

ment and Understanding, their Temptations and Occasions, and applies not himself in his Ministry to search out what is necessary and useful unto their *Edification*; he fights *uncertainly* in his whole Work, as a Man *beating the Air*. But, whereas their obligation to attend unto the *Word and Prayer*, confines them much unto a retirement for the greatest part of their time, they cannot by themselves obtain that Acquaintance with the whole Flock, but that others may greatly assist therein from their daily Inspection, Converse and Observation.

9. AND it is their Duty to *meet and consult with the Teaching-Elders*, about such things of importance, as are to be proposed in and unto the Church, for its consent and compliance. Hence, nothing crude or indigested, nothing unsuited to the sense and Duty of the Church, will at any time be proposed therein, so to give occasion unto contests or janglings, disputes contrary unto Order or Decency; but all things may be preserved in a due regard unto the *Gravity and Authority* of the Rulers.

10. TO take care of the due *Liberties* of the Church, that they be not imposed on by any *Diotrephes* in Office, or without it.

11. IT is incumbent on them in times of Difficulties and Persecution, to *consult together with the other Elders* concerning all those things which concern the present Duty of the Church, from time to time, and their preservation from violence, according unto the will of Christ.

12. WHEREAS, there may be, and oft-times is but One *Teaching-Elder, Pastor or Teacher* in a Church, upon his Death or Removal, it is the Work and Duty of *these Elders*, to preserve the Church in Peace and Unity; to take care of the continuation of its Assemblies; to prevent Irregularities in any Persons or Parties among them; to go before, to direct and guide the Church in the *Call and Choice* of some other meet Person or Persons in the room of the deceased or removed.

THESE *few instances* have I given of the Work and Duty of Ruling Elders. They are all of them such as deserve a greater enlargement in their Declaration and Confirmation, than

than I can here afford unto them. And sundry things of the like nature, especially with respect unto *Communion* with other Churches and *Synods*: But what hath been spoken is sufficient unto my present purpose. And to manifest that it is so, I shall add the ensuing Observations.

1. ALL the things insisted on, do undoubtedly and unquestionably belong unto the *Rule* and Order appointed by Christ in his Church. There is no one of them, that is liable unto any just Exception from them by whom all Church Order is not dispised. Wherefore where there is a Defect in them or any of them, the *Church* it self is defective as unto its own Edification. And where this Defect is great, in many of them, there can be no *Beauty*, no *Glory*, no Order in any Church, but only an outward shew and appearance of them. And that all these things do belong unto the Duty of these Elders, there needs no other Proof nor Confirmation, but that they all undoubtedly and unquestionably belong unto that Rule and Order, which the Lord Christ hath appointed in his Church, and which the Scripture testifieth unto, both in general and particular. For all the things which belong unto the Rule of the Church, are committed to the care of the Rulers of the Church.

2. IT is a vain Apprehension to suppose that *one or two Teaching Officers* in a Church, who are obliged to give themselves unto the Word and Prayer, to labour with all their might in the Word and Doctrine, to preach in and out of season; that is, at all times, on all opportunities as they are able, to Convince *Gain-sayers* by Word and Writing, pleading for the Truth; to assist and guide the Consciences of all, under their Temptations and Desertions, with sundry other Duties, in part spoken to before, should be able to take Care of, and attend with Diligence unto all these things, that do evidently belong unto the Rule of the Church. And hence it is, that Churches at this day do live on the Preaching of the Word, the proper work of their Pastor, which they greatly value, and are very little sensible of the Wisdom, Goodness, Love and Care of Christ in the Institution of this Rule in the Church, nor are

partakers of the Benefits of it unto their Edification. And the supply which many have made hitherto herein, by persons either unacquainted with their Duty, or insensible of their own Authority, or cold if not negligent in their Work, doth not answer the end of their Institution. And hence it is that the *Authority of Government* and the Benefit of it, are ready to be lost in most Churches. And it is both vainly and presumptuously pleaded, to give countenance unto a neglect of their Order, that some Churches do walk in Love and Peace, and are Edified without it; supplying some defects by the *prudent Aid* of some Members of them. For it is nothing but a preference of our own Wisdom unto the Wisdom and Authority of Christ; or at best an unwillingness to make a venture on the warranty of his *Rule*, for fear of some disadvantages that may ensue thereon.

3. WHEREAS fundry of the Duties before-mentioned, are, as unto the substance of them, required of the *Members of the Church*, in their several stations, without any especial Obligation to attend unto them *with Diligence, to look after them*, or power to Exercise any Authority in the discharge of them, to leave them from under the *Office-Care* of the Elders, is to let in Confusion and Disorder into the Church, and gradually to remove the whole advantage of the *Discipline of Christ*, as it is come to pass in many Churches already.

IT is therefore Evident, that neither the *Purity*, nor the *Order*, nor the *Beauty* or *Glory* of the Churches of Christ, nor the Representation of his own *Majesty* and *Authority* in the Government of them, can be long preserved without a *Multiplication of Elders* in them, according to the proportion of their respective Members, for their Rule and Guidance. And for want hereof have Churches of old and of late, either degenerated into *Anarchy* and Confusion, their *self Rule* being managed with vain Disputes and Janglings, unto their Division and Ruine; or else given up themselves unto the *Domination* of some *Prelatical Teachers*, to Rule them at their pleasure, which proved the bane and poison

of all the *Primitive Churches*; and they will and must do so in the neglect of this Order for the Future.

## CHAP. IX.

### Of DEACONS.

**T**HE *Original Institution, Nature and Use* of the Office of *Deacons* in the Church, are so well known, as that we need not much insist upon them. Nor shall I treat of the *Name* which is common unto any kind of Ministry Civil or Sacred; but speak of it as it is appropriated unto that especial Work for which this Office was ordained.

The remote foundation of it lieth in that of our Saviour, *The poor you have always with you*, Joh. 12. 8. He doth not only foretel, That such there should be in the Church, but recommends the care of *them who should be so*, unto the Church. For he maketh use of the words of the Law, *Deut. 15. 11. For the poor shall never cease out of the Land; therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thy hand wide unto thy Brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy.* This Legal Institution, founded in the Law of Nature, doth the Lord Christ by his Authority transferr and translate unto the use of Gospel Churches among his Disciples.

AND it may be observed, that at the same instant Hypocrisie and Avarice began to attempt their Advantage on the consideration of this Provision for the Poor, which they afterwards effected unto their safety. For on the pretence hereof, *Judas* immediately condemned an *eminent Duty* towards the *person of Christ*, as containing a *cost* in it, which might have been better laid out in Provision for the Poor: The *Ointment* poured on our Saviour he thought might have been sold for *Three hundred pence* (it may be about Forty or Fifty Pound) and given to the Poor, *But this he said, not that he cared for the*

Poor but because he was a Thief, and had the Bag; out of which he could have made a good prey unto himself, *Joh. 12. 6.* And it may be observed, that although *Judas* maliciously began this murmuring; yet at last some of the other *Disciples* were too credulous of his insinuation, seeing the other *Evangelists*, ascribe it to them also. But the same pretence, on the same grounds, in following Ages was turned unto the greatest advantage of *Hypocrisy and Covetousness* that ever was in the World. For under this pretence of providing for the Poor, the Thieves who had got the Bag, that is the Ruling part of the Clergy, with the *Priests, Friars and Monks* who served them, allowed Men in the neglect of the greatest and most important Duties of Religion towards Christ himself, so as that they would give all that they had to the Poor; not that they cared for the Poor, but because they were Thieves, and had the Bag; by which means they possessed themselves of the greatest part of the Wealth of the Nations professing Christian Religion. This was their compliance with the Command of Christ; which they equally made use of in other things.

THIS Foundation of their Office was farther raised by the Preaching of the Gospel among the Poor. Many of them who first received it, were of that state and condition as the Scripture every where testifieth. *The Poor are Evangelized, Matth. 11. 5. God hath chosen the Poor, Jam. 2. 5.* And so it was in the First Ages of the Church; where the Provision for them was one of the most eminent Graces and Duties of the Church in those days. And this way became the Original Propagation of the Gospel. For it was made manifest thereby, that the Doctrine and Profession of it was not a matter of Worldly Design or Advantage; God also declared therein of how little esteem with him the Riches of this World are; and also Provision was made for the exercise of the Grace of the Rich in their Supply, the only way whereby they may Glorify God with their Substance. And it were well if all Churches, and all the Members of them would wisely consider how eminent is this Grace, how excellent is this Duty, of making Provision for the Poor, how much the Glory of Christ and Honour

of the Gospel are concerned herein. For, whereas for the most part it is looked on as an *ordinary Work* to be performed transiently and curiously, scarce deserving any of the time which is allotted unto the Churches publick Service and Duties, it is indeed one of the most eminent Duties of Christian Societies, wherein the principal exercise of the *Second Evangelical Grace*, namely *Love*, doth consist.

