

42 ARTICLES
On the Subject of
CHURCH ORDER

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The Primitive Baptist and The Christian Pathway

By Mark Green

With contributions from
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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a compilation of a series of articles published in *The Primitive Baptist and The Christian Pathway* from November 2006 through October 2010. With a few minor adjustments, the articles are as they were published in that paper. Most of them were written by me, but I am deeply appreciative of the able contributions of Elders James Isaacs, Philip Conley and Adam Green, whose articles also are included. Bro. Adam serves as Assistant Editor of the paper in which the articles were published. Where they wrote or contributed to articles I have indicated it by including their names. Otherwise, the responsibility for the material is mine.

As I indicated in the opening article, I have for a long time been deeply concerned with an attitude that seems to be developing among our people in many areas that order simply is not a matter of great importance – that good intentions, zeal and kindly affections negate the necessity for a proper and careful procedure in our affairs. I consider that this state of mind is as deadly to the health of the church as almost any we could have. All of us recognize that regulations and procedures are necessary to the efficient and safe functioning of any governmental or business enterprise. We cannot do “just whatever we feel like doing” and hope that the goals of the organization will be met. Order in our methods is an absolute necessity in human affairs – how much more so in the affairs of the kingdom, considering that the One who has given us our “marching orders” is the King of kings.

In these articles, I have dealt with Scriptural mandates, but I also have expressed my personal opinions on many issues. Obviously, where my own opinions are involved, the reader is not under obligation to accept them. However, I would beg you to consider them carefully in the light of the Holy Scriptures before you set them aside. I trust that this collection will be of material benefit to the Lord’s people.

Mark Green
2 November 2010

ARTICLE 1

Having been deeply impressed about the importance of the subject of order within each church and among the churches, it is my intention to begin a series of articles upon that topic. We cannot gainsay the statement that “good order” is of critical importance to the health and the correct functioning of the church as a whole (and, indeed, society as a whole). Paul told the Colossians that it was a matter of great joy to him to behold their good order (Col. 2.5). If it was a matter of joy to the great apostle, ought it not to be so to us? If it would have caused him sorrow to behold disorder, ought we not to be of the same attitude? I will go one step further: when the churches get into such a careless attitude that they do not even consider order to be of importance, but even speak the word with a sneer and treat the concept with contempt (and I have heard that many times), then they have reached a point of *non-order*, which is perhaps even more dangerous than disorder - and will not chaos be the inevitable result?

What is order? Order in the church is that which allows the body to function as a unit, without confusion. That is true in each local church, and that is true in the institution as a whole; thus order is important in our conduct *within* each church and *among* the churches. Jesus set up only one church – singular – and fellowship and cooperation are supposed to exist among the local churches that comprise it, and so good order in the church as a whole is just as important as it is within local bodies. Perhaps the illustration of a column of marching soldiers will give us an idea of why good order is critical. If the officer gives the command, “Column left!” but one soldier turns right, what will be the result? That is easy to visualize. Good order is that which allows matters to proceed efficiently in the operating room or upon the bridge of a submarine during combat conditions. At such times, every move is critical in life-or-death circumstances. There is no room for error, and if there are not plainly-understood guidelines for conduct, the results could be fatal. Are the affairs of the church any less important? Let us always remember that confusion is one of the most deadly enemies of the church, and good order is designed to prevent confusion.

Good order in the church is pleasing to God, and He blesses us as we move together as one in the right direction. “And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes” (Num. 24.2). Israel was camped in good order, “according to their tribes,” and Balaam was compelled to bless them, despite his greed for filthy lucre.

Order comes both from direct Scriptural commands and from agreed-upon conventions that our brethren have found to minimize confusion over many generations and through many difficulties. As examples of the first, the Scriptures explicitly command that we are not permitted to sue a fellow church-member in the courts of the land, and that when the church is met together, one brother should speak at a time. We also have other Rules of Decorum that are not specifically commanded by Scripture, but that our forefathers have found to be necessary that all things may be done “decently and in order.” One church near us has a rule that forbids male members from leaving a conference meeting without the permission of the moderator. Their pastor recently illustrated the reason for this rule by telling of an incident years ago when one of the brethren had to leave to get a visiting relative to the train station by departure time. He

arose and got permission, and then left the building. The pastor pointed out that if the brother had just walked out of the conference, the other members might have thought he left because he was angry about something, and all sorts of misunderstandings and hurt feelings might have resulted. My point is that there are good reasons for our rules and our traditions, even if they are not specifically stated in Scripture, and they ought not to be disregarded.

I will make one other comment in this introductory article. Our rules of order ought to be followed at all times, whether in our churches, in our associations, or even as relates to commonly-accepted modes of procedure that we have traditionally followed in our relationships with sister churches (for to ignore them is to show contempt for our sister churches). Most of the time we have but little business in our conferences, and we probably could get through them in a less formal manner; but our rules of procedure are there to allow us to get through even the difficult seasons in a decent and orderly manner; and if we get into the habit of disregarding them in easy times, it is very difficult to enforce them in difficult and confusing times. Soldiers drill ceaselessly, not for the parade ground, but so that they may function as a unit under stress.

Rules are rules, whether explicitly stated or commonly accepted by tradition, and in both cases there are reasons for their existence. If we have them, we ought to follow them.

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ARTICLE 2

That good order is necessary to the efficient functioning of the church is seen in her nature. The church is a spiritual body. Paul describes it in terms of a natural body in Ephesians Chapter 4: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (v. 16). In order for the body to work properly, every joint (every member) must be working. In order for it to work, it must be “fitly joined together” so that “that which every joint supplieth” can flow freely to supply the health of the body. In our natural bodies, whenever something interrupts the proper functioning of the parts, all the body suffers as a result. Good order demands that every member be in his place, exercising his gift, taking care of his responsibilities so that the health of the body will be maintained. Anything that interferes with this proper functioning is disorder. In natural bodies we call this disorder “disease.” Disorder is the disease that sometimes infects the spiritual body.

The church is a voluntary body. No one is compelled by outside force to enter the kingdom of God. There are many whom we wish were members, but until they purpose within themselves to join, they would not be willing members. We are told that we must press into the kingdom of God. This pressing takes purpose and effort on our part. Because the church is a voluntary entity, we cannot physically compel any member to do anything. He must desire to do that which is right, and resolve to do it, and be diligent to carry out his responsibilities to the best of his ability. The order of the local church is expressed in the rules by which the members agree to abide (Church Covenant and Rules of Decorum) so that the church can function as it was designed. When a church is in “good working order,” that is what will happen. However, when something is “out of

order” – when a part is not working as it should – the body will be hindered, and may break down entirely if something is not done about it.

The rules of the church are not there so people can boss each other around, but in order for the church to be able to go about her business as she should. Compare them to the Operator’s Manual for an automobile. This manual tells what must be done if the car is to be operated as it was designed. If the owner does not change the oil, or if he puts water into the gas tank, then he can expect problems. Common experience tells us that. The church was designed by the Lord, and the rules (order) given to her are necessary for her to be as she should be. If she is not as she should be, then she cannot do as she ought to do. If she does not do as she ought to do, then the sheep are not being fed and protected, but instead are being disturbed and neglected, and God is not being glorified.

The church is made up of sheep. God’s people are called sheep for a reason. Their nature is revealed in that term. One characteristic of sheep is their tendency to scatter when a predator comes among them. They prosper, not while they are under stress, but when they are fed beside still waters. The good order of the church is designed to make sure that the “waters” stay still, instead of being stirred by sin. One obvious point of order is that God has given pastors to the churches, and among the duties of these pastors is to stand upon the wall so that they can see a long way off and warn of approaching dangers. If the pastor is doing his duty, he will see approaching dangers and gently steer the church away from them in such a way that many members might not even realize that there was a danger. However, if he neglects his duty of watchfulness, he may see the danger only at the last moment; and then, to avoid a shipwreck, a sudden, violent adjustment may have to take place, which disturbs the peace of the church and causes great anxiety and stress, so that members’ minds are taken away from Christ and onto the element that is disturbing them. Good order makes for “still waters.” Good order allows the church to function properly even in stressful times when it is “under fire” from Satan. Order is absolutely necessary for the health and growth of the church and for peace in Zion.

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ARTICLE 3

Much of the order among the churches involves the principle of fellowship. To understand how important this principle is, we must remember that the Lord’s church has no earthly headquarters. There is no central earthly authority or national or state headquarters that is dictating to the churches and mandating that they believe and practice particular things. Thus, the relationship among our churches is a purely voluntary one. We recognize them because we understand them to be “of the same faith and order” as we are. That expression means that their beliefs and practices are the same as ours, and thus we regard them as a “sister church,” a true New Testament church with whom we have gospel relations.

The term “in fellowship” has different meanings as used by Primitive Baptists. We are not in fellowship with other religious orders, and by that we mean that we do not recognize them religiously and have no church dealings with them at all. However, sometimes there are schisms between churches within the Primitive Baptist ranks in which, though there is a recognition of the identity of the sister congregation as a church,

nevertheless her conduct, either in doctrine or practice or both, has caused her to be perceived as being so dangerously close to what we might term “fatal error” that *functional* fellowship between them has been lost.

Since error and disorder cause a break in fellowship between churches, and since we recognize that we all do not understand everything as we ought, the issue that churches constantly are called upon to weigh is how much error can be tolerated before fellowship is broken. Primitive Baptist history is replete with examples of churches being too “quick on the trigger” and, conversely, of being too tolerant and too slow to act. In both cases harm was done. If reaction was too slow, then the error was able to take root among the churches; if it was too quick, then an unnecessary division between brethren was made. The severing of fellowship is a matter of judgment. We do not get a letter from heaven telling us how much error persisted in for how long is too much and too long. It is our duty to make those hard decisions, and the consequences of a wrong decision are often staggering in terms of damage to the church in one direction or the other. This is one of the more serious matters which local churches face in their day-to-day affairs. This delicate balance of longsuffering vs. resistance is one reason that factional division has been so much a part of the history of Primitive Baptists. The point is that Old Baptists do care greatly about their doctrine and practice; and since doctrine and practice directly affect fellowship, there has been a constantly-changing landscape of that fellowship among our people.

The severing of fellowship may be caused both by the seriousness of error or by its proximity. Smaller matters can become great in their effects upon us if they are close at hand and if someone is zealously promoting them. A preacher might have a strange idea about something, but if he would leave it alone, it would not be a cause for major concern. On the other hand, if he goes about “riding a hobby” on the matter, his error may be a larger issue than it should be simply because of the vigor and volume being put forth in its promotion in a certain locality. Conversely, a serious error a thousand miles away may not cause a pastor a great deal of distress, because the flock is never in contact with it; but if it becomes something which could affect the church he serves, he will find it necessary to resist it.

The degree to which Primitive Baptists visit sister churches is an amazing thing to people of other religious orders. However, seeing that we have no earthly headquarters, fellowship is the glue that holds the church as a whole together. If there is no communication and correspondence, then there is no fellowship, for in order for there to be fellowship, there must be a degree of confidence in the soundness and orderliness of a church; and until there is a familiarity with it, that confidence will not exist. It is generally the case that when a church ceases to visit among sister churches, it is either holding to something that it does not want revealed, or it eventually will be drawn into such things due to the lack of contact with other sound churches. This principle of relationship between churches is one reason that Old Baptists have put such an emphasis upon whether or not a brother is “safe.” By “safe” we mean that he is sound in doctrine and practice and that we know he will not tolerate damaging error where he is responsible.

Fellowship is a precious thing. It absolutely is worth the time and effort to cultivate it among the churches. It is “good and pleasant” for brethren to dwell together in unity. Many of our ministers have traveled to meetings in different parts of the country

when they were too busy and too tired reasonably to be expected to go, but they did so for the sake of the fellowship that has existed among the Old Baptists. Fellowship is a sweet, sweet blessing. Believe me, brethren, it is worth much labor, as well as much caution and forbearance, to maintain and nurture it.

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ARTICLE 4

Frequently the discussion of “church sovereignty” comes up among our people, and how this subject is viewed has a direct influence on good order in the church. A sovereign is a king, and so “sovereignty” means kingship. To exercise sovereignty means to rule within the bounds of a kingdom. The church is a kingdom, but nothing could be clearer than that members of the church are *not* sovereigns, nor is the church as a body a sovereign. Christ is our sovereign. “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1.22). “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col. 1.18). We are His servants. He rules and reigns in the church. We have *no license whatsoever* to do what we wish, but “in all things” Christ is to have the preeminence; in all things He is to be obeyed. If we ask the question, “Are local churches sovereign?” we can easily see that such an idea is directly contrary to Scripture.

If we asked the right question, however, we would be more likely to get the right answer. “Can one church act for another church?” The answer clearly is “no.” Each church must act for itself. No sister church can presume to take over the affairs of another church. To do so would be highly irregular and a direct violation of good order. Even the apostle Paul, when he was rebuking the Corinthians for the lack of discipline in the case of incestuous fornication, directed *them* to carry out the discipline. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5.4-5). He did not seek to carry out the disciplinary action himself, but instructed them to do it “when ye are gathered together.” As a church, they were to “purge out the old leaven.” Paul did not presume to act where only the church, *as a body*, could act.

While one church cannot act for another, we should not think that sister churches have no voice of any sort in our affairs. They cannot act for us, but they do have and ought to have influence upon us. If this were not true, why would we say in our church covenants that we are to “watch over one another for good” in our local congregations? We are to seek to influence one another in a positive manner in our churches, to “provoke” or call forth one another to good works. If this is true among individuals with a common bond in a local congregation, why not among churches of like faith and order? Do we not all wish to do what is right, and are we not all thankful for good counsel?

To illustrate this, let me parallel the relationship between my household and that of my natural brother. We both bear the same surname and therefore the actions of both our families reflect either credit or shame upon that name. While he has no authority to act within my household, if I or someone in my home were to misbehave in a scandalous manner, my brother certainly would have the right and the duty to speak to us about it,

since he is bound to us by the ties of nature. Similarly, sister churches are bound together by a common name – the name of our Husband. Anything that one church does affects her sister churches, either directly or indirectly. So, to say that sister churches have no say in our affairs would be totally unreasonable. We have the right of influence, but not of action. Thus, we can occupy “seats of counsel” with our sister churches, but we are not able to vote in their conferences. Why would any honest church object if a brother of like faith and order, seeing something amiss in their affairs, were to call it to their attention? If we truly wish to do that which is right, we will appreciate the admonition.

As in most matters, there are extremes on both sides of this issue. Some, presuming too much, have sought to give mandates and decrees to sister churches, which is wrong. Others, allowing too little, have sought to exclude all influence from sister churches in their affairs. In this latter scenario, it is commonly the case that such churches wander into some sort of error from which good counsel might have saved them.

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ARTICLE 5

Any discussion of good church order must include a discussion of baptism. The ordinances define the extent of the church. Where the church is, there are baptism and the Lord’s supper. Where there are no valid baptism and communion, there is no church. The three will always be found together. Baptism has often been described as the door of the church, and this door is in the exterior wall of the building.

It generally has been accepted among our people that the three elements to Scriptural baptism are the correct mode, a valid subject and a valid administrator. I will not now take the time to establish the necessity of those three elements for valid baptism. Concerning the first two there has been pretty much universal agreement among our people. Our brethren have been agreed that a valid administrator is necessary to valid baptism, but occasionally there has been some question as to who is a valid administrator.

The question that complicates the discussion of a valid administrator comes when there is error in a church, for that introduces the old question, “How much error can exist in a church, and for how long, before a church ceases to be a true church?” True New Testament baptism exists only in the true New Testament church, and so the “churchhood” of a body is one of the main things that determine the validity of its baptism. Since we do not get letters from heaven telling us when God has removed the candlestick from a church, there is a judgment that must be exercised by individual churches in assessing the situation that exists with erring sister churches. That is not a very pleasant duty, but we have it to do.

I would argue that recognizing the identity of a church does not necessarily imply complete agreement nor a direct connection with or close fellowship for that church. As long as the candlestick is there the ordinances are there, but at the same time it may not be a “safe” situation, i.e., it may be one from which we feel we need to keep some distance. In other words, though we might feel that a particular erring church is still a true New Testament church, yet we may feel that they have moved into some error to such an extent that it is not safe to be closely or functionally connected with them. We would not wish that church to be exerting any influence upon our members until such time as they have come out of that particular error. If the premise that I have set forth is true, then it

would follow that it is not inconsistent to receive the baptism of a church while at the same time being unwilling to have her ministers come among us or to have close fellowship with her.

