-dispensation, when christians are so much better instructed, favoured with greater measures of grace, and have less need of discipline?---The end, the great end of all government and discipline is the edification, and not the destruction of the church. Now no particular rules, that could be conceived in human language, could promote this so well in various cases that occur, as observation and christian prudence. Let prejudice be laid aside, and candour and love prevail according to the gospel, and a church, especially the more judicious members, may with suitable pains discover what is for their edification with regard to many things, concerning the best methods of proceeding in government and discipline, at least with the help of such neighbours, as they may easily invite to their assistance. And thus it would doubtless have been prejudicial to the church to have had a large body of ecclesiastical laws.

3. Should it be pled, that it seems highly convenient, that the Great Head of the Church should have given plain and precise rules to his church, to direct them how to proceed in all the various cases that come before them, and therefore we may conclude there is such a system of ecclesiastical laws: This appears from what has been said to be far from evident; and it might be observed, that
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it would be more desirable still, to have the whole church secured from all corruption, mistakes and scandals, so as to need no law, nor discipline; or if that cannot be, to have, as the papists fancy, an infallible judge to give a right judgment in every case. And thus a warm imagination is ready to take that to be fact, which it is excessively pleated with, and fancies would be very convenient and beneficial. But if it be a clear and incontestible fact, that there is no infallible judge of controversies, and that the pope who claims this prerogative, is grossly ignorant and superstitious, and justly chargeable with the most notorious contradictions and blunders; we may be absolutely certain, that it was not necessary, nor convenient, there should be any infallible judge over the church in this world. And in like manner, if clear and precise rules for all the various exigencies of government and discipline are not to be found in the gospel, we may be equally certain, that all such pretensions are quite groundless, and that they were not necessary for the health and peace of the church. For the Lord Jesus Christ is infinitely kind and merciful, and wise, and therefore knew, and was ready to grant what was most conducive for her prosperity. If those who are confident, there are divine rules prescribed in the gospel, for the various steps of proceeding in government and discipline, would produce them to the world, this should in all reason end all controversy about the matter, and bring all sober christians to embrace their opinion. But if they cannot produce them, this must be looked on as a clear evidence, that after all they cannot find them, and that in fact they are not to be found, notwithstanding their boasted pretensions.

If there had been such a complete system of church laws, it is strange that councils, which have been generally composed of the most judicious and pious members of the church, should not have discovered them, even in the primitive times, nor in protestant countries where they profess to make the bible their rule, but have gone universally into the practice of making some general regulations and modes of proceeding in the exercise of government, and drawing up articles for the administration
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of church discipline. And equally strange, it is, that there should have been so many different schemes of government embraced by the most judicious and excellent divines, and other learned and eminent men, if every thing relating to all these matters were clearly revealed and prescribed in the bible. For surely it will not be pretended that the rules of government and discipline are revealed in the gospel, but in such a dark and obscure manner, that scarce any body can understand them. Whereas if these modes and regulations are not particularly prescribed, but left in some considerable measure to men's reason and christian prudence, as may best promote the edification of the church, agreeable to some general directions in the gospel, there is room for much diversity, and to adopt plans different in sundry respects, as we find they have done in civil government.

For my part, I am free to declare, that I can find but very few particular rules in the bible, that have any *certain* and *immediate* reference to the government and discipline of the christian church. I think it were easy to shew that there is as much said in the bible about civil as ecclesiastical government. But would not any man be accounted very whimsical, who should pretend that there was not need of any other rules but these divine directions to regulate all our courts of justice in their modes of proceeding and judgments? It is readily granted, that there are such general rules as these, that *every charge must be proved by two or three witnesses*; and that *discipline is for the edification and not the destruction of the church*. But I do not find the particular crimes, that are disciplinable, mentioned only in general; nor the degrees of them, that are censurable, ascertained with much precision; nor the character, and credibility of the witnesses fixed; nor how they are to give in their testimony, under oath, or otherwise. And I might ask how long before trial, and by whom, the accused are to be notified, and by whom are they to be tried? If by the worshipping congregation where they belong, whether women and children, and such as are superannuated are to sit as judges?---And what makes a vote of the church? Every individual

individual member? or the major part? Now if neither the body, who is to try offenders be clearly described; nor the particular modes of their proceeding, and voting be pointed out in the gospel, must we not follow the dictates of reason and common sense? or lay government and discipline wholly aside as impracticable? Nor does this reflect any reproach upon Christ in his kingly office, since he has furnished his church with reason, and given them such an excellent system of precepts, to direct his followers as individuals, which if they would obey, there would be no need of any discipline; and, as I suppose allowed, recommended it to them to apply to their neighbouring churches, in all difficult cases. Hence his apostles, who best knew the mind of their divine Lord and Master, were much more solicitous to persuade men to repent and believe the gospel, and adorn their profession by good works, and live in love and peace, than in compiling a body of ecclesiastical laws. And if christians would be careful to practise holiness, love and peace, according to the great law of Christ, on which he had laid the greatest stress, and which he made the chief evidences of their being his disciples; there would be no need of discipline. The practice of these divine graces would best preserve the purity of the church, and reflect the most honor on religion. But since mistakes and errors, and even damnable heresies creep in and spread, and threaten the destruction of multitudes; since there are many who fall into scandalous crimes, which must be testified against, lest reproach should be reflected on the church, as if she approved such vicious practices; it is needful that there be government and discipline exercised with christian meekness and prudence.

[The design of what has been said can hardly be supposed by any person, who will carefully attend to it, to invest synods, or councils, convocations, or conclaves, with a power of decreeing rights and ceremonies, which have no foundation at all in the scriptures; or of making ecclesiastical canons, and a body of church laws for all the numerous and different cases of government and discipline. For this has been shewed to be quite impracticable,

cable, and not for the benefit of the church, so that the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the great King and Head of the church has tho't best to leave government and discipline in a great measure to christian prudence, and common sense. Must it not then be best for all councils, when any case comes before them, to do what reason points out to be more for edification according to the general rules of the word? Indeed it would be inconvenient for a worshipping assembly, every time they meet, to consider and make an express agreement at what time on sunday they would assemble, and how often they would meet for public worship, whether once, twice, or thrice, and how often they should sing. These, and the like things, if they were to determine them every sunday would take up the greater part, if not the whole of their time, and so would defeat the great ends of their meeting together. It is then undoubtedly best to make an agreement about all such matters once for all, according to what appears most for the edification of the worshipping assembly, and generally abide by it. And thus in like manner, if every time, councils are called to meet, they must first fix all the modes of their proceeding, and how they mean to manage; this would take up more time than the parties who call them would be willing to wait with patience. It is therefore evident according to common sense, that it is best such general regulations should be agreed upon, and known to all the churches, that when councils are called, they may proceed without any needless delay or expense, and give their opinion about the case that is laid before them. Now this, I suppose, is the great thing that is done in the directory, drawn up by the Westminster assembly, by the Cambridge and Say-Brook platforms, which if they cannot be supported by direct institution, and immediate express texts of scripture, yet I take them for substance to be agreeable to the general rules of the word, and the dictates of common sense and reason.

