

The Constitution of a Gospel-Church adapted

to Union and Peace.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED

October 29, 1766.

To the Church meeting near *Cripple-Gate*,

ON THE

ORDINATION

OF THE

Rev. Mr. John Reynolds, their Pastor.

Published at their Request.

By BENJAMIN WALLIN.

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P R E F A C E.

It is a real concern to Mr. *Wallin* that he is again obliged to appear *alone* on such an occasion. Various, and some not very pleasing, conjectures hath transpired, on the unexpected appearance of the other part delivered at the late Ordination; when no application had been made to him, by the Church, for his discourse; he therefore thinks it becomes him to declare, that this is not through the *slight* of his Friends, or by any *neglect* of his own. After the solemnity, in presence of a large Company, a motion was made, in his absence, for both the *Charge* and the *Sermon*, but the Author of the former once and again rejected the proposal, and gave his reason for refusing the earnest and repeated request. This being the case, the Gentlemen judged that it would not be *respectful* if *decent*, to have a separate publication, and therefore did not apply any further till, to their surprise, the *Charge* was published, without the intimation to them or to him.

The Messengers who invited Mr. *Wallin*, know that he at first objected his being liable to a request of this kind; and he flattered himself that, through their influence, it might have been avoided; but, seeing it was otherwise, nothing could be more agreeable than to hear that the proposal was declined, and especially as the reason assigned implied a resolution not to repeat what had given offence. On several accounts Mr. *Wallin* would have gladly been excused at this time, but under these circumstances a compliance was due to his Friends, and to himself; and if his attempt should in any degree promote the order and love which belong to Christian-Society, he shall not regret his being called, even in this manner, to publish on a subject, on which he would rather have seen others go before him: a subject, however distasteful to some, he

apprehends of great importance, and never more needful; and he hopes that his being *thus* left behind, will not deprive him of the- serious and candid attention of those into whose hand his Sermon may providentially come.

Christians very nearly agree in their definition of a Church, but they differ in their modes of discipline and worship, it is therefore probable that a Reader may find something contrary to his own opinion; but at this he will not be offended, when he considers that, with the right of private judgment, averred by all Protestants, each Denomination must be allowed, on these occasions, to speak their mind freely, and to improve the season according to the plan they have espoused from the scripture.

The Reader is further acquainted that it was thought needful to insert a few things in the discourse which escaped, or were omitted, on the delivery, because of the time: care has been taken to recover all that was uttered, nevertheless, if any who heard, shall find a sentence wanting, it is presumed that he will excuse it on being told that for more than three weeks Mr. *Wallin* was under no apprehension of its being applied for.

An opportunity of handling the point discussed in the following pages, in that full and accurate manner it deserves, would have been very acceptable; but the performance, brief as it is, the Author commits to the blessing of God, who is often pleased to succeed the endeavours of the least of his servants to his own glory, and to the edification of his People.

The Constitution of a Gospel-Church

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A

SERMON, &c

I COR. XII. 25

That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another.

Many years are past since a like solemnity was held in this place, and may it be still many more before another such occasion returns; but, through a variety of changes, these calls are very frequent, and of late I have been repeatedly engaged in the same branch of service now allotted me. My appointment is to this Church of Christ; who, under the leadings of Providence, have found out, and chosen, we trust, a fit man to go in and out before them; and whom they have this day openly set apart, and acknowledged as their Pastor, Elder, and Guide.

It will scarce be denied, that a good understanding in the constitution to which we belong, and an agreeable behaviour, are of importance to society; the welfare of every community, and the advantage of her members, greatly depend on these things. Permit me then, Beloved, to remind you of the nature and manner of that sacred fellowship we obtain in a gospel Church-state: In conformity to this, under a divine blessing, every end of your Communion will be answered, and by consequence, all the encouragement and honor due to our Brother, your Minister, secured: For this purpose I have selected the remarkable and instructive passage recited.

I think it decent farther to observe, that my choice of this subject is not from any apprehension of your particular defect in point of order and love; your cleaving together with patience and prayer, while destitute, afforded your Friends a pleasing hope in your favor, and thanks be to God, we have this opportunity of rejoicing with you on the success you have obtained: but I apprehend it a seasonable subject, and your known good behaviour rather emboldens me to take the opportunity of insisting upon it, since where there is no just suspicion of censure, there can be little danger of mistake or offence. These things premised, I shall with freedom proceed.

