

A FEW PLAIN HINTS
ON
CHURCH DISCIPLINE;
TO WHICH IS APPENDED AN ANSWER TO
A SERIES OF QUESTIONS,
RELATIVE TO BAPTIST USAGES
IN CONDUCTING THEIR AFFAIRS IN
CHURCH MEETINGS, &C.

BY THE PASTOR OF A REGULAR BAPTIST
CHURCH IN NEW JERSEY.

STAMFORD, CONN.

PRESS OF E. HOYT.

1850.

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HINTS ON CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

In order to promote the healthy and useful existence of any organic body, it is requisite that it should be governed by well defined and wholesome laws. The obligations imposed by these laws should be faithfully enforced. The penalties annexed should be executed with wisdom and prudence—in a kind and forbearing spirit, and yet with unshaken integrity—or derangement, if not disorganization and anarchy may unavoidably ensue. This is a primary truth, and applies to a gospel Church with the same force as to any other organization. Restricted in its membership, as it is, to true believers, fitly joined and compacted together by that which every joint supplieth—each Church—in visible order—forms, in a certain sense, the body of Christ. No candid, discerning BIBLE Student, will for a moment deny that believers only can be rightfully admitted to church fellowship. Each Church is a distinct, voluntary and independent Society. Their constitution and the laws by which they are to be governed, are contained in the NEW TESTAMENT. By these laws, each Church is authorized to have distinct and exclusive jurisdiction over its own members. In his last charge to his disciples, among other things, the Savior enjoined on them to instruct the Christian converts to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded. It was not sufficient that they were confirmed in the great fundamental truths on which their salvation depended—they were to be instructed also in those principles conducive to holy living—Christian usefulness; in the nature—uses—and most proper way to administer the disciplinary laws connected with the government of the household of faith.

In every well governed Church, wholesome discipline, judiciously and faithfully enforced, will be found indispensable. It tends to preserve its purity—to promote its harmony and prosperity. It is all-important, however, that we understand the time when, the place where, and the manner in which it should be applied, if we would secure the object contemplated. Unless these things are duly regarded we may fall into extreme error, and convert it into an engine of mischief. Discipline, when

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exercised in an ignorant and imprudent manner, is fraught with consequences as serious, if not worse than to neglect it altogether.

When viewed in its character and relations generally, discipline enters in the very composition—forms an important element—and is interwoven throughout with the nature and existence of a gospel Church. Its primary object is, or *should be* to prevent evil. When seasonably and judiciously employed, discipline serves as an invaluable safeguard against those disorders that too frequently interfere with the peace and harmony which ought always to prevail among brethren—disorders that sometimes threaten the Church with ruin. Where spirituality is mutually cultivated among brethren—where usefulness in the Savior's cause is made their diligent study—where the most favorable opportunities for promoting the spiritual benefit of men are earnestly sought—where a due regard is manifested for each other in every condition calling for sympathy—where there is a disposition to bear one another's burdens—to shield the unwary from temptation—to admonish with gentleness those who stray from the path of rectitude—seeking in all kindness, and with prudence to reclaim—making due allowance for education and temperament—in a word, where brethren study *diligently* to understand and do whatever might be conducive to mutual improvement in knowledge, and piety, and usefulness—you will there witness the most blessed results. Their union and piety will be greatly increased in their measure and stability. And where these are abundantly enjoyed, they will seldom be interrupted by those evils which so often mar the peace, and hinder the prosperity of our churches.

But while the Redeemer permits his churches to remain in their present imperfect state, corrective discipline will be found indispensable. But for this, it would be impossible to preserve their order and purity. We are so liable, when admitting individuals to fellowship, to err in judgment—and then, in their membership, our churches embrace such a variety in temperament and character, that without such a code, the most ruinous disorders would be unavoidable. Intimately acquainted with human character, the Savior foresaw the dangers to be apprehended from these sources, and provided this sanative remedy.

The scriptures divide the offences between church members into two general classes—personal, or private; general, or public.

Personal and private offences include such improprieties in the conduct of one member toward another as is intended, or at least calculated to injure him privately in his character or religious influence, to interfere with his interest or happiness, and is indulged in a manner so privately as to be known to but few, or none except the parties immediately concerned. He may censure him severely and unjustly—heap upon him ungenerous and reproachful epithets—impute everything he says and does to improper motives—hold him at a scornful distance—indulge in deception and fraud in business transactions, &c.