THE care of making Provision for the Poor being made in the Church an Institution of Christ, was naturally incumbent on them who were the *First only Officers of the Church*, that is, the *Apostles*. This is plain from the occasion of the Institution of the Office of the *Deacons*, *Act. 6*. The whole Work and Care of the Church being in their hands, it was impossible that they should attend unto the whole and all the parts of it in any manner. Whereas therefore they gave themselves, according to their Duty, mostly unto those parts of their Work, which were incomparably more excellent and necessary than the other, namely *Preaching of the Word and Prayer*; there was such a *defect* in this other part of ministrations unto the Poor, as must unavoidably accompany the actings of humane nature, not able to apply it self constantly unto things of diverse natures at the same time. And hereon those who were concerned quickly, as the manner of all is, expressed their resentment of a *neglect* in somewhat an undue Order; there was a *murmuring about it*, *Ver. 1*. The Apostles hereon declared that the principal part of the Work of the Ministry in the Church, namely the *Word and Prayer*, was sufficient for them constantly to attend unto. Afterwards indeed Men began to think that they could do *all* in the Church themselves, but it was when they began to do *nothing* in a due manner. And whereas the Apostles chose, as their Duty, the Work of Prayer and Preaching, as that which they would and ought entirely give up themselves unto, and for the sake of that Work would deposite the care of other things on other hands; they are a strange kind of Successors unto them, who lay aside that Work which they determined to belong unto them principally and in the first place, to apply themselves unto any thing else whatever.

YET

YET did not the *Apostles* hereon utterly forgo the care of *providing for the Poor* which being originally committed unto them by *Jesus Christ*, they would not *divest themselves* wholly of it. But by the Direction of the Holy Ghost they provided such assistance in the Work, as that for the future it might require no more of their time or pains but what they should spare from their principal Employment. And the same care is still incumbent on the *ordinary Pastors and Elders* of the Churches, so far as the execution of it doth not interfere with their principal Work and Duty, from which those who understand it aright, can spare but little of their time and strength.

HEREON the *Apostles*, by the Authority of *Christ* and direction of the Holy Spirit, under whose Infallible Guidance they were in all the general concerns of the Church, Instituted the *Office of Deacons*, for the discharge of this necessary and important Duty in the Church, which they could not attend unto themselves. And whereas the Lord *Christ* had in an especial manner committed the *care of the Poor unto the Disciples*, there was now a declaration of his Mind and Will, in *what way* and by what means he would have them provided for.

AND it was the *Institution of a new Office*, and not a present supply in a *Work or Business* which they designed. For the limitation of an especial Ecclesiastical Work, with the Designation of Persons unto that Work, with Authority for the discharge of it, (*set over this business*) with a separation unto it, do compleatly constitute an *Office*, nor is there any thing more required thereunto.

BUT whereas there are three things that concur and are required unto the *ministration unto the Poor of the Church*.  
 (1.) The *Love, Charity, Bounty and Benevolence* of the Members of the Church, in contribution unto that ministration.  
 (2.) The *care and oversight* of the discharge of it. And,  
 (3.) The *actual Exercise and Application* of it; the last only belongs unto the Office of the *Deacons*, and neither of the first are discharged by the *Institution* of it. For the first is both a Duty of the Light and Law of Nature, and in its moral part enforced

enforced by many especial Commands of Christ; so as that nothing can absolve Men from their obligation thereunto. The Office and Work of the *Deacons* is to excite, direct and help them in the exercise of that Grace, and discharge of the Duty therein incumbent on them. Nor is any Man, by the entrusting a due proportion of his good things in the hands of the *Deacons* for its distribution, absolved thereby from his own *personal discharge* of it also. For it being a moral Duty required in the Law of Nature, it receiveth peculiar obligations unto a present exercise by such Circumstances as Nature and Providence do suggest: The care also of the whole Work is as was said, still incumbent on the *Pastors* and *Elders* of the Church; only the ordinary Execution is committed unto the *Deacons*.

NOR was this a *Temporary Institution* for that season, and so the Officers appointed *Extraordinary*; but was to abide in the Church throughout all Generations. For, (1.) The *Work it self*, as a distinct work of Ministry in the Church, was never to cease, it was to abide for ever; *The Poor you shall have always with you*. (2.) The *Reason of its Institution* is perpetual; namely, that the Pastors of the Churches are not sufficient in themselves to attend unto the whole work of *Praying, Preaching, and this Ministration*. (3.) They are afterwards not only in this Church at *Jerusalem*, but in all the Churches of the *Gentiles* reckoned among the *fixed Officers* of the Church, *Phil. 1. 1*. And, (4.) *Direction* is given for their *Continuation* in all Churches, with a prescription of the *Qualifications* of the person to be Chosen and called into this Office, *1 Tim. 3. 8, 10, 11*. (5.) The way of their Call is directed, and an Office committed unto them, *Let them be first proved, then let them use the Office of a Deacon*. (6.) A Promise of Acceptance is annexed unto the diligent discharge of this Office, *Verf. 13*.

HENCE those who afterward utterly perverted all Church Order, taking out of the hands and care of the *Deacons*, that work which was committed to them by the Holy Ghost in the Apostles, and for which End alone, their Office was *Instituted*



stituted in the Church, assigning other Work unto them, whereunto they are not called nor appointed; yet thought meet to continue the Name and the pretence of such an Office, because of the evident Institution of it, unto a Continuation. And whereas when all things were swelling with Pride and Ambition in the Church, no sort of its Officers contenting themselves with their Primitive Institution; but striving by various degrees to some-what in Name and Thing, that was high and a-loft, there arose from the Name of this Office the *Meteor* of an *Archdeacon*, with strange Power and Authority, never heard of in the Church for many Ages: But this belongs unto the Mystery of Iniquity; whereunto neither the Scripture nor the Practice of the Primitive Churches do give the least countenance. But some think it not inconvenient even to *sport themselves* in matter of Church Order and Constitutions.

THIS Office of *Deacons*, is an Office of service, which gives not any Authority or Power in the Rule of the Church. But being an Office, it gives Authority with respect unto the special Work of it under a general notion of Authority; that is, a Right to attend unto it in a peculiar manner, and to perform the things that belong thereunto. But this Right is confined unto the particular Church whereunto they do belong. Of the Members of that Church are they to make their Collections, and unto the Members of that Church are they to Administer. *Extraordinary Collections* from, or for other Churches, are to be made and disposed by the *Elders*, *Acts* 11. 30.

WHEREAS, the Reason of the Institution of this Office was in general to *free* the Pastors of the Churches who labour in the Word and Doctrine from Avocations by outward things, such as wherein the Church is concerned; it belongs unto the *Deacons* not only to take care of and provide for the Poor, but to manage all other Affairs of the Church of the same kind; such as are providing for the *place* of the Church-Assemblies, of the *Elements* for the Sacraments, of Keeping, Collecting and Disposing of the *Stock of the Church*, for the maintenance of its Officers, and incidencies, especially in the time of Trouble or Persecution.

Persecution. Hereon are they obliged to attend the *Elders* on all occasions, to perform the Duty of the Church towards them, and receive directions from them. This was the constant practice of the Church in the Primitive Times, until the Avarice and Ambition of the Superior Clergy enclosed all *Alms and Donations* unto themselves; the Beginning and Progress whereof is excellently described and traced by *Paulus Sharpius*, in his Treatise of *matters Beneficiary*.

THAT maintenance of the Poor which they are to distribute, is to be collected by the *voluntary Contributions* of the Church, to be made ordinarily every *first Day of the Week*, and as occasion shall require in an extraordinary manner, *1 Cor. 16. 1, 2.* And this Contribution of the Church ought to be, (1.) In a way of *Bounty*, not sparingly, *2 Cor. 9. 5, 6, 7.* (2.) In a way of *Equality*, as unto Mens Abilities, *2 Cor. 8. 13, 14.* (3.) With respect unto present Successes and Thriving in Affairs, whereof a Portion is due to God; *as God hath prospered him, 1 Cor. 16. 2.* (4.) With *willingness* and freedom, *2 Cor. 8. 12. Chap. 7.* Wherefore it belongs unto the *Deacons* in the Discharge of their Office, (1.) To acquaint the Church with the present necessity of the Poor. (2.) To stir up the particular Members of it unto a free Contribution according unto their Ability. (3.) To admonish those that are negligent herein, who give not according to their proportion; and to acquaint the *Elders* of the Church with those who persist in a neglect of their Duty.

THE consideration of the State of the Poor unto whom the Contributions of the Church are to be ministred, belongs unto the discharge of this Office. As, (1.) That they are *Poor indeed*, and do not pretend themselves so to be, for advantage. (2.) What are the *Degrees* of their Poverty, with respect unto their Relations and Circumstances, that they may have suitable Supplies. (3.) That in other things they walk according unto Rule. (4.) In particular that they *Work and Labour* according to their Ability; for he that will not labour must not eat at the publick Charge. (5.) To Comfort, Counsel and Exhort them unto *Patience*, Submission, Contentment with their

their Condition, and Thankfulness; all which might be enlarged and confirmed, but that they are obvious.

THE Qualifications of Persons to be called unto this Office, are distinctly laid down by the Apostle, 1 Tim. 3. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13. Upon the Trial, Knowledge and Approbation of them, with respect unto these Qualifications, their Call to this Office consists. (1.) In the *choice of the Church*. (2.) In a *separation* unto it by Prayer and Imposition of Hands, *Act. 6. 3, 5, 6*. And the Adjuncts of their ministrations are, (1.) *Mercy* to represent the tenderness of Christ towards the Poor of the Flock, *Rom. 12. 8*. (2.) *Cheerfulness* to relieve the Spirits of them that receive against thoughts of being troublesome and burdensome to others. (3.) *Diligence* and Faithfulness by which they *purchase to themselves a good Degree, and great boldness in the Faith which is in Christ Jesus*.

