

National Church Establishments.

(The National Church Way as God's Way 1—The Jewish Church)

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. *At what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy *it*; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And *at what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. (Jer. 18:6-10)

Question.—*Is a dependent National Church way or an independent Congregational Church way most in accord with Scripture?*

Answer.—By a dependent National Church is meant a multitude of people professing Christianity (*i.e.*, saving faith in Christ), inhabiting one nation, with one civil government wherein the governors are Christian and one church government established by law over particular congregations with all bound together in one national covenant; by an independent Congregational Church is meant a particular body of people professing Christianity, knit into one congregation by way of church-covenant, together with a pastor of their own choosing disclaiming any higher authority in either church or state over them. The former appears because the Church of the Jews, which was God's own institution, Deut. 10:14-16; and it was a National Church in a formal proper political sense, Ex. 19:3-6. In point of fact, the particular worshipping churches all over Judea, meeting in their synagogues, are called by the Psalmist *houses* of God, Ps. 83:12; yet it is well known that all were subject to the Great Sanhedrim at Jerusalem, Num. 11:16. It was before this body that Christ was formally rejected by the Jewish Church, Matt. 26:57; John 18:15, 28. It is mentioned several times in the New Testament (τὸ συνέδριον), Acts 5:21. That this agrees with Scripture is cleared:

First, When it stood with God to form a Church to the best advantage of His own glory and the good of His people, Isa. 43:7, 21; when the people increased from a few souls to a multitude, even a nation, He chose this way of uniting the whole into one society, Ex. 18:16, 25, 26; with a governing church power over the whole, Num. 17:1-5. This, standing in matters of common reason, has never been repealed and, therefore, stands under the New Testament, as well as under the Old, Matt. 5:17, 18. It does not stand with Christ to alter the frame of the Church from national and dependent to congregational independency, nor does Scripture hint at such a change, Matt. 21:43; Acts 15:2.

Second, Jesus Christ was the Head, King and Husband of the Church under the Old as well as under the New Testament, Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8. Therefore, He could not lack affection to the Church then, no more than

He lacked wisdom to form the Church in the best way imaginable for God's glory and the common good of His people, 1 Cor. 1:24; John 10:11.

Third, Uniting the whole of the Jewish nation into one body, with a common church-power to govern the whole, was no part of the ceremonial law, Eph. 2:15, 16; Acts 15:4, 6. It did not belong to any temple-ordinance, and therefore was not typical of anything, as the high priest and sacrifices were, but it was a thing of common right and general equity, not of particular right of the Jews, Lev. 25:2, 3; Deut. 25:5-7; Rom. 2:15; 3:31. Neither was there anything in the subordination of the country synagogues to the Sanhedrim, of any particular of their state, in the land of promise given to them, Acts 15:22, 23.

Fourth, The dangers and difficulties, for the prevention and ease whereof, God had the whole Church of the Jews stand thus united, are the same under the Gospel that they were then, 1 Cor. 10:4-11. This appears most clearly in: 1.) The governing church-power under the Old Testament had a power first to provoke, and not only so, but to require negligent persons to do their duty, whether they were ministers or people, 2 Chron. 24:6. 2.) The governing church-power also retained the right to sit in judgment upon transgressors, Deut. 17:9, 12; Zech. 3:7. 3.) The governing church-power had the right to suspend from the exercise of the ministry, Ezra 2:62. 4.) The governing church-power had the right to excommunicate if they found cause, Ezra 10:8.

In short, it would appear that if Christian nations, under the New Testament, should by Christ's order have no national governing church-power over particular congregations, they would be far worse in this respect than that under the Old Testament, 2 Cor. 3:6-11. It would imply that the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Head, King and Husband of His Church has less care for the Church now than under the Old Testament dispensation, Heb. 8:6, 7. The apostle teaches us that all communities of the whole are concerned with the weal or woe of every part of the body, 1 Cor. 12:21-26.