When the Lord ascended up on high he gave gifts to men, and there was a plentiful effusion of the Spirit on the disciples at Jerusalem, for the spread of the gospel; and every primitive Church had her share of those extraordinary talents which abounded through the operation of the Holy Ghost, but none more indulged, in this respect than that in the city of *Corinth*; of whom it is said, 1 Corinthians 1: 7. that they *came behind in no gift*. But, alas, this singular advantage, was perverted by some into an occasion of discord; many were the confusions and schisms among them, for which they are reprov'd; and then to convince them of their folly, and reclaim them to order, the frame of a Christian-Church, and the becoming deportment of her members, are discours'd on, in a large and particular manner; and it would be happy if this branch of religion was more the study of many who join in the sacred communion, that they might know how to behave in the house of the Lord.

In the chapter before us the Apostle having treated on the author, nature, diversity, and end of spiritual gifts, proceeds to illustrate the constitution of a Church by comparing it with the natural body, and hence shows that divisions among the faithful in communion are far from being decent: 1 Corinthians. 12: 12. *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body: so also is Christ, i. e. the Church.* However this description may in some respects answer to the catholic Church or mystical Body of Christ, in general, the Apostle is manifestly speaking of a visible particular Church, and immediately refers to that Church which then existed at Corinth, for in 1 Corinthians 12: 27 he expressly applies it to them: *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.* Which agreeth with Romans. 12: 5. *So we being many are one body in Christ; and every one members one of another.* Besides, the gifts, order, and offices, treated on in this, and some other chapters, belong only to a particular visible Church.

The Apostle, in pursuit of his design, considers the wonderful disposition and use of the several members in the human frame; in which the divine wisdom and goodness are manifest; and in our text declares that God hath so tempered this curious building together, *that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another.* q. d. These many and diverse members of the natural body, with their different situation and powers are evidently designed, and admirably fitted to promote the harmony of its parts, and thereby the edification of the whole: So also is Christ; or, in other words, that spiritual Corporation a Gospel-Church. [The similitude will hold, and the passage may be applied to the Fellowship of Churches no less than to that of individuals joined in a separate communion. Particular Churches are members of the catholic body in Christ, they are all engaged in the same glorious cause, and from scripture-example it appears that they are mutually obliged to care for one another; but this idea would have led me too far; the Apostle refers it to a particular Society, and the like application states my design.] Now this, my Brethren, no doubt, is recorded for the instruction of the Disciples of Jesus in communion in every place to the end of the world, and I hope our reflection upon it will be found pertinent and useful on the present occasion. From the scope of the place this observation of the Apostle presents us with the following truths; namely, that a Gospel-Church is comparable to the natural body; that she is so constituted by divine wisdom as to leave no just occasion for schism; but that, on the contrary, every thing tends to harmony and love; and further, that her tranquility depends, under God, on the mutual care of her Members.

To our improvement on these articles I shall,

I. Take a view of the similitude suggested in the passage.

II. Enquire into the schism intended.

III. Mention some particulars relative to a Church of Christ, by which it will appear that her constitution is adapted to prevent any kind of division; and then,

IV. Consider the mutual care of her members, according to divine appointment, in the exercise of which her peace is preserved. These points, Sirs, with a word or two concerning your obligation to our dear Brother, who is now your honoured Pastor, will complete my design. And,

I. With respect to the comparison. A Church of Christ is a company of the- elect, who being born again, and vitally united to him, are joined to one another, and walk together in the order of the gospel, for the glory of the Lord, and their mutual edification. This answers to 1 Peter. 2: 5.

Ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. In other places, as in the text, we have seen the Saints in this union are described as a natural body thus, Ephesians. 4: 16. where the Apostle having exhorted the disciples to grow up into Jesus in all things, which is the head, even Christ, adds, *From whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working of the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.* A most beautiful and instructing allusion to the wonderful union, order, and operation of the different members in the human body! Now the particulars in which the similitude holds between this spiritual Corporation and the natural body are obvious, and in a great measure laid out in the context; as,

1. Its Builder is God. In the proceeding verse it is expressly, declared that *God hath tempered the body together*; and we know that this human frame is the handy-work of the Almighty; he created and formed it by his wisdom and power, and after his pleasure; so is the Church. Thus it was in Moses's time, his house or church-state was built by the Lord, *Hebrews. 3.* The pattern of the tabernacle was given in the mount, and the materials, instrument, and form of Solomon's temple were from above. This typical house was not merely by divine direction, but there were supernatural gifts in their kind for completing the same; the priesthood and every thing relating to that service, was by immediate orders from heaven; or if we consider the Congregation of Israel as a Church, they were a People formed by God for himself, to show forth his praise.

In like manner is the Church under the present dispensation; its order and frame is of divine appointment; the materials are prepared by the Spirit of God, their union, communion, gifts and graces, form, ordinances, and officers are prescribed in the Word of the Lord. A regular Gospel-Church leaves no room for human invention; it is all of divine institution, and derives its whole constitution from the wisdom, power, and authority of God; so that what the Apostle saith to the Corinthians is applicable to all true Believers, wherever gathered, and united in a Church-state, Ephesians. 3: 9. *Ye are God's building.* And, by the way, doth not this prove that a neglect of the communion of Saints is a slight of the wisdom and authority of God? But again,

2. As the human frame consists of many members, who all belong to one body, and to each other as related thereto, so is Christ; which I need only mention. And likewise,

3. That the similitude holds in respect of the diversity of its members, in point of situation, capacity and office, which the Apostle particularly describes. Besides,

4. is well known that these numerous and different parts of the human body are supplied from the same head, whence, in a right state of things, flow the animal spirits to invigorate every Member, insomuch that if any one is deprived of this source it will wither and die: Thus it is with the body of Christ. Indeed, lifeless and formal persons may creep into a Christian Community, but they are not allowed, and a Church is to be considered as a spiritual body, the members of which are alive in Christ, really united in that one glorious Head of fullness and grace; as described in the forementioned place in the *Ephesians*. Now every Member of this living body hath an absolute and equal dependence on its supply from the same Head for its power, even from the Lord Jesus, through the agency of the divine Spirit. Thus we read, Colossians. 2: 19. that from this Head *all the body by joints and bands, having now nourishment ministered, and knit together,*

increaseth with the increase of God. In which place the Apostle is speaking not of the natural body, but of Saints united in the order of the gospel, Moreover,

5. As the members of the body thus supplied and maintained, being duly exercised, are a mutual help to each other, and conduce to the good of the whole; so is the Church, 1 Corinthians 12: 21. *The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.* In like manner no living Member of the Church of God, however comparatively small or low in his station and capacity, is useless, nor is there any room for him that is most exalted therein to boast over, or despise his Brother. I might proceed to a farther illustration of this likeness from the sympathy of those who are united in love in this Christian Corporation, the design of the building which is that of a dwelling, it being declared, *Ephesians. 2: 22. that we are builded together an habitation of God, through the Spirit.* And, finally, that this kind of Church-state is temporary, liable to decay, and will sooner or later dissolve. But I forbear, and proceed,

II. To enquire into the Schism intended. Nothing has been more mistaken and abused than the notion of Schism among the Professors of Christianity. Your late honored Minister, whole memory is justly esteemed, and who wrote several excellent pieces, hath left his opinion on this point, with which you are no doubt acquainted. I do not recollect his particular thoughts, but you will allow me to follow my text.

Schism is a *division*; the question is whether it is to be taken for a reparation *from* or a *dissention* in the Church. Some define Schism to be a causeless separation from a particular communion: on this principle all separations have been condemned by one party or another as schismatic. Schism in this sense hath been by some rashly pronounced a fearful, yea almost an unpardonable sin, and then uncharitably imputed to those who could not hold communion with them. Thus, Papists inveigh against Protestants, and heretofore some Zealots among the latter have in like manner treated their Brethren for dissenting from them.