Again—Personal offence may be given by an injury done to a third person—as for instance, Bro. A. may wrong Bro. C., which may be known only to Bro. B. In this instance Bro. C. is *actually* the injured party—yet without his knowledge. But Bro. B. and he only knowing the facts in the case, has a just cause for feeling grieved, and may, and with propriety should admonish his offending Brother, and endeavor if possible to reclaim him from his erroneous course, in a manner just as private as if the injury had been done to himself. There are instances also where offences more general in their nature may become private,—but it is where the conduct indulged has been in a manner so private as to render it next to impossible to become public, unless made so by the very few who have witnessed the transaction. The unchristian conduct indulged by one member towards another, may occur under circumstances rendering it either public or private. He may have prided himself in saying or doing things in a most public manner, calculated to injure his brother. His course may have been persisted in, in all places and on all occasions. Under all these circumstances, so far as individuality has been the aim, the offence is private, and should be treated by the aggrieved party in the same manner as if it had been committed in the most private way. But so far as the circumstances attending the offence have contributed to render it an open and wanton violation of the covenant which unites the whole church in one common brotherhood, so far the honor and happiness of the whole membership have been outraged, and it may be justly taken in hand by any other member, or by the whole body. This same rule may apply to other cases transpiring under similar circumstances. This general outline view may serve as a guide, enabling us to investigate

this branch of the subject more in detail. It is a subject which should be more fully understood by professing Christians.

Public offences are those committed more directly against the whole Church. We will not trespass upon the reader's time and patience, so far as to enter into a minute detail of the offences which may be included in this class. The Scriptures specify a few cases under this denomination, and authorize us to add to the list all bearing a similar character. In doing this, every improper bias should be studiously avoided.

It is a public offence in a church member to renounce Christianity, either in its primary doctrines or precepts. The doctrines and precepts of the Gospel have been committed to the churches by their sovereign Author in all their purity, to be held in trust, not to modify nor to mystify as will best serve party purposes, but with a solemn charge to defend and preserve them in opposition to every anti-Christian innovation. So far as trust possession can give property title, so far these doctrines and precepts are common property. Every trespass, therefore, growing out of a rejection of any or all of them by a church member, is a public offence, for which he should be held accountable to the church where he holds his membership, to whom public satisfaction must be rendered before the breach can be thoroughly healed, even though it may have been given to one or more individuals. Each Gospel church is bound to its sovereign Lawgiver for the faithful discharge of this duty, and is responsible for any neglect, and for any abuse of the power with which it is invested. The Seven Churches in Asia were particularly directed to guard against the notorious heresies that were discovered to exist among them, and to bring those with whom they originated to answer for the offence. The Savior assured them that to neglect this duty would be highly offensive to him, and if persisted in, would be visited with his displeasure. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." We are commanded to reject an individual who holds heretical

sentiments, after the first and second admonition, knowing that he that is such, is subverted and sinneth—being condemned of himself. All who deliberately and obstinately adhere to false doctrine, and labor to beguile others into it, are public offenders against God, against themselves and their brethren, and against the world, and should be held to answer for it.

Individuals connected with the church, habitually addicted to notorious vices are public offenders. For a time they may seek to indulge their unholy propensities in the most secret manner—but the offence is, in character, identically the same—and, when discovered to the church, on credible testimony, deserves an expression of its disapprobation. The Bible furnishes us with a concise catalogue of sins bearing this character, and gives directions concerning the course to be adopted where any member shall be found guilty. “Now I have written unto you,” said an apostle, “that if any man who is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, not to keep company with him—no, not to eat.” According to this passage, these and similar offences are to be regarded as extremely offensive. For enormity, they are placed on a level with stealing and murder, and other abominations, too infamous to find an epithet in human language sufficiently severe to stamp them with merited reprobation. It is deeply to be lamented that, notwithstanding all this, such gross immoralities can find so many apologists among professing Christians, and that such characters should find so many sympathizers. By such influences church discipline is often embarrassed, until offenders become irreclaimable, and their conduct grows so loathsome as to put common modesty to the blush, and brings a foul blot of infamy on the Christian name and cause.

Habitual neglect to discharge the duties connected with our relation to the church, is a public offence, justly subjecting the delinquent to censure and discipline. It would protract this article to a length far beyond its intended limits, to enter into a minute detail of these duties—we must be content with glancing at them briefly. They are such as regular attendance on the worship of God in his sanctuary; prayer, and other public and private religious meetings of the church; contributing according to our means toward the support of the Gospel, the relief of poor members, and defraying all other necessary expenses.

in the church, with other duties, private and public necessarily connected with its prosperity.

These duties stand, each, immediately and inseparably connected with the interest of the whole body, and with the Redeemer's declarative glory. The churches, in all their members, derive a common benefit where each individual promptly and faithfully observes them, and suffer a common injury where they are neglected. Each individual, when he unites with the church, professes to have fully and distinctly understood the nature and extent of the obligations they were about to assume, and they voluntarily pledged themselves before and to each other, to habitually and faithfully fulfil them. Therefore, every member that violates this pledge, has sinned before and against all, and should, in justice, be held to answer to all for the delinquency. We admit that this is a deeply humiliating position, still, in our judgment, it is the only truly Scriptural one, and every delinquent should be willing to submit to it.

