

A
DISCOURSE
CONCERNING
THE ADMINISTRATION
OF
CHURCH CENSURES.

BY
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A DISCOURSE,

&c.

Question 1. **MAY** a true church of Christ err or mistake in the administration of church censures ?

Answer. A true church of Christ may err or mistake in the administration of the censures, or any act of discipline ; whereby members of it, who are true members of Christ, may be injured, and sundry other inconveniences may ensue. And this is not unduly supposed :

1. Because no particular church is absolutely infallible either in doctrine or administrations, especially in such points or things as overthrow not the foundation of faith or worship.

2. Because churches are more obnoxious and liable to error and mistake in their administrations and discipline, than in doctrine. For all doctrines of truth are absolutely determined and revealed in the Scripture, so that there is no principle, means, nor cause of mistake about them, but what is only in the minds of men that inquire into them and after them. But the administration of the censures of the church hath respect unto many fallible mediums, requiring testimonies, evidences, and circumstances, which of themselves may lead a church, acting in sincerity, into many mistakes ; especially considering how much in the dark unto us for the most part are the principles, causes, and ends of actions ; the frames of men's spirits in and after them ; all which in such cases deserve much consideration.

3. Churches have erred in not administering the censures of the gospel, according unto order and their duty ; 1 Cor. v. 2.

4. The experience of all ages confirms the truth of this supposition. The first church censure, after the death of the apostles, that is remaining on any record, was that of the church of Corinth against some of their elders ; wherein

how they miscarried, is evident from the epistle of the church of Rome unto them about that matter.

Corollary. In case any question arise about the administration of any church censure in a church of Christ, it ought to be very jealous, lest it have in matter or manner miscarried therein; seeing absolutely they may do so, and seeing there are so many ways and means whereby they may actually be induced into mistakes.

Ques. 2. Is it necessary that such maladministrations be rectified?

Ans. It is necessary such maladministrations should be rectified, by some way or means of Christ's appointment. And it is so,

1. First on the part of the censures themselves. And that,

(1.) Because of their nullity; for they are null, and bind not.

[1.] 'In foro cœli.' They bind not in heaven; for the Lord Christ ratifieth nothing in heaven, but what is done in his name, by his commission, and according to his word. In some or all of which every maladministration faileth.

[2.] Not 'in foro conscientiaë:' for conscience is not bound, nor will bind, on mere external ecclesiastical authority, where the person is indeed free, and judgeth himself to be so according unto rule.

Only such censures may be said to bind for a season, in some cases, in the church, but that 'quoad ordinem exteriorum et mere ecclesiasticum,' with respect unto outward order, that the peace of the church be not troubled, until mistakes may be rectified; but not 'quoad ordinem internum et mere spiritualem,' with reference unto the dependance of the whole church on Christ the head.

(2.) Because of the consequents of them. Disadvantage to the gospel, prejudice to the ways of Christ, and the utter impairing the authority of all church censures must needs ensue, if there be no way to rectify such mistakes, or if they are left unrectified; as may easily be manifested.

2. This is also necessary on the part of the church supposed to have erred. For whereas all church power is for edification, that which is unduly put forth and exercised, is rather for destruction; the guilt whereof every church ought to rejoice in being delivered from; especially con-

sidering that there is much more evil in condemning the righteous, than in acquitting the wicked, though both of them be an abomination.

3. On the part of the persons unduly or unjustly separated from the church by such censures. This is so evident that it needs no confirmation.

4. On the account of all other churches holding communion with the church which hath (as it is supposed to have) miscarried. The reasons hereof will afterward be made to appear.

Corol. This relief, by what means soever it is to be obtained, is of great use to the churches of Christ, and of great concernment unto their peace and edification.

Ques. 3. How may such administrations be rectified?

Ans. The rectifying such maladministrations may be (and is ordinarily no otherwise to be expected) by the advice and counsel of other churches, walking in the same fellowship and ordinances of the gospel with that church so failing as is supposed. And this to be given upon the hearing and understanding of the whole proceedings of that church in the administration supposed irregular.