But it follows very naturally from what has been said, that they must be greatly mistaken, who set up for an express divine right for every peculiarity in the form of government,

government, and the modes of managing discipline, which they happen to fancy and adopt. This claim of a divine right for every peculiarity in the form of government and the modes of discipline has proved a mistake of a most pernicious tendency ; it has been one great thing which has divided and rent the christian world according to the different fancies, educations and prejudices of zealous bigots, and alienated their affections from one another, and serves to keep up schisms, contentions and uncharitableness without end. For while persons imagine that every punctilio of that government and mode of discipline, which they embrace, is immediately and plainly prescribed by God, they cannot with a good conscience give any of them up, but must earnestly contend for them, let the consequences be what they will. Whereas if we look upon sundry of these lesser things to be left to common sense and christian prudence, and the general rules of the word, we may keep communion with those who differ from us as to these expedients, and still keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of love and peace with those who rather prefer some other forms and modes. And if it be certain matter of fact, that this divine right which is pled for by the warm advocates of these different forms and modes is, as I have represented it, mere imagination without any warrant from the sacred oracles, it is evident they should plead only fancy, education, will or prejudice. It is not a fair and honest way of managing a cause to set up a wrong claim, and make a wrong plea. Let every thing stand on its own proper foundation. And if this could be once obtained, we should probably find that those who make the highest pretensions to a divine rule, and express warrant from heaven for all their modes and forms, have but a very slender foundation to support them.

It is one important thing in all laws that they be plain, since they are designed for general use. Hence if there be divine laws appointing and prescribing every step to be taken about discipline, it may be presumed, they are not

not only to be easily found, but readily understood by all honest enquirers. Let them then be produced.

When any difficulty arises thro' length of time about the meaning of any statute, the practice of the courts upon it is often adduced to explain its meaning. And hence the many volumes of reports of trials and adjudications, to which the gentlemen of the law so often recur in support of their opinion. And thus with regard to the canons and laws of discipline, if any of these appear not quite so plain to us at this distance of time, yet the adjudications upon them would clearly shew how they were understood by the Apostles and primitive church. Let a sufficient number of these reports be produced, to shew us precisely how they proceeded in disciplining offenders. For these are pretty near as necessary as the laws themselves, otherwise learned men would not take so much pains in compiling such books.]

And this leads me to the second general enquiry, viz. Whether this authority be given and confined to a particular church ?

The apostles do not appear to have been fond of exercising their authority, which should teach the ministers of Christ to imitate their moderation. Therefore agreeable to their example, and common sense, when any difficulty arises in a church, they should make full trial to accommodate it among themselves if they can. It is most for their public credit and reputation, and tends to prevent the spread of such things, which often infect other churches when they are divulged.

But many cases happen, when that church in which the difficulty arises cannot bring it to any equitable or comfortable issue. It may so happen that the complainant, or the person to whom the complaint is entered, one, or both of them, may have such connections by near relation with the greatest part of the members of the church, as render them according to the observation of common sense, quite improper persons to decide the complaint. For church-members are not perfect, and while they live in the body, are apt to feel the influence of such connections. Civil courts exclude near relations, and those who
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are violently prejudiced or interested from sitting in judgment. And how can that which is contrary to common sense in civil cases, become agreeable to it in ecclesiastical? And when the case, which I have now supposed happens, how shall such a controversy be decided with impartiality, without favour, affection or prejudice? Or must they live always in a quarrel? Is it not wise and prudent to call in some of their judicious neighbours? Is not this looked upon a privilege in civil cases? It may also happen that the pastor of a church may fall into heresy or scandalous immorality. And what can a church that is absolutely independent do in this case? Such a minister will not vote against himself. And how shall the members of the church over which he presides try, censure and depose him? Will it do for the members to set up and pull down their head and guide at their pleasure? Is it not reasonable and scriptural, that he should be tried by his peers?

If ministers are disposed to lord it over their people, and maintain their standing, let them fall into what scandals and heresies they will, there cannot be a better plan devised for them, than to have the whole government and discipline confined to a particular church, of which they are the leaders, and without whom no censures can be inflicted, nor any dismissal take place. Is not this the way to make every minister a pope in his particular church, whom his people must obey and support, whether they have reason to like or dislike him? And thus this scheme, which appears so very favourable to the liberties of the people at first view, does in the end effectually destroy them, and subjects the parish entirely to their minister, without any possibility of relief, let them be ever so injuriously treated. *

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* Mr. Judson says "it is no wonder, should this seem to some a very weighty objection. But that it should seem so to any that read the gospel with attention is quite strange. Because it is so plain in the gospel, that he that runs may read; that there was a plurality of elders in every church." It is no wonder, yet quite strange. What a consistent representation is this!

May it not be supposed without any strange presumption, that Dr. Doddridge read the new testament with attention? Yet he expresses himself

himself

2. There are cases of discipline of the utmost importance, of far greater importance than most of those that are tried in civil courts. For the greater part of the cases, which are tried in civil courts, only affect the character, or property of particular persons. But the cases of church discipline affect men's spiritual privileges and standing in the visible kingdom of Christ, and whole churches often interest themselves for sundry years, and indeed generations in their decision. There should therefore at least, be as great wisdom in the determination of cases of discipline as of any in the world. Now if we may believe such as are best acquainted with the laws of the nation, † and the proceedings of civil courts, it is necessary that a man should devote himself to the study of the law, and attend courts, fifteen or twenty years, before he can be qualified to be a judge. Can we then

think himself thus in his note on Rev. ii. 1. "That there was *one pastor*, who presided in each of these churches, is indeed evident from the expression here used." And have not the whole christian world almost without exception been of opinion, that there is only one preaching elder or minister ordinarily required in one church according to the gospel. Now when any gentleman tells us, it is so plain in the gospel, that he that runs may read, that there was a plurality of elders in every church, does not this shew he has a great opinion of his own superior sense and penetration.

His proof is, "when they had ordained them elders in every church"—if he had consulted the original, he might have seen that the word *every* was not in the text, and that it was a singular expression. *Cassiodoro*, and *Beza*, who were great critics in the Greek language, render it, *singulas ecclesias*, meaning, I suppose, they ordained elders in the several churches they planted, viz. one in each. Is this plurality of preaching elders so very plain?

There is reason to think from that text, "let the elders, that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and in doctrine;" that there were elders besides the preaching and presiding pastor in the primitive church. Hence allowing our translation to be right, "ordained them elders in every church" it does not certainly prove a plurality of preaching elders or ministers, which is the thing in question.

Many of the primitive churches were very small; as the church at such a person's house. What need could there be of a number of pastors to take care of such a small flock as could conveniently meet at a private house? Is it reasonable to suppose, that when there was a great demand for ministers, the harvest being plenteous, and the labourers

† See Blackstone's Commentaries.

think that every well-meaning christian is a proper person to judge and determine in the more important cases of church discipline, where the honour of Christ, men's spiritual interests, and the prosperity of whole churches are so deeply concerned? Surely such a judging these most important cases of discipline does not appear to be agreeable to the dictates of reason, or the maxims of common sense. Why then shall they be hindered in such difficult cases to apply for the assistance of their judicious neighbours? I should be glad for my part that all the members of every church had wisdom and fidelity enough to determine the most difficult cases, and rightly to discern both time and judgment. Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the feeble were as David, and David as the angel of the Lord. And it would be

labourers few, that they were stationed, where there was no use for them? Now if these small churches had not a plurality of ministers, where is the evidence that the practice obtained in every church?—
 “ We read, says he, of the elders in the church at Jerusalem; of the
 “ elders of the church at Ephesus.” True. But we do not read, that there was but one single worshipping assembly in those places. In the epistle to the Hebrews the apostle exhorts them to *obey them that had the rule over them*. But can any sober Person really believe, that all the Hebrews to whom this epistle was directed, made but one worshipping assembly?

If this be such a plain part of the divine pattern of a gospel church, as he roundly asserts, it is hopeful he will be kind enough to inform the world, how so many ministers can be decently supported without oppressing the churches, and what particular service each of them should perform. For the people in this country are not much inclined to support more clergymen than are necessary.

