

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

The Church Member's Guide

By John Angell James, 1822

Nature of a Christian Church

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"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, **I am nothing.**" 1 Cor. 13:2

We must come back to the first **principles of practical piety**, and cultivate the passive virtues of the Christian character. We must remember that Christianity is being like Christ, and that unless we partake of that love which is patient and kind, which does not envy, nor boast, nor is proud, nor rude, nor self-seeking, nor easily angered, which keeps no record of wrongs **we are nothing!**

Strange indeed it is, that men, who

by their own confession are lost,  
vile, ruined, helpless  
sinners□should lack HUMILITY;  
and that they who believe  
themselves to be saved from hell  
by unmerited mercy□should be  
destitute of LOVE!

We must crucify that selfishness,  
which fixes upon its own  
gratification, and cherish that  
expansive benevolence which looks  
upon the good of others. We must  
contend to be lowest□not to be  
highest! We must seek to please,  
and not merely to be pleased.

Let us remember that HUMILITY  
and LOVE are  
the necessary fruits of our  
doctrines,  
the highest beauty of our  
character, and  
**the guardian angels of our  
churches!**

## **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **ON THE NATURE OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

It is obviously incumbent on the  
members of any community,  
whether civil or sacred, to acquaint  
themselves with its constitution  
and design; without this, they can  
neither adequately enjoy the  
privileges, nor properly discharge

the duties, which their membership brings with it. Such people are held more by feeling than by principle; a tenure quite insufficient, as a bond of religious connection.

It is admitted that as in the human frame, so in the system of divine truth, there are parts of greater and less importance—and the man who would put the principles of church government upon a level with the doctrine of the atonement, and represent a belief in the former as no less essential to salvation than a reliance upon the latter, betrays a lamentable ignorance of both.

Still, however, although the hand is of less consequence to vitality than the head or the heart, is it of no value? Will any one be reckless of his members, because he can lose them and yet live? So because church government is of less importance to spiritual and eternal life than faith in Christ, will any one abandon it as a vain and profitless subject? Whatever God has made the subject of revealed truth, should be guarded, on that account, from being considered as too frivolous to deserve our attention.

The government of the church ought never to be viewed apart from its moral and spiritual improvement, any more than the laws of a country should be considered as something distinct from the means of its civil order, comfort, and strength. It is

impossible for us to imagine otherwise, than that Christ, the head of the church, arranged its government with a direct reference to its purity and peace, and that the system he has laid down is the best calculated to promote these ends. Hence, then, it is obviously our duty to inquire what that system is, not merely for its own sake—but for the sake of the interests of evangelical piety.

The error of viewing the subject of church government as a mere abstract question, is very common, and has tended more than anything else, with many people, to lead them to regard it with indifference and neglect. The acknowledgment of no other rule of faith and practice than the word of God, must tend to exalt the only infallible standard of truth, and the only divine means of sanctity—the refusal to own any other head of the church than Christ, must bring the soul into more direct submission to him—the scheme of founding a right to spiritual privileges exclusively on the scriptural marks of religious character, and not upon legislative enactments, or national dissent, must have a tendency to produce examination, and prevent delusion—and indeed the habit of viewing the whole business of religion as a matter of conscience, and not of custom, to be settled between God and a man's own soul, must ensure for it a degree of attention more solemn and more effectual than can be expected, if it

be allowed, in any degree, to rank with the affairs which are regulated by civil legislation.

It will probably be contended by some, in apology for their neglect, that the New Testament has laid down no specific form of church government, and that where we are left without a guide, it is useless to inquire if we are following his directions. If by this it be meant to say, that the Lord Jesus Christ has left its no apostolic precept or example, which is either directory for our practice, or obligatory upon our conscience, in the formation of Christian societies, nothing can be more erroneous. It might be presumed, that a matter of such moment would not be left so unsettled, and we have only to look into the Word of God, to see how groundless is the assertion. It is true that we shall search the New Testament in vain for either precedent or practice, which will support all the usages of our churches, any otherwise than as **these usages are deduced from the spirit and bearing of general Scriptural principles.** These alone are laid down by the apostles—but still with sufficient precision to enable us to determine whether the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, or Independent form of church government, be most consonant with the mind and will of Christ.

**What is a Christian church?**

The word *church* signifies an assembly. In the New Testament it invariably applies to people, not to places. It means not the building in which the assembly is convened—but the assembly itself. It has an enlarged, and also a more confined signification in the Word of God. In some places it is employed to comprehend the aggregate of believers of every age and nation; hence we read of the "general assembly and church of the first born," and of the church which "Christ loved and purchased with his blood." In its more confined acceptance, it means **a congregation of professing Christians, meeting for worship in one place**; hence we read of the church at Corinth, of the Thessalonians, of Ephesus, etc. These are the only two senses in which the word is ever employed by the sacred writers; consequently all provincial and national churches, or, in other words, to call the people of a province or nation a church of Christ, is a most gross perversion of the term, and rendering the kingdom of Jesus more a matter of geography than of piety. The sacred writers, when speaking of the Christians of a whole province, never employ the term in the singular number; but, with great precision of language, speak of the *churches* of Galatia, Syria, Macedonia, Asia, etc.

A church of Christ, then, in the latter and more usual acceptance of the term, means **"a number of**

**professing Christians, united to each other by their own voluntary consent, having their proper officers, meeting in one place for the observance of religious ordinances, and who are independent of all other control than the authority of Christ expressed in his word."**

This company of professing Christians may be few or many in number, rich or poor in their circumstances, and may meet either in a shoddy or magnificent building--or in no building at all. These things are purely secondary; for, provided they answer to the above definition, they are still, to all intent and purpose, a church of Christ.

**I. The members of the church should be such as make a credible profession of their faith in Christ;** or, in other words, such as appear to be regenerated by the Spirit of God, to have believed in the Lord Jesus for salvation, and to have submitted themselves in their conduct to the authority of his word. To these the Head of the church has limited the privileges of his kingdom; they alone can enjoy its blessings, and perform its duties; and to such the Epistles are uniformly addressed, Romans 1:7. 1 Cor. 1:2. etc. If these passages are read, it will be found that the members of the first churches are not merely admonished to be saints—but are addressed as such; which is a circumstance of great weight in

determining the question about the proper subjects of fellowship.

But who is to judge in this case? I answer, the church; for although no instance can be brought from the New Testament, in which any one of the primitive churches can be proved to have exercised this power, yet, as it is a voluntary society, founded on the principle of mutual affection, it seems reasonable that the church should judge of the existence of those qualifications which are necessary to the enjoyment of communion. The very act of obtruding upon them anyone without their own consent, whether by a minister or by elders, is destructive of one purpose of Christian association—*that is*, the fellowship of the brethren. Nor is the power of searching the heart requisite for those who exercise the right of admitting others, since we are to judge of each other by outward conduct.

**II. This company of professing Christians must meet in one place for the observance of religious institutes.** A society that cannot associate, an assembly that cannot assemble, are total contradictions. When, therefore, a church becomes too large to communicate at one table, and divides, to eat the Lord's supper, in two distinct places of worship, each having its own pastor, there are two churches, and no longer one only.



**III. These people must be formed into a society upon the principle of mutual voluntary consent.**

They are not to be associated by act of civil government, by ecclesiastical decree, by ministerial authority, or by any other power than that of their own unconstrained choice. They are to give themselves first to the Lord, and then to each other. No authority whatever, of an earthly nature, is to constrain them to unite themselves in fellowship, nor to select for them any particular company of believers with whom they shall associate. All is to be the result of their own selection. Parochial limits, ecclesiastical divisions of country, together with all the commands of ministerial authority, have nothing to do in regulating the fellowship of the saints. The civil power, when employed to direct the affairs of the church of Christ, is manifestly out of place. It is as much at a man's own option, so far as human authority is concerned, to say with whom he will associate in matters of religion, as it is to decide who shall be his fellows in philosophical or literary pursuits.

**IV. A church of Christ has its scriptural officers.**

Here two questions arise—  
First, How many kinds of officers does the New Testament mention?  
Secondly, How are they to be chosen?

As to the **KINDS of office-bearers** in the primitive churches,

there can be neither doubt nor difficulty with any one who will impartially consult the Word of God. With all that simplicity which characterizes the works of God, which neither disfigures his productions with what is excessive, nor encumbers them with what is unnecessary, he has instituted but two kinds of permanent officers in his church, bishops (or elders) and deacons; the former to attend to its spiritual affairs, and the latter to direct its temporal concerns. That there were but two, is evident, because we have no information concerning the choice, qualifications, or duties of any other.

The **BISHOPS** of the primitive churches correspond exactly to the pastors of modern ones. That **bishop, elder, and pastor, are only different terms for the same office**, is evident from Acts 20:17, compared with the 28; Titus 1:5, 7, and 1st Peter 5:1, 2. They are called BISHOPS, which signifies overseers, because they overlook the spiritual concerns, and watch for the souls of their brethren, Acts 20:28, 1st Tim. 3:1. PASTORS or shepherds, because they feed the flock of God with truth, Ephes. 4:11. RULERS, because they guide the church, Heb. 13:7. ELDERS, because of their age, or of their possessing those qualities which age supposes, Tit. 1:5. MINISTERS, because they are the servants of Christ and the gospel. Ephes. 6:21.

The **DEACON** is appointed to receive and distribute the funds of the church, especially those which are raised for the relief of the poor. All other kinds of officers than these two, are the inventions of men, and not the appointment of Christ; and which, by intending to add splendor to the kingdom of Jesus, have corrupted its simplicity, destroyed its spirituality, and caused it to symbolize with the kingdoms of this world.

On the **mode of electing them** to their office the Scripture is sufficiently explicit, to justify the practice of those denominations who appeal to the voices of the people. If the Acts of the Apostles be studied with care, a book which seems given us more for the regulation of ecclesiastical practices, than the revelation of theological opinions, we shall find that **nothing was done in the primitive churches without the cooperation of the members; no, not even when the apostles themselves were present.** Even the election of a new apostle was made by the brethren, and not by the ministers exclusively. Acts 1:21, 26. The deacons were chosen by the same people. Acts 6. The decrees of the council at Jerusalem were passed also by them, and went forth with their name. Acts 15:23. From hence we infer, that although no case occurs in the inspired history, where it is mentioned that a church elected its pastor, yet it so entirely accords with the practice of the church in

other respects, that an exception in this particular would have been a singular anomaly, which nothing could justify but the plainest and most express provision.

The decisions of *reason* harmonize, on this subject, with the testimony of revelation; for if we have an undoubted right to choose our own lawyer, or physician, how much more so, to elect the man to whom we shall entrust the care of our soul! If we should feel it hard to be obliged to take the medicines of the parish doctor, whether we liked them or not, how much more oppressive is it, that we should be obliged to hear the opinions of the parish minister, who may have been appointed by the patron for other qualifications than those of a spiritual nature, and whose sentiments may be as much opposed to the doctrines of the gospel, as his conduct is to its holiness! What! are we to be obliged to look up to such a man as our spiritual instructor, because some profligate, who has control of the office, chooses to introduce him to the vacant pulpit?

**V. A Christian church, with its office-bearers, is complete within itself**, for the observance of divine ordinances, and the exercise of discipline; and is subject to no authority or tribunal on earth. This is the Congregational or Independent form of church government, and it is thus denominated, to distinguish it from the Episcopal, or the

government of a bishop, and from the Presbyterian, or the government of the churches by the authority of their assembled pastors and elders. No trace of any foreign control over a church of Christ, can be found in the New Testament, except such as the representatives of Jesus Christ.

**VI. Such a church is bound, by the authority of Christ, in their associated capacity, to observe all the institutes**, to obey all the commands, and to cherish all the dispositions, which relate to their social union, in the time, order, and manner in which they are enjoined by Christ Jesus. They are to assemble in public on the first day of the week for prayer, praise, hearing the Scriptures read and expounded, celebrating the Lord's supper, and exercising mutual affection. They are also bound by divine authority to maintain the purity of the church, by receiving only such as give evidence of true faith, and by excluding from their communion all those whose life is opposed to the doctrine which is according to godliness. They are to live in the exercise of mutual submission and brotherly love, and ever to consider themselves responsible to the tribunal of Christ, for their conduct in their church capacity.

Such is a very concise view of the nature of a Christian church.

Hence what might be termed **the GENERAL principles of the New**

**Testament** on this topic, are the all-sufficiency and exclusive authority of the Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice in matters of religion—the consequent denial of the right of legislatures and ecclesiastical conventions to impose any rites, ceremonies, observances, or interpretations of the Word of God, upon our belief and practice—the unlimited and inalienable right of every man to expound the Word of God for himself, and to worship his Maker in that place and manner which he deems to be most accordant with the directions of the Bible—the utter impropriety of any alliance or incorporation of the church of Christ with the governments of the kingdoms of this world—the duty of every Christian to oppose the authority which would attempt to fetter his conscience with obligations to religious observances not enjoined by Christ. These are general principles, which should lead the thinking Christian to separate from all national establishments of religion whatever.

It is not enough to plead the authority of 'example', or of mere 'feeling', as a reason for any religious service. These are insufficient pilots on the troubled ocean of theological opinion, where opposing currents, stormy winds, and concealed rocks, endanger the safety of the voyager to eternity. Our compass is the word of God; 'reason' must be the steersman at the helms to guide the vessel by

the direction of the needle, and that mariner is accountable for the consequences, who is too ignorant or too indolent to examine his course.

Away with that morbid insensibility which exclaims, "It is of no consequence to what church or denomination a man belongs, provided he be a Christian." Such a spirit is a conspiracy against the throne of truth, and is the first step towards a complete abandonment of the importance of right sentiments. Admitting that error is to be measured by a graduated scale, who will undertake to fix upon the point where harmless mistakes end--and mischievous ones begin? Everything relating to religion is of consequence. In the temple of truth, not only the foundation is to be valued and defended—but every point and every pinnacle.

It does not necessarily follow that an inquiry into the grounds of our conduct should embitter our temper. The mist of angry passion obscures the splendor of truth, as much as fogs do the effulgence of the solar orb. Let us contend earnestly for right principles—but let it be in the exercise of right feelings. Let us hold the truth in love. Then do our sentiments appear to greatest advantage, and look like gems set in gold, when they are supported by a spirit of Christian charity.

