

5. Guidebook for Baptist Churches

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Introduction and History

This document is a reprint of the historical “Treatise on Church Discipline” written by Samuel Jones in 1797, for The Philadelphia Baptist Association. It will serve as a very useful guide for biblical practice among local churches. While the language reflects the historic nature of this document, the truths contained in it are timeless.

Care has been taken to update some words and phrases no longer commonly used in the English language and to present the truths in a manner that is in harmony with BMA doctrine. Also, some inapplicable portions have been removed. Otherwise, this treatise remains as originally written.

Chapter 1: Of a Gospel Church

1. Ekklesia, the word in the original language for assembly,¹ signifies to be called out of; that is, a gospel church consists of such persons, as have been called out of a state of nature into a state of grace, called with an effectual calling, called out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, or are judged in love to be so called. Rom 1:6, 7; 8:30; 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 4:1; Heb 3:1; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 2:9.
2. The word “church” sometimes means the whole body of the believers and is commonly called the Kingdom or Family of God, but is not to be understood as a “universal” or “invisible” body. Eph 1:22, 23; 5:23; Col 1:18, 24.
3. But the church, of which we now write, means a number of disciples, saints, or believers, that have been baptized, and united together in gospel fellowship, and is called a local church. "Were baptized," Acts 2:41. "Tell it unto the church," Matt 18:17. "The church that is in their house," Rom 16:5. "That the church may receive edifying," 1 Cor 14:5. "Churches of the saints," 1 Cor 14:33. "The churches of Asia," 1 Cor 16:19. "The church that is at Babylon," 1 Pet 5:13.
4. A particular or local church is not parochial, as comprehending all of the same parish; nor diocesan, as if one pastor might have several flocks;² nor

yet provincial, for there were many churches in Judea, Gal 1:22. Galatia, 1 Cor 16:1. Macedonia, 2 Cor 8:1., much less national.

5. A number of believers are united together into a particular or local church by an act of mutual confederation. "Gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God," 2 Cor 8:5.

6. Whether the requisite number should be twelve or thirteen, because our blessed Lord and his disciples, at the first celebration of the Lord's supper, made that number, or whether three will be sufficient, because of the promise in Matt 18:20, may be doubtful: but there ought to be so many, as to fulfill the purpose of that holy institution.

7. When such a number is found in any place, they ought to propose among themselves, or others may propose it to them, to be constituted a local, visible church.

8. For this purpose it will be necessary to appoint a time and place when they are to meet fasting. One minister or more from sister churches should be present to assist and to preach on the occasion. Acts 8:14, 11:22.

9. After a suitable sermon has been preached, the acting minister, being furnished with a list of the names of the candidates, and they standing before him, is to interrogate them: respecting their desire to be constituted a Gospel church, their knowledge of, and satisfaction with each other's qualifications, and their purpose and resolution to walk together in church relation, in love to one another, and in obedience to the requirements of Christ in the Gospel, together with such other questions as will involve the leading particulars of a church covenant; and after they have given their assent to the whole, the church covenant³ is to be read to them, which they are then, or afterward, to sign, and the minister pronounces them, in the name of the Lord Jesus, a regular (biblical) Gospel church, giving them, or their representative, the right hand of fellowship, and wishing them prosperity in the Lord. Is 44:5; Amos 3; Acts 11:23; 2 Cor. 6:14, 9:13.

10. It will be understood, that prayers and singing ought to be introduced in their proper places through the whole, and then a suitable address to the constituted church, with a benediction, will close the solemnity.

11. It is this mutual consent, confederation, and union of persons into one body, as a particular church, that makes that church distinct from any other church, and that makes the members of it members of that church more than of any other. "Onesimus, who is one of you; Epaphras, who is one of you." Col 4:9, 12. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ." Rom 12:5.

12. Such particular churches have full power and authority to transact all their own affairs, independent of any other church or churches: such as to

choose their own officers, receive members, exercise discipline among themselves, exclude members, if need be, and, in general, do everything that concerns them as a distinct religious body. Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:2; 2 Thess 3:6, 14; Acts 1:5, 23; 6:3; 15:4; 21:22.

13. No church, however, can be independent of Christ, who is the head of the body, and who, while he has committed the executive power to His churches, has retained the legislative in His own hands, or rather, has enacted, by Himself or His apostles, all the laws that are necessary, and the churches must take heed how they execute the same, as they will answer it to their Lord and Master. "One is your Master, even Christ. Hear ye Him." Matt 18:5; 23:8. "There is one lawgiver." James 4:12.

14. A particular or local church, constituted as above, is said to be a church essential, but not complete, while destitute of officers. These were either extraordinary or ordinary; the first comprehending apostles, prophets, and evangelists; and the other, bishops, or ministers or elders, and deacons; to which some add elders.