It is a little strange that, if this be so very plain as he represents it to be, it should not be absolutely necessary to the being of a true church, which yet he allows it is not. For according to this, the very plainest things in the gospel may be laid aside in the very make or constitution of a true church. And why not also in the modes of government and discipline?

“ The deficiency of elders, he says, is to be supplied by calling
 “ in the assistance of neighbouring elders, in the nature of things and
 “ fair deduction from the word.” But according to him, there was no such deficiency in the first gospel churches. How then can there be any fair deduction from the word about it?—As to “ the nature
 “ of things,” what is this but to call in common sense and councils, to which he has such a great aversion? When the presiding elder is accused and refuses to call in any other, who shall preside in taking such a vote?

be more desirable still, if they were all so eminently holy as to need neither law nor discipline. But will it answer any important end to fancy that they are so wise, judicious, and holy, when it is as clear as the sun at the noon-day, that they are not? Or must we receive none into the church but persons of much skill in matters of discipline? What then shall become of the weak and feeble lambs of the flock? Must they be cast out?

When we look into the new-testament, we find sundry accounts, from which it appears that some were admitted into the apostolic churches, who had made no great proficiency in knowledge about religion. “ We know, *says the apostle Paul*, † that an idol is nothing in the world, and that *there is none other God but one---the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour, eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.*” These were surely ignorant, weak and superstitious to a great degree. And when one of their members had fallen into incest with his father’s wife, they don’t appear to have known that he had done much wrong. “ Ye are puffed up, *says the apostle*, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.” It should seem their system of discipline had not enumerated the crimes that deserved it with much exactness, as has been hinted under the first head of discourse, or they were grossly ignorant and inattentive, and so not very fit to judge in difficult cases that might happen. The apostle John divides the church into three ranks, children, young men, and fathers. And if we were carefully to view the temper and conduct of many members, we should find them too like children, ignorant and weak, unstable, peevish and fretful; while some of the fathers by reason of age are but poorly qualified to judge in difficult cases. It is represented in scripture, as a heavy judgment to a people, † when children and babes rule over

† 1 Cor. viii. 5--7 & v. † Ie. iii. 1--5.

over them. It would not be reckoned rational, but condemned as the greatest absurdity for a civil government to appoint those for judges who are literally or metaphorically children. The very young or the extremely old are looked upon as disqualified for such offices. How then can they be suitable persons in a church to judge in cases of the greatest difficulty and importance? Who is there that would leave their houses or lands to the determination of a worshipping assembly, that happen to meet together in one place? And if men would not be willing to risque their temporal property to be determined by a common worshipping assembly, why should they be desirous of submitting their spiritual privileges to their judgment? Why may they not submit such differences to the decision of their unprejudiced and judicious neighbours?

When God called and appointed men to any particular work, business or office, he always qualified them with abilities to discharge it. When he called Saul from a private station to be king over Israel, he gave him another heart, a spirit of government. And when David was designed for the same office, he was trained up some considerable time in Saul's court, as well as tried with many afflictions, before he ascended the throne. From which we may reason thus, that since God has not qualified church members in general to judge and determine difficult cases, he has not appointed them to undertake and finish this important work.

[But here it is objected that it is grossly inconsistent to allow that cases of scandal ought to be first tried in particular churches where they fall out, if these churches be such unsuitable judges, as has been represented. To this I answer, the representation which I have made of the churches, is not mine, but that which is given in the scripture; and every candid person who is acquainted with a common worshipping assembly, their weakness and prejudice, must allow, that observation and experience perfectly agree with the scripture description. Yet the apostolic churches seem to have had some cognizance of scandal. To say these things are inconsistent

is to charge the scriptures with inconsistency, and those who make the charge, if they profess to be christians, are obliged to find a solution of this difficulty as well as I.

The public peace and reputation of any particular church are matters of the greatest importance. To divulge scandals abroad in the world brings reproach and dishonour on religion, and commonly does more damage to the cause of Christ, than any decision of such matters in this dark and imperfect world can do good, and should therefore be avoided as much as possible. Hence it is surely adviseable for a particular church to heal their own difficulties, if they can with any tolerable prudence and equity. It is better to suffer some wrong, it is in many cases better to suffer a great deal of wrong than to be at the trouble and expense of getting right to take place. Suppose then that a church is not qualified to make a final decision in the most important and difficult cases of discipline where the parties refuse to be reconciled; yet they may try to heal breaches at their first beginning, and accommodate differences that arise, and endeavour to reclaim offenders. When a brother is offended he is to take friendly measures with the offender to tell him his fault, and endeavour to reclaim him. Yet it will not follow from this, that he may sit in the final decision of the complaint. When a quarrel happens among school children in the absence of their master, is it not commendable enough for them, and to their credit, to make it up if they can among themselves, without complaining to their instructor? Yet no body, I believe, would reckon them very skilful judges to determine such matters as cannot easily be settled.]

3. As there are many church-members who are not qualified in respect of wisdom to judge all ecclesiastical matters, so they are greatly liable to be biassed by the misrepresentations of artful and designing men. How easy is it for a crafty politic man to persuade such a popular assembly that he is seeking their best good, and under this pretext influence them to adopt his measures, let them be ever so pernicious. "Good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." How did

the people who had cried Hosanna to the Son of David, thro' the influence of their leaders cry, Away with him, crucify him?

But I need not enlarge on pointing out the many inconveniencies and absurdities of confining the whole power or authority of deciding all controversies to the church. The reason of mankind never invented and established such a sort of government in any nation. And when any doctrine or practice is pretended to be supported by scripture which is evidently contrary to reason, the revelation, which enjoins such a practice, should be very clear and precise. Thus transubstantiation being a doctrine contrary to the clearest sense, the papists who pretend to believe it should have, and be able to produce plain revelation capable of no other interpretation, before they can reasonably urge others to embrace it. And since confining the government and discipline of the church to a common worshipping assembly seems inconsistent with good order and the great ends of government, certainly they who plead for it as of divine institution should produce plain and full proof for it from revelation. Without this, all the pleas they can make for conscience are vain pretences, since nothing can bind the conscience, but the plain laws of God.

Here we shall be referred to Mat. xviii. 15,---20. "And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and publican."

But to shew that this passage is far from being a plain institution of popular government, and limiting discipline to such an assembly, I must observe that the meaning of the word CHURCH is not defined nor ascertained in it. And who can tell who this church is, who according to this passage were to hear and judge? There was not a christian church then in the world, nor till some considerable time after these directions were given. The apostles had no idea of what we call a christian church; nor does it appear that they ever separated entirely from the Jewish church, or introduced any other plan of government and discipline than what was practised among the

the Jews with whom they were educated, since James represents it as a slander, that Paul was supposed not to walk after the customs. Why then may not our blessed Lord be understood here as referring to and recommending the modes of proceeding, which had obtained in that church? For he speaks in the present tense or time, and prescribes to them present duty, and directs them how to conduct towards their offending brethren with whom they had connection. We find our blessed Saviour giving similar directions in other passages which can have no immediate reference to the christian church or its worship. “ If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remembrest, that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” The mention of altar, gift or free-will offering, which belonged to the Mosaic œconomy, clearly shows that this passage refers to the methods that were to be observed by the members of that church. And the phrase “ Let him be to thee, a heathen man, and publican,” in like manner should most naturally seem to refer to the customs that had obtained, and the common methods of treating offenders in the Jewish church; because heathens and publicans are not kept at any distance from the christian church, but had free access by faith in a crucified Redeemer, as well as the most regular Jews. But these directions which our Saviour gave to his disciples, tho’ they had an immediate reference to them as members of the Jewish church, and the customs observed in the Jewish synagogues with offenders; yet being maxims of reason and prudence recommended by Christ, are to be observed by all christians. Hence also the custom of the Romans has, I believe, been adopted by all christian churches, viz. “ It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any one to die, before that he which is accused, have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.” For Christ only reprov’d and rejected the customs and traditions that tended to make void the law.