This being the principal thing aimed at, must be farther considered. And,

1. The way, or means, whereby other churches come to the knowledge of such supposed miscarriages in any church of their communion, may be considered. Now this is either,

(1.) By public report. So the Israelites took notice of the fact of the Reubenites and Gadites in building an altar, which thereupon they sent to inquire about: 'They heard say they had done it;' Josh. xxii. 11. So the apostle took notice of the miscarriage of the church of Corinth in the case of the incestuous person; 1 Cor. v. 5. And this is a sufficient ground of inquiry, or of desiring an account of any church, in such cases.

(2.) By information of particular persons, whom they judge holy and faithful. So the apostle took notice of the dissensions in the church of Corinth: 'They were declared unto him by them of the house of Cloe;' 1 Cor. i. 11.

(3.) By an account given unto them by any church, requiring their advice in any case of difficulty, either before or after the administration of censures. So the church at

Antioch gave an account of their troubles and differences to the church at Jerusalem; Acts xv.

(4.) By the addresses of the persons injured, or supposing themselves to be so; which to make, whilst they judge themselves innocent, is their indispensable duty; either directly, by seeking advice or counsel from them; or by desiring admission into the fellowship of the gospel with them, which they cannot grant, without an inquiry into the causes of their separation from any other church, or society.

Corol. Where there is a concurrence of the most ways or means of information, there ought to be the more diligence in the inquiry.

Hence it follows, that it is the duty of churches walking in the same order and fellowship of the gospel, upon such information or complaint, as beforementioned, of any undue administration of church censures, especially of excommunication by any church amongst themselves, to inquire by their messengers into the cause and manner of it, to the end that they may give their joint advice and counsel in the matter. And it is the duty of the church complained of, or informed against, to give them an account of all their proceedings in that case, with their reasons for their procedure, and to hearken unto and consider the advice that shall be offered and given unto them.

2. This will appear sufficiently confirmed, if we consider, in order unto a right judgment of the grounds whereon this way and practice is asserted,

(1.) That this advice of churches in communion to be given and taken, is no ordinary or standing ordinance of the church as to its practice, though it be as unto its right; but is only to be made use of in extraordinary cases, and such as should not occur, although they will; and for this cause it is more sparingly mentioned in the Scripture.

(2.) That it is, and may be fully proved to be, the duty of all churches, by previous advice with other churches in cases of difficulty, to prevent this consequent counsel, which being after a sentence given, must needs be attended with many difficulties.

(3.) That the practice of the churches, as to discipline, is no longer recorded in the Scripture, than they had the direction and help of the apostles, which supplied all extra-

ordinary emergencies among them : so that many instances of this practice amongst them are not to be expected, and it is of the care and wisdom of our Lord Jesus that we have any.

(4.) That we must here be contented with such arguments and testimonies, as we act upon in other ordinances and things belonging to the worship and order of the churches; such as the distribution of elders into teaching and ruling, the administration of the sacraments by officers only, gesture in the sacrament of the supper, observation of the first day of the week, and the like.

These things being premised, the order above expressed is confirmed,

I. From the light and law of nature, with the unalterable reason of the thing itself. Hence are churches directed into this order and practice.

There is somewhat that is moral in all ordinances. Some of them are wholly so as to their matter and substance, and founded in the light of nature, being only directed as to their principle, manner, and end, in the gospel; such is excommunication itself, as might easily be made to appear. And from hence a direction unto duty, and an indispensable obligation unto obedience doth arise. That which is moral in any ordinance doth no less oblige us to an observation of it, than that which is of mere institution. And it obligeth us because it is moral. And the Lord Christ being in all things the Lord of our consciences, what we do therein, we do it in obedience unto him.

Now that the order established is thus grounded and warranted, appears by the ensuing rules, taken from the light of nature.

1. 'Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari debet.' All men are to consider that wherein the concernment of all doth lie, according to their respective interests. What is the ground and reason why all the members of a church do consider, determine, give their counsel and consent, in the case of any persons being cast out of their society? It is warranted by virtue of this rule. They all have communion with such a person, and must all withdraw communion from him, and therefore must consider the reason of his excision or cutting off. Now a church in its censures doth not eject

any one from the enjoyment of ordinances numerically only, that is, in that one society; but specifically, that is, from the ordinances of Christ in all churches. Hence it becomes the concernment of other churches, even as many as the person ejected may seek communion from; and therefore it is to be considered by them, with respect unto their own duty of walking towards him.

