

## Forward

To the reader:

In August of 1999 my wife and I flew out to Boston for the annual C.F.T.S. Boston Seminar. During that time Rev. Steven H. Ware Bailey walked us through the Cambridge Platform. I never had really read it, even though we were supposed to have it read before the seminar, oops. Yet, I remember going through the Platform and having a large number of light bulbs go off in my head. That week I gained a great deal of clarity about what Congregationalism is supposed to look like from the Platform. Since that time I have always made an effort to review it and study it. Also, as a pastor, I have exerted this same effort to teach each congregation about what Congregationalism is and what it is supposed to look like according to the Platform. In doing so I have found that I fly in the face of the ever popular quasi-Brownist notion that believes a Congregational church may do, and think, whatever it wants because it is its own boss, irregardless of Biblical teaching and our own tradition.

As I began to unpack this document in various classes it occurred to me that maybe one reason lay people do not read it is because they have not been introduced to it. Maybe people have not been introduced to the Platform because the idea of reading a document from the 1600's bores them to tears. What a dilemma. It is not enough for pastors to know the Platform; lay people need to know it as well. Why should anyone try to know the Platform if the prospect of reading seventeenth century English frightens them? In true Protestant fashion I decided that it would be beneficial to have a copy of the Cambridge Platform in modern day English vernacular and style.

The translation theory behind this project has been very simple. I went for what I thought would communicate. In some instances if a word or phrasing still had import I kept it. In some instances I went for more of a dynamic equivalence feel, crafting that which most effectively communicated the idea and the feel of the original reader to today's reader. At other times, because of the verbosity of the Puritans and the need for the economy of words in today's culture, I just cut out areas that I thought carried no significant meaning, free translation theory.

I am no scholar of seventeenth century writings, I am a pastor who sees a need to have a very important idea, thought about by some very smart people, made real for our situation here and now. I found updating the Cambridge Platform into modern English an incredibly fruitful activity for me to engage in, for it forced me to try and know my material. I encourage pastors to do this exercise for themselves. This "translation" is not meant to be authoritative in any way, but it is helpful should anyone choose to use it.

Finally, I am ever grateful to Mrs. Rennae Anderson, my secretary at the time, for scanning this whole document onto disk for me so that I could begin this project.

May it be as fruitful to you as it has been to me.

For Jesus' glory and kingdom,

Rev. Bruce E. Pratt  
5/20/02

# THE CAMBRIDGE PLATFORM

## CHAPTER I

### *The Form of Church-Government; One, Unchanging, and Set Down in Scripture.*

Ecclesiastical Polity, or Church Government, or discipline, is nothing else then the form and order that is to be observed in the Church of Christ; both for the constituting of it, and the work that is performed in it.

2. Church-Government is considered and thought about in regards to either the parts of government themselves, or the necessary circumstances thereof. The parts of government are prescribed in the word, because the holy Scriptures are perfect and they are able to make the Christian perfect and able to do every good work. Undoubtedly, the Scriptures lead to the well ordering of the house of God.

3. The parts of Church-Government are exactly described in the word of God as being a part of, or a means to, worship. This worship is according to the Second Commandment and should continue as one and the same until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that it would not be altered by human inventions.

4. The necessary circumstances of church-government, i.e. the time and place, as well as the rules of membership, as well as behavior in the church, are not left up to people to determine and thrust their own biases onto the church. Rather, the above items are described in God's word with some boundaries: that being the case all other circumstances that are not directly articulated in Scripture are done solely with edification of the body in mind. We know that such a goal is not of human invention, but rather comes from God.

## CHAPTER II

### *The Nature of the Universal Church in General and the Nature of a Local Visible Church.*

The **Universal Church** is the whole company of those that are elected, redeemed, and effectually called from a state of sin and death unto a state of grace, and salvation in Jesus Christ.

2. The universal church is either triumphant, or militant. The **Church Triumphant** is the number of believers who are glorified in heaven. The **Church Militant** is the number of believers who are struggling to be faithful to God while on earth.

3. The militant church is to be thought of as both invisible and visible. The militant

church is invisible, in respect to a person's standing with Christ, because faith is a matter of the heart. The militant church is visible, in respect to the fact that it is composed of particular churches as well as people who have made a profession of faith. As such, there is a universal body of those who profess their faith.

4. The members of the militant visible church are to walk in a church-order that is prescribed in the Gospel. This Gospel order says that there is a spiritual union and communion common to all believers. This Gospel order also implies that this church-order is a local phenomenon. We do not believe that the church order desired in the Gospel endorses a single politically ordered militant-visible church.

5. The state of the members, of the militant-visible church, walking in the order prescribed by the Gospel, since Christ's coming, has always been congregational.