"O divine love! the sweet harmony of souls! the music of angels! the joy of God's own heart; the very darling of his bosom! the source of true happiness! the pure quintessence of heaven! that which reconciles the jarring principles of the world, and makes them all chime together! that which melts men's hearts into one another! See how Paul describes it, and it cannot choose but enamor your affections towards it—"Love envies not, it is not puffed up, it does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, rejoices not in iniquity; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." I may add, love is the best natured thing, the best complexioned thing in the world. Let us express this sweet harmonious affection in these jarring times; that so, if it be possible, we may tune the world into better music. Especially in matters of religion, let us strive with all meekness to instruct and convince one another. Let us endeavor to promote the gospel of peace, the dove-like gospel, with a dove-like spirit. This was the way by which the gospel at first was propagated in the world.

"Christ did not cry nor lift up his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he did not break, and the smoking flax he did not quench; and yet he brought forth judgment unto victory. He whispered the gospel to us from mount Zion, in a still voice; and yet the sound thereof went out quickly throughout all the



earth. The gospel at first came down upon the world gently and softly, like the dew on Gideon's fleece; and yet it quickly penetrated through it; and, doubtless, this is still the most effectual way to promote it farther. Sweetness and kindness will more command men's minds, than angry passion, sourness, and severity; as the soft pillow sooner breaks the flint than the hardest marble. Let us "follow truth in love;" and of the two, indeed, be contented rather to miss of the conveying a speculative truth, than to part with love. When we would convince men of any error by the strength of truth, let us withal pour the sweet balm of love upon their heads. **Truth and love are two of the most powerful things in the world; and when they both go together, they cannot easily be withstood. The golden beams of truth, and the silken cords of love, twisted together, will draw men on with a sweet power, whether they will or not.**

"Let us take heed we do not sometimes call that zeal for God and his gospel, which is nothing else but our own tempestuous and stormy passion. True zeal is a sweet, heavenly, and gentle flame, which makes us active for God—but always within the sphere of love. It never calls for fire from heaven to consume those who differ a little from us in their apprehensions. It is like that kind of lightning, (which the

philosophers speak of,) that melts the sword within—but sings not the scabbard—it strives to save the soul—but hurts not the body. True zeal is a loving thing, and makes us always active to edification, and not to destruction. If we keep the fire of zeal within the chimney, in its own proper place, it never does any hurt; it only warms, quickens, and enlivens us; but if once we let it break out, and catch hold of the thatch of our flesh, and kindle our corrupt nature, and set the house of our body on fire, it is no longer zeal, it is no heavenly fire, it is a most destructive and devouring thing. True zeal is a soft and gentle flame, that will not scorch one's hand; it is no predatory or voracious thing. Carnal and fleshly zeal is like the spirit of gunpowder set on fire, that tears and blows up all that stands before it. True zeal is like the vital heat in us, that we live upon, which we never feel to be angry or troublesome; but though it gently feed upon the radical oil within us, that sweet balsam of our natural moisture, yet it lives lovingly with it, and maintains that by which it is fed—but that other furious and distempered zeal, is nothing else but a fever in the soul.

"To conclude, we may learn what kind of zeal it is, that we should make use of in promoting the gospel, by an emblem of God's own, given us in the Scripture, those fiery tongues, that upon the day of Pentecost sat upon the Apostles—which sure were

harmless flames, for we cannot read that they did any hurt, or that they did so much as singe an hair of their heads." Cudworth's Sermon before the House of Commons, 1647.

## **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **NATURE and DESIGN of Christian Fellowship**

"For lack of clear information on this head, there is, both before and after admission, in the minds of many people, a certain mystic obscurity hanging over the subject, which either repels them from seeking for admission, or fills them with disquiet. Christian churches have no mysteries—no hidden secrets. It is a pernicious policy which would exalt plain duties into secret rites, and transform the simple institutions of the gospel into enigmas." Nothing is more plain than the nature of Christian fellowship, yet nothing is less understood.

***I. Church fellowship is the exercise of the social principle in matters of religion, and in obedience to the authority of Christ.***

Many people seem to imagine that the only end and object of church fellowship, is the participation of the Lord's supper. Hence they

attach no other idea to a church, than that of a company of Christians going together to the sacramental table; who having nothing to do with each other, until they arrive there, and whose reciprocal duties end with that Ordinance. The observance of the Lord's supper, it is confessed, is one design and exercise of fellowship; but it is not the only one. Man is a social being, by which we mean that he instinctively seeks the company of his fellows; is capable of enjoying their society, and derives from their communion no small portion of his improvement and felicity. The aphorism of Solomon is as just as it is beautiful, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."

*Social* bliss was the finish of paradisiacal happiness; its influence has survived the shock of our apostasy, and will be felt amid the felicities of the heavenly state. It is not matter of surprise, therefore, that the Lord Jesus should recognize the social principle in the arrangements of his wise and merciful economy. He might have left his people unconnected by any visible bond, or at best with no other guide to each other than the natural workings and affinities of the human bosom. Instead of this, however, **he has by explicit authority grafted the duties of his religion upon the propensities of our social nature.** The identifying law of

Christ's kingdom is love to one another; and in order that this love may be more perfect in its exercise, we are united in visible communion. When, therefore, we join a Christian church, we enter a society of believers for the purpose of giving and receiving every suitable expression of mutual love. We then associate ourselves with those towards whom we are to cherish, in consequence of a common relationship, the kindest emotions. We are not only to worship with them in the same place, not only to sit with them at the same sacramental table—but we are to consider ourselves as one of their fellowship, to identify our best feelings with theirs, and in all things to consider ourselves members one of another. Our fellowship is not intended for, nor is it to be expressed by, any one exclusive act—but it is to extend itself to every possible way of having communion with each other. We are to rejoice together in the common salvation; and to bring forth together the fruits of a like precious faith. Watts has very beautifully expressed the feelings which every church member, who understands his relationship, constantly recognizes.

"My soul shall pray for Zion still,  
While life or breath remains;  
There my best friends, my kindred  
dwell;  
There God my Savior reigns."

The great end of Christian  
fellowship, and the impropriety of

limiting its design to a celebration of the Lord's table, are strikingly represented by Mr. Hall, "Nothing is more certain than that the communion of saints is by no means confined to one particular occasion, or limited to one transaction, such as that of assembling around the Lord's table; it extends to all the modes by which believers recognize each other as the members of a common Head. Every expression of fraternal regard, every participation in the enjoyments of social worship, every instance of the unity of the Spirit exerted in prayer and supplication, or in acts of Christian sympathy and friendship, as truly belong to the communion of saints, as the celebration of the Lord's table. In truth, if we are strangers to communion with our fellow Christians on other occasions, it is impossible for us to enjoy it there; for the mind is not a piece of mechanism which can be set going at pleasure, whose movements are obedient to the call of time and place. Nothing short of an habitual sympathy of spirit, springing from the cultivation of benevolent feeling, and the interchange of kind services, will secure that reciprocal delight, that social pleasure, which is the soul of Christian communion. Its richest fruits are frequently reserved for private conference, like that in which the two disciples were engaged, in their way to Emmaus, when their hearts burned within them, while the Lord opened to them the Scriptures. When they

take sweet counsel together as they go to the house of God in company, when they bear each other's burdens, weep with those that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice—that is Christian fellowship."

The sacred historian has given us a very beautiful practical exhibition of the ends of Christian fellowship in Acts 2:41-47, "Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church—about three thousand in all. They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved."

Here we see the social principle putting forth all its energies in a way of sacred fellowship, and with direct reference to religion. A new and holy brotherhood was set up, of which love to Christ, and to each other for Christ's sake, was the

bond. There was the recognition of a common relationship, and the exercise of all that affection which it involved. The converts immediately gave themselves to each other, as members one of another, and not only performed acts of religious worship together—but exercised a reciprocal and most substantial benevolence, and afforded the most valuable mutual service.

"Imagination can scarcely delineate a scene more amiably interesting, than that which the infant church in reality displayed. Bound together by the fellowship of sentiments, feeling, and affection—having one Lord, one faith, one baptism—the believers in Christ found more than a compensation for the contempt, and hatred, and persecution of the world, in their common hopes, and mutual offices of kindness. Around them was a scene of crude agitation and wild confusion—but within the little circle of their society all was union, harmony, and love." Alas, alas, that this reign of love and peace should be of such short duration, that the apostles lived to witness, not indeed its termination—but its interruption, and had to interpose their authority to stop the progress of false opinions, and the alienation of heart to which error had given rise.

**This exercise of the social principle is conducted with direct reference to the authority of Christ.** He who is our



Lord has *commanded* it. It is his will that his people should not live solitarily and unconnected—but in visible association. To the question, therefore, Why are you a church member?—the first answer must be, Because Jesus Christ has commanded it. Independently of the advantages arising from this practice, the true ground of it is the authority of our divine Lord. It is not only a privilege which he has permitted us to enjoy—but a duty which he has commanded us to perform. If we were unable to perceive its advantages, it would still be our duty to comply with it. Church fellowship is no less a duty than the observance of the first day Sabbath, as the same reasons may be advanced for one as for the other.

From not viewing it in this light it is, that so many refuse to join themselves to the church—they consider membership merely in the light of a privilege which it is at their option to receive or refuse. This is a very great and very injurious error. If a believer remains outside visible connection with some Christian society, he is guilty of direct disobedience against his rightful Lord.

***II. Fellowship is the instituted way of making a public profession of the faith and hope of the gospel.***

A man may hold the opinions and approve the practices of some voluntary, worldly society—but

until he has united himself with it, he is not considered, either by its members or the public, as one of their number. His actually joining himself to them according to the established usage, is his profession. Thus a man may be a sincere believer of the gospel, and, so far as respects his own private conduct, an exemplary example of genuine piety—but until he has connected himself with a Christian church, he has not *professed* himself to be a Christian. It is by that act he declares to the world his faith and hope as a believer in Christ. It is thus he virtually says, "I receive the opinions, possess the dispositions, submit to the obligations, and observe the practices of the church of God with which I now connect myself." Jesus Christ has made it our duty not only to receive his truth into our hearts—but to confess him before men; and it is a duty on which very considerable stress is laid. This is to be done, not in any ostentatious way—but by joining ourselves to his people—which is a confession, that both the church and the world clearly understand. Hence it is apparent, that church membership is no trifling matter, since it is calling heaven, earth, and hell, to witness our solemn declaration of submission to the authority of Christ. It is saying, in the hearing of more worlds than one, "I am a Christian."

**III. Fellowship is the visible bond of union with the disciples of Jesus.**

Christians are not only to be united—but are to *exhibit* their union. Their oneness of sentiment, of affection, of purpose, is to be seen. We are not only to love one another—but our love is to be known, which is impossible without membership. In its collective capacity, a church concentrates, as in a focus, the light and love that exist in her individual members. Without being combined in a visible union, its splendor would be only as the dim and scattered light which was diffused over the chaos in the twilight of creation, while the fellowship of the saints is the same light gathered up and embodied in the solar orb. We are indeed united in spirit with the church of Christ, from the moment we have believed his gospel—but our union is neither expressed nor recognized, until we have joined it in the usual way. We are citizens in feeling and intention—but not yet known from enemies, aliens, and spies. Membership, therefore, is the bond of visible union with the brethren in Christ.

***IV. Fellowship is an explicit declaration of our determination to submit to the government and discipline of the church.***

Every society has laws for the regulation of its affairs. Without these it could not exist; and to which every member professes, at the time of his entrance, his determination to submit. The church of the Redeemer has in like

manner its social rules, which respect the members in their associated capacity. We are therefore not only amenable to the direct authority of Christ—but also to that authority expressed by the voice of the church; we must submit to all its regulations, observe all its injunctions, support its decisions, or we can no longer remain in its communion. If we are called before it, we must appear; if required to explain any part of our conduct, we must comply; if censured, we must submit. We are in no case haughtily to exclaim, "What is the church, that I should obey it? to my own master I stand or fall." Our act of joining the society is an explicit declaration of our willingness to submit to the laws by which it is governed. We can voluntarily secede when there is just occasion, or in case of a false decision, we can mildly protest—but as long as we continue members we must submit, for our very membership professes and requires it.

***V. Fellowship is designed to exhibit upon a smaller scale that sublime and glorious union and communion which exist, not only between all real Christians of every country, name, and age—but between the whole redeemed church and their Divine Head.***

Passages of a very striking importance speak of this most comprehensive confederation. "That in the dispensation of the

fullness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him." Ephes. 1:10. "There is one body and one spirit." Ephes. 4:4. "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:3. From these passages we learn that the aggregate of believers, united to Jesus Christ, and through him to the Father, form one vast harmonious fellowship of holiness and benevolence. They are united in the same pursuit, which is the divine glory; in the same means for the attainment of that object, which is the salvation of the soul.

The church universal will ever remain the one grand monument on which are recorded the praises of the living God. Of this general assembly every particular society is the miniature resemblance. By its public worship, its beautiful subordination, its mutual affection, its truth, its holiness, its peace, it is an exhibition to the world of that fellowship which has God in Christ for its head, all believers for its members, heaven for its temple, and eternity for its duration; while every time it assembles for worship, it shows forth the unity of the church, and the communion of saints.

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

## **THE PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP**

"The privileges of membership are, in a general sense, to bring Christians, as such, more closely together, to make them known to each other in that character, and to bind them by positive engagements to neighborly offices, godly communion, and brotherly kindness." But to descend to particulars, these privileges consist in,

### ***I. The participation of the Lord's supper.***

That a reception of the appointed memorials of the Savior's dying love, is indeed a privilege, requires no proof. As creatures, whose minds are instructed, and whose hearts are impressed through the medium of our senses, how affecting are the *emblems* of the body and blood of Christ! Enough of resemblance may be observed by the imagination, between the sign and the thing signified, to aid the exercise of the affections, while enough of simplicity remains to prevent the excursions of the imagination from interfering with the more sublime and scriptural operations of our faith.