I would by no means countenance divisions; needless separations are not to be commended, they favour of ignorance, pride, and a disorderly spirit, and may be the occasion of Schism, in the sense of our text; but I do not find the term used for a separation in all the New-Testament, in which it occurs eight or nine times, and in each place the idea conveyed is that of a dissention in the body, as of a rent in a garment, {σχίσμα} *Matthew. 9: 16.* In John 7: 43. it is used for divisions among the people, which agrees with the manifest sense of the word through-out this epistle: thus 1 Corinthians 1: 10. the Apostle saith, I beseech you that there be *no divisions* among you. And again, 1 Corinthians 11: 18. *I hear that there be divisions or schisms, among you; and I partly believe it.*

They had their disorders and Schisms among the first Disciples, as we see from the instance at *Corinth*; but it doth not appear that it was their custom, as in later times, on every difference, to divide into separate Communities. We read of many particular Churches, and in every place they who believed incorporated together, as the Lord hath Appointed, but, in what town or city do we find more than one Church? It is granted that we are not altogether in the like circumstances with our primitive Brethren, and I would be far from suggesting that in the present state of things it may not promote the interest of real religion, especially in populous cities, to have several Churches of the same faith and order nearly adjoining; it certainly doth; if they and their Ministers

love one another: but I am free to declare my opinion, that to divide and subdivide on every dissention, is not adapted to magnify, or even to maintain the visible kingdom of God in a land. Separations where the gospel is professed without a general satisfaction, as to the cause and necessity, hath but too naturally proved an occasion of carnal emulation, strife, and ill will. In a word, needless separations are the bane of brotherly love. But, to return, it is plain that the Corinthians are charged with Schism when they came together as a Church in *one* place, 1 Corinthians 11: 18. They are therefore censured not for *separations*, but for *intestine divisions*. May you, my dear Brethren, be ever unacquainted with these grievous and shameful contentions; to avoid which a wise and good man would suffer any thing he lawfully may; and, in all-appearance conscience is rarely, if ever, concerned in these unnatural strivings.

You see then that *Schism* in the New-Testament is so far from consisting in a separation from a Community, that it supposes a continuance in Church-relation, and this is agreeable to our text, which runs in these terms, *That there should be no Schism IN the body*. A Schism *in* the body, and a separation from the body, are things widely different, and should not be confounded together. I now come,

III. To make it appear that the constitution of a Christian-Church is adapted to prevent every kind of division. Of this no man will doubt, who attends to the following particulars:

1. The foundation on which the Father hath called us into this fellowship with himself: It is grounded on a Covenant of peace, ratified in the blood of his Son, who is the Surety thereof. Unworthy conceptions of this divine appointment are very injurious to the spirit of religion. Indeed, this privilege is common to the Faithful in Christ, but it is not of an ordinary kind, it belongs not to nature, no; it is the communion of Saints; a high and supernatural thing, which results from the good pleasure of a reconciled God, and is a province of the kingdom of grace and of heaven: “We have boldness to enter into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus, *who put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*” So, then our fellowship in Christ is a fruit of redemption, and of that peace our Saviour made, when he finished his work on the cross. And, can any thing be a more direct and powerful objection to the allowance, of strife or division? How perverse are dissentions and discord among brethren United on so glorious a foundation; even peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ! But this is the basis of Christian Communion, in which Believers have fellowship with God: *For we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*, 1 John 1: 7. Again,

2. The near and important relation which subsists among Christians in this gospel-union, is another thing which naturally tends to harmony and peace. This relation is twofold, first; to the Lord Jesus, the common Head of his Members, who have a just and equal claim in him: *Christ is the Head of the Church, and he is the Saviour of the Body*. And again,

We are Members of his Body, his flesh, and his bones, Ephesians. 5: 23, 30 compared. Secondly, To one another, Romans. 12: 5. recited before; *every one members one of another*. And 1 Corinthians 12: 27, below the text, which hath likewise been mentioned already, *Ye are members in particular*; i. e. of the Body of Christ, and of one another in him. And, is not this endearing and universal relation to the Lord and one another an argument against any kind of uncharitable division? So then it appears that the Constitution of a Church is adapted to Union and Love. And,