Chapter 2: Of Ministers

1. The names or titles appropriated to those officers in the New Testament, are either such as seem to belong to them, in virtue of their office, as common names, while they have not taken the charge of any particular or local church, and then they are called teachers or preachers. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28; Rom 10:14; or they are such as arise from their taking the charge of some church, and then they obtain relative titles and are called Pastors. Eph 4:11. Overseers or bishops, Acts 20:17, 28. Elders, 1 Tim 5:17. Stewards, 1 Cor 4:1. Ministers, Col 4:7. 1 Tim 4:6.

2. The qualifications for this office are clearly pointed out, both in a positive and negative way, natural, moral, and evangelical. Luke 21:15; 1 Tim 3:2, 6; Tit 1:5, 9; 2 Tim 2:24; 3:15, 17; Acts 28:24; Rom 9:3; 11:14.

3. To this office, persons must be called: First, of God, styled the inward call, which is a zeal for the glory of God in the salvation of the souls of men, and a strong desire to be made useful in that way, with a persuasion of God's designation of the person for the office. This is the voice of God in his conscience. Is 49:5; Jer 1:5; 23:21; Heb 5:4; 1 Cor 9:16, 17; Rom 10:15. Secondly, they must be called of a church, whose duty it is to look out for useful gifts; and when they have reason to hope that they discover some appearance thereof in any, they should move such to the trial of their gifts; or the person whose mind is impressed may offer himself, 1 Tim 3:1.

4. If, after anyone has been on trial some time, the appearances are promising, the church ought to give him a license,⁴ for the exercise of his

gifts abroad, his encouragement, further improvement, and to obtain the opinion of others concerning his gifts. "Lay hands suddenly on no man," 1 Tim 5:22.

5. After he has been on trial a longer or shorter time, according to circumstances, the church should proceed to encourage him more fully with, and confirm him in, the ministerial office, by ordination.

6. The essence of ordination consists in the call of the church, in their voting in his favor, and designating him by said vote to the ministerial work, which power it was necessary should be placed somewhere, with a view to maintain order that no person who deems himself called and qualified for the office might enter it without the approval of others, and this power was placed in the church. But nevertheless, it is expedient and necessary, in order to give the designation weight and solemnity, that there should be a public and formal procedure, when we install a person in the ministerial office, Acts 14:23; Mark 3:14.

7. For this purpose, having called one or more ministers to their assistance and all met fasting, a sermon should be preached suited to the occasion. Then, after seeing the person's license, and the vote for his ordination, one of the ministers should interrogate him respecting his call of God, his motives, his doctrinal knowledge, his soundness in the faith, and his resolution to persevere with diligence. Having given satisfaction, he is desired to kneel, and the ministers present lay their hands on his head, accompanied with suitable words, and one prays. Then he rises up, and they address him in terms of congratulation, bid him a welcome to take part with them of the holy ministry, and give him the right hand of fellowship. After this, a charge is delivered, and prayer, with singing, having been introduced in their proper places through the whole, a benediction closes the solemnity. "With the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, or eldership," 1 Tim 4:14. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting," Acts 14:23. "Lay hands suddenly on no man," 1 Tim 5:22.

8. The ministers ought to give him a certificate of his ordination.⁵

9. We should now proceed to treat the duties of the ministerial office. But although a person, in virtue of his ordination, is fully installed in the office, and has a right to discharge every part of it, when called thereto, yet while he remains only a teacher or preacher, and is not connected with any church as their pastor or minister, he can have but little to do besides preaching. It will, therefore, be proper to defer the confederation of the duties of the pastoral office until we have dealt with his acquiring that title, by means of taking the oversight of some church, which will greatly enlarge his sphere of action.

Chapter 3: Of Deacons

1. The business of deacons originally, in the church of Jerusalem, was very extensive, for the church consisted of thousands, and had all things common, Acts 2:41, 44; 4:32; 5:14. But, through a change of circumstances in the church, their work is now brought to a different sphere.
2. They are to take charge of meeting the outward, or physical, needs of the church, particularly to serve tables: Acts 6:2-3. The Lord's Table, 1 Cor 10:21. that of the poor, and the minister's table. They are therefore to see that the members of the church contribute to all necessary uses, according to their abilities, 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 9:7.
3. Their qualifications are set down in Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:8, 13.
4. The manner of executing their office is with impartiality or simplicity, cheerfulness, compassion, tenderness, and faithfulness, Rom 12:8.
5. They are to be set in the office by ordination, much after the same manner as ministers, Acts 6:3, 6.
6. By the faithful discharge of their office, they purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith, 1 Tim 2:13.

