

Chapter 26: Of the Church III

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1 The cornerstone of its government: the ministry of the Word

1.1 The official ministry of the Word by pastors ¶ 10

The work of pastors being constantly to attend the service of Christ, in His churches, in the ministry of the Word and prayer, with watching for their souls, as they that must give an account to Him;(19) it is incumbent on the churches to whom they minister, not only to give them all due respect, but also to communicate to them of all their good things, according to their ability,(20) so as they may have a comfortable supply, without being themselves entangled in secular affairs;(21) and may also be capable of exercising hospitality towards others;(22) and this is required by the law of nature, and by the express order of our Lord Jesus, who hath ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel.(23)

This paragraph starts with a bit of a job description. It enumerates ministry of the Word, prayer, “watching for their souls”; in other words, shepherding, or pastoring. There’s enough for pastors to do that it’s a full-time gig if they’re doing it right. So, in Acts 6, when it was clear the apostles didn’t have enough time for both this spiritual ministry, and a physical ministry that shouldn’t be neglected, they created the office of deacon, saying “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:4)

Scripture, and our confession use the words, “continually” and “constantly” here.

Nehemiah Cox on “constantly attending” (Location 10450.)

Let your Care be, to deal with the Souls and Consciences of Men, as knowing that it is the Salvation of Souls which you are

to labour after, a Care of Souls that is committed to you, and an account of them that you must make to God: It is not your Business to gratify the itching Ears or wanton Fancies of Men, but to speak to their Hearts, and by manifestation of the Truth, to recommend your selves to every Man's Conscience in the sight of God, 2 Cor. 4. 2. Lay out your pains in a solid explaining of the Principles of Religion, and a judicious accommodation of them to practice; that sincere Piety, and the power of Godliness, may be promoted by your Ministry: Press the particular Duties of Men in every Relation and Capacity upon them, warn them of the sleights of Satan; rebuke their Errors and Disorders, that go astray; comfort the Afflicted and broken in Heart; And in these things, let no Zeal, Diligence, Boldness, Industry or Labour be wanting.

Because of this continual nature of the job, we could say, therefore, that a bi-vocational pastor, isn't ideal. 1 Timothy 2: 4 supports that conclusion, saying, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." Our confession deals with supporting a pastor in this paragraph. We have good scriptural support for the concept of an elder getting a sufficient living from the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:6-14

⁶ Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? ⁷ Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?

⁸ I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰ Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. ¹¹ If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? ¹² If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food

of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? ¹⁴ So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 says, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.” Again, Paul brings this context of the ox, which makes it clear that “honor” in this passage is talking about remuneration. And it’s not to be considered worldly for an elder who’s doing a decent job to expect a decent paycheck. Galatians 6:6-7 says, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” When the pastor teaches us something, we owe him a return for it.

More than all that, he ought to have enough to be hospitable. He needs to be able to reasonably maintain a comfortable home. 1 Timothy 3:2 makes hospitality a qualification of an elder. “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach”

Our confession adds an allusion to Hebrews 13:17 here. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” There’s a great weightiness to their responsibility. There ought to be a return for that sort of stress.

All this probably seems obvious to us. But Renihan points out that there is an historical context here, he says,

After the enforcement of the Act of Uniformity in August 1662, ejected ministers no longer received support from the tithe system of the Church of England¹.

So, if you were a baptist watching the news in 1662, you’d be thinking “uh-oh, how’s our pastor going to eat?” “Who’s going to pay the bills?” became a question they didn’t necessarily have to deal with before. So our confession says, “it is incumbent on the churches to whom they minister, not only to give them all due respect, but also to communicate to them of all their good things.”

“1689 London General Assembly issued *The Gospel Minister’s Maintenance Vindicated*,”

¹Renihan. Location 10421.

1.2 The auxiliary ministry of the Word by others ¶ 11

Although it be incumbent on the bishops or pastors of the churches, to be instant in preaching the Word, by way of office, yet the work of preaching the Word is not so peculiarly confined to them but that others also gifted and fitted by the Holy Spirit for it, and approved and called by the church, may and ought to perform it.(24)

- 24 - anyone can do it

- Acts 8:5 - [added by Waldron; Philip being a deacon]

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

- Acts 11:19-21 -

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

- 1 Peter 4:10-11 -

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

- humility & submission

- Romans 12:3 - Whoever is gifted and fitted by the Holy Spirit must use their gifts humbly

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

- Hebrews 13:17 - Whoever is gifted and fitted by the Holy Spirit must use their gifts in submission to the eldership

13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

In light of these passages, we would probably not want to put someone in the pulpit who is constantly putting himself forward, or are sour because he's not getting any time in front even though they're a D.D.