The situation that I have described in the paragraph above is the reason that, during times of local division among our people, we have seen the practice of receiving members “by relation” (that is, in recognition of the validity of their baptism, but without direct correspondence or functional fellowship between the churches because of their divided state), and therefore no letter would be received by one from the other. Obviously, this is a difficult state of affairs and one greatly to be regretted, but it serves to illustrate the principle that our people have admitted the existence of the candlestick - and therefore the authority for baptism - in instances where they had no wish to have direct fellowship. The point is that sometimes churches do stray into serious error, and until it is determined whether or not they will continue permanently in that error, it is reasonable for sound sister churches to keep a safe distance.

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ARTICLE 6

Obviously, one of the places where order is most important is in our conference meetings. I will make a few random observations about conferences.

1. Conferences should be held on a regular basis. There should be an appointed time for them, whether monthly, quarterly, or at some other interval. If special conferences need to be held, they should be held only after due notification of the membership. The reason for avoiding spur-of-the-moment or *ad hoc* conferences is so that there can be no hard feelings because of a motion being “railroaded” through. As an illustration, suppose that two brethren in a church were opposed in their opinions on a certain issue, and as long as both were present at conference, neither could get his point passed over the other’s objection. However, if one of them were unavoidably absent from meeting, the other might be able to call an immediate conference and thus be able to get his motion rammed through in the other’s absence. This is not the way the church needs to do business, for it causes hurt feelings. Our object in our business is to arrive at the right conclusions through the multiplied wisdom of the church, so we need to have regular conferences that are scheduled so that a maximum number of members can arrange to be present. Needless to say, with conferences being held at regular times, ALL members need to make a special effort to attend. The presence of members at conference is mandatory, not optional.

2. Conferences should be conducted in a formal manner. It is true that we probably could get through the little business that we normally have in a less structured format, but the formalities are there so that good order may be preserved even in times of stress and disagreement. If we carefully observe the Rules of Decorum in ordinary conferences, then we will be in the habit of doing so when difficult issues arise. If we are in the habit of conducting conferences informally, then if tensions arise over an issue, it could easily dissolve into a disagreeable free-for-all which would severely damage the peace of the church. We need strictly to follow our Rules of Decorum.

3. The function of the Moderator in a conference should be understood and strictly observed. His function is to insure that the deliberations proceed in a moderate

and orderly manner. Most of our churches have rules that prohibit the Moderator from commenting on the substance of a discussion without first vacating the chair during his comments and appointing someone else as Moderator pro tem. I believe that it is a good habit for those addressing the chair to call him “Brother Moderator” instead of using his given name, for that helps to remind us that personalities are to be avoided in our deliberations. Technically, all comments and questions in a conference are to be addressed to the chair. It is the Moderator’s job to keep control of the deliberations, and it is difficult for him to moderate “sideways” conversations directly between members.

4. The participation of sisters in conferences is a matter in which we need to avoid extremes. That the sisters are not to be “running” the business of the church is evident from the directions of the apostles. However, sometimes churches have few or no male members and then the sisters must carry on the business. Furthermore, while the sisters are not to run the business of the church, they are members and as such they are not to be excluded from the business of the church. As members, they have full voting rights and as it is reasonable that they cannot be required to vote on items that they do not fully understand, it is within their rights to ask for more information. Also, there are times when a request for general information has been made to the church and a sister is the only one who has such information. In such cases she should be able to speak freely to supply the church with the facts it has requested of her. If our sisters will maintain a “meek and quiet spirit,” and if our brethren will be careful to safeguard the sisters’ prerogatives as voting members, we will be able to carry on the business of the church in peace in the proper manner.

5. Except in unusual circumstances, the church should hold conference at the appointed conference time. Some may ask, “Why should we hold conference if we have no business?” To them I would reply that the church always has one very important item of business. If nothing else is transacted in conference, the Moderator will inquire as to the peace of the church, which is an item of paramount importance. There might be problems lurking that are unknown to the membership in general, and even if there are none, just hearing the brethren and sisters respond “in peace” is worth the small amount of time it takes to hold conference.

6. Probably most of our churches have rules requiring unanimity in the reception or exclusion of members, which is the Scriptural way. Any member who knows of a valid reason why a member should not be received as a candidate for baptism has a right and a duty to block that baptism. Likewise, any member who knows of a valid reason why a member should not be excluded has a right and duty to block that exclusion. The key is in the word “valid.” That which is valid is according to Scripture. If there is a Scriptural reason not to receive or exclude a member, then it should not be done. However, if the individual’s reasons are not according to Scripture, then the church should labor with that individual to point out the inconsistency of his position; and if the member will not repent of his error, then the church should deal with him.

7. One other miscellaneous item regarding order in our worship services: sometimes at special meetings our brethren, wanting to hear as many preachers as possible, will put up four or more in a single service. Not only is this ill-advised, but it is contrary to the prescribed order of the Scriptures. The apostle Paul commanded, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge” (1 Cor. 14.29). Just before that, when giving instructions for speaking in tongues, he had said “by two, or *at most* by

three,” evidently meaning that two was preferable to three, and anything more than three was prohibited. Preaching committees need to remember this apostolic command.

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ARTICLE 7

Primitive Baptists practice close communion. (“Close” is the proper term, instead of “closed.”) This means that we commune only with those who have been scripturally baptized and who are walking in gospel order. The basis for close communion lies in the identity of the church, and in church discipline.

The identity of the church is bound up in the ordinances. As we have previously stated, where the ordinances are found, there the church is found; where the church is found, there the ordinances will be found. They always go together. If one ceases to be in a local situation, then so does the other. Likewise, the ordinances go together. Baptism is the door to communion. No instance is found in Scripture where an unbaptized person engaged in the Lord’s Supper. In Acts Chapter Two, those who received Peter’s words were baptized and added to the church, and *then* “they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread.” The breaking of bread followed baptism. Those who were added to the church were the ones that communed.

Baptism and communion are the borders of the church. Where the ordinances end, the church ends; where the church ends, so do the ordinances. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth; one of the great works of the church is to defend the truth and maintain the purity of the doctrine. Without control over her own borders, it would be impossible for her to do this. How could the church have any control over what was preached within her borders if she could not put outside her borders those who preached error? The right of the church to forbid communion is thus linked directly to the purity of her doctrine. If the identity of the church is not carefully regarded, neither will be her purity. If the Lord has commanded her to be holy as He is holy, how is she to do that if she cannot “keep house” through discipline? How else is she to keep house if not through excommunication?

The Primitive Baptists’ close attention through the generations to the identity of the church is entirely proper. If just anyone is the church, and if the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, then it follows that “just anything” is the truth. Since just anything is not the truth, but since truth is carefully distinguished from error in the Scriptures, and since we are not to bid “God-speed” to those who are in gross error, then it plainly follows that everyone claiming to be the church cannot be right. Someone must be wrong. Someone must not be the church. If all are not the church, then all do not have the ordinances nor the right to them. Thus, we must practice close communion if we are to show proper regard for truth.

The harshest discipline the church can administer is to deny someone the communion table. “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat” (1 Cor. 5.11). How can we “not eat” with someone if we cannot forbid him the communion supper? It obviously would not be possible. It plainly follows, then, that if there is to be any church discipline, there must be close communion.

I highly recommend that our people read Elder Lemuel Potter's "Four Lectures on Communion," delivered in 1886. We certainly need to be informed on this important subject.

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ARTICLE 8

One of the most important aspects of good order is the maintenance of strict discipline in the church. Elder Sylvester Hassell listed this as the fourth mark of the apostolic church. Certainly without discipline there can be no order. If every man does that which is right in his own eyes, how could there be any possibility of unity in the body? If the church is to function as a body, each member must be in his place doing his duty. Those who refuse to occupy their places or to do their duty throw the body into confusion or disorder and must be dealt with.

Discipline has as its object three main goals. The first is the glory of God in the maintenance of the purity of His church. Second is the safety and health of the body. Third is the good of the individual being disciplined. It is never to anyone's benefit to be allowed to continue unchecked in error. The Lord chastens His people because He loves them. Paul says that God chastens us "for our profit" or benefit.

A church that will not discipline its members cares little for them. The main reasons that usually are advanced for the neglect of discipline are a tenderness of heart toward the persons involved and an unwillingness to stand as judges. To the first we answer that that father who spares the rod of natural discipline is said by the Scriptures to hate his child. Neglecting necessary discipline is not an act of love, but of cowardice and neglect; so that excuse will not stand, even from a natural standpoint. As to the other, we are told by the apostle Paul, "Do not ye judge them that are within?" (1 Cor. 5.12). We are not in our discipline judging whether or not the individuals involved are children of God. We are not saying that we ourselves are without any fault. We are merely ascertaining whether or not they have behaved themselves in a manner for which the Scriptures require correction by the body. Discipline is not optional on the church's part. We are commanded to do it. In many cases, even the nature of the correction involved is not a matter of our judgment, either, for the Bible has told us what measures we are to take. Our judgment is to be a judgment of fact: did he do it? If he did in fact commit the act, then there is correction that is required. Sometimes there is a certain amount of forbearance that must be exercised by the church, and in some offenses a correction less severe than excommunication may be warranted; but the church has no right merely to ignore offenses. She is required by Scriptural mandate to act, both for the good of the person involved and for the welfare of the body.

One thing that has caused no end of trouble among the churches is the failure of one congregation to recognize the action of a sister church in excluding a member. It has been a recognized principle among our people that when a man is excluded from one Old Baptist church, he is excluded from all Old Baptist churches. Only the church which did the excluding has the right to restore the individual involved. One of the most fundamental rights of a local congregation is the right to discipline its own members. For a church to ignore the discipline of a sister church is, for all practical purposes,

tantamount to saying that the disciplining body is not a true church (or at least not one in good order). In other words, it is an act directly affecting fellowship.

The question sometimes arises as to how sister churches should react when a church excludes a member for a reason that is manifestly unscriptural. For example, if a church were to exclude a member because he had brown hair, how ought sister churches to respond? The first and obvious answer is that the erring church should be labored with by one or more of her sister churches to seek to make her see the error of her ways and to correct her unscriptural action. If this fails, then the sister churches are faced with what admittedly is a difficult choice. If the excluded member applies to another church for admission “by relation,” that church has the choice of *a*) refusing the petition and thus allowing the affected member to remain without a church home; *b*) delaying action in hope that the erring church will later see its mistake; or *c*) receiving the wrongly-excluded member by relation with the realization that fellowship probably will be severed with the excluding church. In this last case, great care should be taken that the true facts in the case are known and that every effort has been expended to regain the erring sister church. This is not a small matter, and while it may be necessary in some cases, it *must not* be treated as a small thing. Only in clearly aggravated cases should this third action be taken. If there is error to be made in such cases, I would urge that it must be on the side of caution and with an understanding that the church of the person’s membership was in the best position to make a judgment in the matter. Again, to declare that the home church was mistaken in her judgment and to receive an excluded member is a most serious matter, and should only be done when the church receiving the excluded member is certain that the church taking the action was in such gross disorder in the act that she is willing to sacrifice fellowship with that church.

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ARTICLE 9

Perhaps the most commonly-violated passage of Scripture that relates to order is the Lord’s instruction in Matthew Chapter 18 about dealing with private offenses. Everything in this passage is important and must be considered if we are to proceed correctly.

The passage begins, “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee.” Notice that it says “against *thee*,” not “against the church.” This deals with offenses against us individually and personally. It pertains to cases where our prerogatives are violated by another church member. It does not deal with public offenses, that is, offenses against the body as a whole. When we say “private” and “public” in this discussion, we are not talking about where the offenses were committed, but whether or not they were committed against an individual member or against the church as a body. We can see the great wisdom of the Lord in this regulation, for if it is not regarded, then the church will be burdened with a host of petty, private matters or there will be constant strife and ill-will within the body because these offenses are not dealt with, but are allowed to stew and fester.

“Tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” If a brother sins against us, we are not to take it to the civil courts, we are not to discuss it with our spouses or pastor or friends and relatives, but we are to keep silent about it until we have followed the

Scriptural steps. The first of these steps is to talk to the brother alone. “Alone” means with no one else around to hear the conversation. It is entirely possible that, by talking to the brother in a kind and humble manner, the matter may be solved. He may not realize he had offended us, and will be eager to make it right. If we talk to him in a harsh manner, he may not respond as he should, so we must go to him with the proper attitude, or we are at fault. Notice that the text commands us to “tell him” if we have been offended. We might not tell anyone else, but we also might not tell him, and so we would keep the offense bottled up in our hearts so that it spoils our outlook and attitude and makes us bitter in demeanor. This is not good for us nor for the church. If our brother offends us, then we either need to forgive and forget it or tell him about it; and it is obvious that if we are not able to forget it, then we must do the other.

“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” If the matter cannot satisfactorily be settled one-on-one, then one or two others are to be taken with us to act as mediators. It does not say three or four others, but one or two only. If our attitude is right, we will choose these brethren, not because they are likely to side with us, but because they are impartial and wise and will render sound judgment. If all we want is to “have our way,” then we are as much at fault as the offending brother. These brethren will listen to the facts and give their judgment in the matter, which hopefully will bring the matter to a close. It should be noted again that none of the three or four people involved should be discussing or even mentioning the affair to anyone else.

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.” If the offending brother still will not make satisfaction, then and *then only* are we to bring the matter before the church. At this point, the matter moves from being a private offense to being a public one, because now it affects the body as a whole. The offended party, with the observations of the witnesses, is to set the case before the church and the church is to render her judgment. This judgment may be against the offending party, but it is possible that it might be against the complaining brother; and if that is the case, then the offended party must be prepared to accept the verdict of the church as readily as he would expect the other to do so. If either of the parties will not accept the judgment of the church in the matter, “if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” If the party against whom the judgment is rendered refuses to heed the church, then he is to be dealt with in a disciplinary way.

I would exhort our brethren to be most careful to follow the guidelines of this passage in every regard. Perhaps more trouble thus could be spared the church than by any other one thing we could do. I will mention two other points regarding private offenses that need to be remembered. First, one of the most important responsibilities of the Moderator in a church conference is to forbid private offenses being brought before the church until scriptural labor has been taken. He has the authority to “throw out” the case until that is done. Second, we need to learn to recognize the difference between private and public offenses. I have heard men say that Matthew 18 applies when a man preaches something wrong from the pulpit, so that we are obligated to go to him privately before anything is said about it. It may indeed be advisable to speak to the brother privately first, for any number of reasons - but not because of Matthew 18. If a man

preaches error, that is an offense against the church as a body, and the body as a whole is to deal with it.

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ARTICLE 10

The subject of associations has been the object of much lively discussion among Primitive Baptists over the years. I will state first off that associations do *not* cause trouble; people cause trouble. If there is a problem, then get rid of the actual cause of the problem instead of trying to blame it on something that is not at fault.

Associations are periodic councils of groups of churches who are close geographically and in other ways. It is entirely Scriptural for churches to take council together through their duly-appointed messengers as they deem necessary, and to worship together at such times. The churches at Jerusalem and Antioch did so in the 15th chapter of Acts. It is entirely Scriptural for the council to publish a record of their proceedings, which is what those brethren did. It is entirely Scriptural for a letter to be published and circulated among the churches of the council and others that were not represented. All those things were done in the 15th chapter of Acts. If it is scriptural to do those things, then we can assume that it is *profitable* to do them.

I frequently hear brethren today belittle the business meetings at associations, perhaps saying, “That is not why we are here.” I beg to differ: the business meeting is precisely why we assemble at associations. The worship services are a wonderful benefit of the meeting and no doubt are more eagerly anticipated and more spiritually profitable than the business session, but the reason an association meets is to sit in council. If there is no council, then there is no true association in the historical usage of the term, but merely a rotating annual meeting. A rotating annual meeting can be a wonderful spiritual gathering, but that is not the only reason that the old brethren met in associations. They met to communicate with each other – to ask, “Are we still in peace; are we still walking hand in hand?”

An association rightly has deliberative powers only. It cannot act, except as pertains to minor functional details that relate to the conduct of the meeting itself. It can discuss issues that are brought before it and report back to the churches as to its conclusions. Those conclusions are not binding upon the churches.

It should be noted that the brethren who are appointed by the churches to sit in the council are messengers, and not delegates. The churches do not and cannot delegate their authority. The method of government in the church of God is congregational; it is not episcopal or presbyterian, that is, delegated to a higher body. The council cannot act for the churches, neither can the delegates individually act for the churches. They may speak as representing the church in the council and report back to the church, and take care of any logistical details affecting the meeting itself.

The key word in considering associations is “together.” By sitting in council together, the churches are staying in close and regular *official* communication, they are valuing the wisdom of their sister churches, and they are seeking to “stay on the same page” by addressing problems or heading them off before they may develop. Some have said that the day has passed when such councils of duly-appointed messengers are needed, but let me humbly and emphatically disagree with that opinion. As we see

ourselves slipping closer and closer to a chaotic situation, when have we more needed to be in close and sympathetic *official* communication? There has never been a day when we needed more the multiplied wisdom of the brethren. There has never been a time in the history of the church when unity was more needed than today.