That sacramental seasons are commonly the most happy and most profitable which a believer

ever spends among the means of grace, is a fact not to be denied. It is no wonder that it should be so. It is at the sacred supper that the attention is more powerfully arrested and fixed, and the heart impressed and affected. It is there, that the scheme of redeeming mercy seems peculiarly to expand upon the understanding, and to excite the emotions of the bosom in a degree almost unknown elsewhere. It is there that the glory of the divine character has been most clearly discovered by our mind; there, that Jesus has unfolded to us the wonders of his mediation and there, that the eternal Spirit has descended into our souls, in the most munificent communications of his sanctifying and consoling influence. How have our icy hearts there melted beneath the ardor of celestial love, and flowed down in streams of godly sorrow! How have our groveling, earthly minds soared, on the wings of faith and hope, until we have lost sight of earthly scenes and sounds, amid the glory of such as are divine. It is there, that we have felt ourselves crucified with Christ, and have risen with him into newness of life. It is there, that brotherly love has glowed with its most perfect fervor, and the communion of saints has yielded its most precious delights. Happier hours than those which have been there spent, we never expect to know in this world. They have left a relish and a fragrance upon the mind; the remembrance of them is sweet, and the

anticipation of their return is among the brightest hopes we have this side the veil.

**II.** Another privilege connected with membership is, ***the right of assisting in the choice of a pastor, in the election of deacons, and in the admission and exclusion of members.***

It might indeed be said, that in many cases this right is enjoyed by those who are not church members—be it so—but as it is in *every case* enjoyed by those who *are* members, it may be very fairly placed in the number of their privileges. That it is also in a measure enjoyed by all people who, in a town where there are more places of worship than one, choose the minister whose preaching they will attend, is also granted—but still there is a great difference between choosing a minister to occupy a particular station, and merely going to hear him when chosen by others.

It must surely be accounted no inconsiderable privilege to have a voice in the election of an individual, on whose ministrations so much of our own spiritual welfare, and that of our families, depends; nor is it a light thing to be admitted to a participation of the other business connected with, and arising from, the history of a church.



**III. A church member has the advantage of *pastoral oversight and supplication*.**

"They watch for your souls," said the apostle to the ancient Christians, when speaking of their pastors; evidently implying that it was a great privilege to be the subjects of such inspection. A faithful friend, that will instruct, warn, comfort, or reprove, as circumstances may require, is a great treasure; and such a one a Christian will find—or ought to find—in his minister. In him he has a right to expect a steady, active, and vigilant guardian of his eternal interests; one who will follow the individuals of his charge, as far as can be, through all their spiritual career comforting them when in distress, rousing them when lukewarm, reproofing them when their conduct needs rebuke, lending his ear to their every distress, and opening his heart to receive their every grief. A faithful pastor will consider himself as the guide and the shield of the souls committed to his care; a shepherd to provide for their wants, a watchman to observe the approach of their dangers. He will visit them in the afflictions which attend their pilgrimage; will hasten to their bedside when the sorrows of death encompass them; will disclose to the eye of faith the visions of immortality, which irradiate the dark valley itself; and will never cease his solicitude until the portals of heaven have closed upon their disembodied spirits.

In addition to this, the pastor bears the church in the arms of his affection, and presents them in his prayers before the throne of grace. Like the high priest of the Jews, he approaches the mercy seat, not with the names of the people merely engraved upon his breastplate—but written upon his heart. Nor does he confine himself to general supplications for the society in the aggregate; its individual members, in their separate capacity and peculiar circumstances, are often the subjects of his intercession before the fountain of life. As he takes a deep interest in their personal, no less than in their collective capacity, he expresses his concern by definite and special supplication. Not only are sermons composed—but prayers presented, which are adapted to the various cases of his flock. The afflicted, the backsliding, the tempted, the novice, are all in turn remembered in his holiest moments before God. Nor can any of these individuals say to which they are most indebted, to his labors in the pulpit, or to his supplications in the closet; for if "the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man avails much," we certainly may believe that the entreaty of the righteous minister is not less availing.

***IV. The watchfulness, sympathy and prayers of the church, are no inconsiderable privilege of membership.***

In what way these duties should be performed, will be matter of consideration hereafter; and therefore we shall not enter minutely into the subject now, any farther than to show how great a mercy it is to enjoy an interest in the affection and the intercession of a Christian society. We are commanded to exhort one another daily; and amid such temptations, such weakness, such corruptions as ours—is it not an unspeakable mercy to be surrounded by those who will watch over and assist us? With every help, how hard a thing is it to be a consistent Christian! How difficult to maintain the purity and vigor of true godliness! How often do our steps slip, and our exertions relax! And sometimes, through the deceitfulness of the human heart, others may perceive our danger before we ourselves are aware of its existence. It may often be said of us, as it was of Israel of old, "Strangers have devoured his strength, yet he knows it not; grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows it not."

In such cases, none can estimate the value of those Christian friends, who with faithful love will remind us of our danger, and affectionately admonish us. How inestimable the privilege of having those who will tenderly reprove us, and draw us back with the cords of a man and the bands of love. In the case of our soul's salvation, more than worlds are at stake; and he who will give himself the trouble to admonish us and exhort us to

diligence, performs a service of infinite value, for which, if we improve by it, we shall offer him our gratitude in eternity.

And then think of the value of Christian *sympathy*. How consolatory it is in our troubles to recollect, that there are those who are thinking of our situation and pitying our distress! Even when they visit us not, they are probably talking to each other about us. We have their affectionate remembrance, their tenderest interest.

Nor are their *prayers* withheld when they meet in the temple, or when they retire to the closet. When they join with one accord in supplication, and when they pray to their Father in secret, they mention their suffering brother or sister, to Him who loves the church. Ah! how often has the troubled believer felt it lighten his load, and irradiate his gloom, as he groaned away the hour when the church was assembled, to believe that they were thinking of him, and blessing him with their prayers! It has been as if an angel were dispatched to inform him that supplication was being made for him, and that therefore he ought to dry up his tears. Yes, and the sweet remembrance has in some cases made the tears forget to fall, and the half uttered groan to die away with silent submission. He has laid down upon his restless couch again, and it seemed as if it had been smoothed afresh for him

by some viewless agent; and so it has, for God has heard the prayers of the church on his behalf, and has made "all his bed in his sickness."

\* It has been said that the last two particulars are not the privileges of members exclusively, nor of them as members of a particular church—but as Christians in general. It is unquestionable, however, that church members have a prior and a stronger claim upon their pastors and each other, for these expressions of sympathy, than any others have; and it has been admitted, even by those who object to the author's statement, "that churches were originally formed only to secure and promote the social objects of their union—*that is*, to bring Christians, as Christians, more closely together, to make them known to each other in that character, and to bind them by positive engagements to neighborly offices and brotherly kindness;" if this be correct, as it unquestionably is, then certainly church members, as such, have peculiar claims upon their pastors and each other for neighborly offices and brotherly kindness—and who will doubt if this be a privilege? One great end of membership, is to found a peculiar claim for these manifestations not merely of Christian—but of brotherly love. If there be no peculiarity of claim above what we have upon each other as Christians, why are we formed into separate churches? It appears to

me, then, that in addition to the obligation which rests upon me to pray for and watch over my members as Christians, I am bound to take a special interest in their spiritual affairs as members of the church under my care. They stand in a relation totally different from that of people not in communion—and are entitled far beyond the latter to my sympathy, prayer, and vigilance.

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **GENERAL DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY**

#### ***I. They should seek to acquire clear and enlarged views of divine truth.***

It is a fact which cannot be questioned, that a very large proportion of those whom we believe to be real Christians, are mere babes in knowledge. They have just enough instruction to know that they are sinners, and that salvation is all of grace through Christ Jesus. But ask them to state, prove, and defend, in a scriptural manner, any one of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and you would immediately discover, how contracted is their view, and how feeble is their perception of divine truth. Instead

of walking amid the splendid light and varied scenery of Scriptural revelation, with the confidence and joy of men whose vision is clear and strong, they are groping along with the fear and hesitation of those who are partially blind. This, in most cases, is their *fault*—and not merely their *misfortune*. We are commanded to grow in knowledge; and the apostle in the following very severe language, reproved the believing Hebrews for their ignorance. "When for the time you *ought* to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again, the first principles of the oracles of God." After this he exhorts them to leave the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and go on to perfection. How earnestly, in other parts of his writings, did he supplicate for the churches, an increase of their religious knowledge! Eph. 1:17, 18. Colos. 1:9. It is very common for ministers to complain that they are almost afraid to ascend to the loftier parts of revealed truth, lest a great portion of their hearers, instead of eagerly following them, should reproach them with ascending to barren and almost inaccessible summits.

**The causes of this deficiency of Scriptural knowledge** are numerous and various. In many cases, the **lack of a biblical education** contributes to it. Not a few of them are brought in from the world, when they are far advanced in life.

There is, with many, a more culpable cause; I mean a **systematic neglect of the Scriptures**. "What!" they exclaim, "will *head* knowledge do for us? we are for experience; experience is everything in religion." What kind of experience that is, which is not founded on knowledge—I am at a loss to conceive. With such people, ignorance appears to be the mother of devotion. It should be recollected that it is in the spiritual world, as it is in the natural; the seed of the kingdom is sown in the 'light of truth', and light is essential to every stage of its growth. If that be not right knowledge, which does not produce feeling, certainly that is not right feeling which is not produced by knowledge. Those who have only head knowledge—dwell in the frigid zone of Christianity; and those who have only feeling—occupy the torrid zone. The former are frozen amid mere cold and heartless speculation; the latter are scorched amid wild fanaticism.

How much more real enjoyment of the truth is possessed by him who clearly and comprehensively understands it! and how much more useful is he likely to be in communicating instruction, than the individual who barely understands first principles! Every professing Christian, at least all those who have leisure for reading, should endeavor to unite the knowledge of a good theologian with the experience of a real believer.



In order to accomplish this, let Christians set apart time not only for reading—but *studying* the scriptures; let them read theological books which explain and prove the doctrines of the gospel; let them commit to memory the admirable definitions of these doctrines contained in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism; let them attend upon the preaching of the word with a view not only to be comforted—but to be instructed. The exclusive object for which some people hear sermons, is to obtain a little comfort. They sit waiting and watching for some sweet and savory assurance, some well known hackneyed consolatory topic, some lively appeal to the experience—and until this comes, they think lightly of everything else. The minister may have given the clearest elucidation of some dark and doubtful passage, the most profound discussion of some sublime doctrine, the most masterly defense of some disputed truth—but to the mere 'comfort hunters', all this is nothing else than the husk or the shell, which is to be cracked and thrown away for the kernel of a little Christian experience. From such sermons they go home, with hungry and cheerless appetites, complaining that they have found it a lost opportunity.

Let me not be mistaken. Comfort ought to be sought for—but always through the medium of knowledge. The best warmth is that which comes not from ardent spirits—but

from the sun, which sends his heat to the frame, in those beams which convey light to the eye. The fact is, that some people's religion is of that weak, unhealthy kind, which is supported only by elixirs and cordials.

After all, I am constrained to confess, that the darkness which rests upon the mind of the church member, is the result, in some cases, of that **cloudiness which envelopes the mind of the pastor**; if there is ignorance in the pew, it is because there is so little knowledge in the pulpit. When the preacher dwells on nothing but a few hackneyed commonplace topics of an experimental or consolatory nature; when all the varied and sublime parts of revealed truth are neglected for one unceasing round of beaten subjects; when texts are selected which require no study to understand, no ability to expound; when nothing is heard from one Sabbath to another—but the same sentiments in the same words, until the introduction of a new or original conception would startle the congregation almost as much as the entrance of a spectre; who can wonder, if, under such circumstances, the congregation should grow tired of their preacher; or if such drowsy tinklings should lull the fold, until with their shepherd they sink to the slumbers of indifference—amid the thickening gloom of Scriptural ignorance?

**II. *Advancement in religion is incumbent on every professing Christian.***

As the usual mode of admission to our churches, subjects their members to a scrutiny of their conduct, it is considered by many as a kind of ordeal, which being passed with success, remits them from any solicitude about farther improvement. A kind of indelible character is then impressed upon them, which is susceptible of neither increase nor improvement. I do not mean to say that they come deliberately to such a conclusion, or that they are aware of any such opinion being in their mind—but having passed their trials with honor, they insensibly acquire the idea, that now they are professed and acknowledged Christians, that their religion is admitted to be genuine, that they are put among the disciples, and therefore the same concern is no longer necessary. Often have we seen, especially in the case of young people, that the act of joining the church, has in some measure diminished the earnestness with which their minds were formerly directed to the subject of religion. They were growing rapidly as babes in Christ, until the consciousness of being a church member, and acknowledged a Christian—either by generating pride, or relaxing diligence—has paralyzed their piety, arrested their growth, and left them dwarfs in grace forever after!

We should consider that true religion is not an abstract thing of times, places, and ceremonies; nor is the religious character formed by any single compliance, however public or however solemn. If it were admitted that regeneration is an instantaneous change, in which the whole character of a child of God is formed at once, this will not apply to membership. Instead of considering our union with the church as the *goal* of our religious career, where improvement may cease, and progress be stopped—we should view it as but the very *starting point* from whence we are to forget the things that are behind, and press towards the mark for the prize of our high calling. From that moment, we are under more solemn obligations than ever to grow in grace, inasmuch as the means of growth are increased. Until then, we have been as trees growing in obscurity, without the aid of human culture—but when we associate with a church, we are transplanted into a garden, and have the advantage of the gardener's care, and should therefore abound more than ever, in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory of God.

**III. *Consistency in their conduct, as professing Christians, is a most obvious and pressing obligation of church members.***

The lack of godly conduct of professing Christians has done

more harm to Christianity than all the ravings of infidelity, from the time of Cain to the death of Paine. This sacred and deathless 'cause of Christianity' lifts her venerable form, bearing the scars of many a wound, not inflicted by arrows plumed with the pen of Voltaire or Hume; oh, no, such weapons bounded off her bosom, as from a shield of triple brass, and dropped at her feet to be deposited with the spoils of her victories! But the darts that lacerated her, and left the memorials of their mischief upon her form, were the vices and follies of her votaries! O Christians! will *you* scourge and lacerate her? will *you* array her in the costume of scorn, and, leading her forth bleeding and dejected to meet her enemies in the gate, proclaim, "Behold, an impostor!" Will *you* assist to raise the clamor which infidel philosophers endeavored to excite, and stir up the multitude to exclaim, "Away with her, away with her! Crucify her, crucify her!" Tremble at the thought. If Christianity ever dies, it will not be in the field of conflict, by the power of her enemies—but like Caesar in the capitol, by the hand of her friends! And which of us would like to meet the look of her expiring eye, or the mild reproach of her faltering tongue, "What!—you my son!" But she cannot die! Wounded she may be, and has been—but the memorials of her injury are the proofs of her immortality, and proclaim her to be of heavenly origin—like the fabled scars of the heathen gods of Greece and

Rome—her wounds demonstrably prove that a divinity sustained her!