Chapter 4: Of Calling a Minister

1. A person having been regularly ordained a minister of the gospel, as we have seen in Chap. 2, he is qualified to become a pastor or minister of any pastorless church.
2. This is done in consequence of a call and invitation of some church, and his acceptance of the call on the terms proposed, or such as they may agree upon. Calling of him to preach, ordaining of him, and his being even a member of said church, is not sufficient, there ought to be a mutual agreement between him and the church, whereby he becomes theirs, and they become his. Col 1:7.
3. How unanimous the church ought to be in the choice and calling of a minister, it may be hard to say. On the one hand, a bare, or even a large majority, will not be sufficient, while on the other hand, a unanimous vote may not always be obtained, and, perhaps, in some cases, may not be absolutely necessary. The more unanimous, however, the better.
4. The congregation also is not to be neglected in this business. For, as their good is to be kept in view, and as part of the support is expected to come from them, it ought to be known, that the person proposed to be called gives general satisfaction. 1 Tim 3:7; 3 John 12.

5. In calling a minister, having appointed a time and place, and invited pastors from one or two of the sister churches of like faith and order to assist, and to witness the transaction, one of the ministers, after praying and singing, should preach a suitable sermon. Then he, or another of the council, is to put such questions to the minister to be settled, and to the representative of the church appointed for that purpose, as will draw from each of them promises to fulfill their respective parts of the covenant and agreement between them, upon which he pronounces him, in the presence of God and of the whole assembly, to be the pastor and overseer of that church, and said church to be his flock and charge. Then the settled minister and representative of the church give each other the right hand of fellowship, with expressions of mutual joy and congratulation.

6. After this, a charge should be delivered to the practicing minister, Col 4:17. [sic.] and his church; and then prayer, singing, and a benediction, will close the service.

7. The transactions of the day, and particularly the terms of the agreement between the called minister and the church, should be entered at large on the records of the church.

8. Some may say that so much formality in the business, with witnesses, is unnecessary, and that a private agreement between the parties is sufficient. But as a public form of marriage is indispensable; so the above is expedient and useful, as might be shown were it necessary.

9. The duties incumbent on the pastor of a church, are many and great, and blessed is he who is found faithful therein.

10. He is to exercise love, care, tenderness, watchfulness, and diligence, in all the duties of going before, feeding and defending the flock, the sheep and the lambs, the strong, the weak and diseased, John 21:15, 17; Acts 20:29; 1 Pet 5:2; Jer 3:15.

11. He is to preach in season and out of season, attend funerals, administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, take the lead in church government, visit the flock, particularly the sick, pray for and with them, catechize the young, and defend the faith: besides the duties of prayer, of the study, and his frequent calls abroad, to visit and supply the destitute, settle differences, attend at ordinations, associations, etc.

"And who is sufficient for these things," 2 Cor 2:16.

Chapter 5: Of Dissolving the Connection Between Pastor and His Church

1. The connection between a pastor and his church is very binding, not unlike that between man and wife, and, like that, it should not be dissolved for every cause.
2. An obvious and material breach, however, of the contract between them, will justify a separation.
3. To which we may add one cause more; i.e. when variance, disagreement, animosity, and ill-will, take place between them, or between him and many of them, to such a degree as to preclude a rational prospect of his future usefulness among them.⁶
4. In this case it will not be very material, as to the separation, who may be to blame. Nor will a majority, even a large one, in the minister's favor, make it prudent for him to continue, any more than it would justify his first settlement, among them, Acts 22:18.
5. As a pastor in such circumstances should not to stay among them in support of a party, neither ought he to run away from them nor yet should they use harsh measures with him: but matters of difference ought to be first accommodated in the best manner they can, that they may part in love so far as may be.
6. For this purpose, it will be necessary to call a council from a neighboring church or churches of like faith and order, the very same, if they can be had, as were witnesses of the settlement.
7. At this meeting, peace and accommodation of all matters of variance should be labored after, that the pastor may be dismissed and recommended in as respectful a manner as circumstances will admit, in order that his character may not suffer publicly more than need be, nor his usefulness elsewhere be prevented.
8. Should the church prove resistant, and in their ill-humor, refuse to give the pastor such a character and dismissal as he deserves, the council may and ought to give him, from under their hands, a brief statement of matters of difference, together with their opinion, and such a recommendation as they can answer for to God and their own consciences.
9. If appropriate, public worship may close the meeting.

Chapter 6: Of the Duties of Members to Their Pastors

1. The members of churches owe all their duties in a way of obedience to the will of God revealed in his word.

2. These are to be performed in love to our Lord Jesus Christ, John 14:15; who is the great prophet, priest, and king of His churches, unto whom all power in heaven and earth is given, Matt 28:18; our law-giver, Is 33:22; the head of his church, Eph 1:22; and who is to be honored, John 5:23; and obeyed in all things as God, over all, blessed forever, Rom 9:5.