Renihan gives us a sense of what baptists were doing with this back when our confession was new. He says,

A procedure to identify gifts was in place. Men who would be gifted brothers were required to be approved and called by the church by means of an assessment of gifts. This was a very specific activity, and as Keach stated, a private matter carried out only before the church. In 1679, the Petty France, London, church appointed “Br. Austen . . . to spend some time upon 1 Pet. 5.5 on ye Lord’s day fortnight after ye publick exercise is over, for ye tryall of his gift before ye congregation.”⁸⁰¹ Since this activity was a test, it was thought to be inappropriate to allow non-members to hear².

2 The extent of its government

2.1 It extends to all its members ¶ 12

As all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches, when and where they have opportunity so to do; so all that are admitted unto the privileges of a church, are also under the censures and government thereof, according to the rule of Christ.(25)

Our confession offers a couple passages for support.

²Renihan. Location 10509.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 - “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.”
- 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15

⁶ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. . . . ¹⁴ And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

We start here by referencing previous paragraphs. It’s a matter of obedience that believers join themselves to local churches, none of which are perfect. By doing so, you’re admitted to certain privileges, but you’re also subject to censures, and government according to the rule of Christ.

This paragraph says that “all that are admitted” are subject to government; none of the members are above this, and there are no super-members. Renihan references article 43 of the 1LCF:

And every particular member of each church, how excellent, great, or learned soever, is subject to this censure and judgment; and that the church ought not without great care and tenderness, and due advice, but by the rule of faith, to proceed against her members³.

Renihan also says that the word *censure* here “is a summary term for discipline based in Paul’s universal statement in 1 Thessalonians 5.14,” Hanserd Knollys spells it out a little bit:

Unto this Gospel-Government appertains Church-Censures of Admonition, 2 Thes. 3.15. and Titus 3.10. Suspension (or withdrawing from a Brother or Member, that hath, and doth walk disorderly,) 2 Thes. 3.6. and Excommunication of those Members that live in gross and scandalous sins, 1 Cor. 5.1, 4, 5, 13.

³Renihan. Location 10532.

So we have admonition, suspension, and excommunication. Note that none of these are punishments. The state has the sword to punish. The Church has the keys to shut doors. Most Christians would be willing to say that warnings, or admonitions against sin are not unloving. It's often argued that it is more loving to warn. This goes for these *censures* in the church. We are not to think it merciful to refrain from suspension, or excommunication when it's due.

It is not only unloving to a sinner but,

1. Being disobedient to commands in Matthew 18, it undermines Christ's authority in the church. We're to pray that his will be done on earth as in heaven. We ought not to use the keys to *approve* and *include*, for instance, a fornicator in the visible church.
2. It can lead the body to question the legitimacy of church discipline.
3. It can give members reasonable, and even sufficient cause for departure, as they may judge the body unhealthy.
4. The Lord's name may be blasphemed in the world.

Likewise we get no satisfaction of justice from it. No "pound of flesh," so there's nothing useful in being too hasty about it either.

2.2 It extends to all its problems ¶ 13

No church members, upon any offence taken by them, having performed their duty required of them towards the person they are offended at, ought to disturb any church-order, or absent themselves from the assemblies of the church, or administration of any ordinances, upon the account of such offence at any of their fellow members, but to wait upon Christ, in the further proceedings of the church.(26)

This paragraph is a logical implication of the previous paragraph.

- Matthew 18:15-17
- Ephesians 4:2-3 [1-6]

I [Paul] . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, **with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

So the object of Matthew 18 isn't the just following of the rules, or the fulfillment of law. It's not the satisfaction of justice. The whole object of obedience to Matthew 18 is to keep peace and unity in the church. In any and every disagreement, our first longing should be to seek repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. We are not to be folks who demand satisfaction. We ought not to nurse grudges, or require what we deserve from our brethren, even if we really do deserve it. Yes, biblical forgiveness only follows repentance. But Jesus tells us to *liberally* accept the repentance of our brothers, and forgive them. If our first object is unity, we also can't be nit-pickers of the quality of our brother's repentance.