On this which appears to be a natural and easy interpretation of the passage under consideration, the word **CHURCH** must mean that body of men among the Jews, who had proper cognizance of such complaints. The apostles knew who these were, and needed no description of them, and it appears to be taken for granted in the passage that this word was well understood by them, since without this, the direction could have been but of little advantage to them.---And hence we may observe, that the apostles submitted, when they were accused to the Jewish councils, and never put in any plea against the jurisdiction of the court. They did not indeed think that they were bound in conscience to submit to their determination, but judged they ought to obey God rather than man or council. But they never refused to appear before them, and make their defence, which shews they had no exception against the constitution of the court, and methods of proceeding in the Jewish church.

But if I should allow for arguments sake, that the word **Church** in this passage refers to the christian church, and means the worshipping assembly, as it does in some places, must it not then follow, that it comprehends women and children as well as men, since they make a large part of the worshipping congregation that meet in one place, and by necessary consequence that it contains a commission for all of them, one as much as another, to be judges in all cases of discipline? Shall it be said we must consult some other passages, where we shall find them excluded? I would reply that upon this supposition, it appears that this celebrated text is far from being determinate in describing that body to whom discipline is committed. And I would further observe, that when the apostle says "Let your women keep silence in the churches," he does not appear to have any reference to matters of discipline, but to public teaching, so that this prohibition does not hinder their judging, since it refers to a very different thing. And since women are judged as well as men, why may not they be allowed to hear, reason, and judge in such instances, if not in all? And if Christ has appointed them to this office, surely it cannot with any propriety

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propriety be termed a usurpation of authority, since they have a divine warrant. And then it is no matter how contrary to reason and common sense.---But if it were certain that women are excluded by this passage, as it is not, yet still the male children belong to the church, and the boys commonly are a considerable number of the worshipping assembly. And where is there any thing in all the new testament that excludes them, or shews to what age they should be excluded?---Must not those who are highest for the right and power of the worshipping assembly have recourse to the maxims of reason and government, which have been discovered by experience in the management of cases, unless they will run into the wildest extravagancies in the very forming of their judicial body, notwithstanding all their pretences to plain gospel rule?

I would further beg leave to ask such, where they find the word CHURCH used in the gospel to signify only the brethren who are, as we speak, in full communion? These among us are often not a quarter part of the church, and sometimes not above a tenth. Now if the right and power of judging be committed to the church, how come these few to assume it all to themselves? Is the commission to this exclusive church of exercising government and discipline clear and indubitable from the new testament? For such as forsake our ecclesiastical constitution, and renounce all connection with councils as unscriptural, should, to be consistent with themselves, find another ecclesiastical body invested with authority from the gospel, to exercise government and discipline. What prudence, or conscience, can direct men to separate from one church, and join with another equally unscriptural?

Should it be said that the apostle directed the church at Corinth to put away from among themselves the person who was guilty of incest, I would ask how it appears that this direction was given only to the brethren in full communion?---Does this direction give any description of the church by which we can know to whom government and discipline is committed?---There were at least

two churches at Corinth. The direction might be, for any thing that appears, to the presbytery or consociation of these churches.---But admitting a particular church to be meant, this is perfectly consistent with the platform, and the practice of our consociated churches in this colony. The church at Corinth, to which this incestuous person belonged, endeavoured to reclaim him, as our particular churches where scandals happen always do, and their labours were successful, so that there was no need of any further steps to be taken with him only to restore him. He was truly penitent in the end, and did not desire any appeal from their judgment. But how does this prove, that the right of discipline is confined to a particular church? It begins there. But how does it appear that it must end there, when things cannot be settled to edification? If particular churches could always be so successful in reclaiming offenders, and settling their difficulties, there would be no need of councils. But when they have tried all their best endeavours, and things grow worse and worse, must they break to pieces and dissolve, rather than submit their differences to their unprejudiced and understanding neighbours?

There was a doctrine advanced by some who came to Antioch, which occasioned no small dissension and disputation, and after their best endeavours could not be settled to satisfaction, tho' they had the apostles Paul and Barnabas among them at that time when it happened. Well, how did they proceed in this difficult cause? Did that particular church insist upon their right to determine that weighty controversy? No, they applied to the church at Jerusalem for their opinion about this question, that their determination and influence might settle it to the general satisfaction of all concerned. Had they been only intent about what was the truth and right in the matter, Paul and Barnabas, who were divinely inspired, and on the spot, when the controversy arose, could have resolved it as well as the church of Jerusalem. But they were desirous of removing all jealousies and difficulties by the concurrence of all the apostles and elders, and their mother church. And hence when this question was laid before
the

the church at Jerusalem, they did not like Daniel and his companions in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, look for divine inspiration to answer and resolve it, for then there would have been no need to have considered and reasoned upon the matter. These things may afford light to men, and enable them to draw up a wise judgment, but can be of no service to the Holy Ghost in giving forth truth by immediate revelation. The apostles and elders, and brethren therefore, who met in this council at Jerusalem proceeded, as all wise councils should, by considering and reasoning on the matters laid before them, and so drew up their opinion or judgment. And tho' they say in their determination, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us," &c. This is to be understood of that general guidance and influence, which God has promised to his ministers and churches thus convened, and not of immediate inspiration for the reasons already mentioned. The Lord Jesus Christ has promised that he will be with all his ministers alway even unto the end of the world, viz. By his holy Spirit. But surely he is not with them by way of immediate inspiration, that having long since ceased. Yet he leads and guides them and his people into the truth. And thus he led and directed the apostles, elders and church at Jerusalem to come into such a wise conclusion after a full hearing and deliberation.

And hence the church of Christ encouraged by the happy success of this first council at Jerusalem, and following their example, have looked upon themselves as warranted not only by the reason of things which should of itself seem quite sufficient, in such a plain case, but also by divine pattern to have and call councils in great and important cases. And tho' councils have not been so wise and judicious as this at Jerusalem, which consisted of the apostles and elders; nor their judgment and opinion always attended with equal unanimity among themselves, nor followed with such happy success in healing difficulties; yet it were easy to shew that they have done a great deal of good when conducted with moderation and prudence; have frequently afforded light in difficult and perplexed

perplexed cases, and prevented churches from breaking to pieces.--As for the pretence, that judgments of councils bind the conscience, and are a grievous imposition on the members of Christ, it appears to me to be a great mistake, and this objection, if it be just, may be urged with equal force against the judgment of a particular church, and indeed with more, since they are more likely to be deficient in wisdom, and more liable to be biased and influenced by designing men, and prejudices, and so to give unrighteous judgment. Now if the unrighteous judgment of a church does not bind the conscience, how comes it to be imagined that the opinion or determination of a council can acquire this strange and unaccountable authority? I may safely declare in behalf of the consociation of this district, that we aspire after no such power, and aim not at any high claims and stretches of authority, but would be contented with the very lowest, knowing that this is most likely to promote the edification of the churches.