6. A Congregational church is instituted by Christ and is a part of the militant-visible church. A congregational church consists of a company of saints by calling, that are united into one body by a holy covenant; for the purposes of the public worship of God, and the mutual edification one each other, in fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

### CHAPTER III

#### *The Composition of the Visible Church in Respect to its Quality and Quantity.*

The composition of a visible church is that it consists of saints by calling. By saints, we mean, folks who have attained some knowledge of the Christian faith, and do not have any glaring sin about them. Also, a saint is someone who has professed their faith in Jesus as Christ and has repented of their sin, and tries to live a devout and holy life obedient to Scripture. With this in mind, using charitable discretion, people may be accounted saints by calling. Sometimes a church has someone in its body that looks good on the outside, but is unsound and hypocritical on the inside. At such a time it is important for the church to reprove or remove such a member as it takes only little leaven to destroy the whole lump. More importantly, in such circumstances God's reputation takes a big hit.

2. Children of those considered "saints by calling" are also holy.

3. Members of well-ordered churches occasionally become sinful, wicked, dysfunctional and contentious, at such a time they ought not to be tolerated. Yet, often such people continue in the church because the church does not practice discipline. Such circumstances do not

immediately dissolve the church as seen in Israel, and the Galatian churches.

4. A church ought not be so numerically big that it cannot carry on its work in an orderly fashion, and it also should not be so small that they do not have enough people to carry on the work of the church. The Holy Scripture mentions saints combined into a church-estate in a town or city; here there was one congregation, and usually the Saints were referred to as a singular number, for example the church in Thessalonica. However, Scripture also speaks of the saints in a nation, or province, where there were several congregations, here they were frequently called the churches of Asia, or Galatia, etc. It is further seen that these churches at particular times assembled and met together as the whole church in one place, such as the church at Jerusalem, or at Antioch.

5. Every particular church appointed and ordained by Christ, had a ministry particular to it that was ordained and appointed by Christ. It is clear that officers are appointed by Christ to serve these particular (Congregational) churches. Elders are appointed to serve the church that appoints them, not other church. Realistically, one church provides the elders with more than enough work; therefore, there is no greater church than a single congregation, which ordinarily meets in one place.

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Form of a Visible Church and of its Covenant.*

Saints by Calling, must have a visible, political, union among themselves, or else they are not a local church. Scripture shows us that the nature of a particular church is similar to a body, or house, in which other members must be united, or else they are not part of a body. Two-by-fours and drywall are not a house until they come together. So, saints, or believers, are not a church until they are orderly knit together.

2. Particular churches cannot be distinguished from one another except by their forms. Ephesus is not Smyrna, and Pergamus is not Thyatira, but rather, each church is a distinct society in and of itself having officers, gifts and graces, and problems that are particular to it.

3. The unique forms of church are the Visible Covenant. In this covenant church members agree to: give themselves up to the Lord, observe the ordinances of Christ, and do this all together. We see no other way for members to have church power and accountability mutually over one another. By comparing a local church to a city or a spouse this relationship

seems to imply that the form of church is by way of a covenant. It was a covenant that made the family of Abraham the children of Israel; therefore it is a covenant that makes Gentile believers a church.

4. A church's covenant ought to be as plain and simple as possible, so that it can have room to stir up the hearts and minds of the membership towards their mutual duty. This simplicity also leaves less room for questions and arguments about the validity of a church and/or an individual's membership. We firmly believe that the spirit of the covenant is kept, when there is real agreement and consent by the company of saints, to meet together consistently as one congregation, for the public worship of God, and the mutual edification of each other.

5. It only stands to reason that the church is formed by covenant. A church cannot be formed around faith because faith is invisible and it does not distinguish a member of one church from another member of another church. Church form cannot be determined by baptism because that would presuppose a uniform organic political body for a church, much like circumcision in the Old Testament with Israel. One person may profess their faith and be baptized as an individual, but one person is incapable of being a church.

6. All believers ought to, as God gives them the opportunity, join themselves to a particular church. By doing this, believers honor Jesus Christ, and the example he set forth by instituting the church and requiring our submission to it so that we would be in good communion with him. All of this is founded upon a visible union in a church. Moreover, Jesus taught us that his presence exists in a unique way in a church; because of that we have a special fellowship with him, and with each other. The church also serves as a vehicle that Jesus uses to keep believers in the way of God and his commandments should any of us stray (which all Christ's sheep are subject to in this life). This serves as a benefit for all of us because no one wants to remain permanently in his or her sin. If every believer decided not to join a church then Christ would have no visible body on earth.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Subject of Church Power and to Whom it Belongs.*

There are two types of church power. It is either supreme, which is the power only Jesus himself has, or it is ministerial. Ministerial power is further divided into two groups: extraordinary power, which is seen in the apostles, prophets, and evangelists, or ordinary power,

which every local church has.

2. Ordinary church power is exercised either by office or by privilege. Official power is not immediate; rather it must be bestowed upon a person by the congregation, who once elected, is the only one who can exercise this power. Privileged power is a power that belongs to the brethren; as such it is directly given to them, and therefore may be acted upon immediately.

## CHAPTER VI

### *The Officers of the Church, Especially Pastors and Teachers.*

A church is a company of people combined together by a covenant for the worship of God, and is still a church even when it has no officers.

