

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 30.-Of Church Censures.

IV. For the better attaining of these ends, the Officers of the Church are to proceed by Admonition; suspension from the Lord's Supper for a season; and, by Excommunication from the Church; according to the nature of the crime, and demerit of the person¹.

Question 1.—*For the better attaining of these ends, ought the officers of the Church to proceed by admonition?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 Thess. 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:6,14,15. The first foundation of discipline is to provide for private admonition; that is, if any one does not do his duty spontaneously, or behaves insolently, or lives not quite honestly, or commits something worthy of blame, he must allow himself to be admonished; and every one must study to admonish his brother when the case requires, Prov. 25:9, 10. Here especially is there occasion for the vigilance of pastors and presbyters, whose duty is not only to preach to the people, but to exhort and admonish from house to house, whenever their hearers have not profited sufficiently by general teaching; as Paul shows, Acts 20:20,26,27. Then does doctrine obtain force and authority, not only when the minister publicly expounds to all what they owe to Christ, but has the right and means of exacting this from those whom he may observe to be sluggish or disobedient to his doctrine, Heb. 13:17. Should any one either perversely reject such admonitions, or by persisting in his faults, show that he contemns them, the injunction of Christ is, that after he has been a second time admonished before witnesses, he is to be summoned to the bar of the Church, which is the consistory of elders, and there admonished more sharply, as by public authority, that if he reverence the Church he may submit and obey, Matt. 18:15,17. If even in this way he is not subdued, but persists in his iniquity, he is then, as a despiser of the Church, to be debarred from the society of believers, 1 Cor. 5:11. We must attend to the distinction that some sins are private, others public or openly manifest, 1 Tim. 5:24. Of the former, Christ says to every private individual, admonish privately, Matt. 18:15. Of open sins Paul says to Timothy, to bring merited rebuke, 1 Tim. 5:20. The injunction which Paul gave to Timothy to rebuke those openly who sin openly, he himself followed with Peter, Gal. 2:14. For when Peter sinned so as to give public offence, he did not admonish him apart, but brought him forward in face of the Church, Prov. 27:5. The legitimate course will be to proceed in correcting secret faults by the steps mentioned by Christ, and in open sins, accompanied with public scandal, to proceed at once to solemn correction by the Church, Rom. 16:17, 18.

Question 2.—*For the better attaining of these ends, ought the officers of the Church to next proceed to suspension from the Lord's supper for a season?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 Cor. 11:29,31. The second step is to refuse admittance to the Lord's table, since the objective of censure is the repentance of the person who gives *offense*, 2 Thess. 3:14, as well as to prevent *the church* from being slandered, Rom. 2:24, and so that no one else will be offended by or imitate his sins, 1 Cor. 5:6. Thus, there are some occasions when someone who has committed an offense must be refused admittance for the benefit of the church—someone whom one otherwise would admit as far as the

¹1 Thess. 5:12; 2 Thess. 3:6,14,15; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,13; Matt. 18:17; Tit. 3:10.

person is concerned, since he manifests very genuine sorrow and lives a blameless and godly life both before and after the committed offense, 2 Cor. 2:6, 7; 13:10. The second step of censure is specifically intended for those who persevere in giving offense, 1 Tim. 6:5. It may be proper, in very flagrant cases of scandal, if they cannot be brought speedily to trial, to suspend the accused from sealing ordinances until the trial comes on, or while it is pending; and when a person is found guilty of an offence, he may be suspended from the privileges of the church, until he give evidence of a proper sense of his fault, and of reformation, 1 Cor. 14:40; Lev. 13:4; 2 Thess. 3:14.

Question 3.—*For the better attaining of these ends, ought the officers of the Church last to proceed by excommunication from the Church?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 Cor. 5:4,5,13; Matt. 18:17; Tit. 3:10. Excommunication is the highest censure which the church can inflict: the ground of it is either some highly aggravated immorality, 1 Cor. 5:13, or obstinate perseverance in some scandalous practice subversive of the doctrine or the order of the church, Gal. 5:12 w/ Gal. 1:7: it consists in solemnly excluding from the fellowship of the church, and delivering over to the world, the kingdom of Satan, the impenitent offender, 1 Cor. 5:5. The sentence of excommunication, pronounced according to God's law, is ratified in heaven, John 20:23; Satan receives power over the excommunicated person, 1 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 2:2; he is given up to terrors of conscience, or to what is still more alarming, blindness of mind and hardness of heart, 2 Cor. 2:6-11; Eph. 4:18; church members cease from communion with him; for, although the discharge of natural duties is not suspended, Christians are to avoid all familiar fellowship with the excommunicated sinner, Matt. 18:17; 2 Thess. 3:14.

Question 4.—*Ought the nature of the crime and demerit of the person be taken into account?*

Answer.—Yes. 1 Tim. 5:20. Thus do they err who fail to take into account the nature of the crime and demerit of the person—such sin against true Christian charity, Luke 12:48. The scandalous offences are of three kinds: heresy, which consists in maintaining errors contrary to the subordinate standards of the church, and to the holy scriptures, Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10—Immorality, 1 Cor. 5:11—and contempt of church order, which consists in untenderness to brethren, neglect of ordinances, disrespect to the ministry, and resistance to the authority of the church, 2 Thess. 3:6. As to the nature of the crime, the following ought to be taken into account: For private offences, private means of redress are first to be used, Matt. 18:15; when private exhortation proves ineffectual, or when it is, from the nature of the offence, inadequate to remove the grievance, a libel must be presented to the competent court, Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:12: when the scandal is notorious, the ecclesiastical Judicatory may call the offender to account, upon a charge of *famaclamosa*, Rev. 2:20: the Presbytery, in case of ministers, and the Session, in every other case, is the competent authority to commence and finish the process, unless a reference or an appeal be made to the superior Judicatory, Acts 15:2. As to the demerit of the person, the following ought to be taken into account: The offences of church members are not unnecessarily to be made public, 1 Pet. 4:8. The publicity of the censure is to bear a proportion to the magnitude and the publicity of the scandal, Deut. 21:21. Paul shows this, when he not only verbally rebukes the incestuous Corinthian, but punishes him with excommunication, as soon as he was informed of his crime, 1 Cor. 5:4. Admonitions and rebukes may, according to this rule, prudently applied, be administered to the offender secretly, in the family, before the session of the congregation, and publicly before the whole church, Tit. 1:13; 1 Tim. 5:20.