Those who are in the habit of publishing abroad to the world the business transactions of the church relating to discipline, while such cases are pending, are guilty of a serious breach of their covenant engagements. There are items of business connected with every voluntary association which cannot rightfully-concern nor affect the interest of any but themselves. It does not properly concern *any one*, not connected with the society, to be acquainted with what comes before it under the head of *special business*, or how that business is disposed of. The question—"if what is being transacted be of a character that can suffer no harm by being exposed to public scrutiny, why throw around it a veil of secrecy?"—has nothing to do with this matter—does not touch the merits of the case. In some cases the question would bear with effective weight, but not in all. A man by honest industry having acquired a vast sum of money, is traveling to some distant place with his treasure about him. Would we suspect him as a dishonest man, because he declined publishing abroad, as he journeyed, the fact that he carried about his person such an immense treasure?—Would we not set him down as deficient in cautiousness and wisdom, in case he made the fact known wherever he went, thus exposing himself to the merciless rapacity of the pick-pocket, the highwayman and the assassin? What would we think of the officers of an army, should they in advance of an engage-

ment, send to the enemy's camp a programme of their whole plan of battle? Why, we should regard them as utterly unworthy to occupy the station which they fill—as fit subjects for the insane hospital, or, as deserving to be court-martialed, and subjected to the severest penalty known to the law. Pure intentions, and upright action, are not the only considerations by which we are to determine whether it would be proper or improper to make public or keep concealed for a time, what is being transacted in a deliberative body, especially in matters that pertain to church discipline. The law of expediency should, to every reasonable extent, have an influence over our minds as to the course to be adopted. We should calculate, to some extent, the probable mischief that might arise from the case being made public before the church has come to a final decision. It might prove a serious disadvantage to the party accused. In case the difficulty should be satisfactorily adjusted, it would be better to let the whole affair go into forgetfulness; for it might be of such a nature that, if publicly known, the individual's reputation would suffer in the public estimation—whatever might be the light in which the church might view it—and all this injury would be uncalled for and ungenerous, so far as concerns the course of those who have imprudently furnished the world with the intelligence. Publicity might also embarrass the case, and render adjustment more difficult, if not defeat it altogether. The accused, perhaps, has friends who are not members. Their sympathies would become enlisted. In all probability they would give them unwise counsel, and by giving heed to it, they might become obstinate, which would cause a more tedious delay of the case, if all efforts to bring it to a favorable issue did not utterly fail. In these, and in other respects, serious difficulties might arise to embarrass the church in its disciplinary measures; and all just because some idle tale-bearer counts it a luxury to send abroad on the wings of the wind, and make public what will do the world no good to know, and about which it can do them no harm to remain in profound ignorance. These, to our mind, are sufficient reasons for saying that members should go out into the world with sealed lips at such times, and for regarding an opposite course as a serious breach of discipline, deserving severe censure.

There are other things worthy of notice as public offences in church members. In many respects they lead disorderly lives.

Some are busy-bodies in other people's affairs, and neglect their own, for which reason the cause of Christ is left to suffer.—Others are constantly at work sowing discord among brethren, causing division and contention. Sometimes they succeed in their object by an artful system of what politicians call wire-pulling, so that it becomes difficult to trace out the link, in the chain of circumstances, which connects them with the unhappy disturbance. The apostle represents them as causing divisions and offences contrary to the doctrines taught in the Gospel; as serving their own appetites rather than Jesus Christ, and by good words and fair speeches, or fascinating manner of address, deceiving the hearts of the simple. All such are public offenders, and should be dealt with as such.

Let us now contemplate the course most proper to be pursued in bringing Gospel discipline to bear upon the various offences which may demand its exercise. The great law book of Zion's King should be taken as the only safe guide. This is sufficiently comprehensive and explicit to meet every case when properly understood and applied. It is extremely arrogant and extravagant in us to attempt to modify or expunge any part of this time-honored and sacred statute. According to what we understand the Bible to teach respecting discipline, except in *extraordinary* cases—such as very seldom occur—preliminary measures should invariably be taken. No one acquainted with the true intention for which discipline should be exercised, can fail to see the propriety of this course, and every one who has a desire to do good will not hesitate to conform to it. The design is to vindicate the Redeemer's rights—the honor of religion against the foul aspersions cast upon them by their enemies—to redress the wrongs incurred by brethren at each others hands, and to reclaim and save the offender. In our judgment, a distinction should be made between private and public offences as to the preliminaries to be used.

In adjusting private or personal difficulties, the preliminary steps required are laid down in Matthew v. 23, 24., xviii. 15—17. In all such instances, these rules should be strictly observed, because, in the very nature of things, the offended and offender are the only individuals who can be directly concerned. It is their honor and happiness that are more immediately and seriously involved. They should, therefore, make it their study to prevent their difficulties being publicly known, either in the