Still, however, the inconsistencies of professing Christians may limit her reign, although they cannot destroy her existence. By these things sinners are hardened in their courses, the access to life is rendered more difficult, while the avenues of eternal death are made more wide and easy. That man, whose conduct opposes his profession, may be certainly arraigned for the crime of murder. Let him not go quietly to his pillow as if blood-guiltiness were not upon his conscience; for it *is* there, and a voice is continually saying to him, "Your brother's blood cries to me from the ground!" He has not slain the *body* of a fellow mortal—but has been accessory to the death of *souls*. Some who sought for an apology for their sins, an opiate for their consciences—found it in *his* misconduct!

I have no need to specify the duties included in the general idea of consistency; these are known well enough. The apostle's beautiful and comprehensive admonition is a sufficient directory. "Whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report—if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise—think on these things."

I particularly exhort church members to beware of what might be denominated the *minor* breaches of consistency. We are not to conclude that nothing breaks the uniformity of our character—but what subjects us to the discipline of the church. Overt acts of immorality are comparatively rare, while ten thousand instances of less delinquency, such as the church cannot take cognizance of, are continually occurring in the conduct of Christians—to the disgrace of Christianity and the injury of men's souls! Those things are seen in us, which would pass unnoticed in others who make no profession of religion; just as a spot which would be lost on painted canvass, is visible on sheet of white paper. A Christian's character is like polished steel, which may have its luster destroyed, not only by broad spots of rust—but by an assemblage of innumerable 'specks'!

More scandals have occurred in the Christian church from dishonorable *financial* transactions than from any other source. Instances of drunkenness and debauchery are seldom, compared with those of an artful, imposing, dishonest way of conducting business. **The world is a dangerous and successful foe to growth in grace**; and although every church member professes himself to be through faith a conqueror, how many by their over-reaching, ungenerous conduct, prove that they are yet enslaved by this sordid enemy.

Some there are, who would betray their Master for a less sum than that which Judas set upon his blood; and, for a tenth of thirty pieces of silver, will be guilty of an action which they must know, at the time, will provoke the severest invective and bitterest sarcasm against all religion.

***IV. Church members should excel in the manifestation of the Christian temper.***

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Christians should excel in the manifestation of Christ's character. The mind which was in Jesus, should be in them. They should consider *his* character as a model of their own; and be conspicuous for their poverty of spirit, meekness, gentleness, and love. They should seek a large portion of the "wisdom which comes from above; which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

It is matter of surprise and regret, that many people seem to think that Christianity has nothing to do with the character; and that provided they are free from gross sins, and have lively feelings in devotional exercises, they may be as petulant, irritable, and implacable as they please! This is a dreadful error, and has done great mischief to the cause of God. **A sour, ill-natured Christian, is like a lamb with a wolf's head,**



**a dove with a vulture's beak, a rose with leaves of nettles.** If there be any one word which above all others should describe a Christian's character, it is that which represents his divine Father; and as it is said, that God is love, so should it be also affirmed, that a Christian is love—love embodied, an incarnation of love. His words, conduct, no, his very looks, should be so many expressions of love.

***V. Church members should be very eminent for a right discharge of all their social duties.***

The apostles have given this great importance by the frequency with which they have introduced it. (Ephes. 5:22, 6:1-9. Col. 3:18. 1 Tim. 6:1-4. 1 Pet. 3:1, 2. 1 Pet. 2:18.) Christianity, so far from loosening the bands of society, adds to them incredible strength and firmness, by motives drawn from the eternal world. One part of the design of revelation is to purify and strengthen the social principle, and carry it to its greatest elevation and perfection.

A good Christian, and yet a bad husband, father, brother, neighbor, or citizen, is an anomaly which the world never yet beheld. Professing Christians should excel all others in the beauties of social virtue. True religion should give additional tenderness to the marital relationship; greater love to the parent, and obedience to the child; fresh kindness to the master, and

diligence to the servant. The world should look to the church with this conviction, "Well, if social virtue were driven from every other portion of society, it would find an asylum, and be cherished with care, upon the heights of Zion." Then will religion have attained its highest recognition upon earth, when it shall be admitted by universal consent, that to say a man is a Christian, is an indisputable testimony to his excellence in all the relations he bears to society.

**VI. There are duties to be discharged *in reference to the world.***

By the world, I mean all those who are destitute of true godliness—regardless of their religious denomination. The apostle has summed up our obligations towards them under the comprehensive injunction, "Walk in wisdom towards those who are outside." In another place, we are commanded to "Let our light shine before men, that they seeing our good works, may glorify our Father who is in heaven." We are also exhorted "to have our life-style honest (this word signifies beautiful, honorable) among the Gentiles." In order to comply with this, we must act consistently with our profession; excel in the observance of social duties; abound in mercy; bear a prudent testimony against evil practices; be most punctiliously exact in fulfilling all our engagements, and

performing all our promises; live in a most peaceable and neighborly manner; perform every office of kindness and charity which can please or benefit; and set an example of industry, honesty, and generosity.

**VII. We should as professing Christians *be exemplary in our obedience to the civil magistrate.***

The Scriptures which enjoin this duty are too numerous to be quoted at length. (Rom. 13:1, 2. Acts 23:6. Titus 3:1. 1 Pet. 2:13, 14. 1 Tim. 2:1-3.) One only shall be given—but that is a very striking one. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God—and those who resist shall receive to themselves damnation." This injunction must of course be understood as relating to matters purely civil—or in other words to those laws which are not in opposition to the spirit and letter of divine revelation. If rulers enjoin anything which is condemned by the word of truth, it is the duty of a Christian, without hesitation, and at all hazards, to act upon the principles, and follow the example of the apostles, and "obey God rather than man."

God forbid I should teach a doctrine so pernicious, as that one of the first efforts of true piety when it enters the soul is to extinguish the love of civil liberty; or that having broken the fetters of vice, it immediately bows the regenerated soul into submission to the yoke of despotism. No such thing! True religion is a noble, and sublime, and elevating principle. It expands, not contracts the mind. It is not a spirit of bondage which causes its possessor to fear—but it is a spirit of power, and of a sound mind. It lifts the soul from the dust, and does not chain it there; it has raised a noble army of martyrs, every one of whose millions was a hero that defied the tyrant's rage, and spurned his yoke. Religion therefore is no friend of slavery, nor can any of its precepts be quoted by the tyrant as an excuse for his trampling on the liberties of mankind.

Avowing thus much, and admitting that the most spiritual Christian *may* take an interest, and *ought* to take an interest, in public affairs; no, that he ought to maintain a ceaseless jealousy over the constitution and freedom of his country; still I contend that a constant, and noisy, and factious meddling in party politics, is as injurious to his own personal religion, as it is to the interest of piety in general. We do not cease to be citizens, when we become Christians—but we are in danger of ceasing to be Christians, when we become politicians. It is with

politics as with money; it is not the temperate use—but the immoderate love of it, that is the root of all evil. Thousands of professors of religion have made shipwreck of their faith and a good conscience, during the tempests of political agitation. Let us then, as we value our lives, be cautious how we embark on this stormy and troubled ocean.

There is one way in which many Christians offend against the laws of their country without scruple, and without remorse; I mean by endeavoring to evade the payment of taxes. Had there been no Christian statute to condemn this practice, the general principles of reason would be quite sufficient to prove its criminality. But the New Testament has added the authority of revelation to the dictates of reason; and thus made it a sin against God, no less than a crime against society, to defraud the revenue. "Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" is the authoritative language of Paul. This precept derives great force from the consideration that it was delivered at a time, and under a government, in which the taxes were not imposed by the people themselves—but by the arbitrary power of a despot. Certainly if, under these circumstances, it was the duty of a Christian to pay the tribute money, any effort which we make to evade it, must be

additionally criminal, since we are taxed by the will of our representatives. The excuses usually made in justification of this practice, only serve to show how far even some good people may be imposed upon, by the deceitfulness of the human heart. Every time we have made a false return on the schedule which regulates our measure of taxation; or that we have purchased knowingly a contraband article of food, beverage, or dress—we have committed a fraud upon society, have assumed a power to dispense with the laws of our country, have violated the precepts of the New Testament, have brought the guilt of a complicated crime upon our conscience, and have subjected ourselves to the displeasure of God, and the discipline of his church.

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THEIR PASTORS**

It is the will and appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of his churches, that they should behave towards their pastors as his ministers, who come in his name, bear his commands, and transact his business; and who are to be treated, in every respect, in a manner that corresponds with their office. In a subordinate sense,

they are ambassadors for Christ, and are to be received and esteemed in a way that corresponds with the authority and glory of the Sovereign who commissions them. Whoever slights, insults, or neglects them, in the discharge of their official duties, disobeys and despises their divine Master, who will keenly resent all the injuries that are offered them. No earthly sovereign will allow his messengers to be rejected and insulted with impunity; much less will the Lord of the church. Those who entertain low thoughts of the pastoral office, and neglect its ministrations; who speak contemptuously of their ministers; who excite a spirit of resistance to their counsels, admonitions, and reproofs; who endeavor to lessen that just reverence, to which, for their works' sake, and on their Master's behalf, they are entitled, certainly despise them, and not only them—but Him that sent them also, and for such conduct will incur the heavy displeasure of Christ, Luke 10:16. 1 Thess. 5:13. But to descend to particulars; the duty of church members towards their pastors includes—

***I. SUBMISSION to their just and scriptural authority.***

It is readily admitted that the unscriptural, and therefore usurped domination of the priesthood is the root whence arose the whole system of papal tyranny; which, springing up like a poison tree in

the garden of the Lord, withered by its shadow, and blighted by its influence, almost every plant and flower of genuine Christianity. It is matter of no regret, therefore, nor of surprise, if a ceaseless jealousy should be maintained by those who understand the principles of religious liberty, against the encroachments of pastoral authority. Priestly dominion, as it appears in the Vatican, is the most detestable and the most mischievous of all tyranny. But when it appears in the pastor of an independent church, divested at once of the elements of power and the trappings of majesty, the mere mimicry of authority, it is rather ridiculous than alarming, and bears no nearer resemblance to its prototype at Rome, than the little croaking, hopping frog of the pond, did to the ox of the field, which his pride led him to emulate, until he burst.

Still, however, there is authority belonging to the pastor; for office without authority is a contradiction. "Remember those who have the rule over you," said Paul to the Hebrews, 13:7. "Obey those who have the rule over you. Submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls," ver. 17. "They addicted themselves to the ministry; submit yourselves to such." 1 Cor. 16:15, 16. These are inspired injunctions, and they enjoin obedience and submission on Christian churches to their pastors. **The authority of pastors**, however, is not legislative or coercive—but simply



declarative and executive. To define with precision its limits, is as difficult as to mark the boundaries of the several colors of the rainbow, or those of light and darkness at the hour of twilight in the hemisphere. This is not the only case, in which the precise limits of authority are left undefined by the Scriptures. The duties of the marital union are laid down in the same general manner—the husband is to rule, and the wife to obey; yet it is difficult to declare where, in this instance, authority and submission end. In each of these instances, the union is founded on **mutual love, confidence, and esteem**, and it might therefore be rationally supposed, that, under these circumstances, general terms are sufficient, and that there would arise no contests for power.

If the people see that all the authority of their pastor is employed for their benefit, they will not be inclined to ascertain by measurement whether he has passed its limits. The very circumstance of his prerogative being thus undefined, should, on the one hand, make *him* afraid of *extending* it, and on the other, render his church cautious of *diminishing* it. It is my decided conviction, that, in *some* of our churches, the pastor is depressed far below his just level. He is considered merely in the light of a speaking brother. He has no official distinction or authority. His opinion

is received with no deference, his person treated with no respect.

Those people who are anxious to strip their pastors of all just elevation, cannot expect to derive much edification from their labors; for instruction and advice, like substances falling to the earth, impress the mind with a momentum proportionate to the height from which they descend.

**II. Church members should treat their pastor with distinguishing HONOR, ESTEEM, and LOVE.**

"Let the elders that rule well be accounted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine." 1 Tim. 5:17. \* "Know those who have the rule over you, and esteem them very highly in love, for their works' sake." 1 Thess. 5:11, 12. To prescribe in what way our love should express itself, is almost needless, as **love is the most inventive passion of the heart, and will find or make a thousand opportunities for displaying its power.** Love is also *PRACTICAL*, as well as ingenious, and does not confine itself either to the speculations of the judgment, or the feelings of the heart. It breathes in kind words, and lives in kind deeds. Where a minister is properly esteemed and loved, there will be the greatest deference for his opinions, the most delicate attention to his comfort, a

scrupulous respect for his character.

Some people treat their minister as if he could feel nothing but blows. They are crude, uncourteous, churlish. Instead of this, let him see the most studious and constant care to promote his happiness and usefulness. When he is in sickness, visit him. When in trouble, sympathize with him. When absent from home, take a kind interest in his family. When he returns, greet him with a smile. At the close of the labors of the Sabbath, let the deacons and leading members gather round him in the vestry, and not allow him to retire from his scene of public labors without the reward of some tokens of their approbation, if it be only one friendly pressure of the hand. Let him see that his prayers, and sermons, and solicitude, render him dear to the hearts of his flock.

It is astonishing what an influence is sometimes produced upon a minister's mind and comfort, even by the least expression of his people's regard. Of this we have a beautiful instance in the life of Paul. On that important journey to Rome, which was to decide the question of life or death, he appears to have felt a season of temporary depression when the imperial city presented itself to his view. In silent meditation he revolved, not without some degree of dismay, his approaching appeal to a tribunal from which he had nothing in the way of clemency to

expect. For a little while the heroism of this exalted man was somewhat affected by his situation. At this juncture, some of the Roman Christians, who had been apprized of his arrival, came out to meet him—and when Paul saw them, he thanked God, and took courage." From that moment, fears of Nero, of prison, and of death, all left him. He sprung forward with new ardor in his career, prepared to offer himself in sacrifice on the altar of martyrdom. If, then, the love of these brethren, who had traveled a few stages to meet Paul, produced so happy an effect upon the mind of this illustrious apostle, how certainly might the members of our churches calculate upon a similar influence being produced upon the hearts of their pastors, by even the smaller expressions of their affection!