And now to draw to a conclusion and make application of this discourse; let me entreat this church, especially those of you, who have renounced the ecclesiastical constitution on which you have subsisted, and acted ever since you were a church, to review your conduct; and if you trust to yourselves, that you are Christ's; to be so candid and charitable as to think this again, that as you are Christ's, even so are we Christ's ministers and churches. In whatever light you review and consider your conduct, we think, you may see many reasons to convince you, that you have taken at least an imprudent step, and acted inconsistent with the relation you have so long sustained to the consociation, and, so far as we can judge from what appears, with your own future peace and safety. If the consociation of churches be agreeable to that connection, which according to reason, the nature of societies of the same kind, and the general rules of the gospel ought to subsist between sister-churches, and requisite to maintain the government, and execute the laws of Christ's kingdom in many difficult and important instances, I need not say how unbecoming and irregular
your

your conduct has been, how offensive to our common Lord, as well as injurious and grievous to your brethren. But if you were to view the Say-Brook agreement merely as a constitution founded on principles of human prudence, yet as it had been, on mature deliberation come into by the ministers and churches of Christ of this colony, in general; as it had obtained the approbation and sanction of the legislature; and as you yourselves had been settled on that plan, and sundry times delivered from great difficulties by adhering to and acting upon it, surely you had great reason to think it was calculated for your edification and not your destruction; and it ought not to have been rejected by you without a more thorough understanding of it, and more deliberate consideration and advice, than it appears you have acted upon in this your renouncing it. To renounce our ecclesiastical constitution through jealousies of its infringing your christian liberties, which pretences, if they were thoroughly examined, would most probably appear to all unprejudiced persons to be without foundation, can never be reckoned a prudent proceeding; and especially if the same objection lies with equal or greater force against the scheme of government and discipline you have adopted.

But if you should even plead in your own vindication, that you look upon the platform an unlawful combination, derogatory to the honour of Christ, and inconsistent with the rights and privileges of particular churches, how can you justify your conduct, even on this supposition, to God or to the world in breaking off from the consociation in the manner you have done? You had entered into an agreement with us on this plan, taking it for granted, that it was agreeable to reason and the general rules and pattern of the gospel, and till of late you have acted upon it. Now as our connection was the result of mutual agreement, to afford mutual assistance and light to one another; if you doubted the lawfulness of continuing in this connection, ought you not to have communicated your scruples to us, that we might have had an opportunity to have removed them, or you to have

convinced us of our mistake ; and if this could not be effected, to have asked a dismissal that the relation might have been dissolved by mutual consent ? And till this method had been taken, do you seriously think, that you could rend yourselves off from us by any vote or resolution of your own, without being guilty of breach of covenant ? Was it not soon enough to have thus rent yourselves off when we had refused you a dismissal ?---It deserves your mature consideration, whether such a breach of covenant on your part be not aggravated with great ingratitude ? All the churches of this district have, we suppose, received great benefit by their being united in consociation, but perhaps not one of them has had more important occasions to apply for relief and assistance than you have had. At three different times you have been in such an unhappy situation, that the removal of your pastor was found necessary to your peace and edification, if not to your very existence. At each of these seasons of great difficulty and danger, as I have been credibly informed, you earnestly called for, and received help and deliverance from the consociation, and thankfully acknowledged the assistance thus afforded. And now let me ask you, Have you forgotten these dangers and distresses, and the way in which you obtained deliverance ? ---Have not your sister churches a right to expect the like assistance from you in any difficulties they may meet with ? And can you thus assist them without revoking your late vote ?---Are you secure against as great distresses of the same, or some other kind ? And can you imagine that in such a case you could be safe on that independent plan of government you have lately adopted ? Has not this scheme of government involved churches in divisions and confusions, which have often ended in their dissolution ? And must not this necessarily be the event in this weak and imperfect state, when differences arise between persons, who have large connections and great influence in the church ? Or when the pastor falls into heresy, or scandalous immorality ?

In one of the instances referred to, your pastor declared, as probably some of you may remember, that he
could

could no longer continue in the ministerial office on the foot of presbyterian ordination, and yet was desirous of continuing in his relation to you. He therefore proposed to obtain episcopal ordination, and continue your pastor. In these circumstances, you of yourselves knew not what to do, but you applied for help to the churches with which you were united in consociation. They convened in council, and judged and declared, that the pastoral relation between him and you ought to be dissolved; and it was thereby dissolved; and it was by virtue, and in consequence of this judgment of council, that you were no longer obliged to own and treat him as your pastor. And it was also on this judgment you acted in settling another minister. Now, brethren, let me seriously entreat and beseech you to consider what an unhappy situation you must bring yourselves into by renouncing consociational government and discipline as unscriptural and unlawful. For will it not follow from thence, that the aforesaid judgment of council in dissolving the relation between you and your former pastor was given by an unscriptural body, who had no sort of right to judge in the matter, and therefore is absolutely null and void according to the gospel?---That all your actions grounded upon it are contrary to the new-testament, and an approbation of the usurped power of councils?---And that the gentleman referred to was never according to the laws of Christ's kingdom dismissed from his sacred relation to you, but still continues your rightful pastor, whom you ought to reverence and obey in that character?---That those who have since that time acted as your ministers, have wrongfully intruded into the office of another?---That the church in Newtown, has for forty years lived in a state of schism, or sinful separation from their lawful pastor? These are terrible consequences indeed, and it concerns you to consider, whether they do not fairly follow from your persisting in the measures you seem inclined to adopt.

Thus being called in duty to speak to you on this melancholy occasion, I have endeavoured in brotherly love and kindness, yet with plainness, to represent to you some
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of the reasons, why I cannot think your plan of government and discipline agreeable to reason or scripture, and point out some of the bad consequences of your renouncing the confociation. It is with grief and reluctancy that I have prevailed with myself to use so much plainness. God knows that I have the highest regard for your reverend pastor, and this church, and I hope, you will consider with all due candour what has been spoken in sincerity and love.

A P P E N D I X.

IT is well known to all who are tolerably acquainted with the history of those nations, who did not enjoy divine revelation, that they lost in a great measure all rational ideas of the blessed God, his glorious perfections, his holy will, and sunk into the grossest idolatries; and in many instances practised the most horrid crimes without remorse. Revelation was needful to instruct them in the knowledge of God, and the duties of natural religion. The light indeed shone in darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it. But with regard to any method of reconciliation with God, this was entirely beyond their reach. None but God could reveal, how he could be just, and yet the Justifier of those who believe in Jesus. Evangelical duties which we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ, and which are to be performed thro' the aids of the Holy Spirit, are therefore another most important part of divine revelation.

The case was very different with regard to government. There are so many disorders and gross enormities committed among all nations, that they could not possibly subsist without government. They were therefore forced to fall upon some plan or other, and to make much observation on the tempers of mankind, and exercise their reason about bringing controversies to an equitable issue, and exercising justice upon criminals. Hence sundry of the heathen nations, who were greatly ignorant of the true God, and lived in the practice of many horrid abominations, were very skilful in government, as appears from their systems of juris-prudence, which have been handed down to us. Government is from God, it is agreeable to his will that there should be government, since without it, the public peace cannot be preserved, nor justice administered. But the particular forms of government, and the modes of bringing controversies to an issue, are greatly left to human prudence. And hence the method of appointing judges and appeals even among

the Jews, seems rather to have been first suggested by common sense, according to *Jethro's* advice, than from immediate inspiration, unless we should imagine that *Jethro* was immediately inspired, for which I know of no good reason. Compare Exod. xviii. with Deut. i.

The great end of all government and discipline, whether in church or state, is to preserve the peace and health of the body, and where that cannot be done without deciding controversies, to decide them in the best manner, that justice may be done, and peace and good order restored. And if these important ends are obtained, what great matter is it what the form of government or mode of proceeding be? That form of government and mode of proceeding is doubtless best, which is best calculated to attain these ends.