2. Nevertheless, though officers are not absolutely necessary, they are to the church's benefit. It was Jesus, out of his compassion for the church, who appointed and ordained officers, which he would not have done if they were not useful and needed. Seated in the Heavens Jesus received gifts for us, and gives gifts to us. Officers in the church play a significant role because they are to continue to the end of the world for the perfecting of all the Saints.

3. The category of church officers corresponds to the category of church powers. Officers are either extraordinary, as in apostles, prophets, evangelists, or ordinary as in elders and deacons. The apostles, prophets, and evangelists, were extraordinarily called by Christ so, their office ended with them. Yet, Paul, directing Timothy on how to go about church-administration, does not mention the above, rather Paul speaks only of elders and deacons. When Paul left the church of Ephesus, he committed the care of feeding the church to the elders of that church, and Peter did the same thing.

4. Elders (who are also called bishops in Scripture) attend either to the ministry of the word, like pastors and teachers; or they attend the rule of the church; thus they are called **Ruling Elders**.

5. The office of pastor and teacher appear to be distinct. The pastor's special work is to attend to exhortation and administer a word of wisdom, while the teacher's work is to attend to doctrine and administer a word of knowledge. Both the pastor and the teacher are to administer seals of the Covenant, (Baptism and Communion). Pastors and teachers are also called to administer church discipline, being but a kind of application of the word, it's preaching and its

application of, they are both charged with.

6. And for as much as both pastors and teachers are given by Christ for the perfecting of the saints, and edifying of his body, the church, we account pastors and teachers to be church-officers.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Ruling Elders and Deacons.*

The ruling elders' office is distinct from the office of pastor/teacher. The ruling elders are not called to exclude pastors and teachers from ruling. Rather, ruling and governing are common to pastors, teachers, and elders, but teaching and preaching are a distinct part of the office of pastor and teacher.

2. The ruling elders' work is to join with the pastor and teacher in those acts of spiritual rule, which are distinct from the ministry of the word and sacraments committed to pastors and teachers. The job of the elder is as follows:

- a) To open and shut the doors of Gods house by admitting members into the church, ordaining church officers chosen by the church, removing notorious and obstinate offenders renounced by the church, and restoring penitents forgiven by the church.
- b) To call the church together when there is need and dismiss them.
- c) To do the work of the church in meetings designed for this purpose, so that the matter may be carried out with less trouble and greater speed within the body.
- d) To oversee that all matters of the gathered church be carried out, to ensure that important issues be brought to the church, to order a season of speech and of silence, and they are to decide important matters according to the mind of Christ with the consent of the church.
- e) To be spiritual leaders in the church in all matters of church administration and action.
- f) To see that no one in the church lives a life that would disgrace the Gospel.
- g) To prevent and heal offences in church life and doctrine that could be the undoing of the church.
- h) To feed the flock of God with a word of admonition.

- i) To visit and pray over their sick brethren.
- j) Do visitation when the opportunity presents itself.

3. The office of deacon is instituted in the church by Jesus; sometimes Scripture refers to them as helps. Scripture tells us the qualifications a person should have if s/he feels called to be a deacon: deacons are to be grave, not double tongued, not given to too much wine, not given to filthy lucre. The church should investigate to see if a person can handle the job of deacon, when found blameless, the person should execute the office of deacon.

The deacons' job is to receive offerings and gifts given to the church and keep a treasury. Deacons are also responsible for the distribution of Communion as well as any items that would relieve the suffering of a person in need, i.e. food, clothing, etc.

4. The office of deacon is limited to the care of the temporal things of the church, it does not extend to the word and sacraments.

5. By command of the apostles, and practice of the church, Sunday is a time fit to give an offering and tithes.

\*6. The instituting of all these officers in the church is solely the work of God. Therefore, any offices that exist that are not appointed by him are unbiblical and should not be tolerated in the church. They are to be looked upon as human inventions to the great dishonor of Christ Jesus. These offices are: Popes, Patriarchs, Cardinals, Archbishops, Lordbishops, Archdeacons, Officials, Commissaries, and the like.

7. The Lord appointed ancient widows, (where they may be had) to minister in the church, in giving attendance to the sick, and care unto them, as well as anyone else who needs it.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### *Electing of Church-Officers.*

A person cannot just decide to be a church officer unless God has called them. Aaron did not wake up one morning and decide to be a priest; rather, he was called by God.

2. God's calling of a person to an office is either immediate, by Christ himself, as was the case with the apostles and prophets, but this manner of calling ended with them. Therefore, God uses the church to mediate a calling into an office.

3. It then follows that any person who wishes to be a church officer should first be investigated as to their fitness to lead. We do not blindly lay hands upon elders and deacons,

rather we do so because these people are known to be people of integrity.

4. Potential officers are to be investigated as to whether or not they have the gifting necessary for such positions. The criteria for elders may be found in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, the criteria for deacons is found in Acts 6:1-7 and I Timothy 3:8-13.