\* 1 Tim. 5:17. It is surprising to me that an attempt should have been made to found on no other basis than this passage, a double office of eldership in the church, and to establish a distinction between ruling and preaching elders, when nothing more can be fairly inferred from the passage, than that the apostles intended to show the whole design and duties of the elder's office, and to pronounce him entitled to peculiar respect, who fulfilled them all, and who to ruling well added much diligence in preaching the word.

***III. ATTENDANCE upon their ministrations, is another duty***

**which church members owe their pastors.**

This attendance should be constant, not occasional. Some of our members give unspeakable pain to their pastors by the irregularity of their visits to the house of God. A little inclemency of weather, or the slightest indisposition of body, is sure to render their seats vacant.

Sometimes a still more guilty cause than this exists. Oh! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines triumph." Many professors do not scruple to devote a part of the Sabbath to traveling. They do not probably set off upon a journey in the morning of the Sabbath, and travel all day—but they set off perhaps on Saturday evening, and arrive at home late on Sunday morning; or they leave home after tea on Sunday evening, and thus take only a part of the hallowed day from its destined purpose. This practice, it is to be feared, has much increased of late, and is become one of the prevailing sins of the religious world. Such people deserve to be brought under the censures of the church.

Some people are irregular in their attendance through *the distance at which they live from their place of public worship*. Oftentimes this is unavoidable—but it is a great inconsistency for professing Christians voluntarily to choose a residence which, from its remoteness from the house of God,

must often deprive them of the communion of the saints. Such a disposition to sacrifice spiritual privileges to mere temporal enjoyment, does not afford much evidence that religion is with them the one thing needful, or that they have the mind of David, who thought the threshold of the sanctuary was to be preferred to the park or the palace. Injurious as the practice necessarily must be to the individuals themselves, it is still more so to their servants and children.

In the families of the poor, and in others, indeed, where no servant is kept, the mother is detained from public worship far more than she ought to be, in consequence of her husband not taking his share of parental duty. Many fathers will allow their wives to be kept from the sanctuary for weeks together, rather than take charge of their children—even for one part of the Sabbath. This is most unkind, and most unjust. A mother, it might be thought, has pain and toil enough already, without being called to suffer unnecessary privations in godly matters. That must be an unfeeling husband, who would not gladly afford an hour's rest and respite to his wife, on the day set apart for sacred repose.

Professing Christians should feel the obligations to attend *week day services*. Most ministers have often to complain, that they are half deserted on these occasions. Surely, with such hearts and amid

such circumstances as ours, it is too long to go from Sabbath to Sabbath without the aid of public worship. All people have not the command of their own time—but in the case of those who have, the neglect is inexcusable, and argues a very low state of religion in the soul. And what shall be said of those members whom their pastor, on his way to the house of God, either meets going to parties of pleasure, or sees in the very circles of gaiety?

A minister has a right to expect his members at the meetings for social prayer.\* The Christian that neglects these betrays such an utter indifference to the interests of the church, and the comfort of the pastor, as well as so much lukewarmness in his own personal religion, as to be a fit subject for the exercise of *discipline*.

\* Unfortunately for the interests of our prayer meetings, some brethren who lead our devotions are so outrageously long, that after enjoying the first half of their prayers, the congregation are anxiously waiting for the close of the other half. We are often prayed into a good frame, and then prayed out of it again, by those who extend their supplications to the length of twenty or five and twenty minutes at a time. A prayer on these occasions should rarely exceed *ten minutes*. I do most earnestly recommend this to the consideration of those brethren who are in the habit of engaging in

public prayer. **Devotion ends when weariness begins. Brevity, fervor, and variety, are the qualities which all should seek.** It is also to be regretted that the prayers are so much *alike in the arrangement of their parts*. Each individual seems to think it necessary that he should pursue a regular routine. How much more edifying would it be, if one were to confine himself to one topic, and the next were to enlarge on what the preceding one had omitted. If a person feels his mind impressed and drawn out by any particular subject, let him confine himself to that subject, and not suppose that his supplications will be unacceptable either to God or man because he has not brought in the sick, the church, the minister, the nation, the world, etc. etc. How affecting and impressive would it be to hear a brother sometimes confine his whole intercession to his minister's usefulness; sometimes to the church; sometimes to the spread of the gospel in the world!

#### **IV. Earnest prayer.**

How often and how earnestly did the great apostle of the Gentiles repeat that sentence, which contained at once the authority of a command and the tenderness of a petition, "Brethren, pray for us." In another place, he ascribes his deliverance and preservation to the prayers of the churches, "You also helping together by prayer for us." 2 Cor. 1:11. Surely, then, if this



illustrious man was dependent upon, and indebted to the prayers of Christians, how much more so the ordinary ministers of Christ! Pray, then, for your ministers; for the increase of their intellectual attainments, spiritual qualifications, and ministerial success. Pray for them in your private approaches to the throne of grace; pray for them at the family altar; and thus teach your children to respect and love them. Reasons both numerous and persuasive enforce this duty. It is enjoined by divine authority. It is due to the arduous nature of their employment. Little do our churches know the number and magnitude of our temptations, discouragements, difficulties, and trials.

Our office is no bed of down or of roses, on which the indolent may repose with careless indifference, or uninterrupted slumbers. Far, very far from it. Cares of oppressive weight; anxieties which can be known only by experience; labors of a mental kind almost too strong and incessant for the powers of mind to sustain, fall to our lot, and demand the prayerful sympathy of our flocks. And then, as another claim for our people's prayers, we might urge the consideration of their own interest, which is identified with all *our* efforts. We are to our people just what God makes us, and no more; and he is willing to make us almost what they ask. As regard to their own spiritual profit, if nothing else,

should induce them to bear us much on their hearts before the throne of divine grace. Prayer is a means of assisting a minister within the reach of all. They who can do nothing more, can pray. The *sick*, who cannot encourage their minister by their presence in the sanctuary, can bear him upon their hearts in their lonely chamber. The *poor*, who cannot add to his temporal comfort by financial donations, can supplicate their God "to supply all his needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." The *timid*, who cannot approach to offer him the tribute of their gratitude, can pour their praises into the ear of Jehovah, and entreat him still to encourage the soul of his servant. The *ignorant*, who cannot hope to add one idea to the stock of his knowledge, can place him by prayer before the fountain of celestial radiance. Even the *dying*, who can no longer busy themselves as aforesaid for his interests, can gather up their remaining strength, and employ it in the way of prayer for their pastor.

**Prayer, if it be sincere, always increases our affection for its object.** We never feel even our dearest friends to be so dear, as when we have commended them to the goodness of God. **Prayer is the best extinguisher of enmity—and the best fuel for the flame of love.** If some professing Christians were to take from the time they spend in

*praising* their ministers, and others from that which they employ in *blaming* them, and both were to devote it to the act of *praying* for them, the former would find still more cause for admiration, and the latter far less reason for censure.

***V. Members should encourage others to attend upon the ministry of their pastors.***

'Let us go up to the house of the Lord!' is an invitation which they should often address to the people of the world, who either attend no place of worship at all, or where the truth is not preached. A minister cannot himself ask people to attend his place of worship—but those who are in the habit of hearing him can; and it is astonishing to what an extent the usefulness of private Christians may be carried in this way. I have received very many into the fellowship of the church under my care, who were first brought under the sound of the gospel by the kind solicitations of a godly neighbor.

*To draw away the hearers of one faithful preacher to another, is a despicable ambition—mere sectarian zeal. But to invite those who never hear the gospel, to listen to the joyful sound, is an effort worthy the mind of an angel. Shall sinners invite one another to iniquity—to the brothel, the theater, the tavern—and Christians not attempt to draw them to the house of God? This is one way in which every member, of every*

church, may be the means of doing great good; the rich, the poor, male and female, masters and servants, young and old, have all some acquaintance over whom they may exert their influence; and how can it be better employed than in attracting them to those places, "Where streams of heavenly mercy flow,  
And words of sweet salvation sound?"

**VI. It is incumbent on church members to make known to their pastor anything of importance that occurs within the scope of their observation, or the course of their experience, relating to his church and congregation.**

For instance, their own spiritual confusions, trials, temptations; the declensions, backslidings, and sins of others, which they imagine may have escaped his notice, and which they have first tried, by their own personal efforts, to remove. If they perceive any root of bitterness growing up, which they have not strength or skill enough to eradicate, it is then manifestly their duty to inform him of the circumstance. If they perceive any individual whose case has been overlooked, any one in circumstances which need sympathy or relief, any who are struggling with affliction—but are too modest or timid to disclose their situation; they should bring all such occurrences under his notice.

Especially should they *encourage, by their own personal attentions, any people in the congregation who appear to be under religious concern*; in such cases, they should put forth all their tenderest solicitude to shelter and cherish these hopeful beginnings, and introduce the subjects of them to their minister. There are some Christians—but do they indeed deserve the name?—who would see all the process of conversion going on in the very next seat to theirs, and observe the fixed attention, the anxious look, the tearful eye, the serious deportment—and all this repeated one Sabbath after another—without the least possible interest, or ever exchanging a single syllable with the inquiring penitent! Shame, shame on such professors! Can the love of Christ dwell in such cold and careless hearts? Can *they* have ever felt conviction of sin? How easy and how incumbent is it to introduce ourselves to such individuals; a word, a look, would be received with gratitude.

I am aware that the part of a member's duty, enforced under this division of the subject, requires extreme caution and delicacy, not to degenerate into a busy, meddling, officious disposition. All impertinent obtrusion, all fawning activity, should be carefully avoided by the people, and as carefully discouraged by the pastor.

***VII. Zealous cooperation in all schemes of usefulness proposed by the pastor, whether for the benefit of their own society in particular, or the welfare of the church, and the world at large, is the duty of Christians.***

This is an age of restless activity, practical benevolence, and progressive improvement. One scheme of benefit often contains the germs of many more. The love of innovation and the dread of it, are equally remote from true wisdom. Zeal, when guided by wisdom, is a noble element of character, and the source of incalculable good. A church ought always to stand ready to support any scheme which is proved to their judgment to be beneficial either to themselves or others. It is most disheartening to ministers, to find all their efforts counteracted by that ignorance which can comprehend nothing different—that bigotry which is attached to everything old; by that timidity which startles at everything new; or by that avarice which condemns everything expensive. Usages and customs that are venerable for their antiquity, I admit, should not be touched by hot spirits and crude hands, lest, in removing the sediment deposited by the stream of time at the base of the fabric, they should touch the foundation itself. But where the word of God is the line and the plummet; where this line is held by the hand of caution, and watched by the eye of

wisdom; in such cases, innovation upon the customs of our churches is a blessing, and ought to receive the support of the people. It is a scandal to any Christian society, when the flame of ministerial zeal is allowed to burn, without enkindling a similar fire.

***VIII. A most delicate and tender regard for the pastor's reputation.***

A minister's character is the lock of his strength; and if once this be sacrificed, he is, like Samson shorn of his hair—a poor, feeble, faltering creature, the pity of his friends and the derision of his enemies. I would not have bad ministers screened from scrutiny, nor would I have good ones maligned. When a preacher of righteousness has stood in the way of sinners, and walked in the counsel of the ungodly, he should never again open his lips in the great congregation, until his repentance is as notorious as his sin. But while his character is unsullied, his friends should preserve it with as much care against the tongue of the slanderer, as they would his life against the hand of the assassin.

When I consider the restless malignity of the great enemy of God and holiness, and add to this his subtlety and craft; when I consider how much his malice would be gratified, and his schemes promoted—by blackening the character of the ministers of

the gospel; when I consider what a multitude of creatures there are who are his vassals, and under his influence, creatures so destitute of moral principle, and so filled with venomous spite against true religion, as to be prepared to go any lengths in maligning the righteous, and especially their ministers—I can account for it on no other ground than that of a special interposition of Providence, that the reputation of Christian pastors is not more frequently attacked by slander, and destroyed by calumny.

But probably we see in this, as in other cases, that wise arrangement of Providence by which things of delicacy and consequence are preserved, by calling forth greater solicitude for their safety. Church members should therefore be tremblingly alive to the importance of defending their minister's character. They should neither expect to see him perfect, nor hunt after his imperfections. When they cannot but see his imperfections; **imperfections which, after all, may be consistent with not only real—but eminent piety**—they should not take pleasure in either magnifying or looking at them—but make all reasonable excuse for them, and endeavor to lose sight of his infirmities in his virtues—as they do the spots of the sun amid the blaze of radiance with which they are surrounded.

Let them not be the subject of conversation even between



yourselves, much less before your children and the world. If *you* talk of his faults in derision, who will speak of his excellences with admiration? Do not look at him with *suspicion*—but repose an honorable confidence in his character. Do not make him an offender for a word, and refuse to him that charity and kindness of judgment, which would be granted to every one else. Do not magnify indiscretions into immoralities, and exact from him that absolute perfection, which in your own case you find to be unattainable. Beware of whispers, innuendos, significant nods, and that slanderous silence, which is more defamatory than the broadest accusation.

*Defend him against the groundless attacks of others.* Never hear him spoken of with undeserved reproach, without indignantly repelling the shafts of calumny. Express your firm and dignified displeasure against the **witling** that would make him ridiculous, the **scorner** that would render him contemptible, and the **defamer** that would brand him as sinful.

Especially guard against those creeping reptiles which infest our churches, and are perpetually insinuating that their ministers do not preach the gospel, merely because they do not incessantly repeat the same truths in the same words; because they do not allegorize and spiritualize all the facts of the Old Testament, until

they have found as much gospel in the horses of Pharaoh's chariot—as they can in Paul's epistles; and because they have dared to enforce the moral law as the rule of the believer's conduct. This antinomian spirit has become the pest of many churches. It is the most mischievous and disgusting of all errors. If the heresies which abound in the spiritual world were to be represented by the noxious animals of the natural world, we could find some errors that would answer to the vulture, the tiger, and the serpent—but we could find nothing that would be an adequate emblem of antinomianism, except, by a creation of our own, we had united in some monstrous reptile, the venom of the wasp, with the deformity of the spider, and the slime of the snail.