In the Bible, when the New Testament churches faced that troubling issue in Acts 15, the churches sat together in council. Are we wiser than they? Have we devised a better method than the apostles, such as email or cell phones? Are unofficial meetings of preachers – which have no authority even to speak for the churches – more likely to result in good than the manner in which the brethren met in the book of Acts?

Some have said that modern communications have rendered associations pointless. Again, may I disagree? There is a great difference between individual ministers visiting among themselves and churches speaking officially to sister churches. Ministers have no more right to act for a church than any other member. Email and cell phones may be quicker and more efficient, but **sometimes quicker is not better**. Sometimes the churches need to endure the inconvenience and take the time and trouble to sit down “eye-ball to eye-ball” and seek the answers to troubling questions through the multiplied wisdom that God has so graciously given them. There must have been a very good reason that our forefathers – extending far back into the mists of history in Wales – met in an associational capacity. I think we greatly flatter ourselves if we think that reason does not continue to exist today.

It has been objected that associations have no business to discuss today. I could not disagree more. If nothing else, we always have that most important of items – the peace among the churches. By the reading of the letters, the churches report to their sister bodies that they are in peace within themselves and among the churches of the association. What a blessing that is! Is it not worth **a few minutes a year** to hear the churches report “in peace?” Maybe it is not to you, but it is to me, brethren; it is to me. It is sweet music to my weary ears.

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ARTICLE 11

All that pertains to good order in the church stems from a recognition of the identity of the church. If there is no church, then there is no need for order in the church. If it were impossible to identify the church – where it is, who it is – then we could not tell where good order ought to be maintained. God does have a church in this world and it is distinct from all other religious organizations. Jesus built a particular, identifiable religious institution, which He called “my church.” Everything that we say about the church and her order pertains to the true church, not to imposters or religious orders which claim to be the church, but are not. If we cannot identify the true church, then we can know nothing about her or her order.

Elder Sylvester Hassell gave this as his twelfth characteristic of the apostolic church: “The Twelfth Mark of the Apostolic church was that it was absolutely the only divinely recognized religious organization in the world. There was no forbidden, unhallowed and corrupting alliance between the church and worldly societies and human institutions, combining believers and unbelievers, for carrying on God’s work of evangelizing the nations.” In other words, the true church has claimed to be unique, and

being so, has kept a strict ecclesiastical separation from other religious organizations. Much, if not most, of what we do in the church under the heading of Order relates to this ecclesiastical separation. The true church is the pillar and ground of the truth – not of error – and therefore we may conclude that the true church has not wandered into fatal error. We also know that somewhere upon this earth the true church is still in existence, for “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Further, we are forbidden by the apostle in 2nd Corinthians Chapter Six to have fellowship with religious entities that are outside of the true gospel path.

So, who is the true church? Any organization that was set up since the time of Christ manifestly cannot be it; neither can the Roman Catholic organization or any of her Protestant daughters. (I will not take time to argue that point now, assuming that any true Primitive Baptist believes it.) That limits the church to being within the Baptist denomination. The Primitive Baptists, by our separation from the other Baptist orders in 1827, claimed that they had departed from gospel truth and that we could no longer walk with them in church fellowship. We claimed that we were the true church. This was a momentous religious event, one of the most significant in the history of the church, and it involved a bold claim. I hope our people today appreciate that fact, notwithstanding many who are lamenting the fact that “we are fighting the battle of 1832 all over again.” Principles do not change: either our forefathers were right or they were wrong in what they did. If they were wrong, then we are not the true church; if they were right, then we are the church (if we have continued in the paths in which they walked).

Some well-meaning saints seem to be unable to come to grips with the fact that not every group who claims to be the church is the church. They give such regard to the good intentions of others that they seem to be unable to see the great, eternal issues of truth that are involved. It was Christ’s decree that gospel truth was to be maintained in and by this institution that He set up. It has been His work to protect and nurture her down through the ages, and to call good and faithful men to stand for truth. The church, as the pillar and ground of the truth, has been engaged in a never-ending battle with error, to the extent that the history of the church is largely an account of how she has dealt with the various heresies that have troubled her over the years. If we are to defend truth, then we must be able to recognize the truth. If we are to defend it, then we must realize that God has ordained the church as the body which would be the defender and preserver of gospel truth. To fail to recognize this is to surrender the field to the enemies of truth.

The church is not to fellowship those outside the church; we are not to walk with them in a religious sense. We are forbidden to receive them into our house or to bid them God speed. We are not to eat with them in the Lord’s supper nor to receive their baptism. We are to come out from among them and be separate. This strict separation from other religious orders is one of the great identifying marks of the church. If we surrender our claim to spiritual uniqueness, then we surrender our claim to being the church.

Perhaps the most important debate in Primitive Baptist history was the Potter-Throgmorton debate on the question, “Who are the Primitive Baptists?” I strongly recommend that all our people read this excellent defense by Elder Lemuel Potter of the identity of the Primitive Baptists as the true church of Jesus Christ.

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ARTICLE 12

Elder Adam Green

By request, I have attempted to write about the ordinances of the New Testament Church. For the purposes of this article, I am expanding the meaning somewhat beyond the normal usage. By “ordinance” I mean the church functions of baptism, the Lord’s Supper or Communion (including foot washing), and the ordination of an elder or deacon – all things that were ordained or ordered to be done in the church. The Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 11:2, praises the Corinthian church that they “keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” Paul, as the Apostle of Christ to the Gentiles, had delivered the ordinances to the church at Corinth, and was intent that they (the church) keep those same ordinances in the same manner, design and function that the Apostle had delivered them, that is, “as I delivered them to you.” The Apostles, then, delivered the ordinances to the church. Christ had given the ordinances to the Apostles and instructed them as His direct representatives and messengers to the church to set the practices of the church in order. At the close of the Apostolic age, the ordinances had been delivered to the church in their entirety. There can be no change to the ordinances, doctrine or practice of the church after the Apostles, for no other man had their unique qualifications and authority.

It is important that we recognize that the ordinances were not delivered by the Apostles to church members as individuals, but to the church as a body (Acts 20:7, I Cor. 11:18, 33). No single church member can claim possession of the ordinances. When an individual is baptized, he or she is baptized into a visible assembly of Christ and professing the faith and doctrine of the church. If that were not the case, then the Scriptural instructions regarding church discipline would be of no consequence. Thus, a baptized person cannot claim possession of the ordinances separate from the church body, and the church body has a right to exclude an individual from association with the church and her ordinances. That excluded individual then cannot have any legal right to administer baptism or request such be administered, or sit down with the church at the Lord’s Supper. There is no claim nor right to the ordinances of the church apart from the church.

Baptism is an ordinance of the church in the same way that Communion and ordination are ordinances. If it were not an ordinance of the church, then it would not be governed by the church nor require her approved administrator. Since it is an ordinance, it cannot be performed Scripturally outside the authority of the church. If it cannot be performed outside the authority of the church, than it cannot be valid without its purpose including a uniting with the institution that Christ set up – His Gospel church.

Who then has the authority of the ordinances? It is the church, as a body, which is also the pillar and ground of the truth. As we investigate this subject, we must recognize that there is a difference between the authority of (possessing, maintaining, and governing) the ordinances, and the authority to administer the ordinances.

God’s church, in the days since the Apostles set the practices of the church in order, has maintained that it is only duly ordained elders who have the right to administer the baptism and the Lord’s Supper. That is found today in the practice of the Primitive Baptist church and written into many of the Articles of Faith of her local assemblies. Even Justin Martyr, in his first Apology (defense) of Christianity written in the second century, confirms that it was the practice then for the “president” to administer the Lord’s

Supper and pass it to the deacons to serve the members of the church. Dr. John Gill maintains the same assertion of historical precedence in his comments regarding Communion in his Body of Divinity.

We find repeated and conclusive Scriptural evidence that it is the bishop or elder only (those terms are synonymous in Scripture) who has the right to administer the ordinances. Christ set that pattern during His personal ministry. First, He intentionally sought out John the Baptist to administer His baptism, because “it fulfilled all righteousness.” If the administrator was unimportant, then righteousness could have been fulfilled with merely the proper candidate and mode of baptism (immersion). Since John the Baptist was the only one with God-given authority to administer baptism at that time, Christ went to Him to be baptized. Christ, as the Head of the Church, then passed on the authority to baptize to those men he called to be Apostles. Those same Apostles ordained men like Timothy, who sat in the presbytery of other faithful men, and the laying on of hands continues in an unbroken chain unto this day.

The Apostle Paul, in Titus 1:5, instructs the younger minister to “ordain elders in every city.” It is to be understood that these were places with constituted and functioning churches and that the elders to be ordained would come out of and likely serve those churches. If there is no further requirement for administering church ordinances than that one be baptized, then what would be the purpose of ordaining elders? An ordination does not make a man a preacher, so preaching itself could not be the reason for ordination. The reason **must** have been that ordination was required for these men to administer the ordinances in these local congregations.

The question now arises, “Does the limitation to the elders of the authority to administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper constitute a violation of the authority of the church regarding the ordinances?” No, it does not. In God’s system of church practice we see a balance where the church cannot function long without God’s appointed overseers of the church (the ordained ministry, per Acts 20:28), nor can the ministry exist without the church. There is a divinely-created balance. In the books of Acts, we watch the transition of the founding of church practice as the Apostles set things in order. We go from seeing Philip the Evangelist baptize the Ethiopian eunuch by the direction of the Holy Spirit, to Peter taking six brethren with him to the house of Cornelius and asking their counsel before administering baptism. In I Corinthians 11:34, the Apostle Paul recognized that there were things regarding the ordinances that he still needed to “set in order” for the church at Corinth.

Church membership is the door to the Lord’s Supper (Communion), and baptism is the door to the church. God’s church is manifested in local assemblies who have the authority to choose their own officers (Acts 6:3) and determine whether or not a candidate is a proper subject for baptism and membership in the local assembly. As proven before through the Scriptural teachings of church discipline, a person baptized should be baptized into a local assembly and be subject to her code of conduct. Even a traveling evangelist is under authority to the church of his own membership, and should baptize others only with the consent of his own assembly or that of a requesting and consenting sister church. The church of God has used the custom of “extending an arm” from one established congregation to a group of believers who are endeavoring to start or constitute a church, so that they still have membership in a consenting church and are under her authority until released by letter to the newly constituted body.

The story of Philip and the eunuch would appear to be different than the above practice, but the reader should not forget two things in regard to it. Philip was directed by the Holy Spirit in a supernatural way, and this was before the Apostles had finished their work of establishing the practice of the church. If a man would claim Philip's authority upon that occasion for himself today, let him demonstrate the same personal corroboration of the Holy Spirit with supernatural evidence. I recognize that an evangelist serving at a distance from home cannot physically present most candidates before the church of his own membership before baptizing them, but he can and should have close communication with his home church about the qualifications of those he will baptize and the particulars of their evidence and confession, and subsequently any member received into the church (even through an "arm") is subject to the review of the body as a whole.

In the matter of the Lord's Supper and the ordination of elders, we will make these brief observations in support of the authority **of** the ordinances being held by the church. The Lord's Supper, or Communion, is presided over and administered by the ordained elder, but it is the church who confirms by her membership those who are allowed to commune, and even the times set for Communion. No elder has the right to determine such on his own. In the matter of the ordination of elders, the church is the one who selects those men that are called and who determines the evidence of their call to preach. I Timothy 3:10 says that deacons, as well as elders, are to "first be proved" of their qualifications before being ordained. The "also" in that verse shows that the proving applies not only to deacons, but also to the elders. Where is that proving to take place? in the church, per verse 15. No matter how qualified a man may seem outside of the church or prior to church membership, he is to be proved by and in the church before being ordained as an elder. It is the church who has the authority to identify that a man is called of God to preach, to prove him, and to call for his ordination.

The ordinances were delivered to the church, and God's church is to keep them the way that they were delivered. She has the authority of the ordinances and is the guard of them. The ordained ministry is part of the church as members and gifts to her, but in them alone rests the authority to administer those same ordinances. Let us keep that which has been committed to our trust.

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ARTICLE 13

The two permanent offices in the church (and the only two) are bishop or elder and deacon. Any discussion of good order in the church must address the work of both offices. We will begin with the office of bishop.

John and Peter both said they were elders, and they were among the first group of ministers called to gospel service, so we may conclude that all gospel ministers who have been duly ordained are elders. There are three terms that are used at various times to describe the work of this office: bishop, elder and pastor. "Bishop" is from the Greek word *episkopos*, which means "overseer." The lexicon definition is "a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly." We could say, then, that the bishop is the man who is charged with seeing that everything done in the church is done "in good order." All that happens in the church happens under his watchcare, and

because of this he is said to rule in the church: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account.” This does *not* mean that the bishop is the “boss” of the church or that he has the “say so” about everything, or that the church reports to him. None of these is true. The bishop rules in the church only in the sense that he tells the church what the Bible requires of them and insists that they be conformed to that pattern. He is to watch and see that the church follows the scriptural pattern in all matters. When a bishop begins to seek to have his own way, then he has ceased to be a servant and an example to the church and has begun to be a lord over God’s heritage, and should be called into account by the church. The bishop is not the boss of the church, but the servant of the church; yet the church is to obey the word of God which the bishop declares unto them.

The term “elder” reflects the regard in which the man is held by the church, and his maturity of judgment and wise leadership. The office of elder is not limited to aged men, but it of necessity should be limited to men of sound or mature judgment; and for this reason we are told not to lay hands suddenly upon men, but to observe them for a period of time under gospel responsibilities. John was a very young man when he was called by the Lord into the gospel ministry, yet he was an elder. An elder is to be held in high regard by the church; if he cannot be held in high regard, then he should not be an elder. It is right and proper that the church look to her elders for leadership and guidance in all matters that affect the body.

“Pastor” refers to one who feeds and cares for the flock. Paul links the word with “teachers,” showing us that by teaching the church the word of God the pastor feeds them and leads them in the paths of righteousness, which are safe and edifying paths. A pastor must be kind and gentle with the little lambs of God. Undue harshness in a pastor is a very unbecoming and damaging trait. Paul told Timothy that “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.” He is to care for God’s sheep in the same way that a natural shepherd cares for his flock. He is to lead them beside “still waters” and in “green pastures,” for those are the places where they will prosper.

We will be speaking of the office of deacon particularly, but it should be noted that the work of the deacons falls under the oversight or supervision of the bishop just as much as any activity within the church. The deacons, however, do not “report to” the pastor, but are the servants of the church just as the pastor is. They are to work closely with the pastor and to heed his admonitions and leadership as he oversees the church, but they are co-servants with the pastor and work jointly with him as both offices labor in their specified spheres of responsibility.

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ARTICLE 14

The office of deacon was begun in the sixth chapter of Acts. The reason for deacons was a simple application of the principle of Division of Labor. The apostles recognized that by themselves they could not do everything that needed to be done in the administrative affairs of the church, and so, with sound logic and divine guidance, they told the church to choose out seven men who would be appointed to oversee the daily care of the widows. It is noteworthy that the words used to describe the work of both the

apostles and the deacons are from the Greek word from which “deacon” is taken. The apostles said that it was not reasonable - it did not make good sense - for them to leave the word of God and serve tables. The word “serve” is “diakoneo,” which clearly shows the work of the deacons. They were to serve in the church in the area of “tables,” or seeing to the natural necessities of the widows and other helpless members and, by implication, taking care of those day-to-day matters that would free the hands of the elders. The apostles, in the meantime, would give their time to prayer and the “ministry” of the word. “Ministry” is “diakonia.” It is easy to see from this that both elders and deacons are to serve or minister, but that their area of responsibility is different. Elders are to give themselves to the service of the word and the deacons to the service of tables. Both are set aside to specific functions.

Elders are spoken of as the servants of the church; deacons are likewise spoken as serving in the church. The bishops or elders are to oversee the church’s activities as a whole: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof” (1 Pt. 5.2). They were to take the oversight of the flock as a whole. The deacons were not appointed to the oversight of the flock, but to the oversight of the serving of tables, a particular function within the church. I have seen abuses on both extremes of the relationship of deacons and elders to each other and to the church. In some instances, the pastor has taken it upon himself to function as the “chief executive” of the church, requiring everyone, including deacons, to report to him. This is “being lords over God’s heritage,” which the apostle Peter pointedly condemns. In other instances, the deacons have sought to run the church, taking upon themselves the oversight of the body as a whole and relegating the pastor to the function of a passive observer. Both these extremes are wrong. Deacons and elders should work closely, hand-in-hand, as they serve the church; but the point is that they all serve *the church* in their appointed functions. Each answers to the church as a body as to his proper fulfillment of his duties.