3. The mutual interest and concern which the several Members have in the harmony and order of the Body is a natural and strong motive to “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” In Christian Communion there is a mutual dependence and interest; Elder and Younger are, in their places, subservient to each other’s edification. If a Schism is made, and thereby particular Members are disturbed, the supply of their part, to the nourishment of the Body, is obstructed and lost, by which every one suffers in his credit and comfort, in proportion to the capacity of which he is possessed. This is the case in the human Body: 1 Corinthians 12: 26. *And whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it:* or one member be honoured all the members rejoice in it. The application immediately follows. The honor and advantage of each Member depends on the union and perfection of the body. Surely, my Brethren, a Corporation so framed, that no animosity or division can arise but what will in some measure affect every Member to his disadvantage, must be allowed a Constitution admirably adapted to peace! Once more,

4. The final end of this sacred fellowship, with respect to every one who enjoys it, sufficiently proves it a Constitution fitted for concord and love: It is no less than this, namely, his complete salvation, and happiness in communion with God and his Fellow- Christians in the Church triumphant in glory. This divine appointment is for the perfecting of the Saints, that they may meet in the heavenly kingdom, where they shall be everlasting Companions, in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

And now, Beloved, what can be more evident than that a regular Church is every way adapted to promote the union and peace on which her glory, and the happiness of her Members depend? Surely a Corporation settled on peace made with God by the blood of the cross, and created by the Father’s good pleasure, who is reconciled in his Son; a Corporation, every Member of which stands in this near and endearing relation to Christ, as the Head of the Body, and to one another in him; a Corporation in which all its Members have a mutual dependence and reciprocal interest, insomuch that each one is affected with the state of the Body, according to his situation and power, and consequently must suffer on any division; and, finally, a Corporation designed for the meetening its Members for the peaceful regions of bliss, where they hope to abide together in fullness of joy for ever; I say, it must certainly be admitted, that a Corporation thus designed, and framed by the infinite wisdom and grace of a reconciled God, for the objects of his love, is fitted for harmony and peace.

What can be found in so beautiful and excellent a Constitution to countenance Schism? Doth not every thing plead for union and love? No doubt, my dear Friends, all discord and contention in the Churches of Christ are unnatural, and a departure from the genuine spirit of the Gospel. But the question is, how shall peace be maintained in the Church, and every animosity and Schism prevented? Which leads me,

IV. To consider the mutual care required of the Members in Communion for the attaining this valuable end. Many things conduce to the peace of a Christian Society which are not to be omitted: Union in sentiment is of great importance; hence, chap; i. 10. the Apostle beseecheth the Corinthians *to be perfectly joined together in the same mind., and in the same judgment.* But where a difference in opinion concerning points not essential subsist, the next thing is charity; this, saith the Apostle, *is the bond of perfectness;* i. e. of an entire harmony among Christians, Colossians. 3: 14. It becomes us to see that *we love one another with a pure heart and fervently,*

1 Peter. 1: 22. Humbleness of mind is another thing recommended; without which men are prone to strife and vain glory, See Philippians. 2.

The Scripture saith not in vain, *Only by pride comes contention*, Proverbs. 3: 10. Therefore let each have a sober and humble opinion of himself, as he values the peace of the Brethren. But our text sets the care of the Members one for another in opposition to Schism in the Body; and the Apostle in applying this to the Church at Corinth, manifestly teaches that the mutual care of the Members of a Christian Community is by divine appointment a means of preventing division. This is constitutional in a Church of Christ, that the Members should have the same care one for another. Herein lieth the whole practice of piety, in point of social religion, in opening of which it is proper to enquire in what respects the care of each member is the *same*, the *object* of his care in behalf of his Fellow, and *how* this concern in the heart will appear; And,

1. The identity or sameness of the care to be exercised by all the Members of a Church, cannot intend that the office or particular acts of each one is formally and exactly the same; this cannot be in the nature of the thing, and is absurd to imagine. It is observed in the context, “That God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles;” and these questions follow, “Are all Apostles? are all Prophets? are all workers of miracles?” No: there are diversities of gifts and stations in the house of God. This mutual care of the Members must be taken in a sense consistent with the constitution of things in the Body to which they belong; it doth not confound the order of Society, or give any just occasion for one man to intrude on the function of another: *God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, in all the Churches of the Saints*, 1 Corinthians 14: 33.