### ***IX. Liberal financial support.***

The Scripture is very explicit on this head, "Those who are taught the word of God should help their teachers by paying them." Gal. 6:6. "What *soldier* has to pay his own expenses? And have you ever heard of a *farmer* who harvests his crop and doesn't have the right to eat some of it? What *shepherd* takes care of a flock of sheep and isn't allowed to drink some of the milk? In the same way, the Lord gave orders that those who *preach* the Good News should be supported by those who benefit from it." 1 Cor. 9:7, 14. The necessity of this appears from the injunctions delivered to ministers

to devote themselves exclusively to the duties of their office. 2 Tim. 2:4. 1 Tim. 4:13, 15. I by no means contend that it is unlawful for a minister to engage in secular employment; for necessity is a law which supersedes the ordinary rules of human conduct—And what are they to do, whose pastoral income is too small to support a family, and who have no private source of supply? A minister is under additional obligations to provide for things honest, not only in the sight of the Lord—but of men; to owe no man anything, to provide for his own house; and if he is not enabled to do this by the liberality of his flock, and has no private fortune—he must have recourse to the labor of his hands. It is to the deep, and wide, and endless reproach of some churches, that, although possessed of ability to support their pastors in comfort, they dole out but a wretched pittance from their affluence, leaving the pastor to make up the deficiency by secular work; and then, with insulting cruelty, complain that their sermons are very meager, and have a great sameness.

Such congregations, if they were treated as they deserve, would be put upon abstinence for at least a twelve month, or until they were willing to support their pastor in comfort. They love him dearly with their lips—but hate him as cordially with their pockets. They keep him poor to keep him humble, forgetting that as humility is no

less necessary for themselves than for him—this is an argument why the things which minister to their pride should be reduced—in order to support his comfort. This is certainly not drawing them with the cords of love and the bands of a man—but treating them like animals who are tamed into submission by hunger, and kept humble by being kept poor. It is curious to hear how some people will entreat of God to bless their minister in his basket and his store, while alas! poor man, they have taken care that his basket should be empty, and his store nothingness itself. Is not this mocking both God and his minister with a solemn sound, upon a thoughtless tongue?

Many rich Christians spend more in the needless luxuries, than they contribute towards the support of their pastor. Some give more for the sugar that sweetens their tea, than they do for all the advantages of public worship. A reproach of this kind yet rests upon multitudes, which it is high time should be rolled away.

It is extremely difficult, where a matter of this kind must be left to voluntary contribution, and the dictates of individual liberty, to lay down particular rules; all that can be done, is, to state general principles, and leave these to operate in particular cases. Let all Christians therefore consider what is a just and generous recompense for the labors of a man, who is

devoting his life to assist them in obtaining an incorruptible, undefiled inheritance, and that fades not away; an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory—who, in assisting them to gain eternal life, exerts at the same time an indirect—but a beneficial influence upon all their temporal prosperity—who, by his ministrations, soothes their cares, lightens their sorrows, mortifies their sins, throws a radiance over their darkest scenes, and gilds their brightest ones with additional splendour—who brings heaven down to earth for their comfort, and elevates them from earth to heaven; and who, after mitigating for them the ills of time with an anticipation of the joys of eternity, is prepared to attend them to the verge of the dark valley, and irradiate its gloom with the visions of immortality.

Let it not be thought that what is given to a minister is a *charitable donation*; it is the payment of a just debt. It is what Christ claims for his faithful servants, and which cannot be withheld without robbery. I spurn for myself and for my brethren, the degrading apprehension that we are supported by charity. We are not clerical pensioners upon the mere charity of others. Our appeal is to justice; and if our claims are denied on this ground, we refuse to plead before any other tribunal, and refer the matter to the great day of judgment.\*

\*Since the first edition of this work was printed, the author has received a letter from a very valuable and much respected deacon of his own church, which is justly entitled to the most serious attention, an extract from which is here inserted.

"My Dear Sir,  
"I intimated to you that I should probably take the liberty to suggest to you an idea or two upon a subject which you have considered in your 'Church Member's Guide;' and I feel persuaded you will not attribute my suggestions to any improper motive, or deem me "intruding into those things which I ought not."

The subject is that of a minister's support. You know, Sir, that it is a principle which I have on several occasions inculcated; and the more I think of it, the more I am convinced of its perfect accordance with the law of equity, 'That it is the duty of every person connected with a congregation to contribute somewhat towards the support of the gospel in his own place of worship.'

The principle which I now lay down I consider to be of universal obligation, and applying as much to the domestic servant and to the poor man in his cottage, as to the more affluent members of our congregation. I am quite aware how difficult it is for ministers to bring this subject before their hearers, and how few are those

occasions, when, consistently with delicacy and propriety, such a topic can be urged—but I do think your 'Guide' affords one of the most suitable opportunities of urging it, and its extensive circulation will, I think, bring the matter fairly before the view of the religious public. I verily believe that if all the members of our congregations—for I confine it not to church members—were to act on the principle I have laid down, and every man to do his duty, not only would the evil you justly deplore cease to exist—but a much more general effort of diffusive benevolence be the result.  
Yours, very affectionately,  
J. P.

## **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TOWARDS EACH OTHER**

**I.** The first duty, and that which indeed seems to include every other, is **LOVE**. The stress which is laid on this in the Word of God, both as it respects the manner in which it is stated, and the frequency with which it is enjoined, sufficiently proves its vast importance in the Christian character, and its powerful influence on the communion of believers. It is enforced by our Lord as the identifying law of his

kingdom. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." John 15:12. By this we learn that the subjects of Christ are to be known and distinguished among men, by their mutual affection. This injunction is denominated *the new commandment* of the Christian economy; not that love was no duty before the coming of Christ—but it is now placed more prominently among the duties of believers; is urged on fresh grounds, enforced by a more perfect example, and constrained by stronger motives. The dispensation of Jesus Christ is a system of most wonderful, most mysterious grace; it is the manifestation, commendation, and perfection of divine love. It originated in the love of the Father, and is accomplished by the love of the Son. Jesus Christ was an incarnation of love in our world. Jesus was love living, breathing, speaking, acting, among men. His **birth** was the nativity of love! His **teachings** were the words of love! His **miracles** were the wonders of love! His **tears** were the meltings of love! His **crucifixion** was the agonies of love! His **resurrection** was the triumph of love! Hence it was natural, that love should be the cardinal virtue in the character of his people, and that it should be



the law which regulates their conduct towards each other. And it is worthy of remark, that He has made his love to us, not only the **motive** of our love to each other—but the **pattern** of our love to each other. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you, John 15:17.

Let us for our instruction dwell upon **the properties of the love of Jesus**, that we might know what should be the characteristics of our own. *His* love was *real* and *great* affection, and not a mere nominal one—so let us love, not in word and in tongue only—but also in deed and in truth. *His* love was *free* and *unselfish*, without any regard to our deserts—so ours should be independent of any regard to our own advantage. *His* love was fruitful unto tears, and agonies, and blood, and death—so should ours in everything that can establish the comfort of each other. *His* was a love of *forbearance* and *forgiveness*—so should ours be. *His* love was purely a *spiritual* flame; not loving them as rational creatures merely—but as objects of divine affection, and subjects of divine likeness. *His* love was *unchangeable* notwithstanding our weaknesses and unkindnesses—thus are **we bound to love one another, and continue unalterable in our affection to each other, in spite of all those little infirmities of character and conduct which we daily discover in our fellow Christians.**

The Apostles echoed the language of their Master, and continually enjoined the churches which they had planted, to love one another, and to let brotherly love abound and increase. It is a grace so important that, like holiness, no measure of it is sufficient to satisfy the requirement of the Word of God. Love is the basis, and cement, and beauty of the Christian union. The church where love is lacking, whatever may be the number or gifts of its members—is nothing better than a heap of stones, which, however polished, lack the coherence and similitude of a palace.

In the best and purest ages of the church, this virtue shone so brightly in the character of its members, was so conspicuous in all their conduct, was expressed in actions so replete with noble, unselfish, and heroic affection—as to become a proverb with surrounding pagans, and call forth the well known exclamation, "See how these Christians love one another!" A finer eulogium was never pronounced on the Christian church; a more valuable tribute was never deposited on the altar of Christianity. Alas! that it should so soon have ceased to be just, and that the church, as it grew older, should have lost its loveliness by—losing its love.

But it will be necessary to point out **the MANNER in which brotherly love, wherever it exists, will operate.**

**1. Love to our brethren will lead us to a special *DELIGHT* in them, viewed as the objects of divine love.**

Delight is the very essence of love! And the ground of all proper delight which Christians have for each other—is their relation and likeness to God. We should feel peculiar delight in each other as fellow heirs of the grace of God; partakers of like precious faith, and joint sharers of the common salvation. We must be dear to each other as the objects of the Father's mercy, of the Son's dying grace, and of the Spirit's sanctifying influence. The love of Christians is of a very sacred nature, and is quite peculiar. It is not the love of close relatives, or friendship, or interest, or general esteem—but it is **an affection cherished for Christ's sake!** They may see many things in each other to admire, such as an amiable temper, a servant's heart, tender sympathy—but Christian love does not rest on these things, although they may increase it—but on the ground of a common relationship to Christ. On *this account* they are to take peculiar delight in each other, as being one in Christ. "These," should a believer exclaim, as he looks on the church, "are the objects of the Redeemer's living and dying love, whom he regards with delight; and out of affection to him, I feel an inexpressible delight in them. I love to associate with them, to talk with them, to look

upon them—because they are Christ's!"

**2. Love to our brethren will lead us to *BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*** Gal. 6:2.

When we see them oppressed with a weight of anxious care, instead of carrying ourselves with cold indifference and unfeeling distance towards them, we should cherish a tender solicitude to know and relieve their difficulties. How touching would such a salutation as the following be, from one Christian to another, "Brother, I have observed, with considerable pain, that your countenance has been covered with gloom, as if you were sinking under some inward solicitude. I would not be unpleasantly intrusive, nor wish to obtrude myself upon your attention, farther than is agreeable—but I offer you the expressions of Christian sympathy, and the assistance of Christian counsel. Can I in any way assist to mitigate your care, and restore your tranquility?" At such sounds, the crushed heart would feel as if half its load were gone. It may be, the kind inquirer could yield no effectual relief—but there is balm in the mere expression of his sympathy.

The indifference of some professing Christians to the burdens of their brethren is shocking; they would see them crushed to the very earth with cares and sorrows, and never

make one kind inquiry into their situation, nor lend a helping hand to lift them from the dust. Love requires that we should take the deepest interest in each other's concerns, that we should patiently listen to the tale of woe which a brother brings us, that we should mingle our tears with his, that we should offer him our advice, that we should suggest to him the consolations of the gospel. In short, we should let him see that his troubles reach not only our ear—but our heart. **SYMPATHY is one of the finest, the most natural, the most easy expressions of love.**

**3. Love requires that we should *VISIT our brethren in their affliction.***

"I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came unto me—for as much as you did it unto the least of these my brethren, you did it unto me!" Such is the language of Jesus to his people, by which he teaches us how important and incumbent a duty it is for church members to visit each other in their afflictions. Probably there is no duty more neglected than this. Christians often lie on beds of sickness for weeks and months successively, without seeing a fellow member cross the threshold of their chamber door. How often have I been shocked, when upon inquiring of the sufferer whether any fellow Christians residing in their neighborhood had been to visit them, it had been said in

reply, "Oh! no, sir, I have now been stretched on this bed for days and weeks. My pain and weakness have been so great, that I have scarcely been able to collect my thoughts for meditation and prayer. The sight of a dear Christian friend would indeed have relieved the dull monotony of this gloomy scene, and the voice of piety would have been as music to blunt my sense of pain, and lull my troubled heart to some repose—but such a sight and such a sound have been denied me. No friend has been near me, and it has aggravated sorrows, already heavy, to be thus neglected and forgotten by a church, which I joined with the hope of finding among them the comfort of sympathy. But alas! alas! I find them too much occupied with the seen and temporal things, to think of a suffering brother, to whom wearisome nights and months of vanity are appointed!"

How could I help exclaiming, "O, Christian love, bright image of the Savior's heart! where have you fled, that you so rarely visit the church on earth, to shed your influence, and manifest your beauties there?" There have been ages of Christianity—so historians inform us—in which brotherly love prevailed among Christians to such a degree, that, fearless of the infection diffused by the most malignant and contagious diseases, they have ventured to the bedside of their brethren expiring in the last stages of the plague, to

administer the consolations of a immortal hope. This *was* love; love stronger than death, and which many waters could not quench. It was no doubt imprudent—but it was heroic, and circulated far and wide the praises of that dear name which was the secret of the wonder.

How many are there, now bearing the Christian name, who scarcely ever yet paid one visit to the bed side of a suffering brother! Shame and disgrace upon such professors!! Let *them* not expect to hear the Savior say, "I was sick and you visited me."

That this branch of Christian love may be performed with greater diligence, it would be a good plan for the pastor, at every church meeting, to mention the names of the afflicted members, and stir up the brethren to visit them. It would be particularly desirable for Christians to go to the scene of suffering on a Sabbath day, and read the Bible and sermons to the afflicted, at that time, as they are then peculiarly apt to feel their sorrows, in consequence of being cut off from the enjoyments of public worship.

#### **4. "PRAY one for another."**

James 5:16.

Not only *with*—but *for* one another. A Christian should take the interests of his brethren into the closet. Private devotion is not to be selfish devotion. It would much

increase our affection for others, did we devote more of our private prayers to each other's welfare.

***5. FINANCIAL RELIEF should be administered to those who need it.***

"Distributing to the necessities of the saints," Rom. 12:13, is mentioned among the incumbent duties of professing Christians. How just, how forcible is the interrogation of the Apostle, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" 1 John 3:17. Nothing can be more absurd than those pretensions to love, which are not supported by exertions to relieve the needs of the object beloved. It is a very peculiar affection—which is destitute of showing mercy to the object of affection. So powerfully did this holy passion operate in the first ages of the church, that many rich Christians sold their estates, and shared their affluence with the poor. What rendered this act the more remarkable is, that it was purely voluntary. It is not our duty any more than it was theirs, to go this length; still, however, it is evident both from general principles as well as from particular precepts, that we are under obligation to make some provision for the comfort of the poor and needy. This duty must be left in the statement of general terms, as it is impossible to define its precise limits. It does not appear to me to



be at all incumbent to make regular periodical distributions to the poor, whether in circumstances of distress or not. Some churches have a registered list of pensioners, who come as regularly for their pay, as if they were hired servants. If they are old, infirm, of unprovided for, this is very well—but for those to receive support, who are getting a comfortable subsistence by their labor, is an abuse of the charity of the church. The money collected at the Lord's supper, should be reserved for times of sickness and peculiar necessity.