IT remains only that we enquire into some few things relating unto this Office, and those that are called unto it. As,

1. WHAT is the meaning of the Apostle, where he affirms, that the Deacons in the Discharge of their Office, βαδμὸν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ ἀνὸν πεποιθῆσας, 1 Tim. 3. 13. Do purchase or procure unto themselves a good Degree. βαδμὸς is a Step, a Degree, a Seat a little Exalted, and Metaphorically it is applied to denote Dignity and Authority. This good Degree, which Deacons may obtain, is in the judgment of most the Office of *Presbytery*. This they shall be promoted unto in the Church. From *Deacons* they shall be made *Presbyters*. I cannot comply with this Interpretation of the Words. For, (1.) The Office of *Presbytery* is called καλὸν ἔργον, a good Work, no where καλὸς βαδμὸς, a good Degree. (2.) The difference between a *Deacon* and a *Presbyter* is not in Degree, but in Order. A *Deacon* made a *Presbyter* is not advanced unto a further Degree in his own Order; but leaves it for another. (3.) The diligent discharge of the Work of a *Deacon*, is not a due preparation for the Office of the *Presbytery*, but an hinderance of it; for it lies wholly in the providing and disposal of Earthly things, in a serving of the Tables of the Church, and those private of the Poor: But preparation for the Ministry consists in a Mans giving himself unto Study, Prayer and Meditation.

I SHALL

I SHALL only give my conjecture on the Words, the Apostle seems to me to have respect unto Church-Order, with Decency therein, in both these Expressions, *shall purchase to themselves a good Degree, and great confidence in the Faith*: Βαθμὸς is of the same signification with βαθύς, which is a Seat raised in an Assembly to hear or speak. So saith the *Schol. on Sophoc. Oed.* ὁ πόθος ἐνθα ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐγένετο, βαθμίον ἢ κύκλον διελημμένον, ἄλλαις ἐπ' ἄλλαις ἐνθα οἱ συναθρόντες πάντες καθήμενοι ἀνεμωδίστως ἠκεῶντο τὰ ἰσαμένα ἐν μέσῳ. *The place where the Assembly (or Church) met, was divided round about with Seats in Degrees, some above others, where all that met might without trouble hear him that stood in the midst as they sate.* And countenance is given hereunto by what is observed concerning the custom of sitting in the Jewish Synagogues. So *Ambrose*; *Traditio est Synagoga, ut sedentes disputarent, Siniore dignitate in Cathedris, subsequentes in subselliis, novissimi in pavimento*; *It is the Tradition or Order of the Synagogue, that the Elders in Dignity (or Office) should discourse sitting in Chairs; the next Order on Forms or Benches, and the last on the Floor.* So speaks *Philo* before him; εἰς ἰσῶς ἀφικνήμενοι τῶτες καθ' ἡλικίας ἐν ταῖς ἐσθῆσι ἰσῶς ὡς οὐρανῶν καὶ καθ' ἡλικίας, *when we meet in sacred places, places of Divine Worship, the younger sort according to their Quality sit in Orders under the Elders.* And this *James* the Apostle hath respect unto in the Primitive Assemblies of the Christian Jews. For reproving their partiality in accepting of Mens Persons, preferring the Rich immoderately before the Poor, he instanceth in their disposing of them unto Seats in their Assemblies. *They said unto the Rich Man, σὺ καθὲν ὡς καλῶς, sit thou here in a good place; that is in βαθμῷ καλῷ, in the best degree; and to the Poor, stand thou there on the floor, or sit at my foot-stool, without respect unto those other Qualifications whereby they were to be distinguished.* Wherefore, the Apostle having respect unto Church-Assemblies, and the Order to be observed in them, the καλὸς βαθμὸς here intended, may signifie no more but a place of some eminency in the Church-Assemblies, which is due unto such Deacons, where with boldness and confidence they may assist in the management of the Affairs of the Church, which belongs unto the Profession of the Faith which is in Christ Jesus.

IF any shall rather think that both of the Expressions do signify an *increase in Gifts and Grace*, which is a certain consequence of Mens faithful discharge of their Office in the Church, wherein many Deacons of old were eminent unto Martyrdom, I shall not contend against it.

2. WHEREAS there are Qualifications expressly required in the *Wives of Deacons*, as that they should be *grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things*, 1 Tim. 3. 12. which is to be considered before their call to Office; supposing that any of them do fall from the Faith as becoming *Papists, Socinians, or Quakers*, whether their Husbands may be continued in their Office?

*Ans.* 1. HE who in his own Person faithfully dischargeth his Office, may be continued therein, yea, though his Wife should be actually Excommunicated out of the Church. *Every One of us must give an account of himself unto the Lord.* He rejects us not for what we cannot remedy. The sinning Person shall bear his own judgment. (2.) Such an one ought to take care, by virtue of his *Authority* as an Husband, that as little offence as possible may be given to the Church by his Wife, when she loseth the qualification of *not being a slanderer*, which is inseparable from such *Apostates*.

3. *MAY a Deacon be dismissed from his Office wholly, after he hath been solemnly set apart unto it by Prayer?*

*Ans.* 1. THE very end of the Office being only the *convenience of the Church* and its accommodation, the continuation of Men in this Office is to be regulated by them. And if the Church at any time stand not in need of the Ministry of this or that Person, they may, upon his desire, discharge him of his Office. (2.) Things may so fall out with Men, as unto their outward circumstances, with respect unto either their Persons in Bodily Distempers and Infirmities, or their Condition in the World, as that they are not able any longer to attend unto the due discharge of this Office; in which case they ought to be released. (3.) A Man may be solemnly set apart unto a Work and Duty by Prayer for a *limited Season*, suppose for a year only; wherefore this doth not hinder but that a Man on just Reasons may be dismissed

at any time from his Office, though he be so set apart unto it. (4.) A *Deacon* by unfaithfulness and other offences, may forfeit his Office, and be justly excluded from it, losing all his Right unto it and Interest in it, and therefore on just Reasons may be dismissed wholly from it. (5.) For any one to *desert his Office* through forwardness, covetousness, sloth or negligence, is an offence and scandal which the Church ought to take notice of. (6.) He who desires a dismissal from his Office, ought to give an account of his desires and the Reasons of them unto the Church, that the Ministry which he held may be duly supplied, and love continued between him and the Church.

4. *HOW many Deacons may there be in one Congregation?*

*Ans.* AS many as they stand in need of, for the ends of that Ministry; and they may be at all times *encreased*, as the State of the Church doth require; and it is meet that there should always be so many, as that none of the Poor be neglected in the daily Ministrations, nor the Work be made burdensome unto themselves.

5. *WHAT is the Duty of the Deacons towards the Elders of the Church?*

*Ans.* WHEREAS the care of the whole Church in all its concernments is principally committed unto the Pastors, Teachers, and Elders, it is the Duty of the Deacons in the discharge of their Office, (1.) To *acquaint them* from time to time with the state of the Church, and especially of the Poor, so far as it falls under their Inspection. (2.) To seek and take their Advice in matters of greater importance relating unto their Office. (3.) To be assisting unto them in all the outward concerns of the Church.

6. *MAY Deacons Preach the Word and Baptize authoritatively by virtue of their Office?*

*Ans.* (1.) THE Deacons, whose Office is instituted, *Act. 6.* and whose Qualifications are fixed, *1 Tim. 3.* have no call unto, or *Ministerial Power* in these things. The limitation of their Office, Work and Power, is so express, as will not admit of any debate. (2.) Persons once called unto this Office, might of old in an extraordinary manner, may at present in an ordinary way, be

be called unto the preaching of the Word ; but they were not then, they cannot be now authorized thereunto by virtue of this Office. (3.) If a *new Office* be erected under the name of *Deacons*, it is in the will of them by whom it is erected, to Assign what Power unto it they please.

## CHAP. X.

### Of EXCOMMUNICATION.

**T**HE Power of the Church towards its Members (for it hath nothing to do *with them that are without*) may be referred unto Three Heads, (1.) The *Admission* of Members into its Society. (2.) The *Rule* and Edification of them that belong unto it. (3.) The *Exclusion* out of its Society of such as *obstinately* refuse to live and walk according unto the Laws and Rules of it. And these things belong essentially and inseparably unto every free Society, and are comprehensive of all Church-Power whatever.

THE *Second* of these hath been treated of in the Discourse concerning *Church Offices and Rule*. And all that belongs unto the *first* of them, is fully declared in the Chapters of the *Essential Constituent parts of Gospel Churches*, namely their *Matter* and *Form*. The *Third* must be now spoken, unto which is the *Power of Excommunication*.