3. All church members, therefore, are under the strictest obligations to do and observe whatsoever Christ has instructed them, in particular the duties they owe to their ministers.

4. They ought to pray for them, that God would assist them in and bless their labors, Eph 6:19; Col 4:3; 1 Thes 5:25; 2 Thes 3:1; Heb 13:18; and that he would support them under all their trials and afflictions, 2 Thes 3:2.

5. They ought to obey them in the exercise of every part of their official authority, according to the word, Heb 13:17.

6. They ought to treat them with respect and esteem, 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Thes 5:12, 13; Phil 2:29; Gal 4:15; 3 John 9, 10.

7. They ought to stand by them in their trials, afflictions, and sufferings, 2 Tim 1:15; 4:16; 1 Cor 16:10; 1 Tim 5:19.

8. They ought to contribute towards their livelihood, that they may apply themselves to the extensive duties of their office, Acts 6:2, 4.

9. Pastors of churches have a divine right to their support if the church is able to give it without being oppressed, or so far as they are able, than which nothing is more manifest in the New Testament. "For the workman is worthy of his meat," Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7. "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" 1 Cor 9:11. "Do ye not know, that they who minister about holy things, live of the things of the temple? and they who wait at the altar, are partakers with the altar? Even so has the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel," 1 Cor 9:13, 14. "Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things," Gal 6:6; See 1 Tim 5:17, 18.

10. These passages of Scripture are so unequivocal and clear, that no one can evade their force.

11. Mr. Hooker well observes, that "they who will not pay their ministers would not pay anyone his due, could they refuse with the same temporal impunity." Everyone knows that those who will not do justice farther than the law compels them are destitute of an honest principle.

12. Nothing but ignorance of his duty, or covetousness and want of principle, or both, can induce him to neglect or refuse paying; and a covetous brother should be expelled from the church, and kept no company with, 1 Cor 5:11.

13. When a people neglect their duty in regard to the support of their minister, they are not only willful neglecters of the divine law, but must otherwise be great losers, both as they forfeit a right to the divine blessing, as also because their minister will be less capable of, and prevented from, serving them to the same advantage, Gal 6:6, 7; 2 Cor 9:6-8.

14. This support of the minister should not be done in the way of charity, or alms, but as a matter of right; and, if the people are able, it ought to exceed his bare necessity, that he may be able to be exemplary in acts of hospitality, 1 Tim 3:2.

15. If any church and congregation are not able to give their minister a comfortable support but are willing to do what they can towards it, it will perhaps be duty, at least very commendable, in the minister, to forego a part of his right, rather than leave them and apply himself to some business to make up their deficiency, 1 Cor 9:12.

Chapter 7: The Duties of Members Towards Each Other

The principal of these are the following:

1. Love one another, John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom 12:9, 10; 13:8, 10; Gal 5:15; 1 Pet 1:22.

2. Avoid everything that tends to lessen love and make disagreeable impressions, Gal 5:26. Concerning this, they should avoid whispering and backbiting, 2 Cor 12:20; evil speaking and suspicions, James 4:11; 1 Tim 6:4; tattling and being busybodies, 1 Tim 5:13.

3. No one should indulge reluctance in himself towards another, but immediately make known to the other his grievance and suspicion: and when he discovers reluctance in another, he should inquire after the reason of it, Matt 5:23, 24; Eph 4:26.

4. Bear with one another, Matt 18:21, 22; Rom 15:1; Gal 6:2.

5. Promote peace and harmony, Eph 4:3; Rom 14:19; 1 Thes 5:13.

6. Advance one another's spiritual benefit and edification, 1 Cor 14:26.

7. Watch over one another for good and admonish one another when occasion requires, but in much love and tenderness, Rom 15:14; 2 Thes 3:15.

8. Exhort and stir up one another to a diligent attendance on the means of grace, Heb 10:25; Acts 2:42.

9. Stir up one another to zeal in holy living, and in supporting the gospel.

10. Relieve the necessities of the poor, Matt 25:40; John 12:8; Rom 12:13; 15:26; Gal 2:10; Deut 15:7, 11; 1 Cor 16:1, 2; 1 John 3:17. No good reason can be given why a church should refuse the assistance which the good and wholesome laws of the land offer.

11. In the last place, they should not go to law with one another if matters can be accommodated in the church, or by reference, 1 Cor 6:1-7. Although the law always has justice in view, justice is not always within its reach. A Christian should never take advantage against anyone, especially not a brother. But by leave of the church, recourse may be had to the civil law.

Chapter 8: Of Admission of Members

1. We have already observed that every particular or local church has full power and authority to transact all its own affairs for its well-being, independent of any other church or combination of churches.