When an elder is ordained, he is given the right and responsibility to fulfill all the duties of a gospel minister, and he does not have to be re-ordained every time a baptism occurs or the Lord’s supper is observed or every time he travels somewhere to preach the gospel. Likewise, when a deacon is ordained, he is appointed to care for the natural and physical affairs of the church, freeing the elders’ hands to give themselves to prayer and the word. Once ordained, the deacon has the right and responsibility to fulfill his duties, and does not have to be re-authorized each time something needs to be done. If there is a need for funds to be disbursed from the church account to take care of matters for which he is responsible, he does not have to go back to the church to get authority to do so; he was given that authority when he was ordained. If the church must specifically authorize every act of the deacon in his responsibilities, then what need is there to have deacons? The whole purpose in ordaining the first deacons was to make the functioning of the church more efficient in day-to-day affairs, and if the deacons cannot act without specific church approval for every disbursement of funds, then that efficiency has been lost entirely.

It is worth noting that the church at Jerusalem prospered as the deacons began fulfilling their duties: “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” God, in His infinite wisdom, structured the church as He did for a good and wise reason. When we follow His instructions, we can expect that the church will prosper

more than if those instructions are ignored. Good, responsible, humble deacons are a tremendous blessing to a church. When the pastor can dismiss from his mind worries about those affairs and concentrate upon the spiritual welfare of the body, it is obvious that things are more likely to go as they should.

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ARTICLE 15

In the ordination of ministers and deacons, there are those things which are Scripturally required and without which there can be no ordination, and there are those things that are advisable and constitute a safe and careful way to proceed. There also are those things that are merely customary, but which have their place, nonetheless.

The Scriptural pattern in the ordination both of elders and deacons is that the church chooses the man to be ordained. This is shown in Acts Chapters One and Six. This is not just a bare choosing, but in the case of ministers a gift must have been made manifest, the man must have shown himself over some time to be faithful in the kingdom, and the other qualifications that Paul lists must be present. The point is that it is the church, and not the presbytery, that calls for the ordination. Hers is the authority by which the ordination is done. The actual ordination in the Scriptures was always done by the presbytery, not by the church herself. We can see the wisdom of this “double-keyed lock” in preserving the purity of the office. Both the church and the presbytery must be satisfied as to the man’s qualifications before an ordination can occur.

After the church has marked out the man to be ordained, the only two acts which the Bible specifically prescribes for a valid ordination are prayer and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Just as immersion in water might seem to us to be a strange act to constitute Scriptural baptism, so the laying on of hands may also seem a little peculiar; but whatever we might think of it, it is what the Bible requires, and we may be assured that it is exactly the proper signification for the transfer of Scriptural authority to the new elder or deacon.

It is customary in our ordinations for the man to be ordained to be publicly questioned by someone designated for that task by the presbytery. In years past, because of travel and communication hindrances, some members of the presbytery may not have been familiar with the man, and so the questioning had the functional purpose of gathering information for the presbytery. Today it is more likely to be the case that everyone in the presbytery is acquainted with the man being ordained, and so the questioning is to some degree a formality; but it is a formality that needs to be done. Even if every man in the presbytery has heard the candidate’s views on all the appropriate points, it still is advisable that he again be asked those questions publicly. In the first place, even if we have no doubt as to the love of a couple being married, yet still it is necessary that they publicly affirm their love; so even if we have no doubts as to the candidate’s soundness, it is appropriate that he give public assent as to his belief in the doctrine and practice of the church and demonstrate his understanding of those principles. It is also good and safe that he particularly be questioned about any issues that currently may be troubling the church. Second, it is good for the candidate to be questioned for his own sake, so that all present may have no doubt as to where he stands. If he is carefully examined, then doubts are removed (if there were any), and he can be recommended to

brethren everywhere without reservation. Third, it is good to have a questioning for the sake of the hearers. It is always edifying for our people to hear the major points of our doctrine defended publicly, and oftentimes points are raised at an ordination that they might not otherwise hear discussed. There is no Scriptural requirement for a formal examination at an ordination, but time has shown that it is advisable that there be one; and our people would consider it unsafe and inappropriate to have an ordination without a questioning, and rightly so.

I will mention here one point about the man doing the questioning. In some areas of the country, the presbytery will heed any requests the candidate may have as to the brethren to be involved in the various parts of the ordination. For instance, if there is some elder who has been particularly close to him, the presbytery may grant his wish and appoint that brother to give the charge or pray the ordination prayer. I would insist that, while the presbytery may grant the candidate's wishes, it is still the presbytery's choice as to who will fulfill the various functions, and *not* the candidate's. These are requests only, and if the presbytery thinks another choice is advisable, then they should choose a different brother for that role. I also feel very strongly that the candidate should not even be asked as to whom he would like to have do the questioning. That choice should be reserved *solely* to the presbytery so that the ordination does not have appearance of collusion or impropriety. We do not want it to appear that "the fox was guarding the henhouse," so to speak. For instance, if particularly pointed questions needed to be asked because of certain issues troubling the churches in that area, and if the man doing the questioning were the choice of the candidate and were to omit those questions, then it might appear that the candidate had been "let off easy" by his hand-picked questioner, and we do not need to have such clouds hanging over our ordinations.

It is customary at our ordinations to have a charge, and often this is looked upon as the heart of the ordination, but that is not so. If the brother is not already well-informed as to his gospel responsibilities, then he is not ready to be ordained. Besides, many of us were in such a state of emotional shock at our ordinations that we scarcely remember anything that was said to us. However, it is a nice custom and is valuable in that we are reminded of the qualifications and responsibilities of the ministry – but it probably is of more immediate benefit to the congregation than to the candidate.

I would say finally that an ordination, whether of a deacon or an elder, is a very solemn and serious occasion and should be conducted as such. If ever there were a time when our demeanor should be with utmost gravity, it is here. To that end, a Moderator should be chosen by the presbytery who will insist upon and maintain good order and a proper atmosphere of solemnity and who will keep the proceedings moving along in an efficient manner so that the ordination does not become an endurance contest.

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ARTICLE 16

Elder Adam Green

A minister is a servant of God and a servant of God's people. As such, he is commanded to be obedient to God and to watch over the flock of God of which the Lord has made him an overseer, as well as a servant. Ministers are men "of like passions" as

any other, and at times any minister can get in a frame of mind so that he thinks that there is no obligation upon him to consider his brethren.

Should we consider our brethren, and in particular, should we consider their feelings in the matter of church fellowship? Obviously we should not be dishonest with them, as per Paul's withstanding of Peter in Galatians 2:12. But, the Apostle Paul was also the man who shaved his head and took a vow of purification in order to be considerate of the feelings of his Jewish brethren at Jerusalem (Acts 21:21-26). He obviously recognized that the feelings of his brethren were important.

I sometimes hear men say that other churches or ministers should not be allowed to react as to who they (the minister or his church) fellowship or preach or what practices they incorporate into their church functions. They claim that they are just following the Lord's personal direction and that those other brethren should not object or censure or avoid them for such actions. Well, as Deuteronomy 12:8 shows, it is a deplorable condition when men or churches are just "doing what is right in their own eyes." In fact, Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."

It is true that we are to obey God rather than men, but it is also true that we as God's ministers and God's church have a Scriptural responsibility to mark those that walk contrary to the doctrines and principles of God's church and who in so doing cause divisions and controversies among the Lord's people (Romans 16:17). This verse also says to avoid them. If a majority or strong multitude of good, sound, cautious brethren see certain men or ministers as causing division and trouble in the church and walking contrary to our doctrine (either doctrine of belief or doctrine of practice), then how would we have any right to ignore their counsel and tread on their concerns by continuing close fellowship with erring and divisive men? If a man rejects the counsel or objections of his brethren, he has no right to then object when they deem him unsafe for their congregations or fellowship because of his disregard for order and the safety of God's house, and especially the purity of God's church and His name.

When ministers or churches are maintaining ties of close fellowship with erring ministers and churches (especially asking the ministers to come preach), they cannot complain if they themselves are linked to that error in doctrine or practice because they put no distance between themselves and that error. Some will claim they are just taking "the middle ground," but eventually there comes a time when there is no middle ground. Is there any middle ground with the Progressives, or the Absoluters, or the Missionaries? Were I to put an advertisement for a Communist presidential candidate in my yard, a bumper sticker on my car, and attend a fundraising dinner for that candidate, could I really expect anyone to believe me if I said that I was not in support of that candidate and his principles? Truly, a man is known by the company he keeps (Amos 3:3).

Often brethren will bring up the subject of "laboring with" erring ministers and churches, and there is indeed legitimacy to that. We ought to labor with brethren in error, and attempt to save them from that error; but labor cannot go on forever. The Lord himself labored with the churches in Revelation 2, but please notice that several of those churches were given a timeline of "quickly," indicating that the labor would not go on indefinitely. It makes no sense when men have advocated a departure from orthodox principles for over a decade and still demand that others "labor with them" when no labor or objection in the past has ever been heeded. When it becomes obvious that a diseased

limb will not improve, it is removed from the body for the safety of the body. So it should also be with the Lord's church – we should not endanger the young and tender members of our congregations by giving divisive men the continued opportunity to influence or affect them. Enough is eventually enough.

If a man would have the fellowship of the Lord's church (which is made up of local assemblies), then he should consider his brethren, and seek their good and not their harm. As another elder once said, "It is reasonable that we expect our brethren to give us the benefit of the doubt; we all make honest mistakes. It is *not* reasonable that we demand from them a 'blank check.' It is *not* reasonable that we ask them to conclude from our pattern of conduct that which no reasonable person could conclude. If we expect brethren to walk with us, then we cannot walk in a manner that causes them discomfort, deliberately trampling upon their feelings without any good reason." I agree wholeheartedly with those sentiments. Seek ye first the kingdom of God. We serve God by serving His children, as Matthew 25 plainly states.

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ARTICLE 17

Elders James Isaacs and Mark Green

We sometimes hear the question, "Is it proper for a minister to baptize someone without baptizing that person into the fellowship of a particular church?" To this I would answer an unhesitating and emphatic, "No, it is *not* proper."

Jesus commanded those who would become His disciples, "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt. 16.24). Baptism is the first act of *gospel* obedience. Gospel obedience is submission to those commands which were given by Christ and by the apostles as they wrote to the various churches and church members. Whatever the apostles bound on earth was bound in heaven, meaning that the commands given to the saints by the apostles when under the inspiration of the Spirit had divine sanction; it was altogether as if they had been spoken directly by God. We obey gospel commands in the gospel kingdom. The gospel kingdom in its visible phase is the New Testament church. It is to the church that the rules and regulations of the kingdom were given. If a man would follow Christ, he must follow Him in His *visible* kingdom, submitting himself to Christ's gospel commands. If he is not willing to do this, then can he *really* be said to be submissive to Christ?

Paul, in Romans 7, charges the believers to be married to Christ. Marriage means to take an obligation to commit oneself to a spouse for the durations of our lives. That commitment is to be expressed in a legally recognized ceremony. I know of no society which grants a divorce prior to a marriage ceremony. An individual who expresses himself as wishing to be baptized without becoming a member of any local church is asking to have a marriage ceremony performed upon the condition that he will not in fact be married when the ceremony is complete; or, he expresses himself as being divorced prior to the wedding. This then becomes a wedding for the wedding's sake. It is no marriage at all. Would we not consider a wedding ceremony carried out with all the usual ceremony to be a solemn mockery if we knew beforehand that the bride and groom had no intention of ever living together? How much more would be the case when an individual comes to a gospel minister asking that a ceremony be performed which is

ordinarily considered to be that whereby one becomes a member of the Lord's visible Bride, but with absolutely no intention that church membership would be attached to the ceremony. It is to make a mockery of the Lord's church and His ordinance.

Gospel obedience involves placing oneself "at risk." Not only do we expose ourselves to persecution from without, but to gospel sanction from within the church. We submit ourselves to the review of our brethren regarding our day-to-day conduct. One who is not willing to be under the possibility of gospel sanction by the church has not really denied himself and cannot truly be said to have become a disciple.

If we baptize people without placing them in the fellowship of a local church, then we deny the church the right and ability to carry out discipline upon those who have been baptized. The most severe discipline the church can impose upon its members is excommunication or exclusion. Furthermore, the church has no right of gospel discipline in any regard upon those who are outside the church. We cannot place outside the church someone who is outside already. One who is baptized, but who does not join himself to the church, is not subject to church discipline. (Some might sarcastically say that that is a most "convenient" arrangement – and they would be right.) Such a person wants the name but not the responsibilities. It is a fundamental principle of gospel obedience that no one has a right to the name without being subject to the laws of the kingdom, and no one is subject to the laws of the kingdom if he is not IN the kingdom. Isaiah spoke of those who said, "We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach" (Is. 4.1). They want the name of "Christian" but they do not want to be subject to the discipline of the kingdom of Christ – again, a very "convenient" situation, is it not? Does a person who wants to be baptized but who does not want to be subject to church discipline *really* desire to deny himself? Why would a minister of the gospel baptize anyone who was not willing to deny himself to the extent of walking in *gospel* obedience? How could we rightly claim to believe in church discipline if we would baptize someone who was not willing to make himself subject to church discipline?

Baptism means something. Some try to make it everything; some try to make it nothing; some try to make it anything; but certainly it means something. However, we make baptism virtually meaningless when we disconnect it from gospel obedience in the kingdom of Christ. What has someone done who has been immersed but who has not come into the kingdom? He has gotten wet; he may have relieved his conscience; he may have thought he took to himself the name "Christian;" but he did *not* come into the visible kingdom of Christ. Why should we baptize someone who was not willing to come into the kingdom?

Certainly the Lord placed great emphasis upon baptism. It must have some definite purpose. Surely Jesus did not place such emphasis upon the ordinance and then leave it up to each individual to decide what it means in his case. If we were to adopt the position that baptism is whatever we want it to be, in complete abandonment of its God-given meaning, then maybe we could baptize without church authority. Otherwise, we must stick to the pattern. Does it seem reasonable that God, the great Creator of order, would just leave up to each individual to decide what baptism would mean to him? I have to believe that whatever God intended baptism to mean to one individual, it must mean to **every** individual who is baptized.

When this topic is discussed, the case of Philip and the eunuch invariably is raised. “What church did the eunuch join?” it is asked. To this I would reply that Philip received a direct command from heaven to “join thyself to this chariot” and to proceed as he did. If a man has a similar direct authorization from heaven itself, then he would have a right to proceed as Philip did; but I will say now that if he claims such an authorization I will not believe him. Besides, who can say how Philip instructed the eunuch? He obviously taught him about the duty of baptism, and who can say that he did not also teach about church membership? The case of Philip and the eunuch is no pattern for us. Unless the preacher is sent directly by the Spirit to an inquiring individual and is caught away by the Spirit when his mission is accomplished, he cannot claim this incident as his pattern. We have every reason to believe that the eunuch came under the authority of the Jerusalem church and no reason to think otherwise. We do know from history that the Church of the Lord Jesus was very active in Ethiopia for at least a couple of centuries, and we have historical reason to believe that it started from this eunuch. It is not reasonable to assume that he just was baptized and never came under the oversight of a local church.

I can think of few things that would lead to more utter confusion in the church than the practice of baptizing people without their becoming church members. What is their status? How are we to regard them? Does such baptism bestow any privileges? (The answer to that last question is NO!) Such a situation would breed an unending series of baffling questions. Confusion is one of the great enemies of the church. That which is disorderly by its nature will lead to confusion. Therefore, anything that by its very nature leads to confusion must be disorder.

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ARTICLE 18

“Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tm. 5.22).

I think it is significant that this command says “*no* man.” It does not say most men or a majority of the men. It forbids that hands be laid on any man “suddenly.” We are tempted sometimes to make exceptions to that rule, but it is a universal rule and allows no deviations. We are *never* to lay hands suddenly upon a man.

The reason that we are not to lay hands suddenly upon a man is that if we do we would be partakers of his sins should he stray. If we should get in a hurry and not follow the divinely-inspired injunction, and then that man who was ordained to the ministry were to go astray and cause hurt and confusion among the churches, we would have been partakers of his sins, or would have put him in a position to do harm to the cause.

Caution is the watchword in the ordination of a minister. It is easy to see why men sometimes get in a hurry and take shortcuts in the process of the recognition and ordination of a minister. In many areas the churches are woefully lacking in ministerial gifts and need preachers badly. When someone begins to manifest a gift, there is understandable joy among the brethren and it is human nature sometimes to get in a hurry; but this is a tendency we must resist, for it will lead only to trouble.