Church or the world, while there remains the least hope of their being adjusted. During the period when they are seeking to effect a mutual reconciliation, their interviews should be private. If they succeed in restoring confidence and fraternal feeling between each other, then it becomes their duty, by mutual agreement to bury and forget the offence. So far as in their power to prevent, they should never suffer it again to come in question. In all cases it is a duty incumbent on the party offended to wait on the offender, acquaint him with his grievance, and labor to have the difficulty reconciled as speedily and permanently as possible. There are instances, where the offence is merely and *altogether* imaginary. Still, if any brother labors under an honest impression, that he has a just provocation for feeling offended, and nothing has been done to remove that impression, so far, to him, it is real, and he is bound to seek an interview with the supposed offender, and state his grievance, and the brother supposed to have given the offence, is under obligation to listen to the complaint, and as far as in his power, give a satisfactory explanation. He is not bound to confess, where no cause exists for an offence, nor to ask pardon where none is needed, but he should, and if actuated by a right spirit, he will take all reasonable measures to satisfy the aggrieved party, that he never had the *remotest* idea of doing him an injury. And where such an assurance is sincerely given, nothing further should be required. The same course should be taken where the offence is *real*, and the party with whom the difficulty originated is bound to make reparation for the violence done to his brother's feelings, who in return should cheerfully forgive. After this the same friendly and christian intercourse should be maintained as if no difficulty had ever existed.

There are many instances in which brethren, after having suffered a supposed or real injury, act *very* imprudently. Instead of discharging their duty in a proper manner, they yield to a sullen spirit of resentment. They may say nothing in public, but their habitual demeanor toward the offending party, while the cause is studiously concealed, may be such as to excite anxious surprise, and provoke unpleasant remarks. Such a course is highly improper. But where this is the case, and is known to the individual on whose account this improper conduct is indulged, it then becomes *his* duty to afford him every opportunity for making known his grievance. But if, after all, he

still persists in observing a sullen silence, and neglects to act the part which becomes a Christian brother to act, it *then* becomes his duty to seek a private interview with him, and ascertain if possible, the occasion of his grief; with a view of effecting a speedy and honorable reconciliation. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has aught against thee, leave thou thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." The common impression among Christians is, that the offender is under no obligations to go first to the party aggrieved. If he has any thing against *me*, says one, let him come and see me: I will not avoid an interview with him. It is his undoubted duty to take the first step. But, if he neglects or refuses to do it, this by no means exonerates the other. An attempt to justify ourselves on such grounds betrays an unenviable spirit, even if the Scriptures were silent on the subject. It could certainly be no violation of Christian principle to seek out an offended brother even on the ground of Christian condescension. And where is there a sincere lover of peace and harmony among brethren, whose pride would disdain to make such a sacrifice for the sake of healing a breach, *especially* where it had its origin with himself. He who cheerfully acts on a principle so laudable as this—evinces a spirit too pure and lofty, wilfully and needlessly to give a fellow Christian pain—a spirit which, once manifested, would in itself be sufficient to more than half heal the breach. It is earnestly hoped that Christians will give more attention to this branch of duty, and that it will be more universally observed.

But when one brother waits on another, at whose hands he has suffered wrong, seeking reparation, he should pay particular regard to time and circumstances. There are seasons when they might come together with much brighter prospects of a favorable issue than at others. When the individual is at leisure, when his mind is in a composed state, and under the influence of elevated pious feelings, is the time when, more than at any other period, he will be likely to effect his object. It is incumbent on him also to study propriety in relation to his own course. Before he commences to labor, it is his duty to seek the Lord for direction, that his mind may, as far as possible, be free from animosity and prejudice, and that it may be eminently spiritual. It is proper to place the most charitable

construction on the offending brother's motives, to avoid abruptness in manner, and a censorious disposition, and to approach him as a fellow Christian, in a Christian spirit. Where such vast consequences are involved, every thing possible should be done to bring the difficulty to a favorable termination. Nothing could be more appropriate than for the parties, when met together, before the subject is introduced, to engage in solemn and fervent supplication at the throne of grace, that they may be directed aright. There are instances where a mutual conversation, on some interesting religious topic, would serve admirably to open the way, by which they may introduce the question to be settled. This course is happily calculated to remove obstacles that might otherwise be encountered. It would tend to subdue much of that asperity of feeling that had been engendered, and enable them to take the case into calm and dispassionate consideration. And even if the grievance were introduced in an incidental, (rather than in a direct) manner, by degrees so as to form, in appearance, part of a general conversation, it might prepare the way in which a more speedy, and happy and permanent adjustment would be effected. Indeed, in numerous cases the parties would become more than half reconciled, before the offender would be aware of the distinct object of the interview. "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves," is an excellent maxim to be governed by always. Much patience and forbearance will be found requisite when engaged in a duty so unpleasant and yet so important. If in our first attempt we prove unsuccessful, it is not advisable to conclude we have done all in a personal and private way that is required. Before the affair is disclosed to others it would be well to institute a serious inquiry whether our failure has not been owing to some defect on our own part. And then a second, and third, and so on to the twentieth effort, should be made, provided there remains the shadow of a hope that a reconciliation can be effected. But, when every means taken in this way proves an utter failure, we are then authorized and *instructed* to call one or two brethren to our aid. Here we should move with great caution. In this branch of our duty, success will depend very much on the selection. The difficulty has now assumed a new and more serious aspect, and requires much piety, and wisdom, and prudence, and gentleness, coupled with a great force of character in the advisers chosen in order to arrest and prevent it