2. 'Cujus est judicare, ejus est cognoscere.' Whoever is to judge, is to take cognizance of the fact, and the reason of it. This is to be done according to the several interests that men may have in the matter under consideration; which in some is of jurisdiction, which in this case we admit not of; in others of counsel and advice. Now other churches are not allowed in this case to be merely passive and indifferent, but must make a determination in it. This is evident on supposition of the injured person's offering himself to their communion: for they must reject him, or receive him. In both they judge, and therein must take cognizance by hearing the matter from the church; and so on both sides. And unless this be allowed, no church can or ought to expect, that any other church will reject from communion any whom they reject, merely because they are rejected; unless they suppose their judgment to be absolutely a rule unto any other churches to walk by, in their observation of the commands and institutions of Christ.

3. On the part of the persons supposed to be injured, every man by the law of nature is obliged to undertake 'in-culpatam sui tutelam,' the just defence of his own innocency, by all lawful ways and means. And as absolutely the way, means, and measure of this defence is left unto a man's own prudence; so there is a rule given unto it, wherever the glory of God or of the good of his neighbour is concerned: if either of these suffer by his wrong, he is obliged to vindicate his own innocency, nor is at liberty to suffer false imputations to lie upon him. It is in such cases a man's sin not to do so. And in the case under consideration this can be done only by an address unto other persons, for their assistance according to their interest. An interest of jurisdiction in civil courts, or in churches, in this case there is none. The interest of private persons herein is of compassion, prayer, and private advice; the interest of churches is a cog-

nizance of the cause, with advice and judgment thereon. And for persons or churches not to give assistance in this case, according to the truth and equity, is their sin.

That these are principles of the light of nature, and the natural reason of such things, appears from the general allowance of them so to be, and their constant practice amongst all men, walking according to that light and law.

Corol. If churches, as they are assemblies and societies of men in communion for the same end, observe not the indispensable rules of societies, they cannot, as such, be ordinarily preserved in their being and communion.

II. The way and order laid down is directed unto, warranted, and confirmed by general rules of the Scripture.

1. On the part of the church supposed to err in its administrations.

There are sundry general rules, which declare it to be their duty to give an account unto other churches, of their proceedings therein, and to consider their advice. Some of these may be named. As,

(1.) That 'they give none offence to the churches of God;' 1 Cor. x. 32. 'Give no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed;' 2 Cor. vi. 3. Upon a supposition, or information, or complaint of maladministration of any ordinance, offence may be taken, and that, if accompanied (as it may be) with much appearing evidence, justly. And in this case the church hath no way to clear itself from having indeed given offence, but by giving an account of their proceedings and the reason thereof. And without this it cannot be avoided, but that offences will be multiplied amongst the churches of Christ, and that to the utter ruin of their mutual communion. Thus when Peter, by the special command and direction of God, went and preached the gospel to the Gentiles, many, not knowing the grounds of his so doing, nor his warrant for it, took offence at it, and charged him with irregular walking, Acts xi. 2, 3. In this case, he doth not defend himself by his apostolical authority and privilege, nor in a few words tell them he had a warrant for what he did; but to remove all doubts, questions, and causes of offence, he distinctly repeats the whole matter, and all the circumstances of it: an example of so great importance, that the Holy Ghost thought meet at large to express

his account and defence, though the matter of it was set down immediately before; Acts x. and xi.

(2.) That they 'be ready always to give an answer (that is, an account) of the hope that is in them (and consequently of their practice suitable thereunto) with meekness and fear,' 1 Pet. iii. 15. This proves it a 'minore ad majus:' if they should be ready thus to answer every man, much more many churches of God, and that in and about things of their mutual edification.

(3.) That in particular they clear themselves, when suffering under any imputation, or being in danger of so doing. 'What carefulness it wrought in you, what clearing of yourselves: in all things you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter;' 2 Cor. vii. 11. And this on many accounts is the duty of a church in the case proposed: the glory of God, the honour of Christ, their own peace and edification, with the peace and credit of all other churches, require it of them. Nor can this duty be any otherwise performed, but by this giving an account of their own proceedings, and receiving the advice of other churches therein. And if this be not done freely, with readiness and submission of mind, there is no way left to preserve the peace and communion of churches. Those who suppose they may in such cases act in a way of jurisdiction and church-power, can attain the end by them aimed at, by virtue of the censures which they do administer. But in this way of counsel and advice, unless those who are concerned to give an account of themselves, will do it with meekness, gentleness, mutual trust and confidence suitable unto the conduct of the Spirit of Christ, in obedience unto his institutions, the whole end of it will be in danger to be frustrated.