THERE is nothing in Christian Religion, about which the contest of Opinions hath been more fierce than this of *Excommunication*, most of them proceeding evidently from false *Presumptions* and *secular Interests*. And no greater instance can be given of what the *Serpentine* wits of Men engaged by the desire of *Domination* and *Wealth*, and assisted by opportunities may attain unto. For whereas, as we shall see immediately, there is nothing more plain, simple, and more exposed unto the common understanding of all *Christians*, yea of all

Man-

*Mankind*, than is this Institution of Christ; both as unto its Nature, Form and Manner of Administration, nothing more *wholesome* nor useful unto the Souls of Men; nothing more remote from giving the least disturbance or prejudice to Civil Society, to Magistrates or Rulers, unto the *Personal* or *Political Rights* or Concernments of any one individual in the World: It hath been *Metamorphosed* into an hideous Monster; an Engine of *Priestly Domination and Tyranny*, for the *Deposition* or *Assassination* of Kings and Princes, the *Wasting of Nations* with bloody Wars, the *Terror* of the Souls of Men, and the destruction of their Lives, with all their Earthly Concerns, unto the *Erection* of a *Tyrannical Empire*, no less pernicious unto the Christian World, than those of the *Saracens* or the *Turks*. He is a stranger unto all that hath passed in the World for near a *Thousand Years*, who knows not the Truth of these things. And to this very day the greatest part of them that are *called Christians* are so supinely Ignorant and Doating, or so infatuated and blinded by their Prejudices and Corrupt Interests, as to suppose, or to say, That if the *Pope of Rome* do Excommunicate *Kings or Princes*, they may be lawfully *deposed* from their Rule, and in some cases killed; and that other persons being rightly Excommunicated according unto certain Laws, Rules, and Processes, that some have framed, ought to be *Fined, Punished, Imprisoned, and so Destroyed*. And about these things there are many Disputes and Contentests; when if Men were awakned out of their Lethargy they would be laughed at, as the most ridiculous and contemptible *Mormo's* that ever appeared in the World; though they are no *laughing matter* at present, unto them that are concerned in them.

SUPPOSING then, *Ecclesiastical Excommunication* (as I at present suppose, and shall immediately prove it) to be an appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ; these things are plain and evident concerning it, not capable of any modest Contradiction, (1.) That there is no *Divine Evangelical Institution*, that is more suited unto the Light of Nature, the Rules of common Equity, and Principles of *unseared Consciences*, as unto the Nature,



ture, Efficacy and Rule of it, than this is. (2.) That the way of the Administration and Exercise of the Power and Acts of it, is so determined, described and limited in the Scripture, and the Light of Nature, as that there can be no *gross error* or mistake about it, but what proceeds from *Secular Interests, Pride, Ambition, Covetousness*, or other vicious Habits and Inclinations of the minds of Men. (3.) That the whole *Authority* of it, its Sentence, Power and Efficacy, are *meerly Spiritual*, with respect unto the Souls and Consciences of Men only; and that to extend it *directly* or *indirectly, immediately* or by *consequences*, unto the temporal hurt, evil or damage of any in their Lives, Liberties, Estates, Natural or Legal Privileges, is opposite unto, and destructive of the whole Government of Christ in and over his Church. All these things wilfully appear in the account which we shall give of it.

IT is therefore evident, as was intimated, that nothing in Christian Practice hath been, or is more *abused*, corrupted or perverted, than this of *Excommunication* hath been and is. The Residence of the Supream Power of it to be exercised towards and over all Christians, Rulers and Subjects, in the *Pope of Rome*, or in other *single Persons* absolutely, over less or greater Distributions of them; the Administration of it by *Citations, Processes, Pleadings* and *Contentions* in wrangling Law Courts according unto *Arbitrary Canons* and Constitutions, whose Original is either *known*, or *unknown*; the Application of it unto the *Hurt, Damage, Evil* or Loss of Men in their Temporal Concerns, are utterly and openly foreign unto the Gospel, and expressly contrary unto what the Lord Christ hath appointed therein. It would require a *whole Volume* to declare the *horrible abuses* that both in point of Right, and in *matter of Fact*, with the pernicious consequences that have ensued thereon, which the corruption of this Divine Institution hath produced: But to make a Declaration hereof, doth not belong to my present design; besides, it hath in some good measure been done by others. In brief, it is so come to pass that it is made a *meer Political Engine*, of an *external forcible Government*, of the *Persons* of Men, unto the ends of the *Interests* of some, who have got a pretence

a pretence of its Power, administred by *such ways* and means, as wherein the *Consciences* of Men, neither of those by whom it is Administred, nor of those unto whom it is Applied, are any way concerned, with respect unto the Authority, or any Institution of Jesus Christ.

FROM an observation hereof, and a desire to vindicate as well Christian Religion from such a *scandalous Abuse* as *Man-kind* from Bondage, to such a monstrous fiction as is the present power and exercise of it, some have fallen into *another extrem*, denying that there is any such thing as *Excommunication*, appointed or approved by the Gospel. But this neither is, nor ever will be a way to reduce Religion nor any thing in it, unto its Primitive Order and Purity. To deny the *Being* of any thing because it hath *been abused*, when there could have been *no abuse* of it, but upon a supposition of its *Being*, is not a rational way to reprove and convince that abuse. And when those who have *corrupted this Institution*, find the insufficiency of the Arguments produced to prove that there *never was any such Institution*, it makes them secure in the practice of their own Abuses of it. For they imagine that there is nothing incumbent on them to justify their present possession and exercise of the Power of Excommunication; but that *Excommunication* itself is appointed in the Church by Christ, whereas the true consideration of this *Appointment*, is the only means to divest them of their power and practice. For the most effectual course to discharge and disprove all corruptions in the *Agenda* or *Practicals* of Religion, as the *Sacraments*, *publick Worship*, *Rule* and the like, is to propose and declare the things themselves in their Original simplicity, and purity, as appointed by Christ, and recorded in the Scriptures. A real view of them in such a *Proposal*, will divest the minds of Men, not corrupted and hardened by Prejudice and Interest, of those erroneous conceptions of them, that from some kind of Tradition they have been prepossessed withal. And this I shall now attempt in this particular of *Excommunication*.

THERE hath been great enquiry about the nature and exercise of this Ordinance, under the *Old Testament*, with the Account

count given of it by the latter *Jews*. For the Right and Power of it in general, belongs unto a *Church as such, every Church,* and not that which is purely *Evangelical* only. This I shall not enquire into; it hath been sifted to the bran already, and intermixed with many *Rabbinical* conjectures and mistakes. In general, there is nothing more certain, than that there was a *double Removal* of Persons by Church-Authority, from the communion of the whole Congregation in Divine Worship. The one *for a Season*, the other *for Ever*; whereof I have given Instances elsewhere. But I intend only the consideration of what belongs unto Churches under the New Testament. And to this end we may observe,

I. THAT all *lawful Societies*, constituted such by *voluntary confederation*, according unto peculiar Laws and Rules of their own choice, unto especial Duties and Ends, have a *Right* and *Power* by the Light of Nature, to receive into their Society those that are *willing* and meet, engaging themselves to observe the Rules, Laws and Ends of the Society; and to *Expel* them out of it who wilfully deviate from those Rules. This is the life and form of every *lawful Society* or Community of Men in the World, without which they can neither coalesce nor subsist. But it is required hereunto,

I. THAT those who so enter into such a Society, have *Right or Power so to do*. And many things are required unto this end: As, (1.) That those who enter into such a Society be *sui Juris*; have a *lawful Right to dispose of themselves*, as unto all the Duties and Ends of such a Society. Hence *Children, Servants, Subjects*, have no power in themselves to enter into such Societies, without the interposition of and obligation from a power Superior unto that of Parents, Masters, or Princes, namely, that of God himself. (2.) That the Rules, Laws, and ends of the Society be *lawful*, good and useful unto themselves and others. For there may be a *confederation* in and for evil; which is a combination that gives no Right nor Power, over one another, or towards others that enter into it. (3.) That it contains nothing that is *prejudicial* unto others in things Divine or Humane. (4.) Nor oblige unto the *omission*.

or neglect of any Duty, that Men by virtue of any Relations, Natural, Moral or Political, do owe unto others: Nor, (5.) Is *hurtful* unto themselves in their Lives, Liberties, Names, Reputation, usefulness in the World, or any thing else, unto whose preservation they are obliged by the Law of Nature. Nor, (6.) Can be, or are such Persons obliged to forsake the *conduct of themselves* in things Divine and Humane, by the Light of their own Consciences, by an Ingagement of blind obedience unto others, which would render every *Society unlawful* by the Law of God and Light of Nature. (7.) Least of all, have any Persons Right or Power to oblige themselves in such Societies, unto things *Evil, Sinful, Superstitious* or *Idolatrous*.

THESE things are plain, and evident in themselves, and every way sufficient to divest all the *Religious Societies* and *Fraternities* that are erected in the *Church of Rome*, of all that Right and Power which belongs unto *lawful Societies*, constituted by voluntary confederation. And if any thing inconsistent with these principles of *Natural Light* be pretended in Churches, it divests them of *all Power*, as to the exercise of it, by virtue of any compact or confederation whatever.

2. IT is required that a *Society*, by *voluntary consent* vested with the Right and Power mentioned, do neither give nor take away any Right, Privilege or Advantage, to, or from any Members of the Society which belong unto them *Naturally* or *Politically*; but their Power is confined unto those things alone, wherein Men may be benefited and advantaged by the Society. And this is the foundation of all *political Societies*. Men, for the sake and benefit of them, may and ought to forego many particular Advantages, which, without them, they might make unto themselves. But they cannot forego any of those Rights, which in their several Relations are inseparably annexed unto them by the Law of Nature, nor give power over themselves in such things unto the Society. So is it with Churches; the power of *expulsion* out of their Society, extends only unto the *Benefits* and *Advantages* which the Society, as such, doth afford and communicate. Now these are only things *Spiritual*, if Churches be an institution of him, whose

Kingdom is not of this World. The power then that is in Churches, by virtue of their being what they are, extends not it self unto any *outward concernments of Men*, as unto their Lives, Liberties, Natural or Political Privileges, Estates or Possessions; unless we shall say, that Men hold and possess these things by virtue of their Relation unto the Church, which is to overthrow all Natural and Humane Right in the World. *De facto*, Men are now compelled whether they will or no, to be esteemed to be of this or that Church, and to be dealt withal accordingly. But if they had not been divested of their natural Liberty, they know not how, without their own consent, and should be taught, that by entering into a Church, they must come under a new *Tenure of their Lives, Liberties* and Estates, at the Will of the Lords of the Society according to the *Customs of their Courts*, there would not be so many Wise Men in Churches, as now there are thought to be.