5. Officers are to be called by the churches where they hold their membership, it is where they serve, and this is how it was done during the time of the apostles.

6. As a local autonomous entity a church cannot become subject to anybody's authority unless they choose to elect certain people over them. Yet, once a church does choose to place people in authority, then members become subject to that person and must willingly submit themselves to their authority, which they granted them in the Lord.

7. Because the church has the power to choose their officers and ministers, then, in certain cases, the church also has the power to remove people from leadership. For to open and shut, choose and refuse, place in office and remove from office, are all the same type powers.

8. It is in the best interest of the church, and to the well being of its communion with other churches, to seek the aid and council of sister churches when a body tries a church officer.

9. The choice of church officers does not belong to the civil governments, as is the case with diocesan-bishops or patrons, for in such cases Scripture says nothing about these civil positions having authority in these matters.

## **CHAPTER IX**

### *Ordination and the Laying on of Hands.*

Church-officers are not only to be chosen by the Church, but they are to be installed into their office by the laying on of hands, prayer, and fasting.

2. Ordination of a church officer is nothing more than the solemn placing of a person into their office in the church which s/he was given right after election. The ordination is similar to installing a public official.

Ordination should not go before the election, but follows it. The essence of a person's call as an officer of the church is seen, not in his/her ordination, but instead in his/her voluntary and free election by the church. This is the nature of the relationship between a pastor and his/her church. Ordination does not make a person an officer, nor does it give them their power. The apostles were elders without imposition of hands, Paul and Barnabas were officers before

the imposition of hands, and the Levites were priests before hands were laid on them by the nation of Israel.

3. In churches where there are elders, the laying on of hands in ordination is to be performed by those elders.

4. In churches where there are no elders, the laying on of hands may be performed by the brethren. Members of a church elect officers and bestow on them their power, they may also lay on of hands in ordination when the situation calls for it.

5. In churches where there are no elders, if the church desires it, elders from other churches may lay on the hands: the elders of Ephesus laid hands upon Timothy as an evangelist, and the elders at Antioch laid hands upon Paul and Barnabas.

6. Church officers are officers to one church. In so much as elders are commanded to feed their own particular flock they are still required by the Gospel to tend to the entire body of Christ when the situation demands it. This fact is also true for an ordained pastor.

7. A person that served as an officer in a particular church, may not serve that function in another church unless s/he is called to that office by the new body of believers. In such an instance a person ought to be ordained again. Paul received the imposition of hands at least twice.

## CHAPTER X

### *The Power of Church and its Officers.*

Supreme and lordly power over all the churches on earth belongs only to Jesus Christ, who is its head. Jesus has the governments upon his shoulders and all power, in heaven and on earth, has been given to him.

2. A company of covenanted, professed, believers is a church before they have officers. Even a church without officers is given power by Christ, and power is given to the church by Christ, so that it has the sufficiency necessary to provided for its growth and continuance.

3. The government/power of a church is a combination of different forms of government. As the church relates to Christ it is a Monarchy with Jesus at the top. As a church relates to itself as a body, member to member, it is a Democracy. As the church relates to its officers it is an Aristocracy.

4. Jesus' sovereign power is seen in the following manner:

- a) In calling the church out of the world into fellowship with himself.
  - b) In instituting the ordinances of worship, the appointment of ministers and officers for the dispensing of these ordinances.
  - c) In giving laws for the ordering all our ways and the ways of his house.
  - d) In giving power and life to all his churches and followers.
  - e) In protecting his church against enemies that would seek its undoing.
5. The power of the church body given to it by Christ is:
- a) To choose their own officers be they elders or deacons.
  - b) To admit members into their fellowship as well as remove them from the fellowship. (See: Mt 18: 15-20)

6. If an elder were to sin, and/or abuse his/her power, the church has the power to remove this person from office. If this person were to stay in their sin, because s/he is now only a member, the church may remove this person from the fellowship.

7. Christ places church government, or rule, into the hands of officers of the church, yet if someone abuses their power they are subject to the church, as was said above. In Scripture, the Holy Spirit always ascribes church rule/church government to the elders. Whereas, the job of the people is to obey their elders and submit themselves to their authority; which has been given to them by God. It follows that a complete church is a body of people that consists of some that govern, and some that are governed, in the Lord.

8. The power which Christ has given to the elders is:
- a) To feed and rule the church of God.
  - b) To call the church together for any weighty occasion and when such a meeting is called members, without just cause, may not refuse to come, or depart before they are dismissed, or speak in the church before the elders allow them to do so. Members may not oppose or contradict the judgment and sentence of the elders unless there is sufficient cause to do so; because such behavior leads to confusion.

9. The elders also have the power to:
- a) Examine any officers or members before they are placed in their office or received into the church.
  - b) Receive accusations brought to the church and prepare them for church hearing.

c) In lieu of that hearing elders may declare, punish, and pronounce sentence on an offending brother with the consent of the church.

d) Bless them in the name of the Lord when they dismiss them.