2. The chief part of church power, exercised under Christ, and according to the rules of the gospel, is demonstrated in four ways; the choice of their own officers, the admission of members, governing of them, and finally, their exclusion when they prove unworthy of a place in the house of God. Rom 14:1; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 5:13.

3. Admission is either out of the world or from other churches.

4. When persons are wrought upon and turned to the Lord, under a real work of conviction and conversion, it will be their duty to offer themselves for baptism and give themselves members of some gospel church that may be near them, with whom they may walk in fellowship and enjoy the privileges of the house of God, appointed for their nourishment and growth in grace. Acts 2:38; 2 Cor 8:5.

5. To this end it will be proper for the candidate to acquaint the minister or pastor beforehand of his desire, which is commonly done, so that the minister, after conversing freely with him, may either encourage or discourage.

6. There is no doubt but that every gospel minister has a right, in virtue of the commission, to baptize all suitable people who request baptism, and afterward the church may receive them on the testimony of said minister, or on their giving of their religious testimony.

7. But, since the church has a right to obtain full knowledge of the experience, religious principles, and moral conduct of those that offer themselves for membership and forasmuch as it is edifying, and tends to excite and increase Christian fellowship, to hear persons declare what the Lord has done for them, Ps 66:16, and also, as it may be of use to administer the holy ordinance of baptism in a more open and public way it will be better for persons to be examined in the first instance before the church, either on the day of preparation before communion, or at any other time, and then baptized.

8. The prerequisites for baptism and admission into the church are salvation, soundness in the faith, and a godly life.

9. Knowledge of the first will be best obtained by letting persons declare in their own way the gracious dealings of the Lord with them, such questions being put occasionally as will assist and lead them on. 1 Pet 3:15. The second should be confined to the essentials of doctrine. Rom 14:1; 15:7. And we attend to the last, as the necessary fruit, without which their pretension to religion must be vain. Titus 2:12, 14; 3:8.

10. In admitting persons to baptism and then into the church, all precautions should be attended to, and carefulness used, that we open not the doors too wide on the one hand, nor on the other keep them too closed. Zech 4:10; Matt 12:20; Is 26:1-6. Particularly, when they give in their religious experience, seek to discover whether they have been convinced of righteousness as well as of sin; whether they have only felt the power of the law, or have also discovered the glory of the gospel. John 16:8.

11. When the church is generally satisfied with the parties' confession and testimony of conversion, they are, after being baptized, to be received into the church as members.

12. In doing this, the Minister, after a brief introduction, enquires whether they will watch and be watched over, give and receive admonition and reproof as occasion may require, keep their places in the church, contribute according to their abilities towards all necessary uses, and in all things walk in a professed and willing subjection to the commands and institutions of Christ in the gospel which having promised he gives them the right hand of fellowship, bids them a welcome among the disciples, prays, and leads in a suitable hymn. 2 Cor 8:5; Acts 2:41; 2 Cor 6:14.

13. If the case of the applicant is doubtful, his baptism, and consequently admission, had better be deferred: but this should be done with much tenderness and suitable encouragement when there are some hopeful appearances.

14. When any member's residence is, in providence, removed to a distance from the church whereof he is a member, and more convenient to attend with another church of the same faith, he ought to apply to the church of which he is a member, for a letter recommendatory and dismissive to the church closer to him, and the church whereof he is a member ought to give him such a letter if he is in good standing among them, directed to the church to which he is dismissed, and said church ought to receive him unless they should have good reason to refuse. Rom 16:1; Acts 9:26, 27; 18:27.

15. It is a good general rule that persons ought to be members of such churches as are nearest to them—a local church; for they cannot otherwise so well enjoy the benefit of membership nor perform the duties that arise out of church relation.

16. There may be, however, cases that will make against this rule, particularly when persons plead greater benefit to themselves, in a church more remote; and they ought to be attended to, provided the other church be not too remote; for edification is the first object of church relation, and their entering into the relation at first was a voluntary act; nor should a church be made a prison wherein to confine people against their will.

17. It is certain there can be no dismission to the world; and it is doubted whether it would be regular for a church to dismiss to another church with which it can hold no communion: but in this case, it may give a few lines signifying the person's character and standing with them.

Chapter 9: Of Church Censures (Discipline)

1. Church censures or matters of discipline are properly but only two: admonition or rebuke, and excommunication; for suspension in most cases, is rather a delay or postponement of censure.

2. Admonition and rebuke are nearly synonymous. The first is of the nature of advice, entreaty, warning, 1 Cor 10:11; Acts 27:9; 2 Thes 3:15; 1 Tim 5:1; Titus 3:10. The other carries in it more of reprehension, severity, and authority, Lev 19:17; Luke 19:39; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 2:15.