BUT this is the true State of things in the Church of Rome, and *among others* also. Christians are esteemed to be of them, and belong unto them, whether they will or no. Immediately hereon all the *Rights, Liberties, Privileges*, Possessions which they enjoy by the Law of God and Nature, and by the just Laws and Constitutions of Men in Civil Governments, under which they live, come to depend upon, and be subject unto the especial *Laws and Rules of the Society* which they are adjudged to belong unto. For upon expulsion out of that Society by *Excommunication*, according unto the Laws and Rules which it hath framed unto it self, all their *Rights and Titles*, and *Liberties and Enjoyments* are forfeited and exposed to Ruine. Some indeed do earnestly and learnedly contend that the *Pope of Rome* hath not Power to Excommunicate Sovereign *Kings and Princes*; and that if he do, they make no forfeiture of Life or Dignity thereby. And there are good Reasons why they do so. But in the mean time, they deal with other poor Men after the same manner. For if a poor *Man* be Excommunicated, immediately he loseth the free Tenure of his Life, Liberty and Goods, by the Law of the Church and the Land, and is Committed to the Gaol without Bail or Mainprize. So that

that by this *Artifice*, all Men hold their Natural and Civil Rights, by the Rules of the Church Society whereto they are supposed to belong. And as this utterly overthrows the foundation of all that *Property* according to the Laws of the Land, which is so much talked of and valued; so indeed it would be destructive of all Order and Liberty, but that the Church is *wise enough* not to employ this Engine unto *Great Men* and Men in Power, who may yet deserve *Excommunication* as well as some of their poor Neighbours, if the Gospel be thought to give the Rule of it. But those that are poor, helpless and friendless, shall in the pursuit of this Excommunication be driven from their *Houses, cast into Prisons*, and kept there until they and their Families starve and perish. And it is apparent that we are beholding unto the *Greatness, Authority, and Wealth of many*, whom the *Ecclesiastical Courts* care not to conflict withal, that the whole Nation is not actually brought under this *new Tenure* of their *Lives, Liberties and Estates*, which on this presumption they are obnoxious unto.

AND all this evil ariseth from the neglect and contempt of this *fundamental Rule of all Societies*, apparent unto all in the Light of Nature it self; namely, that *they have no Power in or over any Thing, Right, Privilege or Advantage, but what Men are made Partakers of by virtue of such Societies, their Rule and Laws whereunto they are obliged*. But of this sort are not the Lives, the Liberties, the Houses and Possessions of Men, with respect unto the Church. They receive them not from the Church, and a Man would certainly think, that the Church could not take them away.

YEA, we live and subsist in Order, upon the good Nature and Wisdom of Men, who judge it best neither to exert their Power, nor act their Principles in this matter. For, whereas they esteem all the *Inhabitants of the Land* to belong unto their Church; if they should in the first place *Excommunicate* all that ought to be Excommunicated by the *Rule and Law of the Gospel*, and then all that ought to be so, according to their *own Laws and Canons*, both which a Man would think they were obliged in point of Conscience unto; and in pursuit of their  
Sentence,

Sentence, send out the *Capias* for them all, I very much question whether any of them would go to *Prison* or no; and then in what a fine case would this Government be; and if they should all go to *Gaol*, I am perswaded the King would be in an ill State to defend his *Realms* against his Enemies.

3. EVERY Society hath this Power towards those who are *incorporated in it by their own consent*, and not towards others. For whence should they have such a Power, or who should commit it unto them? Nor can any be cast out from those Privileges which they never had an Interest in, nor a Right unto. The Apostles Rule holds in this case, especially with respect unto Churches; *What have we to do to judge them that are without*. And as unto the exercise of this Power, they are all to be esteemed *to be without*, who are not rightly incorporated into that particular Church, by which they may be ejected out of it. A Power of Excommunication at *Random* towards all that those who exercise it can extend force unto, hath *no foundation* either in the Light of Nature or Authority of the Scripture. And it would be ridiculous in any Corporation to *disfranchise* such as never belonged unto it, who were never Members of it.

4. THE only Reason or Cause for the expulsion of any Person out of such a Society, is a *wilful deviation from the Rules and Laws of the Society*, whose observance he had engaged unto upon his entrance into it. Nothing else can be required unto the *Preservation* of a Mans Interest in any Right or Privilege, but what he took upon himself to perform in his Admittance into it. And if the great Rule of every Church-Society, be, *That Men observe and do whatsoever the Lord Christ hath commanded*, none can be justly ejected out of that Society, but upon a *wilful disobedience* unto his Commands. And therefore the casting of Men out of Church-Communion on light and trivial occasions, or for any Reasons or Causes whatever, but such as *essentially* belong unto the Rules and Laws whereon the Church doth originally coalesce into a Society, is contrary unto Natural Light, and the Reason of the Things themselves.

THUS

THUS far I say is every lawful confederate Society enabled and warranted by the Light of Nature, to remove from its Communion, and from a participation in its Rights and Privileges any of its number who will not walk according to the Rules and Principles of its Coalescency and Constitution. Whereas therefore the Rule of the Constitution of the Church is, That Men walk together in holy Obedience unto the Commands of Christ, and the observance of all his Institutions, without giving Offence unto one another, or those that are without, by any sinful miscarriage, and do abide in the Profession of the Truth; if any one shall wilfully and obstinately transgress in any of these things, it is the Right and Duty, and in the Power of the Church to remove him from its Society.

BUT this is not the entire nor the next immediate Ground, Reason, or Warranty of Ecclesiastical Excommunication. For this natural Equity will not extend it self unto cases that are in things Spiritual and Supernatural; nor will the actings of the Church thereon reach unto the Consciences of Men, for the proper ends of Excommunication. Wherefore it was necessary that it should have a peculiar Institution in the Church by the Authority of Jesus Christ. For,

1. THE Church is such a Society as no Men have Right or Power either to enter into themselves, or to exclude others from, but by virtue of the Authority of Christ. No warranty from the Light of nature, or from the Laws of Men, or their own voluntary confederation, can enable any to constitute a Church-Society, unless they do all things expressly in obedience unto the Authority of Christ. For his Church is his Kingdom, his House; which none can constitute or build but himself. Wherefore it is necessary, that the power of Admission into, and Exclusion from the Church, do arise from his Grant and Institution. Nor is it in the power of any Men in the World, to admit into, or exclude from this Society but by virtue thereof.

2. *EXCOMMUNICATION* is an act of Authority, as we shall see afterwards. But no Authority can be exercised in  
the



the Church, towards any person whatever, but by virtue of the Institution of Christ. For the Authority it self however ministerially exercised by others, is his alone; and he exerts it not, but in the ways of his own appointment. So in particular the Apostle directs, that Excommunication be exerted in *the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ*; that is, in and by his Authority, *1 Cor. 5. 4.*

3. *THE Privileges* from which Men are excluded by Excommunication are not such, as they have any Natural or Civil Right unto (as hath been proved) but meerly such as are granted unto the Church by Jesus Christ; and Men cannot by virtue of any Agreement among themselves, without a Warranty from him by his Institution, *Expel others* from the Privileges which are meerly of his Grant and Donation. He alone therefore hath given and granted this Power unto the Church, namely of Excluding any by the Rules and Ways of his Appointment from the Privileges of his Grant, which is the peculiar Power of Excommunication inquired after.

4. *THERE* is such an *Efficacy* assigned unto Excommunication in *binding* the Consciences of Men, in *retaining* their Sins, in the *Destruction* or Mortification of the Flesh, in the Healing and Recovery of Sinners; as nothing but the Authority of a Divine Institution can give unto it. By virtue of natural Light and mutual Consent, Men may free themselves from the Company and Society of those who will not walk with them according to Rules of Communion agreed upon among them; but they cannot reach the Minds and Consciences of others with any of these Effects.