10. The power of the elders does not infringe upon or usurp the power of brethren; and the power of the brethren does not usurp or infringe upon the power of the elders. Rather, the two ought to be in agreement. Even with all their power, the apostles sought the agreement and consent of the brethren in church administrations. In all matters each party is to submit itself and be obedient to the other's particular area of authority. This is the command of Christ.

11. In light of the above, any power not specifically granted to the elder, belongs to the church body. Even so, it stands to reason that an organic church ought to proceed so that no church act may be consummated, or perfected, without the consent of both.

## CHAPTER XI

### *The Maintenance of Church Officers.*

The apostles concluded that ministers of the word should be properly compensated for their efforts. We see this idea in the Law of Moses, in the general economy, and it makes sense. Moreover, Scripture not only calls elders "laborers and workmen", but it also says that a laborer is worthy of his/her hire and it says that the Lord desires for those that preach the Gospel, should make their living doing so, "do not muzzle the mouth of the ox, that treads out the corn". (See: I Tim 5:18)

2. The Scriptures tell us that this compensation is required and is not a matter of alms or a love offering, in which people are free to give or not give as they please. The church ought to pay those that minister and work among them, as well as pay any debts that the church may owe; for this is commanded by God.

3. In Galatians 6:6 the apostle Paul tells us that if we receive great teaching then we should share everything of ours with our teachers. Scripture does not leave how much or what portion a person is to give, God has made it clear that we are to share everything.

4. This idea does not only apply to members of churches, but also to anyone who benefits from a teacher of the word; everyone is to take care of their teachers' earthly needs. If any person in a congregation is neglecting their responsibilities in the area of financial stewardship, the deacons are to discuss it with them. If this does not work the church has the power to require

it of her members. If for some reason the church has an inability to do the following, the magistrate is to make sure that the ministry is duly provided for. (See: Nehemiah) It is in everyone's best interest for people to know what they are required to give, before hand, and then give it; this prevents any controversies from arising.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Admitting Members into a Church.*

God has appointed it that the doors of the Churches of Christ are not so wide open that any kind of person, good or bad, may freely enter at their pleasure. Rather, persons who desire to become members ought to be examined and tried first, to see if they fit the criteria for church membership. The Eunuch of Ethiopia, before his admission, was examined by Philip to see whether he had faith in Jesus as Christ. There is a consistent logic for investigating the faith of professed believers. The officers are charged with admitting people into church membership; therefore they are to examine the fitness of each candidate for membership. Remember, Twelve Angels sit at the gates of the Temple so that no one ceremonially unclean could enter.

2. There are two things, which are necessary for church membership, and these should be found in all church members.

- a) Has the person sincere repentance from sin?
- b) Does this person have faith in Jesus as Christ?

These are the things people are to be examined for at their admission into the church. Each person must be able to profess why they believe what they do; keeping in mind that we are to examine them with a spirit that would satisfy rational charity. John Baptist admitted people who were baptized and they had confessed their sins, while of others it is said that they came and confessed, and then showed their deeds. So it is with examinations.

3. In all circumstances the weakest measure of faith is to be accepted by the officers of the church for those that desire to be admitted as members into the church. Because weak Christians, if sincere, have the substance of faith, i.e. repentance and holiness, which is required for church membership. It is just such a people who have the greatest need for the confirmation of their faith, and their subsequent growth in grace. The Lord Jesus would not quench smoking flax, nor break a bruised reed, but rather he would gather tender lambs into his arms, and carry them gently in his bosom. This is the type of charity and tenderness that is to be used during

examination. The weakest Christian, if sincere, may not be excluded from membership nor discouraged from trying. In all circumstances severe examination is to be avoided.

4. If someone has a huge fear of speaking in public, or is unable to talk about their spiritual journey and their faith in Jesus because of some infirmity, then it is sufficient to do such things before the elders of the church. If the elders are satisfied then they simply state so to the body, whichever is most uplifting is the one to be done. However, the folks of better abilities in speaking should do so in front of the entire body.

5. A personal and public statement about the movement of God upon one's life is powerful and useful to the entire body. In Acts 2: 37 -41 those that came to faith had to give an account of the movement of God upon their heart as a result of Peter's sermon. We are admonished that as Christians to, "Be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, to every one that asks us." (See: II Peter 3:15) Therefore, at any moment we must be able and ready to declare and show our repentance from sin, our faith, and our effectual calling; because these three things are the reason we have a well-grounded hope. Psalm 40:10 says, "I have not hidden your righteousness from the great congregation."

6. A profession of faith and repentance at a person's admission must also be done by those who were previously members of another church. Moreover, the church one is presently joining is well within their prerogative to require it of those transferring a membership. Other churches may err in their admission of people; a particular person may regularly fall into an offence. It is the liberty of each individual church to perform these examinations as they see fit, even if Jane Doe was already a member of Congregational Church X. This only ensures that all churches are equal.