Since therefore mankind were so well acquainted with government in general, and the methods of trying causes and administering justice, the great King and Head of the Church found it necessary to give only a few rules, or to recommend some of those which had obtained according to common sense and reason, "leaving room (as is granted) for the use of a discretionary prudence in the church." These general rules, I allow, plainly enough forbid the popish and prelatical forms of government, and, I think, reason is as much against them as scripture. For the enormous power and jurisdiction of popes and prelates appear not to be devised for the happiness and prosperity of the church, but for the wealth and grandeur of a few overgrown clergymen. The pride and ambition, the folly and superstition of the *Romish* clergy do not proceed from their close adherence to common sense and christian prudence; but to their paying so little regard to them, and setting up, as some others also do, for a divine patent or right to support them. Time has been when such pretended warrants from heaven have been believed by the christian nations without examination, in opposition to common sense and reason. But blessed be God, those days of ignorance are near an end. Common sense begins to gain ground in philology in spite of all the jargon and cobwebs of metaphysics. The divine right

right of civil government has been fully examined. And whoever pretends such a high claim for the peculiarities of his particular church, doctrine, government, or discipline, must expect to bring full proof, let him be papist or protestant, an episcopalian, a presbyterian, or an independent.

Since common sense and reason are the gift of God, as well as revelation, is it not evident they cannot be contrary to one another? Revelation may, and indeed does, teach us things beyond our reason, but not contrary to it.

If any gentleman imagines that injunction of our blessed Lord, "Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you," militates against what I have advanced in my sermon, I would ask him, whether he can seriously think that Christ has forbidden us to exercise our reason in such matters as I had in view? Will any plead for a government and discipline in the church, that is contrary to common sense and reason? Or that is to be managed without any regard to them? How shall we know what is for edification, and not for destruction, without consulting our conscience and reason?---It is one thing to invent rites and ceremonies with the papists, which have no foundation in scripture, sense, nor reason; and another to put the general directions Christ has given us in execution according to the best of our judgment. What sober dissenter has denied this latter?

It is somewhat strange, that any should be so greatly alarmed at common sense and reason in such things as I referred to in my sermon, when they might have known, that our Saviour was so far from forbidding us, that he has expressly referred us to consult them in various matters of moral conduct. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets." Thus instead of multiplying laws, provisos and exceptions for all the various circumstances, that occur in human life, which would have filled many folio volumes, beyond what could have been read or remembered, he has recommended it to us to consult our own conscience, and reason, and feeling, and do to others as

we could reasonably desire them to do to us. The apostle has a general reference to the same guides in the following summary of our duty. " Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things."

" It was deservedly looked upon as one of the chief excellencies of the *Persian* laws, that they did not so much design the punishment of vice, as the using means to prevent the commission of it; that by a careful education of youth, in the principles of virtue and morality, they took away the cause of all inordinate desires and affections, and rendered their duty so familiar, and habitual to them, that they had no need of those terrible tortures, and bloody executions, whereby other lawgivers frightened their subjects into obedience." With how much more propriety may this be said of the gospel of Christ, the Prince of Peace? In his reign it was foretold that " The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." How much happier, than to have the church and world full of church canons and discipline? It is the law of the spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, that makes persons free from the law of sin and death.

It being then the great design of the gospel dispensation to bring men to such a divine temper, that they should need no discipline or government, but their own benevolent and holy disposition, may further account for there being so little said about these things in the new testament.

testament. For if men who enjoy this excellent revelation will not be influenced by its divine arguments and motives, it is at least very doubtful, whether they will be much influenced by the force and terror of church government and discipline. And we find in fact but very few happy effects, that follow the administration of discipline. The most learned Mr. *Selden*, who, if I remember right, was a member of the famous Westminster assembly, delivered his opinion against all suspensions and excommunications to this effect, " That for four thousand years there was no law to suspend persons from religious exercises. Strangers, indeed, were kept from the passover, but they were Pagans, and not of the Jewish religion. The question is not now for keeping away pagans in times of christianity, but protestants from protestant worship. No divine can shew that there is any such command as this to suspend from the sacrament. No man is kept from the sacrament *eo nomine*, because he is guilty of any sin, by the constitution of the reformed churches, or because he has not made satisfaction. Every man is a sinner; the difference is only, that one is in private and the other in public. Dic ecclesie in St. Matthew were the courts of law which then sat at Jerusalem. No man can shew any excommunication 'till the pope's Victor and Zephorinus (two hundred years after Christ) first began to use them upon private quarrels, whereby it appears that excommunication is an human invention, taken from the Heathens." See Neal's hist. purit. vol. iii. 224.

However I cannot but think that discipline is countenanced by the gospel, and some general rules given about it, as has been represented in the preceding discourse. But those who are so zealous about the modes of discipline, and the persons by whom it is to be administered, as to rend and tear their churches to pieces for the peculiarities they fancy, may be as profitably employed in searching into the divine warrant for this controverted matter, since some of the most learned and best men in the christian world have been so confident that the whole of it was of popish

popish or human invention. Whether that celebrated passage in Mat. xviii. immediately referred to the courts of law, as the learned *Selden* supposed, or the modes of proceeding with offenders in the Jewish synagogue and church is a question not easy to be determined. But as the directions are evident maxims of common sense, approved and recommended by our Lord Jesus Christ, there can be no reasonable doubt, but that christians should pay a due regard to them in all the offences they meet with and prosecute, whether civil or ecclesiastical, which would have a most excellent tendency to remove them, and reconcile brethren, and thus prevent suspensions and excommunications. "If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." This is proper to be done in all sorts of trespasses and misunderstandings. But if we take our Saviour's account and explanation of the word *Brother* in the parable of the good Samaritan, we shall find no very strong reason to limit this method of proceeding, only to those who are our brethren in full communion, or at least that this is not so evident as not to admit of some doubt.

The second direction is, "If he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." Does this refer to all sorts of trespasses and crimes, whether secret, or known only to some few? If to a crime that is only known to the accuser and the accused, is it right to divulge it before two or three witnesses? May not an action of defamation lie against the accuser for spreading the scandalous report? And what can these brethren, who are called in, testify and prove about the crime charged upon their brother? Can they testify any more than that such an accusation was laid against their brother, whether justly or not, in case he denies, they cannot tell? And is this any proof at all of the person's being guilty, since there are many false accusations laid against the most innocent persons? The nature of offences is not described here, nor what proof and evidence is requisite for the conviction of an offender. There are various

rious instances wherein persons confess the fact, which is alledged against them, but say they had good right to do as they did ; or that tho' it was wrong in some measure, yet not in such manner and form and degree as to expose them to the censures and discipline of the church. There is nothing said in this passage about persons confession, and how far, and in what circumstances, it should be looked upon as sufficient evidence. It is generally looked upon as evidence against a person, yet in the famous case of witchcraft, when the country came to the exercise of common sense and reason, it was disregarded. And there are many instances wherein a person's confession should not be looked on as any evidence against him. And how shall we do in all such cases without having recourse to common sense and reason ? And what shall we do with persons papers, or writings, when they are produced as evidence, as sometimes happens ?

We are referred to 1 Cor. v. 11. " If any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat." Here, says Mr. Judson, *is given an express enumeration of several kinds of crimes, under the one or the other of which are included most of the scandalous crimes that mankind are incident unto.* The most of a thing is a little more than half. Most of the scandalous crimes that mankind are incident unto, is but a little more than half. Thus his express enumeration is a very imperfect one. If a man owe this gentleman a hundred pounds, would he be contented if he paid him sixty ? Yet certainly the debtor might plead he had paid the most of the sum. He would be apt to think such a debtor did not accustom himself, if he could believe him to be really in earnest, to much precision and exactness in the payment of his debts.