How long is long enough? How long does it take before the laying on of hands would not be “sudden” and would thus fulfill the Scriptural guideline? Paul gives us an

answer in the qualifications for deacons: “Let them first be proved.” The time required is time enough for the brother in question to have manifested to the satisfaction - even of the more cautious of the brethren - that he is sound in doctrine, sober in judgment, upright in character and that in all other respects he meets the scriptural qualifications. Paul told Timothy, “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,” etc. One thing that must be proven is the brother’s “manner of life.” Is he a faithful man? Is he thoughtful and careful, or is he rash and careless? Does he rule his own house well? It takes more than just a few days to see how a man will act under gospel responsibilities. We are not looking for how he acted in a situation or two, but for evidence of his “manner of life,” that is, the pattern of his life. It should be emphasized that the “proving” here is not how the man acted as a worker or husband or friend before he joined the church, but how he has acted under the burdens and responsibilities *within* the gospel kingdom.

One of the times when there is a particular temptation to rush the process is when a brother comes among us who has been preaching for some other religious order. He already has experience at public efforts and so his gift may be more readily manifested than some young man just beginning. Still, that is no reason for us to rush things along. If he is indeed a humble servant of the Lord, then he will not object to the scriptural pattern being followed. If he objects to due prudence, then that should throw up a “caution flag” to us. Think back for yourselves: how many times have men come among us from other orders with considerable preaching gifts, but who were not really committed to the practice and order of God’s house, and who caused much trouble among us further along? It seems reasonable to me that such a situation should demand *more* caution, not less, for it is very easy for the members to get carried away with such a man’s gift so that they do not objectively examine the conduct and attitudes of the brother involved. On the other hand, it also should be noted that some of our ablest and most sound and faithful men have come to us from other orders, so their gifts should not be neglected any more than any other brother’s; but in all cases prudence and care should be shown to follow the constraints of the guidelines laid out for us by the apostle.

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ARTICLE 19

“But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name” (3 Jn. 14).

With this verse the apostle John ended his third general epistle. I want to notice particularly his expression, “Greet the friends *by name*.” The individuals of whom John was speaking were those whom he knew and loved and to whom he wished to have his personal regard communicated. If we think of a group of people as a general mass, our regard for them may likewise be only general; but when we think of people individually, our concern for them is elevated and enhanced. We need to remember the saints “by name.”

I am blessed to be able to travel among the brethren across the country, and it is embarrassing when I meet good brethren and sisters whom I have seen a number of times before and whose faces I know well, but whose names I cannot remember. This is a great failing of mine. I console myself with the fact that I do not see them often and that there

is a great number of them altogether. Nothing excuses me, however, from not knowing the members of the churches I serve. I believe it would help us greatly if each member kept a copy of the membership roll of the church. From time to time we can try to pray for the next person on the list. That way we know that over time we will be thinking individually of every member of the church. As we think of them individually and try to pray for them, we are reminded of their difficulties in life, their problems, their weaknesses, and are able to bear those things before the throne of grace.

The rolls of membership of our local churches are very important documents. On them are listed the names of those who are members in good standing in that local body. One of the most important duties of the church clerk is to keep the membership roll current and accurate, including the date each person joined and whether it was by baptism, letter or relation. *Every person* on that roll is subject to the discipline of that local body, and every person on that roll is obligated to keep the church covenant (to the extent that he is physically and mentally able).

Slack discipline is an epidemic problem among our churches. I am ashamed to have to admit that, but my candid observation has confirmed it. Far too often members forsake the assembly, and because they are not with the assembly, the other members allow them to drift from their minds. Frequently even more flagrant offenses are ignored. It is easy to ignore people who are out of our minds, but if we are praying individually and personally for people, it is impossible to ignore them. If, while we pray for them, we are reminded that members of our home church have slipped from the path of duty and righteousness, it ought to disturb us. Being disturbed about it ought to cause us to do something about it, both for the good of the individuals involved and for the health of the body. If every member of every Old Baptist church had a membership roll and prayed regularly for those on it, I believe it would help remedy the slackness of our discipline.

In conclusion, I will warn against a tendency of many of our brethren to regard the forsaking of the assembly as a minor infraction not worthy of exclusion. In the first place, it is obvious that the apostle Paul did not so regard it. In Hebrews 10.25, he uses this language: “For (connecting it to what went before) if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” This is strong language. The particular sin that he has just mentioned in the preceding verse, which is connected to the 25th verse by the word “for,” is the forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. Paul did not consider that a small matter. In the second place, those who forsake the assembly place themselves in grave danger, for almost inevitably they will wander into more serious offenses because of their absence from the house of God. In the third place, a covenant is a solemn responsibility, and our church covenants are the most serious of all. Those who covenant not to forsake the assembly, and then do so, are covenant breakers, which is a major offense. Those who said they would faithfully attend their church meetings, and then have neglected to do so, have not been truthful. If we would begin to regard this offense, not as “non-attendance,” but as covenant breaking and lying, it might seem more serious to us – as serious as it is in fact.

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ARTICLE 20

It is often overlooked, but much that goes to constitute good order in the church is in the hands of the clerk, and thus the selection of a church clerk is a most important matter. This must be someone who is careful about detail and who will follow up his responsibilities and see things to a proper conclusion.

The clerk is in charge of the maintenance of the official records of the church. That is his responsibility on a continual basis. It is a good practice to have someone appointed as his assistant should he be absent, and this person also should be familiar with the duties of the clerk. After the reading of the minute of each conference, the church should correct (if necessary) and approve the minute, after which it becomes the official record of the church conference and a part of the history of the church. The church members should listen carefully as the minute is read, and if they hear a discrepancy or something that needs to be made clearer, they should speak up. If, as has often happened, there is a disagreement within the body and reference is made to the church's actions in past conferences, the minute is the approved record of what happened. At that point it is too late for members to be claiming, "That is not what really happened." They should have pointed out the error when the minute was read.

It is very helpful to the clerk if the Rules of Decorum are followed strictly. Most of our churches have rules that govern how conference is to be conducted, and if they are followed it makes the clerk's job much easier. For example, some of our Rules of Decorum state that only one member is to speak at a time, and he is to *rise to his feet* and address the Moderator. When the speaker rises, it allows the Clerk to see who is talking and to hear him more clearly.

The church minutes constitute a most important document and should be treated as such. The clerk has the duty of seeing to their preservation and should keep them in a safe place. Every member of the church has access to the church records at will, but each should remember that the clerk has the duty of protecting them and so he must use due care and good judgment in watching over them. It is critical that all members understand that the records are the property of the church and not of the clerk. It has sometimes been the case that the clerk died and the church was not careful to have the minutes promptly returned, and in time the clerk's family began to regard them as their personal property, which absolutely is not the case. Given the number of church records that have been lost in fires over the years, it is a good practice to have photocopies made of them that can be stored in a different location from the original.

If possible, the clerk should take the time to familiarize himself with the complete records of the church, going back as far as they are available. The minutes constitute a rich history, and it is good to have at least one person in the church who has a good working knowledge of that record.

It is vitally important that the clerk keep an up-to-date record of the membership of the body, which should include when and how each joined and when and how each left the membership, if applicable. As each member is subject to the discipline of the church and responsible to keep the church covenant, and as the church has a responsibility to see that each member is doing that, a current membership roll is critical.

The clerk is the correspondent for the church. Where there are letters to be written to sister churches, to the association, or to individuals, it is the clerk's duty to compose

and send those letters, keeping a record of what was sent. They should be clear, to the point, should avoid any language that might be misconstrued, and should express only the church's intent, not the clerk's personal viewpoint.

One of the great tragedies among our people is the disappearance of the records of churches that have disbanded or ceased to meet. How much of our history has just disappeared when the minutes of those churches were lost? Over the last few years I have been given a portion of the records of several such churches which were in northwest Arkansas, probably because different people knew I have a keen interest in church history. I had kept them together at my home, but recently I became convicted that I should not be treating them as my personal property, even if those churches no longer existed. So, in a service recently, I formally presented them to our conscientious clerk, Deacon Danny Pippin, to be regarded as the property of Six Mile Creek Church, unless and until any of those churches should be revived.

Good, efficient clerks are a great benefit to any church. Much of the "keeping things in good order" falls to their responsibility. It is easy for us to take them for granted, but having been a clerk many years ago for a brief time, I can assure the readers that it is no easy task, especially if done right. We should appreciate those in the clerk function and esteem their work highly.

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ARTICLE 21

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tm. 2.11-12).

For any church blatantly to disobey a plain command from God's word is directly detrimental to the interests of that church. When we disobey God's word we do not edify or build up the church, but we do her damage.

Our text is very plain. It would be difficult to misinterpret. The woman is to learn in silence and in subjection, and is not permitted to teach. Of what situation is this speaking? Certainly the command not to teach is not applicable to the home, for there she is responsible to teach her children. The older women are to teach the younger women to live honorable and useful lives, both from a natural standpoint and as citizens of the kingdom of God. All this is done privately, however. When the church is met together, the women are to keep silent; they are not to teach. That this is true is clearly seen from Paul's writing to the Corinthians: "Let your women keep silence *in the churches*: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." Not only are they expressly forbidden to teach, but also to ask questions publicly regarding the preaching. "And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." Notice that Paul says that it is a *shameful* thing for sisters to be speaking in the church services.

Just so you did not miss the point, let me restate the commands of the apostle Paul. Sisters are not permitted to teach or to ask questions in the church services, but are to remain silent.

In our text, the word "teach" has as one of its meanings "to explain or expound a thing." The word *expound* means "to set forth or state in detail; to explain; interpret." So, for a woman to explain the Scriptures or to give her interpretation of them in front of the

body is *expressly forbidden*. I want to emphasize that: Paul forbade the sisters from giving their views of Scripture before the church or from asking questions about the Scriptures before the church. At this point it may be objected that Priscilla was involved in teaching Apollos the way of God more perfectly. True, but this was in a private capacity. “And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” Priscilla and Aquila had heard Apollos preach and had perceived an error in his preaching, so they took him “unto them,” that is, they took him aside privately, and explained to him the true meaning of the passage of Scripture under consideration. This was not a violation of “keeping silence *in the churches*.”

It should be very clear from the writings of the apostle Paul that when we have a church service (regardless of the day of the week or the place where it is held) in which we permit and encourage the sisters to give their views upon Bible passages and to publicly ask questions about them before the body, we are in direct violation of the Scriptures. **No type of service that is in direct violation of the Scriptures can be beneficial to the church.**

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ARTICLE 22

Elder Philip N. Conley

Many today like the sound of “progress” in different areas and fields. Our society is geared to the progress of science, technology, business, economy and finance. What is meant by “progress” in these fields? Progress is defined as “advancement or achievement towards a particular goal or an improvement of state from inferior to superior.” By the very definition of the word, we can easily discern its appeal to man and society. Anything that improves our state will be appealing, as that makes for happier environs than before. But, what should be the perception of “progress” in the church?

Whenever the subject of progress is bantered about in the realm of church discussion, several things seem to come up over and over. We will attempt to discuss two of these things and to show that the Lord’s church was established correctly without any need of course-correction along the way. The first thought that comes out is, “Well, we are all sinners, and we need to progress better each day.” Indeed, the thought portrayed is a correct one, but the scope of its application needs to be honed and well-defined. When we speak of sinners being in the church, I must say, “Verily, amen.” I do trust that we are penitent sinners that are seeking to follow after righteousness, but sinners nonetheless. However, we must take great care to limit our discussion of progress to individual (personal) progress instead of church progress.

Our Lord declares in Matthew 16:18 that His church (founded upon Himself) would stand with the gates of hell never prevailing against her. So, either we take our Lord at His word that the church has forever been in this earth (in spirit and in truth) or we do not. Likewise, our Lord established her with all things that were necessary for her for ALL time. Should we feel that something is needed today that was not needed then, we accuse our Lord of short-changing His bride all these years. Should we say that something is not necessary, we accuse Him of over-burdening her all those years. If we talk of our own personal shortcomings, we are speaking of how we have short-changed or

over-burdened the church by our actions. May we seek to change our ways and not the Lord's bride.

Since the Lord has given His bride all that is necessary for her in this world with a complete Book of furnishings (II Timothy 3:16-17), let us look and examine the other thought that comes forth quite often: "Well, what does it hurt?" If we try to bring in our own thoughts of "bettering" the church and must resort to asking what the harm is, then we have already admitted being in the wrong. For example, when someone brings to light advancement in technology, the first thing he talks about is how his advancement will help the particular application that it will be used in. Paul exhorted Titus to "affirm" some things constantly (Titus 3:8). To speak in the affirmative designates that we are talking of things that help the cause, not how they are not harmful to the cause.

However, should one still persist in asking, "What does it hurt?" let us dig a little deeper to see how we should approach such issues. Man may say, "A musical instrument will not hurt the service, but will make the singing more pleasing to the ear. Separating the children will put them in an environment more suitable for teaching them. Having programs and plays will bring people into the church that would not come otherwise. What do these things hurt?" Quite frankly, they may hurt greatly when one considers what the Lord's church is compared to. The Lord's church is over and over compared to the Lord's bride (see Ephesians 5 for Paul's comparison). What if a man told another man that his wife needed a facelift? What is the harm in that? Honestly, my demeanor and temper are less likely to be restrained when abuses and assaults are hurled at my bride than when hurled directly at me.

The "what does it hurt" question also gives us (at least by inference) more wisdom than God. When someone asks what the harm is in musical instruments in worship, they are basically charging our Husband and Bridegroom with lack of wisdom on the best music that can be offered, as He is pleased with the offerings of our lips (Col. 3:16; Hebrews 13:15-16). When they ask what the harm is in separating children from the adults, they are saying that God's method of preaching to one congregation cannot teach as well as separation of the body. When someone desires to gain members by programs and plays, they are saying that the attractions of mammon are better for the church than the Lord's invitation of "Come and see" (John 1).

Oh, beloved, may our progress be daily and minute by moment in our personal endeavors! But, may our course in a "church sense" be tried and fast built upon the earnest contention for the faith once delivered to the saints. Since there are no more deliveries or updates for the church (faith given one time), may we stand firmly upon those precepts and not add our own inventions and designs or take away from the beauty wherewith our Lord has decked her. In Isaiah 4:1, we read of seven women that want Christ's name but not His bread or apparel. Today, may we eat the bread of His doctrine, and wear the apparel of His practice. In so doing, we can then declare what the benefits are of the Lord's design and not have to stoop to asking, "What does it hurt?"

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ARTICLE 23

Primitive Baptists have long emphasized that the three components of the worship service – and the only three – are preaching, praying and singing. Because they are all part of the worship, it should be emphasized that our conduct in all three should be worshipful and reverent. We are in the presence of God and should act like it. In fact, that is a very sobering question that we ought regularly to ask ourselves in the worship service: “Would I be acting as I am if Jesus Christ were here bodily?”

The song service ought not to be a warm-up session while the congregation assembles and gets in the mood to focus upon God. It *is* worship and ought to be regarded as such. If it is not worship, then we ought to leave it off. If we do not act in a worshipful manner during the song service, then we would have a hard time making the case that it is worship.

We should get to church on time so that we can get finished with whatever visitation we feel is necessary *before* time for the song service to begin. Tardiness is a great hindrance to proper devotion. Once the moderator or the song leader calls the services to order, it is time to focus upon God. The song service is NOT a performance and it is NOT entertainment and ought not to be regarded as such. It is the responsibility of the song leader to make sure everyone knows the next hymn to be sung, to get it started in a proper manner, to try to keep the congregation together, and past that, to disappear. He is leading in the worship service, not directing music, and that should always be remembered. Since the song service is worship, hymns never should be selected because “I like the music” or because “it is fun to sing.” The music that counts is that which we are making in our hearts. If the sentiment or the character of a song is not appropriate for worship, then it should not be sung. While I am on that subject, in my humble opinion, the compilers of hymnbooks have done us a great disservice by including in hymnbooks numbers which are not appropriate for the worship service. If they are in the book, they inevitably will be selected sooner or later by someone, and many will be called frequently; and the song service may disintegrate into something other than worship. Hymns that are too difficult for the general congregation should be left off, for if the people are having to concentrate on the music, then they are not concentrating on the words, and so have ceased to worship.

The man who is leads in public prayer has a solemn responsibility, for he is speaking to God on behalf of the congregation and in their hearing. For that reason, he should speak loudly so that the congregation can hear. It is best for him to move to some central point, preferably toward the front. All public prayer should be in a reverent tone. Personally, I prefer for our brethren use the archaic pronoun and verb forms at points in their prayer, for whatever else the language of King James’ time is to us, it certainly would be considered formal language by us today. Public prayer should be formal in tone, never casual. We do not “chat” with the Sovereign of the universe. I recognize that some of our brethren with physical restrictions have difficulty in kneeling, but I have found that that physical posture helps me to be in a proper frame of mind, and I think it helps to emphasize to the congregation our submission to God. Again, the song service and the prayer are no less a part of worship than is the preaching, and they ought not to be treated as a “warm-up” period. The time to get ready for worship is before we reach the meeting place.