3. Admonition or rebuke is either private or public.

4. Private admonition is when the offense, whether against God or more especially against a particular person, is private and not much known, Rom 15:14; Luke 17:3.

5. In this case, the offended brother is not to divulge the matter, but to go to the offender and endeavor in a tender, friendly manner, to convince and reclaim his brother. If he succeeds, and the offending brother shows signs of

repentance, and promises amendment, the matter is to end there. But if not, the offended brother is to take one or two of the brethren with him, such as he shall judge most likely to positively influence his brother. If this admonition also should take no effect, the matter is to be brought before the church, Matt 18:15, 17.

6. This rule holds good, let the offense be of ever so heinous a nature, provided it be private.

7. When it is brought before the church, after the charge is proved, should he deny it, the minister is to admonish, and endeavor in the spirit of meekness to reclaim the offender, 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 1:13. Should this prove ineffectual, and the offender continue obstinate and impenitent, the church is to proceed to higher acts of censure, and, in some cases, if he is penitent, as we shall see in the 17th verse, Matt 18:17.

8. Should any private matter be brought into the church before the previous steps have been taken, the person that brings it in ought to be severely reproofed and admonished, and that publicly before the church, for his irregular and injurious conduct therein: yet nevertheless, the church must now take it in hand, forasmuch as it will then be no longer private, but will require public satisfaction.

9. Public admonition or rebuke also takes place in regard to public offenses of a less heinous nature, but unseemly in Christians, and unworthy of their vocation, Rom 14:22; Matt 5:22; 1 Cor 8:12.

10. Suspension is to be used when a person, under the first admonition or rebuke in the church, proves unrepentant. For since there is to be a second admonition, Titus 3:10. He ought, while we are waiting to see the effect of the first, to be put under suspension and debarred the privileges of the church, Rev 2:21.

11. When a charge is brought into the church against a person, if he denies it, and witnesses are not at hand, or some other circumstances make it inconvenient for the present to discuss the matter, it will be necessary to lay him, in the meantime, under suspension from the Lord's table, until the matter can come to a hearing, Lev 13-14.

12. Suspension is also used when the offense is not sufficiently great, or is not yet ripe for the great sentence of excommunication. Such is not to be accounted as an enemy, but to be exhorted as a brother; in union, though not in communion. 2 Thes 3:6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15.

13. To the above three cases, wherein suspension is to take place, we may add a fourth, and that is, when a person is called in question for some high offense, for which he ought to be excommunicated, it is thought that if there

are strong signs of genuine repentance, the infliction of the sentence ought to be dispensed with, yet nevertheless, the guilty person ought to be suspended from communion for a time, as a testimony of the church's indignation against every species of wickedness, and in vindication of the honor and glory of God. Thus, the Lord appointed concerning Miriam, that she should be shut out of the camp seven days, and then received in again, Num 12:14, 15.

14. The last and highest act of church censure or discipline is excommunication, to which recourse must be had when previous censures have not their due effect in bringing persons dealt with to repentance, provided the matters for which they are under dealing with the circumstances of aggravation during the course of said dealing manifestly involve immorality or heresy.⁷

15. Acts of immorality include not only the particulars of the 10 Commandments, but also the commands, appointments, institutions, and ordinances contained in the New Testament; for a breach of any positive injunction, or requirement of divine authority, must involve in it a breach of morality.

16. There should be care taken, however, not to make forced constructions of implicit immorality, as for instance, to charge a person with transgressing the rule in Heb 10:25, and breach of covenant, because he neglects his place, attends worship elsewhere, and perhaps with those of a different persuasion, but pleads greater edification, and perhaps, conscience,⁸ lest we should act the part of Diotrefes. 3 John 10.

17. When a member is found guilty of some gross act of immorality, and which is notorious and scandalous, the church should proceed to this censure in the first place, without the previous steps of admonition and reproof, in order to vindicate the credit of their holy profession and to manifest their abhorrence of such abomination, 1 Cor 5:1, 2, 7, 13; 1 Tim 5:24.

18. Such as are heretical in their principles, denying some essential doctrine, or holding and teaching such as may be unsound and scandalous, come under the notice of this ordinance, Gal 1:6-7; compared with chap 5:12; 1 Tim 1:19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim 2:16-18; Rev 2:14, 15, 20; 2 Cor 2:6.

19. The charge being sufficiently proved in the opinion of the church, and they having determined on the person's exclusion and set the time for that purpose, the minister is to lay open the seriousness of the offense or error, with the aggravating circumstances thereof, and the scandal such a one is become to religion; he is to apply the particular places of scripture, that may be pertinent to the case in order to charge make the offense known to the

conscience of the offender, if present, and that others also may fear; he is to explain the nature and results of the discipline, expressing the solemn sense of himself and church on this awful occasion; and then he is, in the presence of the church, to cut off and seclude such an offender by name from the union and communion of the church, so that he is not henceforth to be looked upon, deemed or accounted a brother, or a member of such a church, until God shall restore him again by repentance, for which they pray.