But if this enumeration were complete which is not pretended, I would ask, whether the several degrees of the crimes which are censurable are expressly pointed out ? This gentleman will certainly not confine fornication to the gross act, because our Saviour has determined otherwise. All foolish jesting is doubtless forbidden. Now
from

from the distant *double entendre*, that will scarcely raise a blush in the modest fair, to the obscene talk of the lewd debauchee that is shocking to every chaste person, there are many intermediate degrees. Now what are the different degrees of discipline to be inflicted for these different degrees of this sin ?

What is covetousness ? There are very different opinions about this, according to mens different tempers and educations. What one man calls frugality, and a necessary care of his family, another calls covetousness. A person educated in generous principles is ready to look on every little narrow-souled action to be covetousness, while others look upon such generous persons to be lavish and prodigal. What then is covetousness, that degree of covetousness, for which a man ought to be excluded from communion ? And how shall a man be convicted of it by proper witnesses ?

Dr. *Cotton Mather* was one of the most learned and pious divines that New-England ever produced. But being a gentleman of wit, and having a great aversion to tobacco, in giving advice to a candidate, if I remember right, he says, " If smoakers entice thee, consent thou not." This, in the opinion of many, was making too free with the holy scriptures, and so according to the assembly of divines, a breach of the third command. And I can tell my replier of a grave divine, who, when one of his brethren, who professed to adhere to Say-Brook platform, attempted, as the said divine imagined by mistake, to defend it on a different footing from what he supposed the compilers did, with apparent allusion to some of the most solemn passages of scripture, broke out into the following vehement exclamation, " Be astonished ye heavens, and wonder O earth at this !" Perhaps such solemn scripture expressions were never introduced on a more trifling occasion. How far Mr. Judson may think such slips of great and good men deserve discipline, I shall not presume to determine. But query, what is railing ? What degrees of it are censurable ?

Mr. Judson quotes some other texts, and concludes thus, " Every man therefore that lives in the open viola-

“ tion of any divine precept, is to be noted, and his com-
 “ pany avoided in all matters of special christian fellow-
 “ ship.” But this manner of treating the matter does
 not determine the degrees of the crime that are censur-
 able, nor how open the violation must be in order to ex-
 pose a man to discipline. How shall we find this out
 without having recourse to common sense and christian
 prudence ?

“ A man that is an heretick, after the first and second
 “ admonition, reject.” *Under which says Mr. Judson,*
all scandalous damnable error is included. But what is scan-
 dalous and damnable error ? Is every error and mistake
 scandalous and damnable ? Is every *degree* of error and
 mistake scandalous and damnable ? If not, point out with
 precision what errors are not scandalous and damnable,
 and which are, i. e. at least excommunicable.

We are directed, upon the two first steps failing of suc-
 cess, to take a third, “ Tell it to the church.” But who
 the church is to whom we are to tell it, we are not told in
 this passage ; and I do not find that Mr. Judson has de-
 termined from scripture with any tolerable precision,
 who the church is, that ought to sit, *hear and judge*, tho’
 he has been often requested to speak plain and determi-
 nate, and acknowleges he had a loud call from God to
 consider this matter. P. 1.

He allows, p. 17. that “ baptized children belong to
 “ the church, but under the wing of their parents, who
 “ act for them until they come of age capable of acting
 “ for themselves.” But has the gospel fixed this age ?---
 As to females, he says, “ If they cannot silently concur
 “ with what the male members act, they have most cer-
 “ tainly a right SOME WAY to make known their griev-
 “ ances.” A right some way to make known their
 grievances is a most vague manner of expression, which
 probably would not have been used, if the replier had had
 any clear and determinate ideas about his church, and
 could have fairly removed the objection bro’t against him.

The question under consideration is, Who is that
 church who are expressly commissioned by the Lord Je-
 sus Christ to hear complaints, and witnesses, reason about
 the

the matter, and acquit or condemn? The accounts Mr. Judson gives of the church are various. Sometimes it comprehends all baptized persons, and by necessary consequence, since he holds infant baptism, must take in not only the brethren, but women and children. "Thus," *says he*, such as being baptized were added to that number, which continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers, were thereby added to the church." p. 9. But in another passage he limits it to the whole body of communicants, which, since he does not yet pretend that infants should be communicants, excludes them from the judging church, without any gospel rule. But we have many baptized persons, who are grown to years of discretion, and who are not communicants. Why as to them he says, p. 17. "If they do not come as disciples of Jesus to eat the Lord's supper, they can have nothing to do according to the scriptures, in receiving or rejecting others." But he has been careful not to quote these scriptures. According to common sense, all who are once taken in to be members of any society, belong to it, till they are cast out. But these persons have been solemnly acknowledged to be in the church by baptism, and they have never been cast out. Now suppose that they forego the privilege of coming to the sacrament, how does this take away their other privileges? Does the omission of one duty discharge them from the performance of all others? If a man does not join in singing psalms in the congregation, must he be forbidden to hear the word? However by this means near two thirds of the worshipping assembly, which sometimes seems to be Mr. Judson's church, are excluded from it.

There yet remain the women, who are commonly full half of the communicants. And as to them, he says, "If they cannot silently concur with what the male members act, they have most certainly a right *some way* to make known their grievance." But are they proper judges or not? Thus the church is the worshipping assembly, but not so neither; for children and non-communicants, tho' they belong to the church, being neither
accused,

accused, condemned, nor cast out, are excluded. It is the whole body of communicants, that are to hear and judge. But this won't do neither, the women make full half, and they have only a right *some way* to manifest their grievance, perhaps in the news paper. All this is very plain, and precise, agreeable to clear gospel rule and description ! What is there we may not prove from scripture at this rate ?

“ As to prejudiced members, says Mr. Judson, that
 “ ought not to be suffered, they need to be first taken
 “ care of and reclaimed.” An easy way of answering
 the objection ! The question is not what ought to be in
 church members, but what in fact often takes place in
 this imperfect state. Men *ought not* to sin against God,
 nor offend their brethren, and so there *ought not* to be any
 just cause for discipline. Men *ought not* to be prejudiced
 and biassed. But what if some of the best men in a
 church are prejudiced ? Will Mr. Judson say, that *Barnabas*
 was perfectly free from all prejudice in favour of
Mark his sister's son, when *Paul* and he had such a sharp
 contention about him ? And was not the apostle *Peter* a
 little under a wrong bias “ when he separated himself
 “ from the gentile christians fearing them which were of
 “ the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled
 “ likewise with him ; infomuch that Barnabas also
 “ was carried away with their dissimulation.” What
 then does it signify to tell us, that church members *ought*
not to be prejudiced, since it is matter of fact that so
 many are prejudiced ? And perhaps some are ready to
 think that Mr. Judson is not altogether free from this
 sour leaven against the consociation, since he complains so
 bitterly merely for their attempting to dissolve the con-
 nection between him and them in an orderly manner.
 In short, I do not see but he has rather strengthened than
 invalidated the objections against his plan of government.

In trying cases in our courts, there are five judges and
 twelve jurymen. Now let us for once suppose, that
 three of the judges, and seven of the Jury, by some means
 or other were missing, when a verdict was drawn, or ex-
 cluded by some impediment, or did not agree to it ;
 would

would it do for the remainder to say, the verdict must be accepted and recorded, for the judges and jurymen, who were not called upon to vote, had a right to manifest their grievance *some way*? And if it should plainly appear that a number of the jurymen, and some of the judges were biassed, would it do to say when objection is made against them, there is no weight in it because they *ought not* to be prejudiced?