Finally, I would emphasize that the preaching service is indeed worship. The man of God should be describing to us the nature and works of God, our relationship to Him, and our duty to Him because of that relationship. The more we understand about God, the more we should be in wonder and awe at His infinite Person, resplendent as it is in glory and majesty. Good preaching will help us to that end, and we ought to give close heed to the minister, since he is speaking as an ambassador for Christ.

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ARTICLE 24

Speaking in general terms, what are the causes of disorder? What causes good order in the church to be set aside?

1. Probably the first cause we could name is ignorance. Many churches and church members violate principles of good order simply because they do not realize that those things ought to be or that they are important. Perhaps that was the main reason that prompted me to initiate this series of articles: the desire to make our people aware of the need for care in maintaining good order and what goes to make up that order. I suspect that we ministers have failed to teach about the subject of order as we ought to, especially over the last couple of generations. After all, it is not a very exciting subject, and it is one that necessarily tends to shed light on problems that exist within and between churches. Many members simply do not wish to learn about it and consequently many pastors do not spend much time on the subject.

2. A second factor that causes men to set aside good order is the fact that they get in a hurry. They are eager to accomplish some goal that may be in itself laudable, but in order to get to the goal they take shortcuts that the Scripture does not justify and that cause their brethren to look upon their efforts with a critical eye. However, eagerness toward a good end does not justify cutting corners in the process. As we have tried to emphasize in these articles, those processes are there for a reason, and bypassing them leads at least to confusion and possibly to being in direct violation of Scripture. A rash and careless attitude by ministers has caused no end of harm to the church in every generation, and ours is no different. “Slow down and do it the right way” ought to be our motto as we go forward in the kingdom of God.

3. A third cause of disorder is the view that the end justifies the means. This attitude was very evident in the division between our people and the Missionaries. When men become very zealous toward some cause, there is a tendency to neglect to be careful about how things are done in that cause. “We should not be too particular about the details,” some would claim; but they forget the old saying that “the devil is in the details,” or in this case, in the ignoring of the details. Paul told Timothy, “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” To strive for “masteries” or to accomplish things in a cause is a worthwhile ambition, but Paul warns the young preacher that it *did* matter how he did things. “Lawfully” is an adverb that tells how the striving was to be done. Timothy would not be crowned (would not receive the approval of God) unless he went about his striving in the proper manner.

4. Finally, one fruitful cause of disorder in the church is a disregard for precedent, or how things have been done in the past. Precedent in itself is neither here nor there, for how things were done in the past might be entirely wrong. However, we are not speaking

here of how things have been done in worldly institutions, but in the church of Jesus Christ, which body has been blessed down through time with men of wisdom. To disregard casually the accumulated wisdom of the ages is dangerous, to say the least. To proceed with an attitude of contempt for how our forefathers did things is suicidal and will lead to confusion and disorder sooner or later.

Occasionally we see what I will call “anti-traditionalism” rear its head in the church. Men with this viewpoint seem to delight in doing things differently just to prove that they can do it. They seem to have the attitude that if it is traditional, then it must be wrong. We do not need that attitude in the church. Men can make mistakes, of course, and our forefathers were only men, but an *attitude* of contempt toward the old brethren is dangerous to the highest degree. Those who went before us already have endured whatever trials they faced, and whatever they learned can be for our safety if we take heed to it. If we, through a contemptuous way of thinking, cast aside what they learned through hard experience, then we are likely doomed to repeat those same mistakes and suffer the same consequences. May God deliver us from that!

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ARTICLE 25

One of the temptations to disorder (particularly in a “progressive” direction) is the desire of church members and minister to have an “active” church. The problem is that many cast their eyes about to the religious orders of the world and see the noise and clamor of those institutions and conclude that, by comparison, Old Baptist churches are asleep. Some of our churches are no doubt in a lukewarm Laodicean state, and that is to be lamented and certainly should not be excused; but that does not mean that the absence of things done by the Progressives and Missionaries means that an Old Baptist church is not active.

Primitive Baptists have long been very particular to define “good works” as those that the Lord has commanded. Because they were not commanded by the Lord or the apostles, we have not believed that the long “laundry list” of activities invented by the world’s religions meet that definition. We do not feel guilty for not engaging in those activities because we do not believe they meet the scriptural criteria for “good works.”

The activities of the early church were severely simple. “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2.42). There is nothing of the fluff and bluster of the world’s religions in that, is there? They met to hear the doctrines of the Bible proclaimed, to observe the Lord’s supper, and to pray. We find in Paul’s writings that they also sang hymns of praise. They cared for one another in a natural way, seeing after the welfare of the elderly and disadvantaged. That is pretty simple, is it not?

One reason that some Old Baptists are tempted to think that our churches are not “active” is that many things done in our churches are not readily visible. Can you see worship? Can you observe the thoughts of God’s people? We sit quietly and sing hymns of praise without instrumental accompaniment, and some say, “That is very boring; they are not doing anything.” Well, if meditating upon the goodness and grace of God as depicted by the lyrics of the hymns is boring to you, then so be it – but it IS worship; and if a congregation is singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord, then they are actively engaged in something which the church was specifically commanded to do. It is

not flashy; it is not entertaining in a worldly sense; but it is worship, and it is proper to be done in the church because it is commanded, and those who are fervently engaged in that are active in the Lord's service.

For a moment, let us enumerate some of the things in which an active church definitely should be engaged. First, we certainly ought to be a praying people. The Lord himself commanded us to go into our closets and pray, and we should cultivate that habit – daily. If we are in our closets, then it is not something that others are going to observe, but it will be something in which we are active. A praying church is an active church. If you do not know enough people who are in need of the blessing of the Lord, just ask someone else about those of his acquaintance. It takes no time at all to have more names than we can “shake a stick at.” There is no end of trouble in this low ground of sin and sorrow, and so there is no end of troubled people who would appreciate being remembered in prayer.

Next, we certainly should give time daily to reading and meditating upon God's word. We need to consider carefully the things in the holy Scriptures and turn them over in our minds. It is my considered opinion that the reason we hear so much clamor today for “Bible studies” is that people are not studying their Bibles privately, and so they try to find a crutch and an excuse by which they can get others to do for them that which they ought to be doing themselves. If a church member were to carefully consider and meditate upon the texts and topics to which the preacher referred at the last meeting, and to pursue those lines of thought in related texts, it would provide a fertile field for his studies and private meditations until the next meeting.

One other thing we need to be doing is visiting the disabled and discouraged in the churches. I have publicly challenged the young people where I serve to do this. I have told them that the statement that there is nothing for young people in the Primitive Baptist church is an outright, malicious lie. Once you have visited all the elderly, the infirm, the shut-ins in your home church – if you have any time left – contact the pastors and deacons of neighboring churches and see if they have any members that need to be visited. This is pure and undefiled religion – to visit the widows. Do we do it? I am not asking if we talk about it or admit that we ought to do it. ***Do we do it?*** Until we are doing it, we cannot say that we need something new to do in order to be “active.”

Now, brethren, I think I have outlined a “program” here that will keep most anyone busy on a fulltime basis while being engaged only in things that our people always have endorsed and that are thoroughly scriptural and therefore in good order. If we have a church full of people that are praying as they should, reading their Bibles as they should and visiting the widows as they should, then we have an ***active*** church. I do not know about your daily schedule, but if I were to be doing those things as I ought to, there would not be very much time left – no time left for me to get into mischief and indulge my flesh in worldly lusts. Do those three simple things, and you have an active church – indeed, a *very* active church.

There are many people who think that the only things that are zealous are things that are novel or that are calculated to advertise the church and make it popular – but we want no such new things in the church, and we do not have to bring new things into the church in order for the church to be active.

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ARTICLE 26

Elder Adam Green

A question of importance to the church is that of the minister or pastor. As the Scriptures give us answers to other questions of church function and order, we can expect to find the answers we need in regard to this subject also. How much authority is the minister to have over the church, and in what way is that authority to be exercised?

In Acts 20:26-28, the Apostle Paul spoke to the elders of the church at Ephesus and reminded them of his faithfulness to teach all the counsel of God. He then went on to tell them to “take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” The apostle referred to the elders (obviously ministers, since they were to feed the flock) as the overseers of the church. They were made overseers of the church by the Holy Ghost’s calling them to preach and placing a burden on them to serve the church which was among them, and the church’s recognizing and sanctifying that gift and authority by ordination. So then, they had authority to act as overseers.

What is an overseer? First of all, it is a man “charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly.” It is a curator, a guardian, or a superintendent. The overseer is not the owner, nor the lord, nor the boss. He has the oversight of the church (1 Pt. 5:2), and in that manner is to rule. 1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of the importance of an elder ruling well. The overseer has the authority to preside over the affairs of the church as an undershepherd, and his responsibility is to rule through application of the Scriptures in such a way that the church is brought to recognize and hopefully to follow the commandment of the Great Shepherd and Head of the church, Christ Jesus. The rule and oversight of the minister or pastor is centered around the ministry of the word. At the same time that he oversees the church, he is serving them in the presentation of Gospel truths to them. He is to ensure that what the church believes and practices is in accordance with the revealed dictates of the Word of God. “Thus saith the pastor” is not the standard by which he is to rule, but “thus saith the Lord.” He rules by teaching, exhorting, reproof and rebuking. “Follow me as I follow Christ” should be his motto.

Another aspect of the authority of the overseer or pastor is found in the recognition that an overseer is a guardian – in this case specifically the guardian of the welfare of souls. The minister is not responsible for the eternal salvation of any man’s soul, since that burden and authority was placed solely upon the shoulders of the Captain of our Salvation, Jesus Christ (John 17:2). However, as Hebrews 13:17 tells us, the minister is responsible for the welfare and good of the souls under his watchful care in the church he serves. A soul in error, whether an error of lifestyle, belief or church practice, is a soul that is harmed and in danger of losing some of the benefits of his fellowship with God and possibly all the benefits of being a part of God’s visible church. When a minister sees a danger to the church as a whole somewhere out on the horizon (possibly from some propagated error outside the church) or a problem within the church, he will be stirred up and will desire to preach and teach on that, either to the church as a body or in conversation to those particularly at risk. The church should heed this act of legitimate pastoral rule, and follow the admonition and guidance as it is Scriptural.

What a minister or pastor is not to be is the boss of the church or a lord over God’s heritage (1 Pt. 5:3). The minister is not to have sole authority over every decision

that is made by the church. Should the pastor have the final say as to who preaches to the church? Yes, for that is part of the oversight and guardianship of the church. Should the pastor decide how much money the church gives to him or to any visiting minister, what color carpet the church has, or what the menu is for the lunch meal? No. If all financial and administrative decisions of a church have to flow through the pastor before any action is taken, then that church has serious problems and is headed toward a dictatorship. The pastor is not to be the sole authority and final arbiter in matters of church discipline nor in matters of the church's choosing who is to be ordained. While it is appropriate for a pastor to object to the church's calling for the ordination of a man he truly believes is not qualified, it is reprehensible for a pastor to push for the ordination of a man that the church does not believe should be ordained or to ordain anyone without the consent and prior review and action of the church. Those are just some simple and noticeable ways in which a man may try to lord over God's church.

We should never go to either extreme in this subject. The church should not "run over" the pastor or fail to heed his guidance and follow his oversight and Godly rule, but at the same time the minister or pastor should never set himself up as the dictator of the church and insist that everything be according to his personal preferences. We should follow the pattern given to us in the Scriptures and avoid tendencies to follow one extreme or the other. God's way is still the best way, and always will be.

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ARTICLE 27

There is a relationship between truth and peace. The prophet condemned men who claimed that there was peace where none existed. God has forever placed in the nature of truth an antagonism toward error. The two cannot co-exist peacefully. "What communion hath light with darkness?" the apostle Paul asked. The apostle John very pointedly commanded, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." Those who stand for truth are forbidden to aid and abet religiously those who propagate error.

Ahab claimed that it was faithful Elijah who was troubling Israel by opposing wickedness. The prophet answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord." Those who depart from the truth of the Scriptures, whether it be in doctrine, practice or order, are the ones who bring trouble to the church.

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. One of her prime responsibilities is to uphold the truth that was once delivered to the saints. When she begins to compromise the truth, she has set aside her God-given duty. Therefore, the church cannot ever be at peace with error. If a body of people ever begins to do that, then at some point they will cease to be the true church, for the true church upholds truth.

Order is the procedural machinery within the church which allows it to function efficiently and correctly in its task of upholding truth and opposing error. Error may spring up at any time through the efforts of malicious or confused men, but it can take root only when good order in the church breaks down. Those who sneer at order and consider it to be unimportant are implying that truth is so insignificant that the body that is commanded to uphold it need not be in good health and functioning correctly.

Peace is *not* the ultimate object of the church. She greatly desires to have peace, but if she is ever to oppose error, then she will not always enjoy it. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword,” our Lord instructed us. Even if the foes of truth come from within our own household, we are to stand for truth. Peace is desirable, but peace is not always possible. **When peace is not possible without surrendering truth, then truth must predominate over peace.** We may surrender peace when it is necessary, but we are never given license to surrender truth.

The “peace” of error is the peace of death. We may have peace because we are agreed in the truth, and that is a wonderful situation; but we may also have what is *called* peace because we have neglected to oppose error forthrightly. Surrender to error is not scriptural peace. If we would ever have true peace, then we must contend for the truth. The word “contend” contains in it the idea that at times we will have to strive against error.

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ARTICLE 28

One of the key elements of good order within the borders of the church is the principle that each person is to be a member of only one local congregation at a time. There is a very good reason for this. The kingdom of God cannot function without the maintenance of good discipline, for without it there would be no way to assure good behavior and sound doctrine and practice within the bounds of the kingdom. Bad behavior and unsound doctrine are so damaging to the church and reflect so negatively upon the name of the Head of the church that He has commanded us, if the departure is flagrant enough, “with such an one, no not to eat.” That “eating” refers not to natural meals, but to the Lord’s Supper. We are not to take the Lord’s Supper with someone whose conduct is disorderly or immoral or whose doctrine is heretical. Therefore, those who are guilty of those things must be placed outside the church, since the most precious of the privileges of those within the church is their right to sit at the Lord’s table.

Consider the confusion if a person were a member of more than one local church at a time. He might be excluded from one of the churches, but still be considered as being in good standing at the other, and thus could partake of the Supper at one church, but not at the other. Obviously, that would not work. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Any semblance of church discipline would dissolve in a very short time if we were to adopt that practice. The apostle Paul established the principle that the church of the individual’s membership was the one which must do the disciplining when he told the Corinthian church, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh” (1 Cor. 5.4-5). Paul did not do the excommunicating, nor did the church where he was then laboring (probably Ephesus); but he told the Corinthian church to take care of that matter “when ye are gathered together.” They were the ones who were to take care of the discipline in their own body.

Consider the confusion if members of the church were considered to be members of the church at large only, and not members of any particular congregation. How could church discipline ever be practiced in such a situation? How could morality, doctrinal soundness and good order ever be maintained with a “membership at large?”

Because of the unworkable scenarios that we have listed above, the orderly transfer of membership from one church to another is of utmost importance. In my humble opinion, the best method for the transfer of membership by letter is for the member himself to ask for his letter from his home church, and then present the letter to the church to which he desires his membership to be moved. This second church would then communicate back to the original church that the member had been received. There has been a tendency in many areas in recent years for members wishing to transfer membership to present themselves to the new church, and then the receiving church to communicate with the original church regarding the need for a letter. While this will give the same ultimate result, there have been any number of cases where members, who were “at outs” somehow with their church or someone in that church, would in effect “hide behind” the church to which they were wishing to transfer their membership by letting her do the communicating for them; and for that reason I believe that the first procedure I have outlined is by far the best. The transfer of membership is not designed to help churches and members dodge issues that ought to be addressed.

It is of utmost importance that we understand that membership does not transfer until both churches have acted in the matter. Until *both* the original church which granted the transfer and the receiving church have officially voted, membership has not transferred, and the individual remains under the discipline of the original church.

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ARTICLE 29

Under the Mosaic law, the Israelites were strictly forbidden to commit the sin of perjury. “And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord” (Lv. 19.12). “If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth” (Num 30.2). This same principle is found in the New Testament in the writings of the apostles. “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3.9).

When we promise to do something and then fail to do it, we have lied. This is aggravated when we make a formal pronouncement of that promise in the form of an oath, a covenant, a vow or a contract. Since our God is a God of truth and his church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and since the devil is the father of lies, it is easy to see that it is no small thing when a member of the church breaks covenant or fails to fulfill that which he has sworn he would do. Church members who do not keep their word should be dealt with by the church.