5. *THAT* Excommunication is an exprefs Ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ in his Churches is fully declared in the Scripture. For, (1.) The power of it is contained in the Authority given by Christ unto the Church, under the Name of *the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*. For the Power expressed therein is not meerly *Doctrinal* and Declarative as is the *preaching of the Gospel*, the consequent whereof upon the Faith or Unbelief of them that hear it, is the *Remitting* or *Retaining* of their Sin in Heaven and Earth; but it is *Disciplinary* also,  
as

as it is appropriated unto the House whose *Keys* are committed unto the Stewards of it. And seeing the design of Christ was to have his Church *Holy, Unblamable and without offence* in the World, that therein he might make a Representation of his own Holiness, and the Holiness of his Rule; and whereas those of whom it is constituted, are liable and subject unto Sins *scandalous* and offensive, reflecting dishonour on himself and the Church, in being the occasion of sinning unto others; that design would not have been accomplished, had he not given this *Authority* unto his Church to cast out and separate from it self all that do by their Sins so give offence. And the neglect of the exercise of this Authority in a due manner, was the principal means whereby the Glory, Honour, and usefulness of the Churches in the World, were at length utterly lost. (2.) It hath a direct Institution, *Matth.* 18. 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20. *If thy Brother shall Trespass, &c. tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an Heathen Man and a Publican. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven, &c.* After all the Learned and Unlearned Contests that have been about this place, the sense of it is plain and obvious, unto such as whose Minds are not clouded with prejudices about such Churches and such Excommunications as are utterly foreign unto the Scripture. But that by *Trespases* in this place, Sins against God giving scandal or offence, are intended, hath been proved before; as also, that by a Church, a particular Christian Congregation is intended. This Church hath the cognizance of the *scandalous offences* of its Members committed unto it, when brought before it in the due Order described. Hereon it makes a *Determination*, designing in the first place the Recovery of the Person offending, from his Sin, by his hearing of its Counsel and Advice. But in case of *Obstinacy*, it is to remove him from its Communion, leaving him in the outward condition of an Heathen and a Publican. So is he to be esteemed by them that were offended with his Sin, and that because of the Authority of the Church binding him in

in Heaven and Earth unto the punishment due unto his Sin, unless he doth Repent. The *Rejection* of an offending Brother out of the Society of the Church, leaving him as unto *all the Privileges of the Church*, in the State of an Heathen, declaring him liable unto the Displeasure of Christ, and Everlasting Punishment without Repentance, is the Excommunication we plead for; and the Power of it, with its Exercise, is plainly here granted by Christ and Ordained in the Church. (3.) According unto this Institution was the practice of the Apostles, whereof we have several Instances. I might insist upon the Excommunication of *Simon the Magician*, a baptized professor, by *Peter*, who declared him *to have neither part or lot in the Church* upon the discovery of his wickedness, *Act. 8. 13, 20, 21, 22, 23.* Yet because it was the single Act of *one Apostle*, and so may be esteemed extraordinary, I shall omit it. However, that fact of the Apostle is sufficiently declarative of what is to be done in the Church in like cases, and which if it be not done, it cannot be preserved in its purity according unto the mind of Christ. But that which was directed by the Apostle *Paul* in the Church of *Corinth* towards the *incestuous Person*, is express, *1 Cor. 5. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7.* (1.) He declares the *Sin* whereof the Person charged was guilty, with the Ignominy and Scandal of it, *Ver. 1.* (2.) He *blames the Church* that they had not been affected with the Guilt and Scandal of it, so as to have proceeded to his Removal or Expulsion out of the Church, that he might be taken away or cut off from them, *Ver. 2.* (3.) He declares his *own judgment* in the case, that he ought to be so taken away or removed, which yet was not actually effected by that Judgment and Sentence of his, *Ver. 3.* (4.) He declares the *causes* of this Excision. (1.) The *Supream efficient cause* of it, is the *Power or Authority of the Lord Jesus Christ* instituting this Ordinance in his Church, giving Right and Power unto it for its administration, *In the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and with his Power. (2.) The *declarative cause* of the Equity of this Sentence, which was the Spirit of the Apostle, or the Authoritative Declaration of his judgment in the case, *with my Spirit.* (3.) The *Instrumental Ministerial*

sterial cause of it, which is the Church; do it in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, *when you are gathered together*, Ver. 4. and thereby *purge out the old Leaven, that you may be a new Lump*, Ver. 7. whence the *punishment* of this Sentence is said to be *inflicted by many*, 2 Cor. 2. 6. that is, all those who on his Repentance were obliged to forgive and comfort him, that is the whole Church, Ver. 7. (5.) The nature of the Sentence is the *delivering of such an one to Satan for the destruction of the Flesh, that the Spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*, Ver. 5. Not the destruction of his Body by Death, but the through *mortification of the Flesh*, whereby he was shortly afterwards recovered and restored into his former condition. The whole of what we plead for, is here exemplified; as, (1.) The *cause* of Excommunication, which is a scandalous Sin unrepented of. (2.) The preparation for its execution, which is the Churches sense of the Sin and Scandal, with Humiliation for it. (3.) The *warranty* of it, which is the Institution of Christ, wherein his Authority is engaged. (4.) The *manner* and form of it, by an Act of Authority with the consent of the whole Church. (5.) The *effect* of it in a total separation from the Privileges of the Church. (6.) The *end* of it. (1.) With respect unto the Church, its purging and vindication. (2.) With respect unto the Person Excommunicated; his Repentance, Reformation and Salvation.

IT is usually replied hereunto, that this was an *extraordinary act of Apostolical Power*, and so not to be drawn by us into Example. For he himself both determines the case, and asserts his presence in Spirit, that is by his Authority to be necessary unto what was done. Besides, it was a *delivery of the Man to Satan*, that is, into his power to be afflicted and cruciated by him, to be terrified in his Mind, and punished in his Body to the destruction of the Flesh, that is unto Death. Such was the *Delivery of a Man to Satan* by the Apostle mentioned here, and 1 Tim. 1. 9, 20. in the judgment of many of the Ancients. But there is no such Power in any Church at present to *deliver an offender unto Satan*, nor any appearing effects of such a pretence. Wherefore, this

this is a matter which belongs not unto Churches at present.

I ANSWER, (1.) What the Apostles did in any Church, whether present or absent, by their own Authority, did not prejudice the Right of the Churches themselves, nor their Power acted in *Subordination* unto them and their guidance. So it is evident in this place, that notwithstanding the exerting of any *Apostolical Power* intimated, the Church it self is charged with its Duty, and directed to exercise its Authority in the Rejection of the Offender. (2.) There is nothing *extraordinary* in the case. (1.) It is not so that a Member of a Church should fall into a *scandalous Sin*, unto the dishonour of Christ and the Church, giving offence unto Persons of all sorts. (2.) It is an ordinary Rule, founded in the Light of Nature, confirmed here and elsewhere by express Divine Commands, that such an one be rejected from the Society and Communion of the Church, until he give satisfaction by Repentance and Reformation. (3.) It is that without which the Church cannot be preserved in its *purity*, nor its being continued, as both Reason and Experience do manifest. (4.) The *judgment* both of the *Fact* and *Right* was left unto the Church it self, whence it was afterwards highly commended by the Apostle for the diligent discharge of its Duty herein, 2 *Cor.* 2. In brief, it is such a Divine Order that is here prescribed, as without the observance whereof, no Church can long subsist. (5.) There is no difficulty in the other part of the Objection, about the *Delivery unto Satan*. For, (1.) It cannot be proved, that hereon the Offender was delivered *so into the power of Satan* to be cruciated, agitated, and at length killed, as some imagine; nor can any instance of any such thing, be given in the Scripture or Antiquity; though there be many of them, who upon their rejection out of the Church, were enraged unto an opposition against it, as it was with *Simon Magus*, *Marcian*, and others. (2.) Yea, it is evident that there was no such thing included in their delivery unto *Satan*, as is pretended. For the design and end of it was the *Mans Humiliation, Recovery and Salvation*, as is expressly

preſly affirmed in the Text ; and this effect it actually had, for the Man was *healed* and reſtored. Wherefore, this *Delivery unto Satan*, is an Ordinance of Chriſt for the exciting of Saving Grace in the Souls of Men, adapted unto the caſe of falling by ſcandalous Sins, peculiarly effectual above any other Gospel Ordinance. Now this cannot be *ſuch a Delivery unto Satan*, as that pretended, which can have no other end but Deſtruction and Death. (3.) This *Delivery unto Satan* is no more but the caſting of a Man out of the viſible Kingdom of Chriſt, ſo giving him up as unto his outward condition into the ſtate of Heathens and Publicans which belonged unto the Kingdom of *Satan*. For he, who by the Authority of Chriſt himſelf, according unto his Law and Inſtitution, is not only debarred from a participation of all the privileges of the Gospel, but alſo *viſibly* and regularly deſteſted of all preſent Right to them and Intereſt in them, he belongs unto the viſible Kingdom of *Satan*. The gathering of Men by Conversion into the Church, is the *turning of them from the Power of Satan unto God*, *Act. 26. 18.* a *delivery from the Power of Darkneſs*, that is, the Kingdom of *Satan*, and a tranſlation unto the Kingdom of Chriſt, *Col. 1. 13.* Wherefore, after a Man hath by Faith, and his conjunction unto a viſible Church, been tranſlated into the Kingdom of Chriſt, his juſt rejection out of it, is the *Redelivery* of him into the viſible Kingdom of *Satan*, which is all that is here intended. And this is an act ſuited unto the end whereunto it is deſigned. For a Man hereby is not taken out of his own Power and the conduct of his own Mind, not acted or agitated by the Devil, but is left unto the ſedate conſideration of his preſent ſtate and condition. And this, if there be any ſpark of ingenuous Grace left in him, will be effectually operative, by ſhame, grief and fear, unto his Humiliation, eſpecially underſtanding that the deſign of Chriſt and his Church herein, is only his Repentance and Reſtauration.