2. On the part of other churches.

(1.) All churches, walking in the same order and fellowship of the gospel, are mutually debtors to each other for their good and edification. 'Their debtors they are;' Rom. xv. 27. And this debt in this case can no otherwise be paid, but by the way prescribed.

(2.) What the apostles did, might do, and ought to do, towards one another, who were all equal by virtue of their common interest in the same work, that one church may do, and ought to do, towards another, or many churches towards

one: but one apostle might take cognizance of the ways and walking of another, and withstand, advise, or reprove him, if in any thing he failed, and walked not with a right foot; Gal. ii. 11, 14, 15.

Corol. General rules, containing the grounds and reasons of particular institutions, are sure guidance and direction in and unto their observation.

III. The way and order expressed is warranted by necessity; as that without which the peace of communion and edification of the churches cannot be preserved and carried on. As,

1. On the part of the church whose administrations are questioned. The persons censured (which is ordinary) may, in their own vindication, or by way of undue reflection, not to be discovered without a just examination, impair their reputation with other churches, or many members of them, whereby it may suffer and be exposed to sundry inconveniences. In this case a church can have no relief, but by reporting the matter unto other churches, so seeking their advice and counsel, whereby they may receive great encouragement, comfort, and boldness in the Lord, if found to have proceeded according unto rule.

2. On the part of other churches. A church may either causelessly, or with just cause, cast out or withdraw communion from such a number of their members, as bearing themselves on their own innocency and right, may continue in a society, and plead that the power, authority, and privilege of the church doth abide with them. How in this case shall other churches know with which of these societies they may and ought to hold communion, unless they may and ought to examine and consider the causes of the dissension between them? And they may justly, and ought to withhold communion from that party of them, which shall refuse to tender their case unto such consideration.

3. On the part of the persons supposed to be injured; and that either for their restoration, or their conviction and humiliation. For,

(1.) If they are innocent, it is meet that they should be heard, as the Israelites heard the Reubenites; and necessary that they should be restored. Now it being supposed that the church which hath rejected them, will not rescind their

own act without new light and evidence, which for many reasons is not like to spring from among themselves; this is the only way left for that necessary relief, which the Lord Christ requires to be given. For what is our duty towards a person repenting, in reference to his restoration, is certainly our duty towards a person who hath not sinned, when his innocence shall be discovered.

(2.) For their conviction and humiliation, if they be found offenders. Whilst they see not the right regularity of the church's proceedings with them; whilst they are able to justify themselves in their own consciences, and their hearts condemn them not, it is not to be expected that the sentence of excommunication, which works only by the means of men's light and conviction, will have its effect upon them. But when there shall be the concurrence of many churches, in the approbation of the censure inflicted on them, which probably will be accompanied with a contribution of new light and conviction, it is a most useful means to bring them to humiliation and repentance. It was an aggravation of the censure inflicted on the incestuous Corinthian, that it was given out against him by many, 2 Cor. ii. 6. that is, by the common consent of the church: and it will add thereunto, when the censure shall be confirmed and approved by the concurrent advice of many churches.

Corol. The Lord Christ having provided all things necessary for the peace and edification of his church, in all things that are evidently of that importance, his mind and will is diligently to be inquired after.

IV. This whole order and practice is grounded on especial warrant and approbation, recorded Acts xv. Concerning which we may observe,

1. That the occasion there mentioned fell out in the providence of God, and the practice upon it was guided by the Holy Ghost, that it might be an example and rule for the churches of Christ, in cases of a like concernment unto them in all ages, and so hath the force and warranty of an institution. As it was in the case that gave occasion unto deacons, Acts iv. a matter of fact, wherein was some disorder, rectified by a practice answering the necessity of the churches, became an institution for order in all future ages.

2. That in that synod things were not determined by im-

mediate inspiration, but the truth was searched out, and the mind of the Holy Ghost searched into by reasonings, arguings, and the consideration of Scripture testimonies, whereby they were guided in the conclusion and determination.