from becoming irreconcilable. The very best men that can be found in the church, ought therefore to be selected. These are not always found among the most wordy and blustering individuals. In the event of the difficulties having arrived at a point so critical, such individuals would frequently be as unsafe as a coal of fire in a heedless child's hand around a magazine of powder. If you would secure peace between contending brethren—equally honorable to both, select cool, reflecting, discerning men: men of a prayerful and Christian spirit, men whose judgments cannot be biased by personal considerations on either side. If this course, faithfully and patiently pursued, fails of success, then, as a last resort, it becomes a duty to refer the whole difficulty to the church, for investigation and adjustment; provided there be evidence to substantiate the charges. In the entire absence of testimony however, the aggrieved party had better, after the first and second steps of labor, leave the case without further agitation, otherwise he might involve his own reputation and membership in danger. But where there is evidence, he should bring it before the church. If the accused, on being convicted before this last *highest authorized* ecclesiastical tribunal, refuses to make restitution, then he must be publicly expelled.

Where public offenses occur—the disciplinary course of the church wears a different aspect in certain respects. Public offences, though they affect the honor, and interest, and happiness of each member, do not affect them in the same respect, as when they are exclusively personal in their aim. An individual addicted to open immoralities inflicts an injury on all his brethren, but it is in the relation they sustain to the church, and in proportion to the common interest felt for its honor and welfare. The same is true, and true in the same respect, relative to delinquencies in religious duty, or where religious heresy is imbibed and propagated. The sense therefore in which these offences injuriously affect members individually is such as necessarily render them public in their nature. It is optional with the members, so far as obligation is concerned, whether they pursue a public or private course in dealing with the offenders. We have never seen any thing in the divine statute book, prohibiting a private course where brethren feel disposed to adopt it.—Where it would be safe to dispense with immediate exclusion, and where a reasonable hope is entertained that the delinquent

may be reclaimed, there can be no impropriety in resorting to the milder measure of individual private dealing, indeed it is commendable and advisable. By such a course his conscience may be aroused to a sense of the enormity of his backslidings. He may in this way be led more speedily to repentance, to hold his sins in just and deep abhorrence, and be reclaimed more readily from his wanderings than in any other. In this way, much valuable service may also be rendered to the church, enabling it to carry into more speedy and effectual execution, those measures necessary to vindicate its own honor, and save the transgressor. The individual would be likely to realize more deeply the enormity of his sins, by seeing the deep distress they have occasioned his brethren individually; and the tender solicitude they have manifested for his spiritual welfare, would doubly endear them to his heart through life. But being public in its nature—though brethren in their individual capacities may prove eminently successful in gaining satisfaction, in restoring mutual confidence, and in preparing the way for the church to reclaim the offender, still, the offence, for all this, requires the church's official notice. Here, however, as in private and personal misunderstandings, it is proper in all cases, where immediate exclusion is not required, to take preliminary steps. These are to be performed by a committee acting under the authority of the church. The same privacy should be observed while prosecuting these duties, as in private offences, with this difference; what transpires between the parties in one case is to be kept a profound secret from the church, while there is any hope that a reconciliation can be effected, and from the world altogether, unless the accused party be excluded. The other being a case pending before the church, the same care is to be observed to prevent it from being made known to the world while the result remains undetermined. So far as concerns the world, the church should invariably never suffer its disciplinary proceedings to be made known while pending.

In the first place, we are not to lend an ear to every trifling report, circulated by idle, gossiping news-mongers to injure a brother's character. We know that many of them are without foundation, and that even those having a show of truth, are frequently so magnified as to render them incredible. Duty, propriety and Christian principle imperatively require that every report injurious to a brother's reputation, and the authors be

treated with silent contempt, except such as are substantiated by the most credible testimony. It is to be deeply lamented that we have so many brethren in our churches, who are always ready to credit and circulate every scandalous report they hear against their fellow members. Their motto is, "Report, and we will report it."

As already remarked, the preliminary steps taken in discipline for public offences should be the appointment of a judicious committee. They have a two-fold duty to perform. First, endeavor by impartial investigation to ascertain whether there be any truth in the reports; and second, labor diligently to reclaim the accused, provided the evidence be sufficient to justify the charges against him. They should be careful to discriminate between offences, according to the temperament, and strength of mind in individuals, and the circumstances under which they have been committed. It is manifest to every reasonable mind, that a righteous distinction may be made between individuals as to the amount of censure due, where each has committed the same act. There are possible instances where an offender by a satisfactory confession made to a committee, may be properly excused from making a public confession in person before the church. It may be admissable through them. In all cases, however, it devolves upon them to report what they have done and the results, leaving the church to decide who shall confess publicly, and who may be exonerated from the duty. There are instances where a church cannot excuse delinquents from making a public acknowledgement, without prejudice to its own honor, and to the public and private interests of religion. The opinion has been held by some, that there are instances in which they should be required to confess their faults both before the church and the world, and in this we see no real impropriety. There are instances where confession should be followed with admonition and reprimand from the church. These should always be blended with the utmost Christian kindness, taking special care to impress the offender's mind with a conviction that all is done with an eye to his spiritual advantage. Temporary suspension from certain church privileges may sometimes be expedient; where this is done, it should be mingled with much Christian tenderness, treating the individual as a brother. It may be necessary sometimes to exclude an individual, even when we are fully satisfied with his sincere penitence, and that