7. The type of examination described above is also to be applied to those who are born into, baptized, and raised in said church. If we desire to extend rights, privileges, duties, and obligations to these people, they need to go through the same process as everyone else, even if they were raised in the church. However, those who have been raised in the church obviously have an advantage over those who were not. These youth are in covenant with God; they have the seal of Baptism upon them and in many ways have a greater chance of attaining regenerating grace, as well as, all the spiritual blessings of the covenant and its seals. Additionally, these youth are under the watchful and nurturing eye of the church, to help them grow up to be responsible, loving men and women of God.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *How Church Members Move From One Church to Another, and Letters of Recommendation and Dismissal.*

Members of a church may not resign their membership whenever they please, rather there needs to be a just and weighty reason. Members ought to live and dwell together and not forsake their need to fellowship with each other. Hasty departure is neither good for the individual member, or the rest of the church body. Just like pulling stones and pieces of lumber from the building, hasty departure does no one any good.

2. Therefore, it is the duty of each member to consult with the leaders of the church they are members of, as to whether it is appropriate or not to leave. They will either be encouraged or they should otherwise desist. They who join with consent, should not depart without consent, except when their hand is forced.

3. If a member's departure is seen to be spiritually unsafe and sinful for themselves, their families and their church, then the church must not consent to their departure. To consent to such an act is to condone a particular person's sin. If the case is unclear as to whether it is spiritually unsafe, and the person may not be dissuaded from such an act, then the church should leave the matter to God, and no longer detain the member's removal.

4. The following are just reasons for a member's removal of him/herself from a church:

- a) A particular person cannot continue without partaking in a sin.
- b) There is personal persecution in the town, i.e. Paul left the disciples at Damascus because the Jewish authorities were out to get him.
- c) If a member gets a better job in a different geographic local.

In all these, or like cases, a member may lawfully remove themselves from the church.

5. To separate from a church because:

- a) A person has contempt for their holy fellowship
- b) Or because the person is jealous of a larger, bigger church
- c) Or because of a schism in the church
- d) Or out of a spirit of contention, disrespect, or an evil perceived or actual,  
particularly when the roads of confrontation and forgiveness have not been tried.

For all these or the like reasons, to withdraw from a church is unlawful and sinful.

6. A member who has moved to a new location needs to join another church as soon as possible. A refusal to do this keeps the person from using their gifts and experiencing Christ manifest amongst the believers. The Body of Christ suffers when all its parts are not connected and in use.

7. Order requires that a member who is removing him/herself from a church because of a move ought to have a letter of transfer accompanying him/her, so that the church they will be joining can have a solid testimony of the particular person's standing in their church. This enables the new church to have a clear grasp on the person they are accepting into their fellowship. Until the person dismissed is received into another church's fellowship, s/he does not cease to be a member of the church where s/he was. A church cannot make a member, no member except by excommunication.

8. If a member of a church is to be removed for a specific period of time, letters of recommendation are also helpful in these circumstances, i.e. Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, had letters written for her to the church of Rome, so that she would be received by the saints there.

9. Letters of recommendation and dismissal are Biblical. Letters were written for Apollos, for Marcus to the Colossians, for Phoebe to the Romans, and for sundry other churches. The use of letter of recommendation and dismissal for transfer memberships allows the person, the corresponding church, and the receiving church; to act with integrity and maintain a spotless reputation.

#### CHAPTER XIV

##### *Excommunication and Other Censures.*

The censures of the church are appointed by Christ to prevent, remove, and heal offences in the church. Moreover, censures aid in reclaiming and gaining the offending brethren, as well as deterring other members from like offences. Churches must purge out the leaven, which infects the whole lump, churches must vindicate the honor of Christ, his church, and the holy profession of the gospel. All of this prevents the wrath of God from justly falling upon a church should they suffer his covenant, and refuse to deal with the notorious and obstinate offenders amidst their ranks.

2. If an offence is private (one brother offending another) the offender is to go and acknowledge his repentance to the offended brother, who is then to extend forgiveness. However, if the offender neglects or refuses to acknowledge wrongdoing, much less seek forgiveness, the offended brother is to go and confront the offender and admonish him of his offence privately. If the offender repents of his offence, the admonisher has won his brother, but if the offender will not hear it, the offended one is to take with him one or two witnesses so that every word may be established. (Whether the offender received the admonition or not) If the offender refuses admonition, then the offended brother is to take his grievance to the elders of the church. If the offender hears it from the church and repents he is recovered and gained. If the offender is unwilling to hear it from the church, they are to dispense upon him a public admonition and withhold communion until repentance. If the offender still continues to be obstinate the church is to cast him out by excommunication. (See: Mathew 18: 21-24)

3. If an offence is more public at first, and also more heinous and criminal in nature, then the church is to cast out the offender from their holy communion without such gradual proceedings as seen above. Such a move is in the best eternal interest of the offender's soul.