I would not be understood by any thing I have said to find any fault with the common method practised in our churches of entring a complaint to the pastor and brethren. For as they are the principal part of the church, it is very agreeable to common sense, that they should take cognizance of the matter; and this is agreeable to the general direction in Mat. xviii. But I can see no evidence at all, that this is particularly prescribed in that or in any other divine rule. And I would further ask, since, according to Mr. Judson, the power belongs to the worshipping assembly, and yet according to him, one half or three quarters may give up their right to the male communicants, why *they* may not give up theirs to a select number, or church session with the presbyterians, or to a consociated council with our churches?

“ But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Here it may be observed, that there is no account, what satisfaction is sufficient and ought to be accepted by the church, which yet is commonly reckoned a very important thing in discipline; nor in what manner and place in the broad-alley, or elsewhere; which likewise have been matters of some dispute. And as to what is to be done to the offender, or about him, in case he remains obstinate, it is not perfectly clear to some, who have not the privilege of a warm imagination. “ Let him be to thee as an heathen man and a publican.” For how does it appear that the publicans were excluded from the communion of the Jewish Church.--- The people indeed hated them, as they do all commissioners and collectors of taxes; but I do not at present recollect any proof, that they were
debarred

debarred from attending the most holy ordinances among the Jews, or from the communion of the christian church, when it was erected. John the Baptist baptized many of them, and did not forbid them to follow their employment, and our blessed Lord readily admitted them among his disciples, and freely eat and drank with them. When therefore an impenitent offender is to be treated as a publican, I should be glad for my own satisfaction, that some learned and candid gentleman would shew how this was.

It follows, *Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven.* “ Here, says Mr. Judson, it is carefully to be noted, that the very same church, unto which an offence is to be told ; are to judge thereof, and that from their judgment there lies no appeal to any other board under heaven. Whereby an absolute bar is laid in against the judgment of any other board on earth. And neither therefore to be attempted, but in direct violation of this express law of Christ.”

The intelligent reader will observe that according to this exposition a particular church (if it could be once determined what body that is) is hereby declared to be infallible, and is, as he represents the confociation, “ a body invested with such horns of power, as that whithersoever the body moves, thither the horns move also, enforcing their every act, judgment, counsel, opinion or advice with binding authority.”

Query, Whether this be not the great thing, which Mr. Judson and some others are aiming at, to have it supposed, that particular churches are invested with infallibility, and that from their judgment there lies no appeal, it being ratified in heaven? Will not this suit the self-conceit and pride of many church-members to fancy themselves Christ's vicegerents? And will not this gratify the ambition and lordliness of some clergymen? The pastor is by office not only moderator of the church, but ordinarily has by far a great deal more influence in it, than any other person. Now by choosing such times for

for church meetings as are most convenient for his purposes, and by private cajoling some of the leading members, may he not get a majority of the church to vote anything he pleases? There are various ways of obtaining votes!

That these are not mere groundless fears and surmises, I think, may be pretty fairly gathered from what Mr. Judson himself says, p. 18. "As to ignorant and superannuated members; there are none who are capable of examining themselves and discerning the Lord's Body, as the scriptures require of all that eat the Lord's-supper; but that are able also, by the assistance of wiser members to judge about matters of fact. So that when suitable care is taken about the admission of members; churches under the guidance of their pastors are much better judges respecting such matters as are cognizable before them, than the jury in civil courts often are, in respect to many intricate cases laid before them."

Thus the pastors seem to be compared to the judges of the court, and the church to the jury. The ignorant and superannuated are to judge by the assistance of wiser members. And what if the pastor should conceit, that he is the wisest person of the community, and can best assist those weak brethren?---He has likewise the principal share in admitting members. And what if he shall take it into his head to admit none but such as adopt his peculiar sentiments, and will vote just as he guides them?---Could our religious liberties be as secure as our civil privileges on this plan? Would it be safe to allow the court to chuse the jury?

The times when a civil court sits are appointed by law, and they have no hand in chusing the jurymen. These are chosen by the respective towns among us, and the court can send them back to reconsider their verdict so many times and no more. But a pastor may appoint a church meeting without any previous warning, and just when he sees his special friends are chiefly present, and he may guide the superannuated members, and lead the church

church to reconsider their vote, if it be contrary to his mind, as often as he pleases, till they are tired out, and give up the matter. In civil courts the towns or sheriff are required to return good and sufficient men, and all prejudiced and interested jurymen are set aside; and if it should appear to the court that any of the jury were so ignorant thro' natural weakness of capacity, or being superannuated, that they were able to judge only by the assistance of wiser members, the court would doubtless be of opinion, that such weak and superannuated persons might be excused from that service. And in all the lower courts there are appeals allowed, which is esteemed a great privilege. But there is no objecting against the church members; no appeal from the judgment of Mr. Judson and his church; no rehearing unless he pleases, i. e. unless he is confident they will vote to his mind. And when a vote is once obtained, let it be by whatever means, or carried by ever so small a majority, it is a vote, and then the aggrieved brethren are not to be allowed so much as to attempt to remove the cause to any other board, but to be *counseled, directed and advised to fall in quietly and peaceably with the majority of the church and society, in their votes as a matter of right that ought to govern in all communities, even as a thing essential to the orderly subsistence of every community.* How far such a plan tends to support the liberties of the people, or the power of the clergy I leave to be considered. But it seems to me, that wherever such a plan of government is adopted, the pastors ought to be endowed with infallibility.

As to the words of our blessed Lord, on which Mr. Judson pretends to build the plan of NO APPEALS from the vote of a church, if he had not been so eager for proof, or in so great a hurry in publishing, he might have observed that Christ changes from the third to the second Person, and addresses himself to his apostles who were then present with him, "Verily I say unto you whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven." So that there is no evidence from this text, that Christ had reference to any power in government or discipline
at

at all. For when this gentleman had more leisurely considered the matter, he expounds such expressions very differently. P. 32. "Whereby is to be understood a power of binding and loosing doctrinally, i. e. by declaring the mind and will of Christ, binding upon the conscience.--Hence all apostolic writings are binding on the conscience, so as no uninspired writings can be -----A power not to be claimed by uninspired men, without daring presumption." Pray then, good sir, why have you claimed it for every particular church?

As our blessed Lord addressed himself in these words immediately to his apostles, who were to be rulers or officers in his church, the passage might with some appearance of propriety and reason be adduced to support the authority of councils, and their determinations, when they are agreeable to the mind of Christ. But I have no high opinion of the infallibility of any body of uninspired men, and can therefore pretty fully agree with Mr. Judson in his last exposition of them in referring the ratification in heaven, not to their decisions in general, but to the apostolic writings; and since I am so generous as to give up the infallibility of councils, I hope he will never plead for this, which he calls a daring and presumptuous claim in behalf of particular churches.

It were very easy to make many more remarks on Mr. Judson's performance. But since he has not given us his plan of church government with precision, and, so far as I can apprehend it, repeatedly given it up in my view, and neglected fairly to consider the objections that were bro't against it, but amused himself and his readers with general terms, and vehement exclamations, so much may suffice for the present. Indeed I cannot but think, I might have been excused if I had taken no notice at all of his book, since I reckon my sermon as it was delivered, a pretty full confutation of his reply. Whether I gave him any just cause to treat me in the manner he has done, is now submitted to the public. I suppose the great want of delicacy which he has discovered, has not recommended his book much to the polished and judicious reader. And I do not think that any thing can be a sufficient justification

tion of the spirit and stile of his reply, since the Lord Jesus Christ, whose ministers we profess to be, has not allowed us to return railing for railing.

It has been desired by some gentlemen, that I would point out, enumerate and explain the general rules of government and discipline, which I have supposed to be delivered in the bible, and shew how far these out-lines extend. But I have no leisure for such an attempt at present, nor is there any great need of it, since they may for substance be found in the Westminster directory, the Cambridge or Say-Brook platform.