We break covenant when we fail to fulfill our financial obligations. Any time we enter into a business transaction we make a covenant. When we scan a credit card into a gas pump and receive an “approved” signal, we have entered into a covenant that any gas we pump we will pay for. We have made a formal vow that we will pay that bill. It has long been the established policy of the church that members who will not pay their debts are subject to the discipline of the church. Elder J. G Webb recorded that in 1860, Tennessee Baptist, a Missionary Baptist publication, admitted, “Business men say that they never lose anything in business transactions with [Primitive Baptists]. It is proverbial that traders are not afraid to risk ‘Hard-shell Baptists’.” It has long been

known that Primitive Baptist churches require that their members pay their debts. Were it to be known in the community that a Primitive Baptist had refused to pay his debts, it would bring reproach upon every other person who bears the name Primitive Baptist; and more importantly, it would bring reproach upon the name of our great Husband, the Lord Jesus. Certainly we recognize that, due to circumstances beyond their control, people sometimes get into situations where they cannot pay what they owe, and that is to be regretted. However, when church members *will not* pay their debts, or when they live in such a wasteful or extravagant manner that they cannot pay their debts, the church should deal with them in a disciplinary way. Covenant-breaking should not be tolerated in the church.

A marriage vow is the most solemn natural covenant that we can make. When a couple marries, they promise that they will dwell together “for better or for worse, till death do us part,” or words to that effect. This vow is said before the man administering the oath and other witnesses. It is a gravely serious matter. When a couple has entered into a covenant that they will dwell together and love one another through good times and bad, “till death do us part,” and the marriage later breaks up, it must be the case that at least one of them has broken covenant. There is no such thing as a “no fault” break-up of a marriage. Society has become alarmingly lax in its view of this responsibility, but it should not be so regarded by the church. Every time a marriage breaks up, *someone* – either the husband or wife, or both – has committed **perjury** before God and man regarding the most solemn natural vow that it is possible for human beings to make. People who do not fulfill their marriage vows are covenant breakers. Covenant breaking should not be tolerated by the church.

When we join the church of the Lord Jesus, we enter into a covenant. Most local churches have a document known as the Church Covenant. *Every member* is obligated to keep *each particular* of the church covenant, and any who do not do so are subject to discipline by the church. It is a good habit to read the church covenant to the membership regularly – at least once a year – and to emphasize to them their obligations to the church and to their Lord. When a person joins the church, he has no right to live just any way. He enters into a covenant that will govern his behavior as long as he is a member of the church – and there are only two exits from the church: either honorably by death, or dishonorably by exclusion. Those who join the church are obligated to live by their Church Covenant, and those who will not do so should be dealt with by the church.

Before the world began, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit entered into an Eternal Covenant that pertained to our salvation. God cannot break that covenant; it is impossible for Him to do so because God cannot lie. We, by contrast, are capable of telling lies, but we ought not do so. The Scriptures and the honor of the church require that members keep their word. The church is no place for covenant breakers.

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ARTICLE 30

“For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies” (2 Th. 3.11). No discussion of order in the church would be complete without mentioning one offense that the apostle specifically cites as disorder.

This particular warning respects lazy busybodies, people who, instead of being employed gainfully, spend their time intruding into things that do not concern them.

It should be carefully noted that Paul is not here indicting those who cannot work, but those who *will not*. Some people cannot work because they are disabled for one reason or another. As we have seen in the recent economic downturn, some people would very much like to have gainful employment, but cannot find work, at least on a steady basis. These are not the ones about which Paul is speaking, but those who are able to work but will not. In fact, Paul's feelings regarding this were so strong that he said, "If any *would not* work, neither should he eat."

Laziness is disorder. It appears that there may have been an opinion at Thessalonica that the return of the Lord was imminent, and since He was returning immediately, there was no need to work. There is always a need to work. We work today because we will starve if we do not, but even in the garden, where he had only to put forth his hand and partake of the multitude of fruits to be found there, Adam was employed in dressing and keeping the garden. Labor is good for man, and has been from the beginning.

Those who refuse to work generally will find something to occupy their time, and almost always it is something they do not need to be doing. These at Thessalonica appear to have spent their time meddling in other people's business. If we do not have enough to keep us busy, we will stay busy by intruding into business where we have no business. We are to stay busy with our own responsibilities, and all of us have enough of them to keep us busy.

Paul set an example for the Thessalonians in his own affairs. "We behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us." Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and even though he could have spent his time in gospel labors, in order to counteract the disorder that was creeping in among them, he labored with his own hands, evidently working long hours.

The kingdom of God is no place for laziness or meddling. That definitely is disorder. All of us have enough to do, if we will just open our eyes and look around, and then we should do what our hand finds to do.

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ARTICLE 31

One of the great hindrances to good order is a particular attitude that we see popping up from time to time among the churches, that being Landmarkism. There are many features of this particular belief, but one particularly dangerous doctrine that is sometimes advanced by those who adhere to it is the view that the word "church" when used in the New Testament is to be taken always and only in a local sense, such as "the church at Ephesus."

That the word "church" is not always used in this way is seen in Matthew 16, where Jesus says, "Upon this rock I will build my church." This is a statement of exclusivity, and in it our Lord claims validity for His church alone; all others are excluded. If "church" is to be used in a local sense only, then the exclusivity that He

claimed was for the church at Jerusalem only, and no other local assembly could be regarded as the church. Another example is when Paul said, "I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (Ga. 1.13). Saul, when he was persecuting the church, had no concern about particular local congregations. He was intent upon destroying all of "this way," as it is termed in Acts 9.2. Saul of Tarsus was determined to obliterate this particular cause, which he then viewed as heretical. He was striving against the institution that was set up by our Lord and that carried His name, not merely against a particular local assembly.

It is easy to see how that when this sort of Landmarkism is among a people, it can have a very damaging effect upon any feeling or sense of "cause." Under that persuasion, one cannot think in terms of "the church" as an institution or as a cause, but only as a local congregation. It would make no sense under this doctrine to have any sort of feeling for "the Old Baptists," since the only view of the church that is supposed to be scriptural is that of the local congregation. Landmarkism very often fosters a sense of isolationism, since each church being "the church" unto herself, her affairs cannot logically be considered as being any other church's business. This attitude also has a dampening affect upon order among the churches. Since the local church is the only sense in which the term may be used, it logically follows that the only need for order is *within* the local church, and not *among* the churches, or in the church as an institution considered collectively (since "church" cannot be considered in that way according to that viewpoint).

Notice the attitude of the church at Antioch during the first great doctrinal disturbance that is recorded as having troubled the church. When certain men came down from Judaea disturbing them with erroneous doctrine, was the attitude of the brethren at Antioch that this was strictly their problem, and no one else's business? No indeed, but *immediately* they sent messengers to Jerusalem to sit in counsel with the those brethren regarding the trouble. The churches at Antioch and Jerusalem did not think in terms of "me," but in terms of "us." They knew that whatever troubled them would also be a problem for other churches, and they wished to enlist the multiplied wisdom of the brethren in their deliberations. Since they were linked together in a common cause, they recognized that that which affected one affected all. I believe a point that is often overlooked is that when the early churches faced a problem, their first instinct was to seek to act in concert and unity with their sister churches. When the church was first planted upon this continent, the congregations almost immediately began to cultivate a relationship *among* themselves and to seek the counsel of their brethren. This is totally at odds with the attitude often fostered by Landmarkism.

Our Lord set up only one church. That church is supposed to be in a unified state. If local congregations do not desire to be unified *among* themselves and to act in a way that fosters and encourages that unity, it is unlikely to happen. If they do not think with a sense of the cause of Christ, then they never will have a view like the brethren in Acts and like our forefathers in this country had as they labored tirelessly to unify the churches in a common cause. May God help local churches never to become so self-centered that we forget the *cause* of Christ.

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ARTICLE 32

The question has been asked, “Is the business of sister churches any of our business?” This needs to be rightly understood, for, as in most matters, there are extremes on both sides. We should note that there is a difference between something being our business or our concern, and our attempting to *run* someone else’s business.

When does a sister church’s business begin to be our concern? when they start being our “sister.” What my natural sisters do is of great concern to me, not only because of the affection I have for them, but for the impact it has upon me and my family. One of the saddest occasions of my life was an incident in which I witnessed an elderly brother weep openly because of the actions of his son. How my heart bled at that time to know that that brother, whom I loved dearly, was so grieved at the disgraceful actions of his son. Should we sorrow less when a church, called the bride of Christ, tramples under her feet the mercies of our heavenly Father and grieves Him so?

If my natural father’s bride should play the harlot and bring him shame and pain, would I not grieve for him? Would not it seriously affect my relationship with the woman whom I knew had so treated my natural father? Even if the woman were my natural mother, still my relationship with her would never be quite the same as long as my father mourned over her betrayal. Natural ties, and perhaps the law of God regarding how we should respect our parents, would prohibit my cutting off all connection with her, but I would feel a certain need for caution and concern in all my dealings with her. And what of my children’s relationship with her? If I have small children who have enjoyed a close relationship with this woman, and if they have looked up to her as one to be trusted and followed, would it not be necessary for me to guard them against being infected with her ways and thoughts? Could I allow my teenage daughters (if I had any) to go about with her and converse easily with her and suppose that they could not be damaged by her bad influence? A thousand times no!

If the pastor of a sister church preaches false doctrine to the point of bringing reproach, we must warn our members against the doctrine and the man who preaches it. If our sister church practices disgraceful things, we, for the sake of the glory of our Lord, ought to draw back and guard that they do not infect our tender ones with their evil. If we allow men to preach in our stands who practice ungodly things, we risk his leading our lambs astray. The old sheep may be able to “eat the chicken and spit out the bones,” but the lambs may choke, or they may develop a taste for bone.

At the point where our sister church’s action places us in danger, their business starts to be our business. The doctrine of church sovereignty is one of the most misunderstood doctrines we hold. It is true that there is and can be no higher court than the local church. There is no place in all the world where one church may lodge a complaint or charge against a sister church except before that very church in her own conference. However, the saying we often hear that what each church does is her own business and no other church has a right to interfere or take action against them is straight from the pit. What the church of my membership does affects every church any member of our church visits, and we owe them the courtesy of conducting ourselves so as not to harm them. If we do not, they owe God the respect of withdrawing from us until we correct our course.

Fellowship requires agreement and agreement requires knowledge. If a brother says the business of his church is not my business, then he is saying that we cannot be in fellowship; for I will not be in fellowship with him if I do not know we are in agreement, and I cannot know we are in agreement if I cannot examine the affairs of his church. I will not walk with a man if I do not know where he is walking. If he is unwilling for me to examine where he walks, then he will not have my fellowship.

Agreement is aided by sound counsel. "Iron sharpeneth iron." We arrive at the truth together through the mutual and collective wisdom of one another. If I am unwilling to receive a brother's counsel, then it is highly unlikely that we will ever be in agreement. If a brother (or a church) says he does not desire my counsel, then I must conclude that he thinks he knows it all, or he thinks I know nothing, or he thinks I am unsound - none of which is likely to result in fellowship between us.

If we say our business is none of other churches' concern, we logically also would say that our personal business is none of the concern of other members of our home churches. The principle is the same. "What I do in my home is my own business and none of theirs." Is a church likely to retain in its fellowship a person with that attitude? He is saying he can do anything he wishes and still be a church member - NOT SO! He can do what he wishes and we may not be able to stop him, but he cannot do anything he wishes and still have the fellowship of the church. Similarly a church can do anything she wishes and sister churches may not be able to stop her, but she cannot do anything she wishes and retain sister churches' fellowship. Her affairs are the business of sister churches to that extent, at least.

We absolutely cannot "do what we wish to do and it is none of anyone else's concern." When a church begins to reflect that attitude, then I immediately assume that something is going on there that she does not wish others to know about, or to which she knows others would object.

Sound churches have no fear of inviting others to "behold our order" (a scriptural expression, by the way). We have nothing we wish to hide. If we are wrong, then we want to be right. If you find anything amiss among us, we urge you to counsel with us. We want the fellowship of sound brethren and we recognize that they cannot know if we are sound if they cannot to some extent become acquainted with our business. Other churches cannot act for us, but at the same time we cannot act for them in deciding who they will and will not fellowship. If we refuse to make our business their business to the extent of "beholding our order" and becoming acquainted with our affairs, then we realize that they may take their fellowship from us and go to sound brethren who have nothing to hide. If we say they have no right to exhort us about things in which they see we are in error, then we take from them one of the most basic principles of the bonds of love. No man ever truly loved another who would allow him to go into that which would harm him without calling the danger to his attention. Those who are truly in fellowship welcome the loving counsel and exhortation of their brethren.

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ARTICLE 33

Our actions are contrary to our own interests when we disregard God's commands. We oppose our own good when we disobey him and go our own way.

When men begin to feel that the discipline of the church must be relaxed, or else there will not be enough members to sustain the church, then they act contrary to the best interests of the church. The discipline and order that was installed in the church by the Lord are for the good of the body. The discipline that parents use with their children is for the good of the children, regardless of what they may think. Children find it difficult to believe that the "no" that they hear from their fathers is for their good, but time will prove that it was in their best interests for their father to refuse to allow them to do that which was harmful to them. The laws which Christ gave the church may seem overly restrictive to some in this age of laxness, but we may be assured that they are exactly what the church needs and has needed in every age.

One area where some seem to be determined to relax the Scriptural guidelines for order is in the area of divorce and remarriage. I have heard the argument that if we maintain the standards of the Bible in that regard, then there will not be anyone to join the church in years to come, since divorce is so prevalent today. To that I answer that if it comes to the point that there is no one to join the church, then so be it, if following the commands of the Lord brings us to that. I, for one, do not believe it will ever come to that, but whether it does or not, we have no liberty to change the standards of the Scriptures. The Lord gave us the rules, and if following them diminishes the roll of the church, then we must conclude that the roll needed to be diminished. In any case, that is not our concern: our duty is to do what the Lord told us to do, at all times and in all situations.

To relax the Scripturally-imposed standards of discipline and order in the church is to commit suicide – *certain* suicide – regardless of what man's logic might suggest. Just as surely as the church strays from the order of the Bible, she opposes her own best interests. Whenever the moral and religious standards of the world are rapidly deteriorating, that is the time for the church to stand *even more firmly* for good discipline. If we slide in the other direction, we have put the spiritual equivalent of a dagger into our own hearts.

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ARTICLE 34

What is fellowship? We may go to a meeting and enjoy a wonderful spirit of joy and hospitality while being able to visit with many saints that we love – but is that fellowship? Is fellowship a feeling? Is fellowship just enjoying one another's company? That is one way we commonly use the word, but is that how the Bible uses it?

The apostle Paul gave us a very clear definition of fellowship in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16: "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" In this passage, *fellowship*, *communion*, *concord*, *part* and *agreement* are used in a generally synonymous way. To be in fellowship, then, is to be in agreement. The apostle lays down clearly the principle that if there is no agreement, then there is no fellowship or

communion. One of the reasons that we practice close communion is that we will not sit at the Lord's table with those with whom we are disagreed regarding the principles of the Bible. Without that agreement, there is no basis for communion.

It is possible for us to shrink from the disagreeable and painful task of maintaining order in the house of God. It is much easier to ignore any disagreement in doctrine, practice or order, and concentrate upon a mere good feeling that may pervade the congregation during a meeting. Why worry about whether or not the truth is being preached, or whether or not we are in agreement, as long as everyone is happy and has a good feeling within themselves? Why endure the pain of dealing with error, when we can overlook it and enjoy spiritual meetings?

A question, however, whether a meeting could ever rightly be called "spiritual" where a substantial amount of error is being propagated, because the Holy Spirit never has and never will move men to preach error. Whatever error there may be in a man's message, it did not come from the Holy Spirit, but from another source.

It is easier to ignore error than it is to deal with it, but God has charged us to keep house for Him in the church. If we care so little for the honor and the purity of the house of the living God that we would allow just anything to be preached or done in it, then we also show little regard for the One who set up the church.

I covet the fellowship of sound and faithful brethren. It is a treasure far beyond the price of rubies. However, if I am to be in fellowship – true fellowship – with others, then I must be able to find common ground with them upon the foundation of the truths of God's word. That which is based merely upon warm and tender feelings is not what the apostle called fellowship.

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ARTICLE 35

Elder James Isaacs

I have been requested by a good deacon from another state to write in response to the question, "Does scripture allow one who has married into an adulterous relationship to become a member of the church without leaving that marriage relationship, due to the passage of time or any other circumstance?" My answer, in a word, is no. No amount of time passing or thoughts of sorrow for the situation will end the sin of adultery as long as the couple continue to live together as man and wife.

John the Baptist established this principle when he said to Herod concerning Herodias, Herod's brother Philip's wife, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mk. 6:18). Notice that John considered that she was still Philip's wife even though Herod had married her. Also notice that he did not say that it was unlawful to take her, but that it is unlawful for him to *have* her. Certainly it was unlawful for him to marry her, but it is also unlawful for him to continue to live with her, or to have her. The wrong did not end with the taking, but continues in the having so long as Herod continues to "have" her.