HERE is therefore, in his inſtance, an *Everlaſting Rule* given unto the Church in all Ages, the ordinary Occurrences of the like caſes requiring an ordinary Power for Relief in them,

them, without which the Church cannot be preserved. That it is the Duty of the Church enjoined unto it by the Lord Jesus Christ, and that necessary unto its Glory, its own Honour and Edification to reject scandalous Offenders out of its Communion, is evidently declared in this place: And to suppose that to be the Duty of the Church, which it hath no Power or Authority to discharge, (seeing without them it cannot be discharged) is a wild imagination.

4. *THE Duty of the Church* herein, with such other particular Duties as suppose the Institution hereof, are in many places directed and enjoined. It is so in that insisted on, *1 Cor.*

5. The foundation of the whole Discourse and practice of the Apostle there Recorded lies in this, That *Churches ought to cut off from among them scandalous Offenders*; and that to the End they may preserve themselves pure; and that this they ought to do in the Name of Christ, and by virtue of his Authority, *Verf. 2, 4, 7.* And this is the whole of that *Excommunication* which we plead for. The manner of its Administration we shall consider afterwards, *2 Cor. Chap. 2. 6, 7, 8.* The Apostle commends the Church for what they had done in the *Excommunication of the Incestuous person*, calling it a *Punishment, inflicted on him by them*, *Verf. 6.* He gives also an account of the Effect of this Sentence against him, which was his *Humiliation and Repentance*, *Verf. 7.* And hereon gives direction for his *Restoration*, by an Act of the Church *forgiving him*, and *confirming their Love unto him.* Men may fanlie to themselves strange Notions of *Excommunication*, with reference unto its Power, the Residence of that Power, its Effects, Extent and Ends; and so either on the one hand erect it into an Engine of Arbitrary Domination over the Church and all the Members of it; or deny on the other, that there is any such Institution of Christ in force in his Churches. But we can be taught nothing more plainly of the Mind of Christ, than that he hath given Power unto his Church to cast out of their Communion obstinate *scandalous Offenders*, and to restore them again upon their *Repentance*, enjoining it unto them as their Duty. And it is an Evidence of a woful degeneracy in Churches,  
from

from their Primitive Institution, when this sentence is so administered, as that it hath an effect, by virtue of *Humane Laws*, or the outward concerns of Men, but *no influence* on their Consciences unto Humiliation and Repentance, which is the principal End of its appointment. The Apostle treats of the same matter, *Gal. 5. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.* He speaks of those false Teachers who opposed and overthrew what lay in them, *the Fundamental Doctrine of the Gospel.* These at that time were in great Power and Reputation in the Churches of the *Galatians* whom they had corrupted with their false Opinions; so as that the Apostle doth not directly enjoin their *immediate Excision*; yet he declares what they did deserve, and what was the Duty of the Church towards them, when freed from their Delusions, *Vers. 12. I would they were even cut off that trouble you.* Men have exercised their Minds in curious conjectures about the sense of these Words, altogether in vain and needlessly. The curiosity of some of the best of the Ancients, applying it unto a forcible *Eunuchism* is extremely fond. No other *Excision* is intended, but that which was *from the Church*, and to be done by the Church in obedience unto the Truth. Neither the Subject Matter treated of, the nature of the Crime condemned, nor the state of the Church, or design of the Apostle, will admit of any other Exposition, *2 Thessal. 3. 7.* The Apostle gives command unto the Brethren of the Church, and that in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *to withdraw from every Brother that walketh disorderly.* What it is to *walk disorderly*, he declares immediately, namely, to live in an open disobedience unto any of the commands of Christ, *not after the Tradition which he received of us*, that is, the Doctrine of the Gospel which he had *delivered* unto them. This *withdrawing* is as unto Church-Communion, which cannot be done but upon some act of the Church, depriving them of the Rights of it. For if every Member of the Church should be left unto his own judgment and practice herein, it would bring all things into confusion. And therefore, *Vers. 14.* he requires that a *note be set* on such a Person by the Church, that is, a Sentence be denounced against him, before the Duty of withdrawing



drawing from him by the Brethren be incumbent on them. See to the same purpose *Tit.* 3. 10, 11. *1 Tim.* 5. 20. *Revel.* 2. 2, 14, 15, 20, 21.

IT is therefore evident that this *Censure, Judgment, Spiritual punishment*, is an Institution of Christ, for whose Administration he hath given *Authority* unto his Church, as that which is necessary unto its Edification, with its preservation in Honour, Purity and Order.

THERE have been many Disputes about it, as unto its *Order and Kinds*. Some suppose that there are *two sorts* of Excommunication; the one they call the *lesser*, and the other the *greater*: Some *three sorts*, as it is supposed there were among the *Jews*. There is no mention in the Scripture of any more sorts, but *one*, or of any *Degrees* therein. A *segregation from all participation in Church-Order, Worship and Privileges*, is the only Excommunication spoken of in the Scripture. But whereas an offending Person may cause great disorder in a Church, and give great scandal unto the Members of it, before he can be regularly cut off or expelled the Society; some do judge that there should a *Suspension of him from the Lords Table at least*, precede total or compleat Excommunication in case of Impenitency. And it ought in some cases so to be. But this Suspension is not properly an especial Institution; but only an act of *prudence* in Church-Rule to avoid offence and scandal. And no Men question but that this is lawful unto, yea, the Duty of the Rulers of the Church, to require any one to forbear for a season from the use of their *Privilege* in the participation of the Supper of the Lord, in case of *scandal* and offence which would be taken at it, and ensue thereon. And if any Person shall refuse a Submission unto them in this *Act of Rule*, the Church hath no way for its Relief, but to proceed unto the *total Removal* of such a Person from their whole Communion. For the Edification of the whole Church must not be obstructed by the Refractoriness of any one among them.

'THIS *Excommunication*, as we have proved before, is an *act of Church-Authority*, exerted in the Name of our Lord  
Jesus

Jesus Christ. And if so, then it is an act of the Officers of the Church, namely, so far as it is *Authoritative*; for there is no Authority in the Church properly so called, but what resides in the Officers of it. There is an Office in the Church, which is meerly *Ministerial* without any formal Authority, that is of the *Deacons*. But there is no *Authority* in exercise, but what is in the *Elders* and *Rulers* of the Church. And there are two *Reasons*, which prove that the power of Excommunication, as to the *Authoritative Exercise* of it, is in the *Elders* of the Church. (1.) Because the Apostles, by virtue of their Office-Power in every Church, did join in the *Authoritative Excommunication*, as is plain in the case insisted on, 1 Cor. 5. And there is no Office-Power now remaining, but what is in the *Elders* of the Church. (2.) It is an *Act of Rule*. But all *Rule*, properly so called, is in the hands of *Rulers* only. We may add hereunto, that the *care* of the preservation of the Church in its purity, of the Vindication of its Honour, of the Edification of all its Members, of the Correction and Salvation of Offenders, is principally incumbent on them, or committed unto them as we have declared; as also, that they are *best able to judge* when and for what this Sentence ought to be denounced against any, which requires their *best skill in the Wisdom* of Spiritual Rule. And therefore the omission of the exercise of it, when it was necessary, is charged as a neglect on the *Angels or Rulers of the Churches*, as the due execution of it is commended in them. And therefore unto them it doth belong with respect unto their Office, and is thereon an Office-Act, or an Act of Authority.

HOWBEIT, it cannot be denied, but that the Interest, yea, the power of the whole Church in the *Fraternity* of it, is greatly to be considered herein. For indeed, where-ever the Apostle Treats of it, he doth not any where recommend it unto the *Officers of the Church* in a peculiar manner, but unto the *whole Church* and the Brethren therein. This is evident in the places before quoted. Wherefore the *whole Church* is concerned herein, both in point of Duty, Interest, and Power. (1.) In point of Duty; for by virtue of the *mutual watch* of all the

Members of the Church over each other, and of the care incumbent on every one of them, for the Good, the Honour, the Reputation and Edification of the whole, it is their *Duty* jointly and severally to endeavour the *purging out from among them* of every thing that is contrary unto those ends. And they who are not concerned in these things, are dead and useles Members of the Church. (2.) In *Interest*, they have also a concernment therein. They are to look that no *root of bitterness spring up amongst them, lest themselves are at length defiled thereby*. It is usually said, that the good are not defiled by holding Communion with them that are wicked in a participation of holy Ordinances. And there is some Truth in what is said, with reference unto wicked undiscovered Hypocrites; or such as are not scandalously flagitious: But to promote this *Perswasion*, so as to beget an opinion in Church-Members, that they are *no way* concerned in the *scandalous Sins and Lives* of those with whom they walk in all Duties of Spiritual Communion, openly avowing themselves Members of the same Body with them, is a *Diabolical Engine* invented to countenance Churches in horrible security unto their ruine. But yet besides that defilement, which may be contracted in a joint participation of the same Ordinances with such Persons; there are other ways almost innumerable, whereby their *Example*, if passed by without Animadversion, may be pernicious unto their Faith, Love and Obedience. Wherefore they are obliged in point of *Spiritual Interest*, as they take care of their own Souls, to concur in the ejection out of the Church, of obstinate Offenders. (3.) In point of *Power*. For the *Execution* of this Sentence is committed unto and rests in the Body of the Church. According as they concur and practise, so it is put in Execution or Suspended; for it is they who must withdraw Communion from them, or the Sentence is of no use or validity; this punishment must be inflicted by the many, who also are to restore him who is so rebuked. Wherefore, Excommunication, without the consent of the Church, is a meer nullity.