4. In dealing with an offender we need to take great care so that we will not be overly strict and rigorous, nor too indulgent or remiss. At all times our proceedings ought to be infused with a spirit of meekness, remembering that each of us could very easily be in the offenders spot, and that even so, all of us have need of forgiveness from the Lord. Yet, winning and healing an offender's soul, which is our ultimate goal, requires discernment; for some we must have compassion and on others we must save with fear.

5. While the offender remains excommunicate, the church is to refrain from all member-like-communion with him in spiritual things. Also, this communion is to extend to all natural, domestic, and civil relations that are not minimally required. The church is to refrain from such interactions so that the offender may be ashamed.

6. Excommunication is a spiritual punishment; it does deprive the person of their civil rights, and therefore is not in the domain of princes, or magistrates, in areas of their civil dignity or authority. A person who has been excommunicated is no different than a tax collector or a gentile, for all are lawfully permitted to come and hear the word in church assemblies. We do not deny this prerogative to the excommunicate because maybe, by the preaching of the word, they may come to repentance, which is our greatest hope.

7. If, after all of this, the offending brother is sincerely prompted by God's grace and humbly repents and confesses, the church is to forgive him, comfort him, and restore him to their communion even though he formerly injured them.

8. To allow profane, contentious, obstinate, and scandalous people to continue in a fellowship and partake of the sacraments, is a sin committed by the officers who have the power to address such people, and yet refuse to do so. Nevertheless, in such circumstances the godly are not allowed to separate themselves from the church.

9. There is no need for a godly person to separate from such a church where profane and scandalous people are tolerated. Moreover, there is no need for godly people in such a church to refrain from the sacraments. It is unreasonable for an innocent person to be punished for the crimes of another person that s/he had nothing to do with. How much more unreasonable is it then for a godly person to punish themselves by not partaking of the sacraments, just because others are neglecting what God commands. On the contrary, the innocent and upright need to mourn for these things and stir up others to do their duty. If the church in question cannot be reformed such people may use their liberty, (as is specified in Ch 13 sec. 4) to leave the church. Before godly people may come to conclusion they are bound, mindful of their place and power, to at least try and proceeded against the church to whom this matter does pertain.

## CHAPTER XV

### *The Communion Churches Have With One Another.*

Each local church is autonomous, distinct, and does not have authority over a sister church. Yet, churches need to have communion with one another because they are all united in Christ. It is this communion of churches that allows Congregational churches to maintain their catholicity.

2. Church communion is exercised in several ways:

a) By looking after each other's general welfare.

b) Churches may consult with one another when there is an occasion that requires the judgment and counsel of other churches. We see this in Scripture when the church at Antioch consulted with the Apostles and the elders of the church at Jerusalem, about the question of circumcision of the gentiles and the false teachers that broached that doctrine. We call this the Ecclesiastical Council of

the Vicinage. If a church is wrought with division and strife, and refuses to consult with sister churches about how to heal or remove offenders, that church is offensive to the Lord Jesus and their sister churches as well. At such a point this church should be admonished by her sister churches.

- c) A third way that churches have communion with each other is by way of admonition, i.e. a church has a glaring and public offence, and they are dragging their feet in dealing with the issue. An example of this in Scripture was when Paul rebuked Peter when he saw him stumbling even though Paul had no authority over Peter. If the offending church does not hear the rebuke, the first church is to follow the same course of action as seen in Ch. 14 sec. 2. only this time it takes place on a church to church level. After the whole process is done, if the offending church still will not listen to the word of admonition, then the original church, and any others, may refrain from communion with the offending church.

However, if a member of the offending church stands against its offense, that person is to be received into fellowship. From this point the member of the offending church is to follow the process laid down in Ch 14. Sec. 9, and when s/he withdraws his/her membership a former sister church is to receive him/her into fellowship as if s/he had been orderly dismissed.

- d) A fourth way churches may commune with one another is by way of participation. Sometimes members of one church occasionally attend the worship services of another. In some cases a small church needs to borrow the services of a minister from a church with a larger staff. In either case we see no reason why we should deny baptism or communion to anyone who is part of the body of Christ; for we are all a part of that larger body.
- e) A fifth way churches commune with each other is when a member of one church has to reside in another church for a season. Often, we commend such folks to their watchful fellowship by letters of recommendation. If this person settles there then s/he needs to join the sister church.
- f) A sixth way churches commune with each other is when one church is in need of pastoral care from another church. Sometimes, a sister church may even need

financial support, like the gentile churches who contributed liberally to the poor saints at Jerusalem.

3. When a company of believers desires to gather into a church fellowship, it is in their best interest if they state their intent, and their desire to walk according to the Gospel. If there is no just cause, neighboring churches should extend their help as well as the right hand of Christian fellowship.

4. Besides these several ways of communion, there is also a way for churches to plant other churches. When a church grows too big it is fit for it to break off some of its willing membership, and plant another church out of the first and help them establish themselves with a covenant and officers of their own. When a beehive is too full it sends out swarms that are gathered into other hives, so Christ may do the same thing with a church and require them to extend the right hand of fellowship to that church.