in all human probability he would never again be guilty of a like offence. The honor of Christianity in the world's esteem, and the spiritual welfare of the community might require it; and then there would be no other way in which the church could so properly and effectively express its abhorrence for the offence. It is our duty in all these cases to convince the individual, that while stern necessity urges us to act, we are not indifferent to the genuine sorrow he has expressed for his iniquities, that we still cherish for him a tender regard, and look forward with hope to the time when he will again be restored to fellowship. It may be advisable in some cases to exclude members without making an effort to reclaim, and to close our doors entirely against them; even though we might charitably believe they had repented. For there are some professing Christians, who while in the church, will be an everlasting source of trouble, and render the Christian religion a hissing and a by-word before the world. It is better for the church, for the world, and even for themselves, for such persons to be separated from, than to be connected with it. In all our disciplinary transactions, we need to be eminently endued with wisdom from above, with the temper and spirit of our Master, more by far than we usually are. It is all-important that we concern ourselves more deeply about the spiritual welfare of those with whom necessity has compelled us to deal. Although they are cast out, as a general thing, we should not utterly abandon them. It still remains our duty to labor for their good, and endeavor to lead them to repentance, and restore them to fellowship. We are to remember that they have souls and that we are bound to care for them.

In concluding this article, already extended to a length exceeding the limits originally contemplated, the writer would beg the reader's further indulgence while he submits a few thoughts to their serious and impartial consideration, in answer to several questions which have been proposed to him at different times, and by various individuals, relative to what constitutes the proper exercise of church-discipline, so far as Baptist usages are concerned, in connection with their general usages in other matters pertaining to church meetings, &c., &c. It has been asked,

1. "Is it in accordance with Baptist Church usages to exclude a member without first citing him or her to appear and answer

to any charges that may be alleged against them?" Our reply is: We have never met with any such usages, and if we had, we could never lend them either our sympathy or influence.—It devolves on a church to make an offending member officially acquainted with its grievances, and afford him an opportunity either to investigate the charges, or to confess his wrong and to retract. Should he—after every proper means have been employed to induce him to take these steps—refuse to comply, the church might then be justifiable in excluding him without further delay. The offence might be such in its nature as to justify excommunication, even were the accused disposed to confess and make reparation. But, whatever may be the result, the individual has an inalienable right to know the charges against him, and is entitled to the privilege of meeting his accuser or accusers, face to face, for the purpose either of disproving the charges, or of confessing his guilt, before the church can, with any show of justice or propriety, proceed to an act so solemn. The common law provides that every man, before being condemned, shall, if he chooses, have the benefit of a trial by jury. And surely the Gospel does not allow less privileges to those considered as delinquents in a church. It is asked

2. "If a person should be thus excluded, would it be right to give him a certificate showing the reason for such exclusion, or to allow the excluded person to see the resolution on the church book by which he had been excluded?" In our opinion, no church has a right to discipline a member at all without first giving him notice that such is its intention, at the same time specifying the charges on which that purpose is based. To do so would be dealing about, and not with him. But provided any church could ever forget, and step so far aside from what is right, as to commit an act so rash and undignified—so unwise and unscriptural—nothing could be more reasonable or just than that he should have an official notice, certifying the fact, and the reasons for the transaction—or that he should be permitted to see on the record the resolution by which he was excluded. Any church that would refuse compliance with either of these requests, would betray a consciousness that they had in some way been guilty of mal-administration, and are, either through dishonesty or shame, unwilling to submit their proceedings to inspection.

3. "If an offending brother be notified to show cause why the hand of fellowship should not be withdrawn, have the church