3. That the institution and rule given is not in its exercise to be confined to that particular case and instance there mentioned (which to do would overthrow many other rules and observations which we admit), but it is to be extended, in proportion and parity of reason, unto all cases of a like nature. For the reason of any law is the rule of its interpretation; and so it is of any institution. That that which gives offence and trouble unto any church, that wherein many churches are concerned, that which in any church hinders edification, and disturbs the faith or peace of any of its members, whether it be in doctrine or practice, that is not, or cannot be composed in any one church, should be considered, advised upon, and determined by more churches holding communion together, and meetings for that purpose by their messengers, is the sense, meaning, design, and importance of this institution.

Corol. To deny an institution of so great necessity to the peace and edification of the churches, will give great countenance unto men, who supposing such defects, are ready to supply them with their own inventions.

V. The order asserted is confirmed by the practice of the first churches, after the decease of the apostles. For when the church of Corinth had by an undue exercise of discipline deposed some of their elders, the church of Rome taking cognizance of it, wrote unto them, reproving their rashness, and advised their restoration. And when the church of Antioch was afterward troubled with the pride and false opinions of Pãulus Samosatenus, the neighbouring bishops or elders came unto the church, and joined their consent in his deposition.

Some things are, or may be, objected unto this course of proceeding amongst the churches of Christ, which shall therefore be briefly considered and answered.

Objection 1. This way of proceeding will abridge the liberty, and destroy the privileges, of particular churches, which ought to be carefully preserved as the ground and foundation of the whole superstruction of church-order.

Ans. 1. Particular churches have certainly no liberties or privileges, that are inconsistent with, and do contradict either the light of nature, moral equity, general rules of the Scripture, or the reasons and ends of all institutions, and of the edification of the whole body of Christ. And on these, as hath been declared, is this way and course of proceeding grounded.

2. Other churches taking care about their own concerns and duty according to the will and appointment of Christ, namely, in considering whom they receive into, and whom they are to deny communion unto, with the cause thereof, do not, nor can truly, abridge the liberties or privileges of any church whatever. For the duty of many churches will never interfere with the due liberty of any one. And this is all upon the matter that they do in this case; which must be granted them, unless we will say, that the actings of one church, and those, it may be, irregular, shall not only abridge all other churches of their liberty, but hinder them also from performing their duty.

3. I do not see how counsel and advice can abridge the liberty of any church or person. Certainly to guide, direct, and assist any in the acting of their liberty, is not to abridge it, but rather to strengthen it. For liberty acted not according to rule, is licentiousness. A man in the use of his liberty may be going to do himself some notable injury; he that shall stop him by counsel and persuasion, with the prevalency and authority of reason, doth not take away his liberty, but guides him aright in the use of it.

4. Wherein is the abridgment pretended? Is a church by this means hindered from the free use and acting of its own judgment, in taking in what members it seems good, in watching over them according to the rule, in admonishing, re-proving, or casting them out, if they find just and sufficient cause so to do? To hinder or obstruct a church in any of these acts or actings by any authority, sentence, or determination, by any act or acts whatever, is utterly disclaimed: so that this is but a pretence.

5. When a case hath difficulty in it, and such mostly, if not universally, have all cases, wherein there will be found the least appearance of a grievance in the execution of censures, or pretence for seeking redress; a church hath not

liberty, hath no privilege to secure it from previous seeking the advice of other churches, which is their duty by many rules of Scripture. We must not pretend unbounded liberty against known duty. And as a church doth not seek previous advice from other churches, that they may obtain power to execute their censures, which they have in themselves, no more doth this following advice any way cut them short in the use or execution of their power, but only direct them. And if a church have not this liberty by rule before censure in difficult cases, as it hath not, no more hath it after a censure, whereby the necessity of advice and counsel may be increased.

Obj. 2. This way of proceeding will erect a jurisdiction or judicature in some churches over others, which is not to be allowed.

So some have spoken, who have not, it may be, duly weighed either what jurisdiction, properly so called, is; or how great an evil it is to cast a reproach upon the right ways of the Lord. In answer I say,

Ans. Excommunication itself, whatever men may suppose, is no proper act of jurisdiction. For jurisdiction in any sense is an adjunct of office, and the acts of it are acts of office and power. But so is not excommunication; for it is not an authoritative act of the officers of the church, but a judicial sentence of the whole church. Now the whole church is not in office. The whole body is not an eye. What is then done by it, is no act of office power, but a declaration of a judgment according to especial institution. And if excommunication itself may be exercised without any jurisdiction, surely that exercise may be consulted and advised about, without any pretence thereunto.