## CHAPTER XVI

### *Synods.*

Synods that are orderly assembled and proceed in a pattern that is witnessed in Acts 15 are an ordinance of Christ. Synods are not absolutely necessary, yet at particular times may be necessary to the wellbeing of the churches.

2. Synods are spiritual and ecclesiastical assemblies and therefore, undertake spiritual and ecclesiastical causes. An efficient use for synods is for churches to send their elders, or any other representative, to meet together in the name of Christ, to discuss, debate and determine theological and ecclesial matters according to Scripture. Once the findings are made, they are to be published for the church/es that are directly concerned. Such processes aid in correcting errors in church matters and doctrine, this is the whole reason for synods.<sup>1</sup>

3. Magistrates, have the power to call a synod by calling churches to send their elders or representatives to the synod, to aid the magistrate in matters of religion. Yet, constituting the synod itself is a church act, and is to be transacted by churches, even when magistrates are enemies to the church.

4. Synods have the power to:

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<sup>1</sup> Note: While the Platform does not specifically state so the power and authority of the Synod ends when the Synod disbands.

- a) Debate and determine controversies of faith.
- b) Debate and determine cases of conscience.
- c) Decided holy directions for worship.
- d) Decided on directions for good church government.
- e) Bear witness against mal-administration and corrupt doctrine.
- f) Give directions to reform the above.

5. If the directions and determinations of a synod are with the word of God, they are to be received with reverence and submission. It should be seen as such because the synod was asked for, and God expects people to voluntarily follow the direction of a synod even if they do not have to.

6. It is difficult, if not impossible, for many churches to come together in one place. Therefore, churches may assemble by using delegates selected for that purpose. It is wise for churches to choose elders or other leader-types simply because they have a modicum of expertise in church related matters. However, a list of potential delegates should not be exclusive to elders. Other members of a church with particular skills and gifts can be of great help.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *Civil Authorities and Their Power in Church Matters.*

It is lawful, profitable, and necessary for Christians to gather themselves into a church and exercise all the ordinances of Christ, as seen in Scripture, whether or not they have the support of the magistrate to do such a thing or not.

2. Church government does not stand in opposition to civil governments, nor does it seek to encroach upon the authority of government in their jurisdictions. Churches do not weaken civil governments, on the contrary, they strengthen them by encouraging folks to submit to their authority, despite the ignorant claims of some who think otherwise. This is true; while church and state are distinct they each benefit the other.<sup>2</sup>

3. Civic leaders have the power to aid churches in their continuance and propagation,

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<sup>2</sup> Remember, John Cotton is thinking of a holy Commonwealth in which devout Christians would have served in leadership positions in both areas. It is doubtful that he would have used "church" and "state" language as we have come to understand it. Moreover, the Puritans conceptualized the two spheres working hand in glove. To trace the idea of a separate state and church, one needs to go to the Pilgrims of Plymouth. These, folks most likely adopted such notions from their Annabaptist friends (who were radically committed to just such an idea, thus the name the "Radical Reformers") during their stint in Leyden, Holland.

therefore, it is prudent to have the consent of a civic leader whenever it is to be had. Do not slight these people for it is the honor due to a Christian in government leadership to have their consent. Once consent has been obtained, the churches may then proceed in the plan God has for them.

4. Civil government leaders do not have the power to compel their subjects to become church members, and to partake of the Lords table. Temple priests were reproved for bringing profane people into the sanctuary of God, so it is with civic leaders. If the church has thrown someone out the civic leader is not to put him or her back in

5. As it is unlawful for church officers to meddle with the sword of the magistrate, so it is unlawful for the magistrate to meddle with the work proper to church officers. The melding of the two spheres, as is seen with Moses and David, was a situation with two people who were not only princes, but also prophets. These are two unique people in all of Scripture and not without imitation.

6. It is the duty of the civic leader to take care of matters of religion, and improve his/her civil authority by observing God's commands in the church and in the state, because both spheres are God's. The goal of the civil leader's office is a quiet and peaceable life, induebed with righteousness, holiness, and godliness. All civil leaders are commended in the book of God for exercising their authority this way.

7. Civil authorities do not have power over the inward thought of people. Rather, they only have authority over the outward acts of people. Civil authorities also do not have power to command actions or punish for negligence of those actions, if they do not appear in Scripture. The civil authorities have the power to police actions that are indicated in Scripture. From this mindset a leader should assert his/her authority.

8. Idolatry, blasphemy, heresy, venting of corrupt and pernicious opinions that destroy the foundation of church and society, open contempt for the preached word, profaning the Lord's day, disturbing the peaceable administration and exercise of worship and other church functions; all of these are to be and punished by civil authorities.

9. If any church decides to part from the communion of other churches, and go its own way in a defiant, obstinate, and incorrigible manner, the civil authorities have the right to use their coercive power to bring the church back in line. The tribes on the East side of the Jordan intended to make war against the other tribes who suspected them of building an alter and

turning away from following of the Lord.

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