20. This exclusion is an authoritative putting of such a person out of the church to keep it pure, and in order to his being humbled and broken under a sight and sense of his sins, and where there are signs of this he ought to be restored, 2 Cor 2:6-8.

21. When a person about to be excommunicated believes he has been treated unfairly by the influence of people or otherwise, he has a right to insist on a council being called from a neighboring church or churches of like faith and order, and the church ought to agree to it and allow him the choice of one half of the council.

22. If the church should refuse to call in a council, and cut the person off, or should they do it contrary to the advice of the council, the person aggrieved may lay a statement of his case before the Association, who may appoint a council, and if the church should refuse to admit of a rehearing before said council, or should refuse to abide by the decision of the council, the Association may bring said church under dealing, and, if the church continues obstinate, a neighboring church may receive the aggrieved person into their communion.¹⁰

23. In transacting church business, it is not to be expected that unanimity will always prevail: Some will, at times, be in the minority. These have sometimes taken offense and declined to keep their places in the church for a while. This is very wrong and irregular. For suppose a church does ever so wrong, yet any individual, after bearing his testimony against it, has done his duty, and cleared his conscience, and ought, therefore, to keep his place, except in case of material defection from the faith. It has been thought by good men that our Lord communed with Judas, though he knew at the time what he was.

24. Although a church may refuse a person when he requests membership if they have good cause to suspect that he is not truly religious, yet they have no right to exclude him afterward upon the like suspicion. They may, at first, judge in his favor, but cannot afterward reverse the sentence. Excommunication is only for immorality or heresy. As for their dying away, or seeming to die away in religion, the rule is, "Let them grow together until the harvest," Matt 13:30.

25. There ought to be meetings of business every month, two months, or quarterly, and not do all their business on days of worship, lest something should happen that might discompose the minds of some, and so unfit them for the holy communion next day.

26. Every church should keep a book of records and enter therein all their transactions, that it may at any time afterward be known what was done and how it was done.

Chapter 10: Of the Fellowship and Communion of Churches

1. Local churches of the same faith and gospel order, so far as is necessary to communion as they have all drunk into and of one and the same Spirit as they are branches of one and the same body, and hold to one and the same head and as they have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism they, therefore, may, and ought to, have and enjoy fellowship and a friendly relationship together, as occasion may require and opportunity serve, in the discharge of those relative duties which may tend to the mutual benefit and edification of the whole. 1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:5; John 17:20, 26; to mention a few.

2. They should be ready to assist one another, when required, in difficult cases.

3. Such as have ministerial gifts to spare should be ready and willing to supply such as may be destitute. Song of Solomon 8:8.

4. Admit one another's members of good standing to visiting communion, when the opportunity may serve.

5. Dismiss and receive members to and from one another.

6. They should assist one another with money as well as advice, if need be, and in general perform all acts of kindness towards each other, as neighboring, though distinct families or branches of the one great family and household of faith.

7. And lastly, they have fellowship and communion together, for their mutual benefit, in the social duties of an association.

Chapter 11: Of an Association

1. An Association consists of delegates or Messengers from different particular or local, visible churches, who have agreed to associate together, at stated times, to promote their own interest and the good of the common cause.

2. This practice is recommended by the reason of things, the spirit of religion, and apostolic practice, Acts 15.

3. The meeting thus of churches by their delegates is of special use to gain acquaintance with, and knowledge of one another, to preserve uniformity in faith and practice, Phil 3:16, to detect and discountenance heresies, to curb licentiousness in the wanton abuse of church power, to afford assistance and advice in all difficult cases, to contribute financial aid when necessary, to make appointments of supplies for struggling churches, and every way advance and secure the interest of religion, and strengthen and draw closer the bonds of union and fellowship.

4. Other churches, besides those that enter at the original constitution, may be admitted, on making an application and giving satisfactory evidence in regard to their faith and practice, regular order and good standing.

5. The delegates thus assembled are, properly speaking, only an advisory council. They are not armed with coercive power to compel the churches to submit to their decisions, nor have they any control over the acts or doings of the churches. Every church still remains independent.

6. Nevertheless, the associated body may exclude from their connection any church that may act as an unworthy part. Indeed, it would be absurd to examine churches at their admission, if afterward they are to be continued in the connection, let their principles and practice be what they may.