BUT if any one shall say, that Excommunication is not an Act  
of

of *Authority* nor of *Office*, but of *Power* residing in the *community* resulting from their common suffrage, guided and directed by the *Officers* or *Elders* of the *Church*, I shall again take up this *Enquiry* immediately, and speak unto it more distinctly; lest what is here spoken should not be sufficient unto the satisfaction of any.

OUR next *Enquiry* is concerning *the object* of this *Church Censure*; or who they are that ought to be *Excommunicated*. And,

1. THEY must be *Members of that Church*, by which the *Sentence* is to be denounced against them. And this, as we have proved before, they cannot be without their *own consent*. One *Church* cannot *Excommunicate* the *Members* of another. They are unto them as unto this matter *without*, and they have no power to judge them. The foundation of the *Right* to proceed against any herein, is in their own *voluntary engagement* to observe and keep the *Rules and Laws* of the *Society* whereunto they are admitted. The offence is given unto that *Church* in the *first place*, if not *only*. And it is an *Act* of the *Church* for its own *Edification*. And there is a *nullity* in the *Sentence* which is ordained, decreed or denounced by any who are not *Officers* of that *Church* in particular, wherein the *Sin* is committed.

2. THESE *Church-Members* that may be justly *Excommunicated*, are of *Two* sorts.

1. SUCH as continue *obstinate* in the practice of any *scandalous Sin*, after private and publick admonition. The process from the first *Offence* in *Admonition*, is so stated in ordinary cases, *Matth. 18.* that there is no need farther to declare it. The *Time* that is to be allotted unto the several *Degrees* of it, shall be spoken unto afterwards. And unto a right judgment of *obstinacy* in any *scandalous Sin*, it is required, (1.) That the *Sin* considered in it self be such, as is *owned to be such*, by *all*, without doubting, dispute or hesitation. It must be some *Sin* that is judged and condemned in the *Light of Nature*, or in the express *Testimony of Scripture*; yea, such as the *Holy Ghost* witnesseth, that *continued in without Repentance*, it is inconsistent with *Salvation*. If the thing it self, to be *Animadverted*

on, be dubious or disputable whether it be a Sin or no, especially such a Sin, either from the Nature of the Fact, or the Qualifications of the Person offending, or from other Circumstances, so as that the guilty Person is not *self-condemned*, nor are others fully satisfied in their Minds about the nature of it, there is no room for Excommunication in such cases. And if it be once allowed to be applied towards *any Sins*, but such as are evident to be so (as the Apostle says, the *Works of the Flesh are manifest*) in the Light of Nature, and Express Testimony of Scripture, not only will the Administration of it be made difficult, a matter of *dispute*, unfit for the Determination of the *Body of the Church*, but it will leave it unto the wills of Men to prostitute unto litigious brawls, quarrels and differences, wherein Interest and Partiality may take place; which is to profane this Divine Institution. But confine it as it ought to be, unto such Sins as are condemned in the Light of Nature, or by Express Testimony of Scripture, as inconsistent with Salvation by Jesus Christ, if persisted in, and all things that belong unto the Administration of it, will be plain and easie.

FROM the neglect of this Rule proceeded that horrible confusion and disorder in Excommunication and the Administration of it, which for sundry Ages prevailed in the World. For as it was mostly applied unto things *holy, just, and good*, or the performance of *such Gospel Duties* as Men owed to Christ, and their own Souls; so being exercised with respect unto *irregularities*, that are made such meerly by the *Arbitrary Constitutions* and Laws of Men, and that in cases frivolous, trifling, and of no importance, it was found necessary to be managed in and by such *Courts*, such *Processes*, such *forms of Law*, such *Pleadings* and intricacies of Craft, such a burden of Cost and Charge, as is uncertain whether it ought to be more bewailed, or derided.

2. IT is required hereunto, that the *matter of Fact*, as unto the Relation of the Sin unto the particular Offender, be *confessed*, or not *denied*, or *clearly proved*. How far this is to extend, and what ground of procedure there may be in Reports

or

or *Fame* concurring with leading Circumstances, we shall enquire afterwards. And although in such cases of *publick Fame*, a good Testimony from those of Credit and Repute in the Church given unto the supposed guilty Person, is of *use* and sufficient in some cases, singly to oppose unto publick Reports; yet to require a Man to *purge himself* by others, from any feigned scandalous imputation, is an unwarrantable Tyranny.

3. IT is also required, that the previous process in and by private and publick Admonition, and that repeated with *patient waiting* for the success of each of them, be duly premised. Whether this extend it self unto all *causes* of Excommunication, shall be afterwards enquired into. Ordinarily it is so necessary unto the Conviction of the Mind and Conscience of the *Offender*, and to leave him without either provocation from the Church, or excuse in himself, so suited to be expressive of the Grace and Patience of Christ toward Sinners, so requisite unto the satisfaction of the Church it self in their procedure, as that the *omission of it* will probably render the Sentence useles and ineffectual. A crying out, *I admonish a First, a Second, a Third time*, and so to Excommunication, is a very absurd observation of a Divine Institution.

4. IT is required, that the *case* of the Person to be censured as unto his profession of Repentance on the one hand, or obstinacy on the other, be judged and determined by the whole Church in love and compassion. There are *few* who are so profligately wicked, but that, when the Sin wherewith they are charged, is evidently such in the Light of Nature and Scripture, and when it is *justly proved against them*, they will make some profession of *Sorrow* and Repentance. Whether this be sufficient, as in most cases it is, to suspend the present proceeding of the Church, or quite to lay it aside, is left unto the judgment of the Church it self, upon consideration of present Circumstances, and what is necessary unto its own Edification. Only this Rule must be continually observed, that the least appearance of *haste* or undue precipitation herein, is to be avoided in all these cases, as the bane of Church-Rule and Order.

AGAIN,

AGAIN, The manner of its *Administration*, according to the mind of Christ, may be considered. And hereunto are required, (1.) *Prayer*, without which it can no way be administered in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Administration of any solemn Ordinance of the Gospel, without Prayer, is an horrible profanation of it. And the neglect or contempt hereof, in any who take upon them to Excommunicate others, is an open Proclamation of the *nullity* of their Act and Sentence. And the observation of the Administration of it without any due Reverence of God, without solemn invocation of the Name of Christ, thereby ingaging his Presence and Authority in what they do, is that principally which hath set the Consciences of all mankind at liberty from any concernment in this Ecclesiastical Censure; and whence those that Administer it expect no other success of what they do, but what they can give it by outward force. And where this fails, Excommunication is quickly laid aside. As it was when the *Pope* threatned the *Cantons of the Swissers*, that if they complied not with some of his Impositions, he would Excommunicate them; whereon they sent him word *they would not be Excommunicated*, which ended the matter. Wherefore, when our Lord Jesus Christ gives unto his Church the power of binding and loosing, directing them in the exercise of that power, he directs them to ask assistance by *Prayer*, when they are gathered together, *Matth. 18. 18, 19, 20.* And the Apostle directs the Church of *Corinth*, that they should proceed unto this Sentence when they were gathered together in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, *1 Cor. 5. 4.* which could not be without calling on his Name. In brief, without *Prayer*, neither is the Ordinance it self sanctified unto the Church, nor are any meet to Administer it, nor is the Authority of Christ either owned or engaged, nor Divine Assistance attained; neither is what is done any more *Excommunication* than any rash *Curse* is, so that many proceed inordinately out of the Mouths of Men.

AND the Prayer required herein is of three sorts. (1.) That which is *previous* for guidance and direction in a matter of so great

great weight and importance. It is no small thing to fall into mistakes, when Men act *in the Name of Christ*, and so engage his Authority in what he will not own. And the best of Men, the best of Churches, are liable unto such mistakes, where they are not under the guidance of the holy Spirit, which is to be obtained by Prayer only. (2.) *In, or together with the Administration* of it; that what is done on Earth may be ratified in Heaven, by the approbation of Christ, and be made effectual unto its proper End. (3.) It must be followed with the *Prayer of the Church* unto the same purpose; all with respect unto the Humiliation, Repentance, Healing and Recovery of the Offender.

2ly, IT is to be accompanied with *Lamentation* or Mourning. So the Apostle reproving the Church of *Corinth* for the omission of it when it was necessary, tells them, *That they had not mourned; that the offender might be taken away from among them*, 1 Cor. 5. 2. It is not to be done without *mourning*: And himself calls the Execution of this Sentence from this Adjunct, his *bewailing* of them. *I shall bewail many that have sinned already*, 2 Cor. 12. 2. *Compassion* for the person offending, with respect unto that dangerous condition whereinto he hath cast himself; the Excision of a Member of the same Body with whom they have had Communion in the most holy Mysteries of Divine Worship, and sate down at the Table of the Lord, with a due sense of the Dishonour of the Gospel by his fall, ought to ingenerate this *Mourning* or *Lamentation* in the Minds of them who are concern'd in the Execution of the Sentence. Nor is it advifable for any Church to proceed thereunto, before they are so affected.

3ly, IT is to be accompanied with a *due sense of the future Judgment of Christ*. For we herein Judge for Christ, in the matters of his House and Kingdom. And woe to them who dare pronounce this Sentence without a persuasion on good grounds, that it is the *Sentence of Christ himself*. And there is a Representation also in it of the *future Judgment*, when Christ will Eternally cut off and separate from himself all Hypocrites and impenitent Sinners. This is well expressed by

*Tertullian,*