It should be recollected, also, that *public* contributions do not release the members from the exercise of *private* liberality. The shilling a month which is given at the sacrament, seems, in the opinion of many, to discharge them from all further obligation to provide for the comfort of their poorer brethren, and to be a sort of excuse for the further exercise of charity to others in need. This is a great mistake; it ought rather to be considered as a mere pledge of all that more effective and abundant liberality which they should exercise in secret. Every Christian who is indulged with a considerable share of the bounties of Providence ought to consider the poorer members of the church, who may happen to live in his neighborhood, as the objects of his peculiar care, interest, and relief.

**6. PATIENCE is a great part of love.**

"Be completely humble and gentle; **be patient, bearing with one another in love.**" Ephes. 4:2. In a Christian church, especially where it is of considerable magnitude, we must expect to find a very great diversity of character. There are all the gradations of intellect, and all the varieties of disposition and temperament. In such cases, great patience is absolutely essential to the preservation of harmony and peace. The strong must bear with the infirmities of the weak.

Christians of great attainments in knowledge should not in their hearts despise, nor in their conduct ridicule, the feeble conceptions of those who are babes in Christ—but most meekly correct their errors, and most kindly instruct their ignorance. This is love.

In very many people there will unhappily be found some things, which, although they by no means affect the reality and sincerity of their piety, considerably diminish its luster, and have a tendency, without the caution of love, to disturb our communion with them. Some have a forward and obtrusive manner; others are talkative; others indulge a complaining, whining, begging disposition; others are abrupt, almost to rudeness, in their address. These, and many more, are **the spots of God's children**—with which we are sometimes so much displeased, as to feel an

alienation of heart from the subjects of them, although we have no doubt of their real piety. Now here is room for the exercise of love. These are the cases in which we are to employ that love which covers all things. Are we to love only amiable Christians? Perhaps, after all, in the substantial parts of religion, these rough characters far excel others, whom courtesy and amiableness have carried to the highest degree of polish. I do not say we are to love these individuals *for* their peculiarities and infirmities—but in *spite* of them. Not on their own account—but for Christ's sake, to whom they belong. And what can be a greater proof of our affection for him, than to love an unlovely individual, on Christ's account?

If you had the picture of a valued friend, would you withdraw from it your affection, and throw it away, because there was a spot upon the canvass, which in some degree disfigured the painting? No you would say, it is a likeness of my friend still, and I love it, notwithstanding its imperfection. The believer is a picture of your best Friend—and will you discard him, neglect him, because there is a speck upon the painting?

**7. Love should induce us to WATCH over one another.**

Am I my brother's keeper? was an inquiry suitable enough in the lips of a murderer—but most unsuitable and inconsistent from a Christian.

We are brought into fellowship for the very purpose of being keepers of each other. We are to watch over our brethren—and admonish and reprove them as circumstances may require. I do not mean that church members should pry into each other's secrets, or be busy bodies in other men's matters—for that is forbidden by God and abominable in the sight of man. 1 Thess. 3:11. 1 Pet. 4:15. Much less are they to assume authority over each other, and act the part of proud and tyrannical inquisitors. But still we are to "exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." We are not to allow sin to be committed, or duty to be omitted by a brother, without affectionately admonishing him. What can be more incumbent, more obligatory, than this? Can we indeed love anyone, and at the same time see him do that which we know will injure him—without entreating him to desist? "Brethren, if any man is overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Gal. 6:1.

Let us then take heed against that Cain-like spirit which is too prevalent in our churches, and which leads many to act as if their fellow-members were no more to them than the stranger at the ends of the earth. Striking are the words of God to the Jews, "Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt." Lev. 19:17. Not to rebuke him, then, when he

sins, is, instead of loving him—to hate him. This neglect is what the apostle means by being partakers of other men's sins. The admonition to "warn the unruly," 1 Thess. 5:14. was delivered not merely to ministers—but to private Christians.

I know no duty more neglected than this. It is one of the most prevailing defects of Christians. Many a backslider would have been prevented from going far astray, if, in the very first stages of his declension, some brother, who had observed his critical state, had faithfully and affectionately warned and admonished him. What shame, and anguish, and disgrace, would the offender himself have been spared, and what dishonor and scandal would have been averted from the church—by this one act of faithful love!

I am aware it is a difficult and self-denying duty—but that cannot excuse its neglect. Love will enable us to perform it—and the neglect of it violates the law of Christ.

**II.** Christians should cultivate **PEACE** and **HARMONY** one with another.

"Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephes. 4:3. "Be of one mind, live in peace." 2 Cor. 3:11. "Follow after the things which make for peace." Rom. 14:19. It is quite needless to expatiate on the value and importance of peace. What society

can exist without it? I shall therefore proceed to state what things are necessary for the attainment of this end.

**1. Christians should be SUBJECT one to another in humility.** "Likewise, you younger men, submit yourselves unto those who are older. Yes, all of you, **be subject one to another**, and be clothed with humility." 1 Pet. 5:5. Now from hence we learn, that some kind of mutual subjection ought to be established in every Christian church. This of course does not mean, that some members are to make an entire surrender of their opinions and feelings to others, so far as never to oppose them, and always to be guided by others. It is not the subjection of an inferior to a superior—but of equals to one another; not that which is extorted by authority—but voluntarily conceded by affection; not yielded as matter of right—but given for the sake of peace—in short, it is **the mutual subjection of love and humility.**

YOUNG and inexperienced people ought to be subject to the aged; for what can be more indecorous than to see a stripling standing up at a church meeting, and, with confidence and flippancy, opposing his views to those of a godly disciple, old enough to be his grandfather? Youth loses its loveliness when it loses its humility. They should hearken with deference and most reverential

attention to the opinion of the aged. Nor does the obligation rest here; it extends to those who are equal in age and rank. Church members should be subject to each other; they should not be determined at all events to have their own way—but should go as far as biblical principle would let them, in giving up their own views and personal biases, to the rest of the group. Everyone should hearken with respectful attention to the opinions of others, and be willing to sacrifice his own personal opinion. The 'contention' ought not to be for rule—but for subjection. Instead of haughtily exclaiming, "I have as much right to have my way as any one else!" we should say, "I have an opinion, and will mildly and respectfully state it; yet I will not force it upon the church—but give way to the superior wisdom of others, if I am opposed." There should be in every member a supposition that others may see as clearly, probably more so—than himself.

The democratic principle in our system of church government must not be stretched too far. The idea of equal rights is soon abused, and converted into the means of turbulence and faction. Liberty, unity, and equality, are words which, both in church and state, have often become the signals, in the mouths of some, for the lawless invasion of the rights of others. It has been strangely forgotten, that no man in social life has a right to please only himself;

his will is, or ought to be, the good of the whole. And that individual violates at once the social compact, whether in ecclesiastical or civil society, who pertinaciously and selfishly exclaims, "I will have *my* way!" Such a declaration constitutes him a rebel against the community. Yet, alas! how much of this rebellion is to be found not only in the world—but in the church! And what havoc and desolation has it occasioned! Unfortunately for the peace of our churches, it is sometimes disguised, by the deceitfulness of the human heart—under the cloak of zeal for the general good. Church members should enter into these sentiments, and thus comply with the apostolic admonitions, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory—but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." Phil. 2:3. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." Romans 12:10.

**2. To the preservation of peace, a right treatment of OFFENCES is essentially necessary.**

***We should ever be cautious not to GIVE offence.*** Some people are crude, dogmatic, or imprudent; they never consult the feelings of those around them, and are equally careless whom they please—and whom they offend. They say and do just what their feelings prompt, without the least regard to the consequences of their words and actions. They act like an



individual who, because it pleases him, discharges a loaded musket in a crowded street, where some are almost sure to be wounded. This is not that love which is kind, courteous, and civil. A Christian should be ever afraid of giving offence; he should be anxious not to injure the 'wing of an insect', much more the 'mind of a brother'! The peace of his brethren should even be more sacred than his own. It should be his fixed determination, if possible, to never be the occasion a moment's pain in another. For this purpose he should be kind, and mild, and courteous in all his language, weighing the import of *words* before he utters them, and calculating the consequence of *actions* before he performs them. He should remember that he is moving in a crowd, and be careful not to trample on, or jostle his neighbors.

***We should all be backward to RECEIVE offence.*** Quarrels often *begin* for lack of the caution I have just stated—and are then *continued* because people are too quick to take offence. An observance of these two principles would keep the world in peace. There are some people whose passions are like cotton—kindled into a blaze in a moment by the least spark which has been purposely or accidentally thrown upon it. A word, or a look—is in some cases quite enough to be considered a very serious injury! It is no uncommon thing for such people to excuse themselves on

the ground that their 'feelings are so delicate'—that they are offended by the least touch. This is a humiliating confession, for it is acknowledging that, instead of being like the cedar of Lebanon, or the oak of the forest, which laughs at the tempest, and is unmoved by the boar of the wood—they resemble the sensitive plant, a little squeamish shrub, which trembles before the breeze, and shrivels and contracts beneath the pressure of an insect! Delicate feelings!! In plain English, this means that they are petulant, irritable and peevish! Delicate feelings!! In plain English, this means that they are petulant, irritable and peevish! I would like to have a sign hung around the neck of such people--and it would be this, "Beware of the dog!"

We should never allow ourselves to be offended, until, at least, we are sure that offence was *intended*; and this is really not so often as we are apt to conclude. Had we but patience to wait, or humility to inquire, we would find that many hurtful things were done by mistake, which we are prone to attribute to design. How often do we violate that love which thinks no evil, and which imperatively demands of us to attribute a good motive to another's conduct—until a bad motive is proved! Let us then deliberately determine, that, by God's grace, we will not be easily offended. If such a resolution were generally made and kept, offences would cease. Let us first ascertain

whether offence was intended, before we allow the least emotion of anger to be indulged; and even then, when we have proved that the offence was committed on purpose, let us next ask ourselves whether it is necessary to notice it. What wise man will think it worth while, when an insect has stung him, to pursue and punish the aggressor?

When we have received an injury which is too serious to be passed over unnoticed, and requires explanation in order to our future pleasant communion with the individual who inflicts it, *we should neither brood over it in silence, nor communicate it to a third person—but go directly to the offender himself, and state to him in private, our views of his conduct.* This is most clearly enjoined by our divine Lord, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." Matthew 18:15.

Many people lock up the injury in their own bosom; and instead of going to their offending brother—dwell upon his conduct in silence, until their imagination has added to it every possible aggravation, and their minds have come to the conclusion to separate themselves forever from his society. From that hour, they neither speak to him, nor think well of him—but consider and treat him as an alien from their hearts. This is not *godliness*.

Our duty is to go, and to go as speedily as possible, to the offender. The longer we delay, the more serious will the offence appear in our eyes, and the more difficult will it be to persuade ourselves to obtain the interview.

Others, when they have received an offence, *set off to some friend*, perhaps to more than one, to lodge their complaint, and tell how they have been treated. The report of the injury spreads farther and wider, exaggerated and swelled by those circumstances, which every gossip through whose hands it passes, chooses to add to the original account, until, in process of time, it comes round to the offender himself, in its magnified and distorted form, who now finds that he, in his turn, is aggrieved and calumniated! And thus a difficult and complicated case of offence, grows out of what was at first very simple in its nature—and capable of being adjusted. *We ought to go at once to the party offending us, before a syllable has passed our lips on the subject to a third person! We should also close our ears against the complaints of any individual, who would inform us of the fault of a brother, before he has told the offender himself!*

Sometimes, when people have received a supposed offence, *they will endeavor to gain information from others in a circuitous and clandestine manner*, in order, as they think, to conduct the affair with prudence. This is crooked

policy, and rarely succeeds. It is next to impossible to creep with a step so soft, and to speak with a voice so muffled, as to escape detection. And if he starts to ferret into holes and corners for evidence, it will be sure to excite indignation and disgust. *No! the offended party should go to to the supposed offender at once—and alone!* This is the command of Scripture, and it is approved by reason, Matt. 18:15-17. This single admonition is worth all the volumes that philosophy ever wrote, and ought to be inscribed in letters of gold. It cannot be too often repeated, nor can too much stress be laid upon it.

People, whose ears are ever open to catch slanders and gossip, should be avoided as the plague; *they* are the mischief-makers and quarrel-mongers, and are the pests of our churches!

Great caution, however, should be observed *as to the spirit in which we go to the offending brother.* All the meekness and gentleness of Christ should be in our hearts and manner. **We should dip our very tongue in the fountain of love!** Every feeling of anger, every look of anger, every tone of anger—should be suppressed. We should not *at once accuse* our brother of the injury, for the report may be false—but humbly ask him if it the report is correct. All attempts to extort confession by threatenings should be avoided; and instead of these, nothing should be employed

but the appeals of wisdom—and the gentle persuasions of love. If we succeed in this private interview to gain our brother so far as to produce a little relenting, we ought to cherish, by the kindest expressions, these beginnings of repentance, and to avoid all demands of unnecessary concession—all haughty demeanor of conscious superiority—all insulting methods of dispensing pardon. "Brother," we should say, "my aim was not to *degrade* you—but to *convince* you; and since you see and acknowledge your fault, I am satisfied, and shall forgive and forget it from this moment!"

If the offender should refuse to acknowledge his fault, and it should be necessary for us to take a witness or two—which is our next step in settling a disagreement—*we must be very careful to select men of great discretion and calmness*; men who will not be likely to inflame, instead of healing the wound; men who will act as *mediators*, not as *partisans*.

It is absolutely necessary, in order to offences being removed, that the offender, upon his being convicted of an injury, *should make all suitable concession*; and it will generally be found, that in long continued and complicated strifes, *this obligation becomes mutual*. Whoever is the ORIGINAL aggressor a feud seldom continues long, before *both parties* are to blame. Even the aggrieved individual has something to

concede; and the way to induce the other to acknowledge his greater offence, is for him to confess his lesser one. It is the mark of a noble and godly mind to confess an error, and solicit its forgiveness. "Confess your faults one to another," is an inspired injunction.