On the other hand, we need to be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. We're not commanded to be suckers. It's not nit-picking to look for fruit. We're told to judge trees by their fruit (Matthew 7).

every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ²⁰ Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

The context here is false prophets. But Christ is applying the more general principal that, because we can't judge hearts, we should look for convincing changes; maybe even things that can be measured.

The conclusion of the Matthew 18 passage, excommunication, is sanctifying to the church. It puts someone out who shouldn't be numbered in the visible church. But the larger part of the passage is given to pursuing unity. If unity can be had in obedience to Matthew 18, we need to pursue it.

Waldron says, "Paragraph 13 pointedly addresses a crying sin against the government of the church very common today." I used to lightly switch churches if there was anything I disliked about the one I was attending. But, after growing some years in the faith, and living with this confession, I've

come to the conviction that church membership is almost as important as marriage.

[Waldron p. 384]

Renihan says,

They are to wait upon Christ, expecting that in His time He will reveal His will in the further proceeding of the church as it deliberates and determines a course of action. This is not a special revelation, but a belief that Christ sovereignly expresses His purpose in specific matters such as this through church decisions and actions properly executed according to the Word of God. This practical exhortation assumes that Jesus Christ is present in each true church and will guide His church to truth⁴.

So staying put is the same as trusting Christ.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 was what we would be one, as the Son was with the Father. There is only one body—one universal invisible church, descending from Heaven with the glory of God. We worship the living God here. How is this not bigger than our disagreements with one another, or any disagreement among elders? When we have disagreements, it's our chance to show we're really different from the world. John 13:35 says "By this shall all men know that ye are *my* disciples, if ye have love one to another." Don't leave! Not at the moment when staying really counts. The moment of difficulty is when nothing is more important than to get over ourselves and repent, forgive, and reconcile. We can trust the Lord to make things right. In Deuteronomy 32:25 the Lord says, "vengeance is mine, *I* will repay."

If we leave without some sufficient cause, or abstain from ordinances, what are we saying to our new church about where we came from? Were they *not* brethren at all? Are they *not* a real church of Christ? How can you explain yourself to your new congregation? Irreconcilable differences? Were you the only one in the right? Where's the meekness, and lowliness? Where's the forbearing with one another? Where's the endeavor to keep the unity? I don't think people understand just how radical abstaining from fellowship, and the ordinances really is.

Who are we if we don't forgive each other? Jesus says love for one another is how all men shall know whose disciples we are. If we split up over lack of forgiveness, or a lost vote, or any other less-than-fundamental disagreement with each other, whose disciples are we telling the world we are? Not Christ's, we can say at least that much.

⁴Renihan. Location 10568.

There is reason to be patient even in this matter though. It is in the nature of sheep to scatter at disruption, and disorder. The sheep should remember that staying during difficult times, and conflicts is not necessarily an endorsement of the conflict. Neither is it an approval of any action or failure of action of the elder or elders. Staying put doesn't endorse any bad member, or bad organ playing. But it is biblical obedience.

If we want the church to have the strength in culture it used to have, we need to feel our connection to the local Church more strongly than other connections. We don't have a different culture than the world if we split so easily.

Connection to church ought to be heavier than other connections.

3 Its fraternal relations: the communion of local churches ¶ 14

As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ,(27) in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.(28)

- 27 - bound to pray continually
 - Ephesians 6:18 - After Paul tells us to put on the armor of God, he commands us to “[pray] always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and [watch] thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”
 - Psalm 122:6 - “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.”
- 28 - there's a communion between local churches
 - Romans 16:1-2 - “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”

We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

4 Its special advantage: advisory assemblies ¶ 15

In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church, in their peace, union, and edification; or any member or members of any church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion together, do, by their messengers, meet to consider, and give their advice in or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned;(29) howbeit these messengers assembled, are not intrusted with any church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers.(30)

When this paragraph came into play for us before,

Note that the independence of the local church is maintained. This assembly is advisory.

1. Seek council, rather than being wise in our own conceits.
2. Preserve unity.

This is a way to pursue the alternatives mentioned in paragraph 13. Paragraph 13 says that rather than disturbing church order by refusing ordinances, and absenting our selves, we ought to “wait upon Christ, in the further proceedings of the church.” This is the unity-seeking way of meekness, lowliness, forbearance, and love.

Note that it gives standing to a “member or members” injured “in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order.”