In the natural body, the eye hath not the care of *receiving*, nor the hand of *discerning* what is fit to be applied, nor has the feet an obligation upon it to *either*, yet it has the *same* care for its Fellow-Members, i. e. it is concerned for moving the body from one place to another, when needful: In like manner every Member of a Christian Community hath not the office and care of the Pastor, nor is it incumbent on each to perform the duties of that sacred Function, and the same may be observed of other offices in the Church. Again,

One stated healthful and edifying exercise of this spiritual Corporation, is that of a communicating, as the Apostle expresses it, Philippians. 4: 15. *concerning giving and receiving*, for the relief of the poor, and the expenses of the house of the Lord; but even the exercise itself supposes that every one is not called or qualified to give, though everyone should endeavour to be useful this way, and there is reason to fear that in this respect some withhold more than is meet; yet all have not wherewith to bestow, nor, on the other hand, is it lawful for those to receive, who can by any means avoid being chargeable. Thus we see that to understand the *sameness* of this care of the very *self-same* acts in each individual would be absurd, this would be to reflect on the wisdom and goodness of the Lord, whose constitution it is, by making him require what he hath not rendered his Servants capable of; and, indeed, to demand what is absolutely impossible.

This phrase is certainly to be understood consistent with each Members talent and station in the Body; and I humbly apprehend that in general, the true meaning is this, namely, that all the Members of a Church are under the same obligation, i. e. equally obliged to care for one another, according to each one’s power and office in the Community. Every one knows that this is the only effectual method of peace in any Corporation whatever. Now this mutual obligation is with

great propriety styled the *same* care, i. As it is of the *same kind*, in this case each Member naturally cares for his Fellow: I mean not after the flesh; this care is not grounded in natural relation, or excited by any civil connexion in life; nor doth it arise from any carnal affection, or worldly motive whatever; it is of a sublime and heavenly nature, a fruit of the Spirit, and a branch of that obedience of faith which worketh by love: Nevertheless, every living Member of a Christian Society, who deriving grace from the Head, supplied his place in the Body, naturally careth for his Brother, this care being *natural* to the new creature, and the genuine fruit of divine love, which animates them that are called. And,

2. This may well be denominated the *same* care, since each one exerts himself therein with the same view, namely, To edify the Body, and to the advantage of every particular Member. The fellowship of the Spirit admits of no private, selfish, or sinister end; it is generous, impartial, and influences those who partake of it to mind the same thing, and centre in the same kind and useful design, in every act of communion. And further,

3. The identity of this care lies, in the *manner* in which every one guided by the same Spirit, exerts himself to fulfil it, namely, in the diligent exercise of his talent in the place he is fixed: In a discharge of this obligation each man keeps to his post, and attends the duties of his function.

This *same* care which the Members of a Church are called upon to have one for another, is so far from being inconsistent with their holding different powers and places in the Body, that the fulfilment of this mutual and universal obligation, as the Lord hath appointed, supposes that diversity for it consists in each one being active in his particular station, or as the Apostle expresseth it: *Every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh the increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.*

Thus, the sameness of this care is incumbent on every Church-Member, and is agreeable to the nature and order of Christian Society; it is justly said to be the *same* since it is natural in each, according to the Spirit; every ones care is with the same view, and the manner of fulfilling it the same. Let us now briefly consider,

II. What each Member is to be careful about respecting his Fellow? And the object of his care may be comprised under the following particulars, which I can scarce more than mention.