2. To constitute a jurisdiction it is required that there be, first, an office power stated in them that claim it; and a duty in others on the same account to submit unto them; secondly, an authoritative acting by virtue of that office power, with an obligation from that authority, formally considered, unto obedience; with sundry other things, which in this matter are utterly disclaimed.

3. A right understanding of the true state of the question, of what is granted, and what asserted in this matter,

will, with them that love peace and truth, fully obviate such objections as these. For,

(1.) It is granted that all church-power and authority, for the administration of all the ordinances and institutions of the gospel, is intrusted with a particular congregation.

(2.) That there is no judicature, no church assembly, vested with church-power and authority, without, above, or beyond a particular church, that should either contribute authority unto such a church for its actings, or authoritatively control it in its actings, to order or change its proceeding in any thing, as by virtue of any authority received unto that purpose.

(3.) That in case any person be not satisfied with the administration of the church whereof he is a member, but finds himself aggrieved thereby, he cannot appeal unto any church, or churches, or assemblies of churches, as having power or authority to revoke or disannul the sentence or act of the church, wherewith he is offended; either in pretence that the church without their concurrence and consent had not power to pass any such act, or that they have authority to control their acts, or can on any account authoritatively interpose in their administrations.

(4.) It is then granted, that the power of excommunication in the preceding acts unto it, and full execution of it, is placed in a particular congregation, without respect unto any superior authority, but that of Christ and his word. These things are acknowledged; but that it should hence follow, that in case of supposed maladministration of ordinances, and the complaint of persons pretending to be injured thereby, other churches are not by virtue of Scripture rules, institution of our Lord Jesus, warrant of the light of nature, on their communion and common interest, to inquire into the matter, and take cognizance of it, that no offence be given or taken, that they may know how to discharge aright their duty towards both the church and the persons aggrieved, and give their advice in the common concernment of all the churches, there is no pretence to surmise. And for a church to say, that because they have power to do what they do, they will therefore in such things neither desire advice, nor take advice, nor hearken unto counsel, nor give ac-

count of their proceeding to them that are or may be offended, or that require an account of them, is scarce agreeable to the spirit of Christ, or rule of his word.

Obj. 3. This is the way to frustrate the sentence of excommunication, and to prevent the due efficacy of it upon persons censured, yea to harden them in their sin and offence.

Ans. 1. Concerning whom are these things feared? Were the advice mentioned, and the counsel to be had and given, to be among heathens, enemies of the church, or of the ways of Christ, or of the especial way and order of church fellowship, which in this discourse is supposed, such events might be feared. But to pretend to fear that other churches of Christ, walking in the same order and communion with ourselves, and whom we ought to look on in all things as like-minded with ourselves, as to their aim at the glory of God, and edification of the church, should by their counsel and advice frustrate the end of any ordinance of Christ, is a surmise that ought not to be indulged unto. Yea, we have herein cause to admire the wisdom, and bless the care, of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath provided this help for us, to strengthen and confirm us in the ways of truth and righteousness, or to direct us where we are, or may be, mistaken.

2. Where excommunication is not administered but in a due manner, and for just causes, there will appear little trouble or difficulty in this matter. Let the cause or matter of it be as it ought to be, such a sin, or sins, as the mind or conscience of a believer, of an enlightened person free from open prejudices, will at first view condemn in himself and others, and this, or these sins, persisted in after due admonition; and there will indeed be left no pretence of grievance or complaint in those that are censured. But if it be administered in dubious cases, we shall find that this way of counsel is so far from being an obstruction of its efficacy, as that it is the only means to render it effectual.