any right to refuse to allow him to give his reasons for his conduct?" This, provided it be the first step that has been taken, is altogether an irregular proceeding with reference to a member supposed to have walked disorderly. No church, nor individual member in a church, is authorized to commence to discipline a member, with an eye to his ultimate exclusion. Such a result at the starting point, should never be allowed to enter the mind. In church discipline, the first step, as has been already remarked, is preventive in its aim; and were it generally attended to more strictly, many of the evils among brethren, rendering astringent measures imperative, would never have existed. The second step is corrective, and should always be studiously avoided until preventive measures become unavailing. But when it becomes *necessary* to use corrective means, preferring a *public charge* is not the point at which to begin. Ordinarily, individual and private labor is the starting point, and it ought to be continued patiently, until Christian device has exhausted all its stores without success in its endeavors to reclaim the delinquent. After this the second step should be taken, which is to take one or two other members and make a renewed attempt to reclaim the offender. This course should be pursued without abatement, until it is manifest that their united energies are insufficient to effect the desired object. Urged on by dire necessity, as a last resort, the subject must then come before the church—not for the express purpose of excluding the individual, but with an anxious desire to adjust the difficulty, and to reclaim and save him. Exclusion ought never to be anticipated until driven by fatal necessity to that *solemn and distressing* act. If the above outline of Gospel discipline be correct, what then would be the most proper notice sent by a church to one of its members who had deviated from the path of rectitude? To come forward and show cause why the hand of fellowship should not be withdrawn from him? Why? Has he been convicted and found irreclaimable? In what way has this been done? Has he had a trial with an opportunity to show either that the charges were unfounded, or that there were many palliating circumstances in his favor? If not, how has he been convicted and then called on to show cause why the church should not disown him? Who ever heard of a court of justice acting such a farce toward a criminal? Try and convict him without giving any previous notice, and then call on him to assign rea-

sons why the sentence of the law should not be passed and executed! GIVE a man a fair trial, whether it be in common or religious affairs, in due form, as in each is provided for by their respective laws, and then act according to the facts, which, on an impartial investigation, shall be developed in the case.— But if, after proceeding in this irregular manner until it had determined on a member's exclusion—calling on him to show cause why the solemn sentence should not be executed, the church should refuse to allow him to offer testimony that would either go to establish his innocence, or palliate the offence—it would all be solemn mockery—adding insult to injury. It is asked

4. "Is it an invariable rule with Baptist Churches not to allow any but their own members to be present in a church meeting, notwithstanding they are persons in good standing in other churches?" In reply we would remark, so far as we have examined the Bible on this subject, we have never met with any specific rule, and therefore consider it as optional with each church to act its own pleasure in the premises. They are at liberty to adopt and enforce such rules as are in their judgment most conducive to the primary object for which these meetings are held. We have known churches on such occasions to throw open their doors and admit all who choose to attend.— Ordinarily, we see nothing in this course tending to evil. So far as it regards members of sister churches, there can be nothing reasonably objectionable in their attending at such times. It might very reasonably be expected that their presence would prove conducive to mutual improvement in the divine life. So far as regards the unconverted, there could be no very weighty objection urged against *their* being present. If the meetings were properly conducted they might result in great good to this class. But there are occasions when, for good reasons, it might be advisable to admit *none* but members; that is when the church is exercising discipline. At such times it is desirable and important to avoid *every* thing calculated to give publicity to what is transpiring; not because there is anything being transacted that is wrong, but because it might prove injurious to the parties concerned. There would not be a judicious individual found in *any* church who would decide that it would be wise to admit the world at such times. And it may be preferable to admit *none* but its own members, because no others can come under the cognizance of the church for a violation of any rule

it might deem proper to establish respecting the course to be pursued in such cases. In view, then, of the fact, that so far as the Bible is concerned, it is left at their option, and in view of expediency, no individual, not a member, can justly esteem it a breach of Christian courtesy, if a church should refuse to admit them to its meetings on such occasions. We are asked

5. "Can a member be excluded by a majority vote, or does it require the unanimous vote of the Church?" We hesitate not to say *by a majority vote*. Were it otherwise, it would be easy at almost any time to defeat the most wholesome exercise of discipline. It is also asked

6. "Does it require an unanimous vote, or can a majority vote restore the individual to fellowship?" To this we would answer, by a majority *certainly*.

7. "If the church, by a majority vote restore such member, what is the duty of those members who opposed his restoration, in regard to walking with the church, and communing with the restored member?" It is most desirable always to have a church in all its votes to act with entire unanimity—but this is very seldom the case. There are generally some in every church who will take the negative side, whenever a question comes up to be decided, and will express their opposition either by a vote or by remaining silent. There are some, also, whose indifference, with reference to the result, will induce them to remain silent—so that you do not know positively which side they are on. They may be on the negative, or they may be on the affirmative. Frequently this class complain about the decision afterwards, whatever it may be. It is plain to be seen, therefore, that little or nothing would ever be accomplished in our church meetings if the constitutionality of their proceedings depended on entire unanimity. The majority, therefore, should rule, and the minority, should yield, and hold the restored individual in fellowship. Those who pursue a contrary line of conduct towards him, stand justly exposed to censure. It is further enquired,