1. A principal care of each for his Brother is, that he doth not apostatize from the faith, but that he holds fast his profession to the end. The communion of Saints is a means of perseverance, and the care of Christian Members one for another, bears some analogy to the care of their Head; as the Father put his Chosen into the hands of his Son, that none might be lost, in like manner our mutual care in this fellowship of Christ, is to abide in him unto life everlasting: It is therefore incumbent on every one to endeavour that his Brother turn not aside from the ways of the Lord. This is the grand concern we have for one another in the gospel, that not any man fail of the grace of God, or draw back to perdition: To this end we are “to assemble together; to be looking diligently, and to build up one another in our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.” In a word, we are to care for each other, that each one believeth to the saving of the soul. Again,

2. Every man is to care for his Brother’s increase in grace, and the fruits of righteousness. We are not only to be concerned that no one makes shipwreck of faith, but that every one abounds in the evidence of his calling; and this as a consequence of the former, since they who do not

advance, go backward in religion, and diligence under a profession, is the appointed and necessary means of final perseverance. Besides,

3. We are mutually obliged to care for each other's honor and comfort. There ought to be consolation in Christ, and comfort of love: This includes a carefulness to avoid whatever may occasion offence, and likewise every instance of brotherly-kindness in word or action in our power. These things considered, it is easy to see,

III. That this care in the heart towards a Fellow-Communicant, will be attended with thoughtfulness about him. In the exercise of this spiritual brotherly concern, a man will cast about, and contrive how he may answer the obligation he is under to his Fellow, and promote his piety and joy; it will naturally incite our inspection into his state, our sympathy and fear, whenever we behold him ready to slip in an hour of temptation. Divisions in the Church will be painful; we shall be ready to assemble for discipline, to visit the afflicted, to pass by personal offences, and finally, the subject will be animated, to daily and earnest prayer for the prosperity of Zion.

And, is this the constitution of a Gospel Church? Then nothing short of "cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart" [Acts xi. 23. By which Barnabas seems principally to intend their adhering to their profession, agreeable to the phrase of being added to the Lord, which is the same with being added to the Church. Compare Acts ii. 52. and chap. xi. 24.] can answer the end of Christian communion. If the peace of a Church depends on this mutual care of its Members one for another, will any man undertake to show it possible that a Community should prosper, unless the people keep close together? Without the strictest union, and most intimate correspondence, it is absolutely impossible for this needful care to subsist. It is the bane of social religion, when, through an inordinate love of pleasure, a vain curiosity, or admiration of men, it becomes habitual for Christians in fellowship to wander; and still more threatening if from any cause whatsoever, those who are solemnly united in these bonds of holiness and peace, are on every occasion thrown into contention and schism! Every notion and practice that tends to divide or scatter the Members of a Church, strikes at the foundation, and so far as it prevails, defeats the end of this sacred Constitution. O that our *Jerusalem* could be admired as a city compact together; that the Members of each Society were as Brethren, more universal and constant companions! This would revive and increase the glory of Israel among us; Churches and Ministers, and especially those who are situated nigh, would then gladly embrace every opportunity of friendly intercourse, and be a mutual example and credit, and could not but highly esteem one another.

From this divine Constitution it likewise appears, that gathering of Churches should be the end of preaching the word. The visible interest of Christ, and the continuance of the gospel in any place, depends on the communion of Saints, in the order appointed by heaven, which is that of particular fellowship, it is therefore not a little threatening when this is despised and neglected, or treated as an indifferent matter. In the primitive times there was not only daily preaching, but also daily addition to the Church, for in those days they who believed, without delay were baptized, and joined to the Lord in house; and if this original pattern was followed, there is reason to conclude it would greatly advance the Churches of Christ, and promote the cause of our blessed Redeemer. However, in this way Christianity was first established, and in the same manner it will be maintained on the earth, to the end of the world.

Promiscuous assemblies for hearing the word abound; and, by whomsoever the truth is published, may it succeed, to the enlightening of the children of men; but, unless the design of

the preacher is, to lead them who are called into a professed subjection to the institutions of Christ, what rational view can he have towards the increase of his visible interest among us? It seems not impossible, if permitted, for men who are unacquainted with, or averse to the special ordinances of Christian communion, under a notion of dispensing the word, to preach away a gospel Church-state from a nation. Far be it that by any means the kingdom of heaven should depart from our favourite land!