7. Let it not be thought that this power of the association over the churches in connection with it disannuls or destroys the independence or autonomy of those local churches: for if any church of the associated body should become unsound in their principles, or act irregularly and disorderly, and will not do what may be just and right such a church will still remain an independent church, though an unorthodox and irregular one; but it would be inconsistent and wrong in the association to suffer such a church to continue among them, since they would hereby become partakers of their evil deeds. The association can take nothing from them but what it gave them. This, in such circumstances, it certainly may and ought to do.

8. From what we have said, as well as from considering, that the union of churches in an association is a voluntary act. Being a voluntary union or association, like the voluntary union of members into a church, it follows that every church stands in the same relation to its association as a member does to his church, and therefore is examined in the same manner on admission.

Hence:

9. Complaints may be received by the association against any church belonging to it, especially when the complaint is brought in by another church. Hence also,

10. The association has a right to call any delinquent church to account, whether for malicious abuse of its power towards or over any of its members, neglect of attendance at the association, disregard of those things recommended to them, or any material defect in principle or practice; and if satisfactory reasons are not given, therefore, nor repentance, then to exclude them.

11. At the first formation of an association or afterward, there should be a set of rules, conditions, and regulations drawn up, as the ground on which the churches agree to associate together.

12. For the maintenance of good order, the associated body when met should choose a Moderator to regulate and bring forward what is to come before them, and to preside in their deliberations as also, a Clerk, to take minutes of their proceedings.

References and Additional Information

¹In 1805 this treatise was reprinted in Lexington, KY by T. Anderson. The only change was in the first line. The 1805 edition removed the beginning Greek word “Ecclesia” and simply read “The Greek word, in the original, for Church” and then it goes on as the 1798 edition read.

²We learn from history that a church never thrives unless the minister lives among them. The practice of pluralities may suit the minister’s pride, and save the pockets of the churches, but starves their souls.

³The Church Covenant (See below, after licensure and ordination letters)

‘Licensure and Ordination Letters:

To all people to whom these presents shall come;

_____ Baptist Church sends greeting. The bearer hereof, our beloved brother, being a man of good moral character, real piety, and sound knowledge of divine things and having been called to the exercise of his ministerial gifts, whereof we have now had considerable trial, both in private and public we have judged him worthy and do therefore hereby license and authorize him to preach the Gospel wherever he may have a call not doubting, but that in due time circumstances will lead on to a more full investiture of him in the ministerial office by ordination. In the meantime, we recommend him to favor and respect, praying the Lord may be with and abundantly bless him.

Done at our meeting at _____

Church clerk signature _____

Date: _____

⁵ _____ church on the date _____ ,
at the influence of the Baptist church of aforesaid, for the purpose of setting
apart, by solemn ordination, Brother _____ to the
sacred office of the ministry and being, by sufficient testimonials, fully
certified of his moral character, real piety, and found knowledge in divine
things, as well as ministerial gifts and abilities, whereof we had otherwise
due knowledge: WE DID THEREFORE, on the said day in the presence of
said church, and a full assembly met, solemnly ordain and set apart, to the
said sacred office of the ministry, by the imposition of hands, prayer, and
other rituals among us in that case in use, the said bearer, our worthy and
reverend brother whom we therefore recommend, as such, to favor and
respect.

Signatures of ordaining council:

Date: _____

“See Joshua Thomas’s History of the Baptists in Wales, p. 169.

“It is thought that Matt 18:17 and 1 Cor 5:3, 5 refer not to excommunication.

Church Covenant

We, whose names are under written, being desirous to be constituted a
church of Jesus Christ, in this place, and having all due knowledge of one
another in point of a work of grace on our hearts, religious principles, and
moral characters, and being desirous of enjoying the privileges that
appertain to the people of God in a church relation, do, in the name of the
Lord Jesus, voluntarily and freely give ourselves up to the Lord, and to one
another, according to his word, to be one body under one head, jointly to
exist and act by the bands and rules of the gospel, and do promise and
engage to do all things, by divine assistance, in our different capacities and
relations that the Lord has commanded us, and requires of us: particularly to
deny ourselves, take up our cross, follow Christ, keep the faith, assemble
ourselves together, love the brethren, submit one to another in the Lord,

care one for another, bear one another's burdens, endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and, finally, to honor, obey and maintain them that may have the rule over us in the Lord.

This is the Covenant we solemnly enter into, in the fear of God, humbly imploring the Divine assistance and blessing that we may be built up and established to the glory of God, the advancement of the Redeemer's interest, and the comfort and edification of our own souls, through the infinite riches of free grace, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord: and now, to the only wise God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be worship, honor, power, glory, dominion, and obedience rendered, now and evermore, Amen.

Done at _____ Baptist Church

In the county of _____ and the state of _____

on the _____ day of _____ in the year of our blessed Lord and Savior, _____.