8. "Have ministers any greater authority in church discipline than a private member?" So far as Baptist Church government is concerned, our own opinion inclines us to answer the question in the negative. If a minister is invested with an authority in the premises superior to his private brethren, we should feel greatly obliged to any one who would inform us

from what source that authority is derived. Is it from God? Produce the evidence from the Bible. Does the church confer it, when investing him in, or calling him to, the pastoral office? The individual must be a member of that or some other church in good standing, before they would presume to put him in the ministry, even so far as such an act comes within their jurisdiction. The church is made up of individuals equally entitled to a voice, the majority ruling, or expressing the will of the church as a whole, in the case. Suppose the will expressed to be unanimous. In that case the will of each individual is the clearly expressed will of the whole church; and the will of the Church is clearly the will of each individual. Now is it reasonable to suppose that the office-creating power would invest that office with an authority above itself? In other words, does it look reasonable that any individual would, understandingly and deliberately, lend his influence to clothe an office which he has aided to create, with an authority in disciplinary matters higher than he, by virtue of his relation to the church, himself has a right to exercise? If any minister imagine this to be the case, and on this ground claims the right to exercise such authority, he must have a love for pre-eminence—to which we ever wish to be a stranger. Besides, it would be with extreme reluctance that we should become a member of a church under such a ministry. But if he has this authority, who is prepared to define its limits? In our judgment it would never find a stopping place short of St. Peter's chair, provided his ambition chose thus far to urge his claims. Prus has been driven from that consecrated seat by his disquieted subjects, and it is to be hoped that no BAPTIST MINISTER will ever foolishly aspire to become his successor. Again we have been asked,

9. "Is a minister to be disciplined for misconduct in a way different from a private member?" In reply we would ask, Must a man be a member of a church before he can have its sanction for entering into the public ministry? Does the church by putting him into that office dissolve his relation with, or place him beyond the disciplinary jurisdiction of that or any other church with which he may choose to connect himself? If so, where does it leave him? To what tribunal does it make him accountable for his conduct? Provided he is still a member of the church, he is bound by the same covenant, and to be governed by the same discipline in common with his fellow members.

If he becomes guilty of misdemeanors, subjecting him to discipline, he is to be dealt with in the same manner as private members for the same offence. The same preliminary steps are to be taken, and with the same motives. The same scriptural rule should be observed in bringing his case before the church. The same caution should be used, and the same forbearance and Christian spirit should be exercised in his case as in any other. We see no reason why any difference should exist. It is further inquired,

10. "Has a council any right to act in trying a member before the church has decided the case? Or has a council any authority over the acts of a church? Is a church the highest tribunal to which a member can appeal?" The acts of a council with reference to the conduct of a member, in advance of the church, either before it commences to act, or while it is prosecuting its investigations, is in our judgment an act of gross usurpation, unworthy the character or calling either of a minister or a christian. This is not saying that it is impossible for men who are Christians to participate in such an act. But we *will say* they are pursuing a course altogether injudicious, and unauthorized. They must have a peculiar fondness for meddling with their neighbors' affairs beyond any thing that we desire to cherish. In relation to their authority over the acts of a church, two views may be entertained. They can have no absolute power in the premises whatever. Such a thing is never contemplated in their appointment. Suppose a church, in compliance with the request from a neighboring church, appoints its pastor to meet in connection with pastors of other churches, in the capacity of a council, to adjust a difficulty, has he any reason to infer that they have invested him with power to set aside the previous acts of that church? He must have a strange *phrenological organ* who can draw any such inference. Councils are generally called to act only in an advisory capacity, and then only at the request of the parties, each choosing an equal proportion of its members. Parties may occasionally agree to abide their decision. A council cannot, in any other instance, claim, even in appearance, the right either to confirm or annul the acts of a church, and then it is binding on the parties only on principles of honor.

But after all there is but little reliance to be placed in councils. As a general thing we have but little faith in calling councils. The practice has become too common to be produc-

tive of results tending either to the peace and happiness of our churches, or the divine glory. It has become a matter so easy to get a council who are ready to act in accordance with the wishes of those who honor them with the call, that what they do has but little weight with us. In this remark we intend nothing invidious in relation to our brethren. But we really wish there were less of this council calling in settling church difficulties, and that brethren would more generally refuse to act in this capacity. Would all resolve on this course, there would be less of them to settle. Every Baptist Church is an independent body, and, as such, the highest earthly, *ecclesiastical* tribunal, and is amenable to no other constituted tribunal on earth for its disciplinary transactions. Again

11. "If a member in good standing asks a letter of dismissal from a church, has that church any right to designate what particular Baptist church that member shall unite with?" If there be a Baptist church in the immediate neighborhood where the individual resides, and he or she should request a letter to unite with one 20 or 25 miles distant, the church would be justifiable, (unless reasons the most unquestionable were given,) in refusing to comply with the request. But where there are several churches within an equal distance, or nearly so, of their residence, the church may advise, but have no right to dictate to them, where they shall become a member. It is *their* undoubted right to choose for themselves; and if, because they persevere in uniting with the church of their choice, the church should refuse them a letter, that church would be perfectly justifiable in receiving them. Again it has been asked

12. "Is every Baptist church an independent body—or must each church unite with some association in order to have a good and regular standing in the denomination?" It is advisable, when practicable, for churches to be associated together for mutual spiritual benefit; but such a relation is not essential to a church's independence. As an independent body it can use its pleasure about entering into such a relation. Its remaining separate should never be made to militate against its character and standing in the estimation of the denomination. So far as character is concerned, a church should sink or rise in the estimation of the denomination by weightier considerations than the simple circumstance of their connection with, or separation from an association.