I need only say, as hinted before, that every Schism in a Church is unconstitutional: Whatever may be the occasion, it contradicts the design of a gracious God in his house, and is to be imputed alone to the pride and corruption of man. God hath so tempered or constituted his Church, *that there should be no Schism in the Body, but that the Members should have the same care one for another.*

We have now seen, my Brethren, the nature and manner of this mutual care which every Christian should have for his Fellow; and, is it not an admirable system of communion? Can any thing tend more to harmony and love? Thanks be to God for the comparative peace which at present subsists; but, have we no reason, on reflection, to lament that we fall short of this noble plan of operation? O that the Spirit of wisdom and charity may be poured forth from on high, that, laying aside everything carnal and selfish, we might be more spiritual and princely, preferring one another in love, and thereby more perfectly answer the will of the Lord in the privilege we enjoy! It remains, Beloved, that I drop a word concerning your known obligations to our dear Brother, your Pastor: I have been showing you the only effectual means of honor and comfort in Christian Society, and doubt not but you are ready to say; Happy are the People who are thus mutually concerned, as the Lord hath appointed, for each other's welfare in time and eternity! May you continue to follow this plan, and enjoy the felicity it insures; this will yield universal content, since in the exercise of this care every Member will be regarded according to his station; and, as observed in the beginning of my discourse, this will secure to your Minister whatever is due to his character. The sudden starts of weak and unstable professors, which abound in every age, and by whose breath some persons, unwary, have been flattered to their cost, are uncertain and fleeting: To-day, without sufficient cause, but with precipitant zeal, they extol us to the skies: Tomorrow, with less reason, and greater vehemence, they would depreciate and even debase us to the earth. Nor is this a new or strange conduct; "you know that in this manner the *Galatians* treated the great Apostle Paul; once they received him as an Angel of God, even as Christ Jesus, and blest themselves under his Ministry, insomuch that he bears them record that if it had been possible they would have plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to him; yet in a little time, these very men, being seduced, were turned against him; they counted him as an enemy; and, in all appearance, they would in their displeasure, if they had met with him, have plucked out *his* eyes; where is then the blessedness they spake of?" But the reputation and acceptance of a Minister, which he obtains from an orderly people, will abide, yea, and increase, in proportion to his fidelity, skill, and diligence in the work of the Lord. On this basis I am persuaded that my beloved Brother will find a growing satisfaction in his labours among you.

You need not be told, and I shall not detain you in dwelling on the respect that is due to your Minister, or in proving that a decent and honorable regard to one in his sacred office is of the utmost importance; on this, under a divine blessing, a flourishing state of, religion in the Church very much depends; nevertheless, I must not wholly omit this capital article, and you will suffer

me to say that you are, Beloved, henceforward to account our Brother as a Minister of Christ, and a Steward of the mysteries of God; you will then with reverence and constancy attend his ministration of the word and ordinances, and submit yourselves to him in the Lord. If the mutual care of Christians in fellowship, as you have heard, extends its influence unto the consolation and joy of the least in the Church, it can never consist with grieving your Pastor and Guide, by a willful and habitual neglect of his daily ministrations among you; but if time would permit, your known conduct in this respect forbids my insisting upon it.

You know that it is expressly required that you very highly esteem your Minister; the manner in which you have received him in the Lord, his sacred character, and important work, his courage and usefulness in the discharge of his office, and your own credit and advantage, require you to hold our Brother in due reputation; as one justly observes, the character of a Minister is the grace of a Church; and a despised Ministry, however excellent in itself, hath rarely succeeded.

You have obtained a Pastor, and received him as an answer of prayer; let this be an argument for continuing in fervent supplications for him, both apart and together; a comfortable provision for his support, according to your ability, you need not be urged to; but let me advise you to cultivate an intimate correspondence with him, confine not your knowledge of him to the pulpit, but, as ye have opportunity, let your houses witness to your friendship, and becoming freedom one with another. Satan hath often got an advantage of a shy or distant behaviour between a people and their Minister; and in your converse with him be not on the reserve with respect to your spiritual concerns, and the effects of his labours among you; for want of a frank disposition to acknowledge what the Lord hath done by the Ministry of his Servants, some of them have long been discouraged, when in fact, if they were duly informed, they would see abundant reason to rejoice.

I conclude, my dear Friends, with the Apostle's salutation, when he was about to finish his second Epistle to the Corinthians: Finally, Brethren, farewell: Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Amen.

FINIS.

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