There has been a great deal of discussion in some areas about whether this situation should be viewed as an act, or as a state; that is, is the couple living in a state of adultery or was the adultery a one time act that can be forgiven by the church and the couple admitted to membership? This discussion can be settled by realizing that scripture

views such adultery as an act, but that it is a constantly recurring act. There has been no repentance as long as the parties continue to have each other in a marriage bond. By living in this relationship, they continue to commit adultery. The effort to determine whether it is an act or a state is a fruitless strife about words. It makes no difference which way one expresses the situation when we realize that the act is continuing to occur.

Other brethren have cited 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and claimed that if the adulterous marriage started prior to the regeneration of the parties involved, then when they are born again and become desirous of church membership they could be received because they have been cleansed in regeneration. While I acknowledge the cleansing effect of the washing of regeneration, this washing does not set aside the fact that a man is having another man's wife. If they continue to live together, unlawfully, as husband and wife, they continue to commit adultery and cannot be admitted to the fellowship of the church of Jesus Christ.

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ARTICLE 36

Is it good for there to be divisions in the church? That is a very pertinent question as we study order in the church, and the answer certainly has to be qualified.

It should be obvious to all right-thinking persons that it would be better if there were no divisions of any sort, for someone always will be harmed in a division. Where there is a division, at least one party has done something wrong. There will be no divisions in heaven, for there will be nothing wrong that is done or believed in that bright world.

It would be best if God's people always believed and practiced what was correct here in this life and thus could remain continually in perfect unity. However, before warning the Ephesian elders that "of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them," Brother Paul had charged them, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." They were to be watchful over the safety of the church because of the constant danger of designing men bringing in false doctrine and practice. Paul knew that error was going to trouble the Ephesians from time to time, and likewise the church in every generation.

Since we know that error sometimes will be introduced into the church, we must conclude that it is necessary that division *sometimes* comes in the church. Otherwise, the error would never be cut off and would be free to infect the whole church, and seep into sister churches. No, division is not a good thing in itself, just as surgery is not good in itself; but given the fact of serious diseases, surgery is sometimes better than the alternative, and so is division in the church.

Paul told the Corinthians that divisions were not always a bad thing: "For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11.19). The word "heresies" has, as one of its meanings, "dissensions (divisions) arising from diversity of opinions and aims." To dissent from something is to express your disagreement or to distance yourself from that viewpoint. Is it a good thing that faithful brethren dissent from error when it arises in the church? Certainly it is. If sound men do not object to unsound preaching, how would the flock

ever know where the right way lay? The word “approved” here means “acceptable,” and the word was particularly used with regard to sound currency as opposed to counterfeit money. If sound doctrine is to be distinguished from counterfeit, then there must be a division between the sound and the unsound.

Division in a church or among the churches is much to be regretted and dreaded, but sometimes it is necessary given the situation. The inspired apostle certainly did not regard divisions as the worst of all possible situations (as some of our brethren seem to today). He evidently regarded the unchecked spread of error as being worse than division, and that should be our attitude also.

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ARTICLE 37

To walk in good order is to walk in the right path. To walk in order is to walk in a path of holiness. Disobedience to God is disorder; obedience to God is good order. The proposition is really very simple.

It has been the case down throughout history that when men or churches begin to seek popularity, to that extent they inevitably begin to depart from the paths of good order. It would seem that you can have one or the other, but you cannot have both. You will not be popular with men when you walk in the way that God commanded, so if you seek popularity, you can only get it by abandoning the good way and the old paths.

Churches begin to court popularity when they begin to focus on numbers. Lest any raise the usual objection, I will say that we certainly wish that many who are outside the church would find the courage to deny themselves and press into the kingdom. We wish there were more of God’s people in the church. However, when a church begins to *focus* on numbers and when that becomes an ever-present factor in all their decisions, we may safely assume that a desire for popularity has infected their thinking and that some sort of departure from good order cannot be far down the road.

Our Lord set forth the principle that “you cannot serve God and mammon” or riches. It is impossible. No man can function rightly with such divided loyalties. We might just as accurately say, without doing any violence to the principle, that no man can serve God and the siren song of popularity. When a man or a church begins to court the favor of people, they have moved their focus from the greatest of commandments that we should serve the Lord with *all* our hearts.

We can be holy, or we can be popular. It will not be both ways. “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” If our desire is the esteem of men, then we can expect that our path will be contrary to the ways of godliness. We are commanded to obey God, and if we do, some good men may be favorably impressed with our conduct, and we hope they will be; but we do not obey God so that people outside the church will be impressed. We obey God because it is the right thing to do; and if men outside the church are attracted to our walk, then we praise God for it; but if men revile us because of our walk, so be it. We cannot help how men regard

our order, but we can control our order. If we walk in an orderly manner, it is certain that we will not be generally popular.

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ARTICLE 38

One of the greatest detriments to good order and peace in the church is the unwillingness of many people to leave natural relationships at the door of the church. The apostle James commanded, “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons” (Jm. 2.1). While he was speaking particularly of having more regard for wealthy members than for poor members, the principle that he sets forth is applicable to any natural situation. If we treat people differently in the church because of their natural situation, and that includes blood relationships, then we are having “respect of persons.”

One great problem that has afflicted the church of God down through the ages has been the unwillingness of some to exercise discipline upon those to whom they are related by natural ties. Given the fact that most of our churches are small, and it is a rare church situation that does not have quite a number of ties by blood or marriage within the body, if a church failed to exercise discipline because of that, then she never would do it. When there are two or more family groups within a church, things can very easily deteriorate into a sort of ecclesiastical clan warfare within the church unless the body strictly insists that natural relationships be left at the door.

Many churches have as one of their Rules of Decorum the requirement that at church services, particularly in conference, all members are to address one another as “brother” or “sister.” This rule has the important benefit of helping to remind each of us that the only relationship that has validity within the church is our kinship in Christ. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Can you imagine how careful the brethren of that day had to be to heed to this command, given the fact that some of the members of the church sustained the relationship of master and servant? It could not have been easy strictly to obey this principle, as it was contrary to the habits formed throughout the week, and every member must have had to give the closest attention to this command if the church was to function as it should.

Where church discipline is concerned, we are to give the utmost care to preserving a strict impartiality. The fact that a member is related to us by the ties of nature ought not to make us more lenient – or more harsh – in our exercise of discipline. I have personally witnessed several cases in which those of the closest natural relationship took upon themselves the burden of making and seconding the motion to take action against an erring member. This certainly is the honorable way to proceed and demonstrates to the church and to the world that we are serious about keeping house for the Lord.

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ARTICLE 39

Elder James Isaacs

Love is a fruit of the Spirit. Where love exists, there will be a desire to give of one's goods to help others. From the earliest of times, God's people have shown the love of God in their beings by desiring to give to others. When God had blessed Abraham to rescue his nephew, Lot, from the kings who had carried him away captive, he gave tithes to Melchizedek as an offering of Thanksgiving unto God who had blessed him. This Abraham did willingly, or voluntarily, because he purposed in his heart to do it. He was not constrained by law or commandment to make such an offering, but because Abraham recognized that God had richly blessed him, he desired in his heart to give, and did so.

In the earliest days of the New Testament Church, the giving of material things for the support of the poor was a very important part of the daily lives of those first followers of the Lord. In 2nd Corinthians 9:1-9, the Apostle Paul sets out several principles of giving for New Testament believers. First: He commends the willingness of the Corinthian brethren and says that he has boasted of them in this. Then he exhorts them to be prepared to give and to have the bounty made up ahead of time. Third: Paul points out that he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly and he that soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully. I do not believe that Paul was suggesting that those who give will get back the money they gave with more added to it, as many say; rather, that those who give liberally shall enjoy a greater joy and the bounties of God's provision in any number of ways including, but not limited to, peace with God, joy in the gospel, comfort in the Holy Ghost, and the assurance of hope. Fourth: Paul sets out the principle which is to govern our giving: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." I understand this to be the scriptural rule for how much we are to give. What we purpose in our hearts, we should give. Our minds may argue that our heart is too liberal. Our fleshly desires may reason that we could really buy things with which we could have a lot of fun if we kept that which our hearts have purposed to give. The opposite could, of course, be true. Our carnal nature could say that we would make more of an impression on the church, or the preacher, or the deacons, if we would just make a big, showy gift, thereby drawing attention to ourselves when our heart had purposed to give a more modest and less noticeable amount. The former is more frequent than the latter, I suspect. In any case, it is a real blessing to be able to give of our natural blessings for the help of others.

In the preceding chapter, Paul says that the goal he is setting out is that there be a lessening of the burdens of the less able by the more able. The desired end is an equality. If a poor saint, feeling a necessity to give a significant sum to the support of some cause, gives to the extent of depriving himself of daily bread and the individual who receives the gift is thereby enabled to live sumptuously, the desired end is not achieved. If a person of means, filled with the Love of God, gives to the extent that one or more poor suffering souls are enabled to be filled and warmed as he is, the desired end is at least being approached. In Romans 12:8, we are told that those who give should do it with simplicity. Simplicity here would mean quietly, privately, out of love, not by constraint of system, law, or entrapment. Churches who need a complicated machinery to receive and manage the gifts given by their members are not practicing giving with simplicity.

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ARTICLE 40

Can there be association with error without being a partaker of the error? That is an honest question, and it would seem that we ought to be able to find a scriptural answer to it. If we openly and deliberately associate with serious error in doctrine, practice or order and do nothing to distance ourselves from it or to make it clear that we do not wish to be identified with it, can we rightly object if others lump us together with those that are guilty of the error?

The apostle John, in writing to “the elect lady,” which seems to be a church of the Lord Jesus, rejoiced that her children were walking in the truth. He clearly identified as being deceivers and antichrists any who did not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. Then, he gave a very pointed command: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 Jn. 10-11).

If we understand that the woman here is a church and not an individual, then we can plainly see that verse ten is not a prohibition of common hospitality and charity. We are in many places in the Scriptures commanded to be charitable even toward those who are our enemies, and to entertain strangers. We are to extend common courtesy and kindness toward those with whom we are disagreed religiously and we may wish that things will be well with them in a natural sense. We are not, however, to receive them into the church, nor are we to extend to them well-wishes in their efforts to propagate error, “for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” If we wish him well in his erroneous course, then we are aiding and abetting him, and become a partaker in his error.

John makes it clear that we are to distance ourselves from error and are to show plainly that we do not in any wise wish to see it prospered. We are to make it clear that we do not wish to be associated with that error. If we carry on with those who preach error just as we would with those who preach the truth, how are we not bidding them God speed? Do we not wish to encourage those who preach the truth in love? If men can see no difference in our behavior toward those who preach error and those who preach truth, how are we not bidding God speed toward both?

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ARTICLE 41

In the Revelation, the apostle directly relates the candlestick to the church: “The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches” (Rv. 1.20). In the next chapter, he warns the Ephesian church, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” Since the candlestick is the church, the removal of the candlestick must signify the removal of the church. This may not involve the end of a congregation of people who meet as a body, but it certainly indicates the end of the Lord’s recognition of them as His church.

It should be noted that only God can remove the candlestick; only He can remove the status of a body of people as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also should be noted that a church may be in some degree of error or misconduct and still be a true

church, for the Lord told the Ephesians, whom He addressed as one of His churches, “Thou art fallen;” they had already wandered from the right path in some regard. A third fact we wish to mention is that none of us ever gets a letter directly from heaven telling us when a church is in too much error to be tolerated, or has had its candlestick removed – yet these things are true. One of the burdens of the church in maintaining order is that we must use our God-given judgment to assess the situation – not only within our home church, but also in other churches as we consider our relationship to them.

The conduct of our brethren in this country with regard to churches with whom we have some disagreement has taken different forms. Of course, where we view an error as fatal and permanent, we sustain no church relationship at all with another body. We do not recognize their baptism nor will we commune with them. We have no church fellowship with them whatsoever. However, perplexing problems sometimes arise when churches with which we have been in fellowship in years past begin to depart from sound positions to the extent that discomfort begins. Normally this departure does not happen abruptly, but gradually over time. This raises the questions of how long we should bear with them, and how much distance should we put between ourselves and them. These questions are not always easily answered. Whatever the conclusion, the position of the church as the pillar and ground of the truth demands that we view our responsibility in this matter with seriousness. It is not something we can safely ignore.

For the safety of the little lambs of God in the church, where error to a significant degree is detected in a sister church, something should be done that indicates our discomfort. If the situation is not too aggravated, but is nonetheless of concern, this may take the form simply of not using their ministers in a public way. If the circumstances are more serious, churches have sometimes felt the need to further indicate a severing of a functional relationship with those churches by receiving transfers of membership from them only by “relation” (that is, without a formal letter between them indicating such fellowship) or by asking that they not sit with them in communion. When things advance to this degree, brethren occasionally have felt it necessary to state their positions publicly in some sort of letter or declaration so that their stance is generally known among the churches.

Whatever course a church chooses to use in a given situation, we should emphasize that our relationship with our sister churches is a precious thing and should be valued and cultivated. At the same time, the safety of the church membership and our corporate duty as the pillar and ground of the truth demand that we act with prudence and caution as we cultivate those relationships. The Scriptures give us general guidelines and advice on how to proceed as we deal with the relationships between churches, but, as mentioned before, we will not get a letter from heaven instructing us as to the specifics of each problem. That duty God has placed upon us, and we must act prudently and carefully with the glory of God and the good of the kingdom always in view.

It is necessary that in these matters we be humble, but firm. If we are not humble, we may act in a self-serving and arbitrary manner and may cause unnecessary hurt in the

church. If we are not firm, we may allow those things in the church which would do her irreparable harm

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ARTICLE 42

Why does good order matter? Order is the cross that we take up when we follow the Lord in gospel obedience. If it does not matter what we do nor how we do it, then there is no yoke in the kingdom of God. Anyone can do “just anything,” but it takes discipline and dedication to do the right thing.

“Let him deny himself.” That is what our Lord said as a requirement for those who would become His disciples. Those things which are to be denied are the inclinations of the flesh. If we do whatever the flesh wishes to do, then we have not denied ourselves. In order to be a disciple of the Lord, one must walk in good order. It is disorder to walk after the flesh. It is no burden to walk after the flesh. It does not require any self-discipline or self-denial. Anyone can do “just anything” or “whatever I want to do,” but it requires a denial of self to do what the Lord has commanded us to do. It requires good order to walk in the strait and narrow way.

What about the church? If a religious organization can do just anything and still be a church, then it would require no effort on the part of it or other churches. If a church could allow just anything and believe just anything and practice just anything, and still have the fellowship of sound sister churches and of the Lord, then there would be no difficulty whatsoever in being a church. There would be no “keeping house for the Lord” to be done in the kingdom, because the Lord would not care how His house was kept. It requires no effort to live in a dirty, cluttered house; but it requires diligence to keep a house clean.

Maintaining good order - individually, in each church and among the churches - is what makes the cross a cross and the burden a burden. It is what makes it necessary to *press* into the kingdom. Without good order, Christianity is something that any person could do – no trouble at all. Order is easier to write about than to practice, but practice it we must, or stand by and watch the church self-destruct.

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ARTICLE 43

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?” (1 Cor. 6.1). In this verse and the seven that follow it, the apostle commands an absolute prohibition against church members going to law with other church members in the courts of the land. This would apply to *all* civil cases of whatever nature where the complainant and the offending party were church members. “How dare you do this?” the apostle asks. How dare you insult the integrity and wisdom of the church of the living God by trusting the judgment of worldly men rather than the saints of God? To do so is an affront to the body of Christ. “Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another.” This was “utterly a fault,” that is, a grievous fault. From the strong language that Brother Paul uses in this passage we may infer that he considers violation of this principle to be gross disorder in the church of God.

Personal offenses between church members are to be settled by the pattern laid out by our Lord in Matthew Chapter 18. I know of no exceptions listed in the Scriptures to this rule. I dare say that more trouble and confusion has been caused in the church by

the violation of this rule than any other one thing. After following the first and second steps, if the matter still cannot be resolved, “tell it unto the church.” Set the matter before the saints of God, those who have the Spirit of God residing within them and whose desire is to please the Lord in all that they do. Had you rather have a case decided before corrupt lawyers or before godly men who have received that wisdom that is from above?

It should be noted that this passage does not deal with criminal cases nor with moral issues that are offenses against the church. If a man breaks a law, then the state in which he lives will file charges against him. In the kingdom of God, if he is guilty of a moral offense then the matter is to be brought directly before the church for action. This passage deals with offenses between brethren, which we would call civil suits in the context of the law and private offenses in the context of the church.

Brethren, I fear we have become very lax in this matter. This is not a suggestion of the apostle Paul, but a command, and in the strongest language. It is a vital matter, and one that we ignore to our hurt and to the hurt of the cause of Christ.

THE END