3. No man will complain or address himself unto the relief declared, if he be convinced in his conscience that he is not injured, but that he is indeed guilty of the crimes charged on him, and that by Scripture rule they are such as deserve that censure. In this case no man will be so foolish or obstinate as to seek for relief. And if he should do so, he can possibly expect nothing, but to have his bonds

made strong. But now suppose that a person be not so convinced, neither before nor after sentence denounced against him, but looks on himself as innocent and injured, either in part, or in whole, in matter or manner of proceeding, what effect can be expected of his excommunication? We are deceived, if we look that this ordinance should have any effect upon men, but by the conviction of their minds and consciences. It worketh doctrinally only, though peculiarly by virtue of especial institution. And in this case it is evident how this way may farther, and that it cannot possibly obstruct, the effects of this censure, as was in part before declared.

4. The address being but once to be made, this is the only way to bind the guilty person, and that without delay, and to give him a sense of his sin; which it is supposed that before he had not.

5. It is our duty not to cast even persons that are excommunicated under new temptations. Now he that is aggrieved with the sentence denounced against him, and supposeth himself injured (which whilst he doth so, he cannot be humbled for his sin), if he supposeth he hath no way of relief left unto him, that is, that his case can no more come under advice or counsel, he will be exposed unto temptations to irregular ways, and so cast off the yoke which he supposeth grievous and injurious.

Obj. 4. The pattern urged for this course of proceeding, Acts xv. concerneth only doctrines, and not the administration of censures, which was not then nor there in question. And therefore in the like case only may the like course be taken.

Ans. 1. The way of mutual counsel and advice amongst churches, pleaded for, is not built only upon that instance and example, as hath before been evinced. There are many more grounds of it, reasons for it, and directions about it, than what are, or can be, comprised in any one particular instance.

2. There is frequently, if not always, some doctrinal mistake in the bottom of all maladministration. For whereas the nature of the sin proceeded against, and the rule proceeded by, ought in the first place to be doctrinally and dogmatically stated, here usually is the beginning of

the mistake and error of any church. This therefore falls confessedly under that example of Acts xv.

3. Though that assembly made a doctrinal determination of the things in difference, yet the formal reason of the consideration of those things was the offence that was given, and that the churches were troubled. So that the pattern is to be extended unto all things whereby the peace of the church is disturbed.

4. Maladministration may tend to the subversion of the church, and the ruin of the souls of men, no less than false doctrines. As, suppose a church should admit known Arians or Socinians into their society, supposing they have liberty so to do, may not other churches both consider the fact, and unless they alter their proceeding, withhold communion from them? Instances innumerable of the same kind may be given.

Obj. 5. Churches have the sole power of admitting members into their society; by virtue of which admission they are not only received into a participation of the privileges of the church in that particular society whereof they are members, but also into the communion of all other churches of Christ. Now this is daily practised by churches, without any farther inspection into their actions by others. Those admitted are received upon their testimony into their admission. And why shall not churches have the same trust reposed in them, as to the exclusion of any members from them; and expect that their testimony alone in the fact should satisfy, for their exclusion from all other churches, and their communion?

Ans. 1. The cases indeed are parallel, and the power of every church is no less for the exclusion of any of their members, than for their admission. Nor ought their testimony to be of less weight in the one, than in the other.

2. Ordinarily, and where there is no ground of farther consideration, the actings of a church of Christ in both these cases are, and ought to be granted and taken to be, according unto rule; so that other churches do acquiesce as to their concernments in the judgment of all the several churches of their communion.

3. There may be mistakes in admission, as well as in the exclusion of members. And some there are, who do very

much scruple complete communion with many churches, principally upon this account, that they proceed not on right grounds in their admission of members; and such cannot but grant, that on occasion the grounds of their own admissions may, and ought to be, questioned and examined.

4. No church hath such an absolute power in the admission of members, but that in cases of difficulty, and such as may in their determination one way or other give offence, they are bound to seek, and to take the advice of other churches with whom they hold communion.

5. Suppose it be reported or intimated by any of the ways that were before mentioned, that a church in communion with others, had admitted into their society an Arian, or Socinian, a seducer, or a person of a flagitious life, given to corrupt the manners of others; shall not the other churches of the same communion, to whom the matter is so reported or declared, and who are offended thereat, require an account of the church's proceeding therein, to know whether it be as it is reported, or no? And is not that church, so represented or reported of, obliged to give a full and punctual account of their proceedings, and to receive advice thereupon? Let any consider the instances before given, the nature of the thing itself, the rule of the Scripture in such cases, and determine. The case is directly the same as to excommunication. 'But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God;' 1 Cor. xi. 16.