The man who is too proud to acknowledge his fault, when his conduct demands it, has violated his duty, and is a fit subject for censure. There are some people, so far forgetful of their obligations to Christ and to their brethren, as not only to refuse to make concession—but even to *give excuses for their sinful behavior*. Their proud spirits disdain even to afford the least satisfaction in the way of throwing light upon a supposed offence. This is most criminal, and is such a defiance of the authority of the Lord Jesus, as ought to bring the individual before the discipline of the church.

We should be very cautious *not to exact unreasonable concession*. A revengeful spirit is often as effectually gratified by imposing hard and humiliating terms of reconciliation, as it possibly could be by making the severest retaliation. No offender is so severely punished, as he who is obliged to degrade himself in order to obtain a pardon. And as all revenge is unlawful, we should be extremely careful not to gratify it at the very time and by the manner in which we are dispensing

pardon. To convince a brother, not to degrade him, is the object we are to seek; and especially should we endeavor to show him, that *his offence is more against Christ than against ourselves.*

When suitable acknowledgments are made, *the act of forgiveness is no longer optional with us.* From that moment every spark of anger, every feeling of a revengeful nature, is to be quenched. "Let not the sun go down upon your anger, neither give place to the devil." Ephes. 4:26, 27. If we allow sleep to visit our eyes before we have forgiven an offending, but penitent brother—we are committing a greater offence against Christ, than our brother has committed against us! The man that takes a revengeful temper to his pillow, is inviting Satan to be his guest! Such a man would probably tremble at the thought of taking a harlot to his bed—but is it no crime to sleep in the embrace of a *fiend—himself!* The word revenge should be blotted from the Christian's vocabulary by the tears which he sheds for his own offences. How can an merciless Christian repeat that petition of our Lord's prayer, "Forgive me my trespasses—as I forgive those who trespass against me?" Does he forget that if he uses such language while he is living in a state of resentment against a brother, he is praying *for perdition?*—for how does he forgive them that trespass against him? By revenge!



How strong is the language of Paul!  
"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, *just as in Christ God forgave you!*" Ephes. 4:30-32. What motives to a forgiving spirit!! Can that man have ever tasted the sweets of pardoning mercy—who refuses to forgive an erring brother? Go, Christian professor, go first to the law, and learn your twenty thousand sins! Go in imagination to the brink of the bottomless pit, and as you hearken to the howlings of the damned, remember that those howlings might have been your! Then go to the cross, and while you look on the bleeding victim who is nailed to it, hearken to the accents of mercy which breathe like soft music in your ear, "Go in peace, your sins are all forgiven you!" What, *will* you, *can* you return from such scenes, with purposes of revenge? No! Impossible!

An *implacable, merciless* Christian is a contradiction in terms. "Bigots there may be, and have been, of all denominations—but an implacable, irreconcilable, unforgiving Christian—is of the same figure of speech—as a godly adulterer, a religious drunkard, a devout murderer!" (Grosvenor's most touching sermon on the "Temper of Jesus")

"The last step in reclaiming an offender, is to *bring him before the assembled church*. "But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." Matthew 18:16-17. Every effort that ingenuity can invent, affection prompt, or patience can conduct—ought to be made, before it be brought to be investigated by the brethren at large. If every trivial disagreement is laid before the church, it will soon become a court of common pleas, and have all its time consumed in adjusting matters of which it ought never to have heard. Before a public inquiry takes place, the pastor should be made acquainted with the matter; who, if he possess the confidence and affection of his people, will have sufficient influence, at least in all ordinary cases, to terminate the difference in an amicable manner. It is best to settle it even without his interference, if possible—but it is better to consult him in every case, before the affair is submitted to the last tribunal.

***An offence ought never to be considered as removed, until love is restored.*** We should never rest until such an explanation has been given and received, as will enable us to return to harmony and confidence. A mere cessation

of actual hostilities may do for the communion of the world—but not for the fellowship of the saints. There is no actual strife between the tenants of the sepulcher—but the cold and gloomy stillness of a church-yard is an inappropriate emblem of the peace of a Christian church. In such a community, we expect, that not only will the discords and sounds of enmity be hushed—but the sweet harmonies of love be heard; not only that the conflict of rage will terminate—but be succeeded by the activity of genuine affection.

***When once an offence has been removed, it should never be adverted to in future.*** Its very remembrance should, if possible, be washed from the memory by the waters of forgetfulness. Other causes of disagreement may exist, and fresh feuds arise—but the old one is dead and buried, and its angry spirit should never be evoked to add fury to the passion of its successor. Nor should we, when in our turn we are convicted of an error, shelter ourselves from reproof, by reminding our reprover, that he was once guilty of a similar offence. This is mean, dishonorable, unchristian, and mischievous.

*Every Christian should bear reproof with meekness.* Few know how to give reproof with propriety, still fewer how to receive reproof. "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be as excellent oil,

which shall not break my head."  
How small is the number who can adopt this language in sincerity! What wounded pride, what mortification and resentment are felt by many when their faults are told to them. When we have so far sinned as to deserve rebuke, we ought to have humility enough to bear it with meekness; and should it be delivered in greater weight, or with less affection than we think is proper—a penitential remembrance of our offence should prevent all feelings of irritation or resentment. The scripture is very severe in its language to those who turn with neglect, anger or disgust from the admonitions of their brethren. "He who despises reproof, sins." Prov. 10:17. "He who hates reproof is brutish." Prov. 12:1. "He who is often reproofed, and yet hardens his neck, shall be suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy." Prov. 29:1. Such people are guilty of great pride, great neglect of the word of God, and great contempt of one of the ordinances of Heaven—and thus injure their souls by that which was given to benefit them.

Do not then act so wickedly as to turn with indignation from a brother that comes in the spirit of meekness to admonish and reprove you. Rather thank him for his fidelity, and profit by his kindness. I know not a more decisive mark of true and strong piety—than a willingness to receive reproof with meekness, and to

profit by admonition, come from whom it might.

**3. If the peace of the church be preserved, the members must watch against and repress A TATTLING DISPOSITION.**

There are few circumstances which tend more to disturb the harmony and repose of our societies, than a proneness, in some of their members, to a gossiping, tattling disposition. There are people so deeply infected with the Athenian passion to hear or tell some new thing, that their ears or lips are always open. With insatiable appetite they devour all the news and rumors they can by any means collect, and are never easy until it is all disgorged again, to the unspeakable annoyance and disgust of others around them. It is one of the mysteries of God's natural government, that such should gain a sort of advantageous consequence by the mischief they occasion, and be thus sheltered from scorn, by being regarded with dread. The *tattler* is of this description—I mean the individual who loves to talk of other men's matters, and especially of their *faults*; for it will be found, that by a singular perversity of disposition, those who love to talk about the circumstances of others, rarely ever select their *excellences* as matter of discourse—but almost always fix upon their *failings*; and thus, to borrow a simile of Solomon's, they resemble the fly which neglects the healthful part of

the frame to feast and luxuriate on the loathsome sore.

In the case of **tattling** there are generally three parties to blame; there is first the tattler, then the person who is weak enough to listen to the tales; and lastly, the individual who is the subject of the gossip, who allows his mind to be irritated, instead of going, in the spirit of meekness, to require an explanation from the original reporter.

Now let it be a rule with every church member, *to avoid speaking of the personal circumstances, and especially of the faults of others.* Let this rule have the sanctity of the laws of Heaven, and the immutability of those of the Medes and Persians. Let every individual resolve with himself thus, "I will be slow to speak of others. I will neither *originate* a report by saying what I think, nor help to *circulate* a report by repeating what I hear." This is a most wise regulation, which would at once preserve our own peace and the peace of society. We should beware of saying anything, which, by the perverted ingenuity of a slanderous disposition, may become the basis of a tale to the disadvantage of another. It is not enough, as I have hinted, that we do not *originate* a report—but we ought not to *circulate* it. When it reaches us, there it should stop, and go no farther. We should give it to prudence, to be buried in silence. *We must never appear pleased*

with the tales of gossips and newsmongers, much less with the scandals of the backbiter—our smile is their reward. *If there were no listeners, there would be no tattlers.* In company, let us always discourage and repress such conversation. Talkers know where to find a market for their stuff; and like poachers and smugglers, who never carry their contraband articles to the house of an tax-man, they never offer their reports to an individual who, they know, would reprove them in the name of Jesus.

*Let us avoid and discourage the hollow, deceitful practice of indulging a tattling disposition, under the cover of lamenting over the faults of our brethren.*

Many who would be afraid or ashamed to mention the faults of a brother in the way of direct gossip, easily find, or attempt to find, a disguise for their 'backbiting disposition' in *affected lamentations*. "What a pity it is," they exclaim, "that brother B. should have behaved so badly. Poor man, I am so sorry for him. The petulance of his temper is exceedingly to be regretted. He much dishonors the church." "And then," replies a second, "how sorry I am to hear this report of sister C.! How the world will talk, and the cause of Christ suffer, by such unwarrantable things in the conduct of a professor! It will not be a secret long, or I would not mention it." "Oh," says a third, "I

have heard whispers of the same kind in times past. I have long suspected it, and mentioned my fears some months ago to a friend or two. I thought she was not the person she 'appeared' to be. I am very sorry for her, and for the cause of Christ. I have long had my suspicions, and now they are all confirmed. I shall tell the friends to whom I expressed my fears, what I have now heard." In this way is a tattling disposition indulged in the circles of even good people, under the guise of lamentation for the sins of others.

"Odious and disgusting cant!" would a noble and honorable Christian exclaim, with hallowed indignation, "which of you, if you really lamented the fact, would report it? Which of you has gone to the erring individual, inquired into the truth of the matter, and, finding it true, has mildly expostulated? Let your lamentations be poured out before God and the offender—but to none else."

Others, again, indulge this disposition *by running about to inquire into the truth of a report, which they say has reached them, respecting a brother.* "Have you heard anything of brother H. lately?" they ask, with a significant look. "No," replies the person. "Then I suppose it is not true." "Why, what have you heard? Nothing, I hope, affecting his moral character." "Nothing very substantiated—but I hope it is



false." The tattler cannot go, however, without letting out the secret, and then sets off to inquire of another and another. Mischief making creature! Why had he not gone, as was his obvious duty, to the individual who was the subject of the report, and inquired of him the truth of it? Yes—but then the story would have been abolished at once, and the pleasure of telling it would have been ended.

There are cases in which a modest disclosure of the failings of others *is necessary*. Such, for example, as when a church is likely to be deceived in the character of an individual, whom it is about to admit to communion. In such instances, the person who is aware of the imposition that is likely to be practiced, should go directly to the pastor, and make him acquainted with the fact; instead of which, some people whisper their suspicions to any and to many—*except* the pastor. It is perfectly lawful also to prevent any brother from being betrayed into a ruinous confidence in financial matters, by informing him of the character of the individual by whom he is about to be deceived. Silence, in such cases, would be an obvious injury.

BE SLOW TO SPEAK, then, is a maxim which every Christian should always keep before his eyes. **Silent people can do no harm—but talkers are always dangerous!**

**III.** Besides these things, there are **duties which Christians owe to the church in its COLLECTIVE capacity.**

**1. They are bound to take a deep interest in its concerns, and to seek its prosperity by all lawful means.** Everyone should feel that he has a personal share in the welfare of the society. He should consider that, having selected that particular community with which he is associated, as his religious home, he is under a solemn obligation to promote, by every proper effort, its real interest. He is to be indifferent to nothing which at any time affects its prosperity. Some members, from the moment they have joined a Christian church, take no concern in any of its affairs. They scarcely ever attend a church meeting; they know neither who are excluded, nor who are received. If members are added, they express no delight; if none are admitted, they feel no grief. They fill up their places at the table of the Lord, and in the house of God; and beyond this, seem to have nothing else to do with the church. This is a most criminal apathy! A Christian ought to be as tremblingly alive to the welfare of the church to which he is united—as he is to the success of his worldly affairs.

**2. They are bound to attend all the meetings of the church,** at least so far as their circumstances will allow. They had better be

absent from sermons and prayer-meetings, than from these. How can they know the state of the church, if they are not present when its affairs are exhibited and arranged? or how can they exercise that proper confidence in the piety of the brethren, which is essential to fellowship, if they are absent at the time of their admission?

**3. They should most conscientiously devote their gifts, graces and abilities to the service of the church, in an orderly and modest way;** neither obtruding their assistance when it is not required, nor withholding it when it is solicited. Those who have gifts of *prayer*, should not be backward to exercise them for the edification of their brethren. Those who have *penetration* and *sound judgment*, should render their counsel and advice upon every occasion. People of large and respectable *temporal means* may often use their influence with great benefit to the temporal affairs of the church.

And there is one line of charitable exertion, which would be peculiarly beneficial, and which has been too much neglected in all our societies; I mean the practice of *respectable members reading the Scriptures, religious tracts, and sermons—in the habitations of the poor*. I am aware that this is an age when many run to and fro, and when lay preaching is carried to a very improper and mischievous extent.

Some who have no other qualification for preaching than boldness and ignorance, are every Sabbath employed, of whom it might be said, that, it is a pity they have not the gift of silence. Unfortunately, those who are *most qualified*, are frequently *least disposed*; while the least qualified, are frequently the most zealous. But how many wise, judicious, holy men, are there in our churches, who would be most honorably and most usefully employed, in reading the words of life, and short evangelical sermons, in the cottages of the poor! Let a convenient house be selected, and the neighbors invited to attend—and who can tell what vast benefit would accrue from such a scheme? By the blessing of God upon these efforts, reformation would be wrought in the lower classes; religion would gain an entrance where it could be introduced by no other means, and our churches be replenished with holy, consistent members. People of *respectable circumstances in life*, especially, should thus employ themselves, as *their* situation gives them greater influence. Females may be thus engaged, without transgressing either against the injunction of the apostle, or the modesty which is so becoming their sex. I am astonished that means of usefulness so simple, so easy, and so efficient, are not more generally employed.

4. It is due to the authority of the church, that *every member should*

*cordially submit to its discipline.*  
Without this, order would be destroyed, and the reign of anarchy introduced. This, indeed, as we have already considered, is essentially implied in the very act of joining the church—and no one ought to think of such an act of union, who is not determined to submit to its rules and its decisions.

## **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS TO THE MEMBERS OF OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES**

**First. In those cases where the churches are of a DIFFERENT DENOMINATION.**

***1. We should respect their religious opinions and practices.***

They act conscientiously; and whatever is done at the dictate of conscience, is too sacred to be made the matter of ridicule. The way to bring the scorn of ungodly men upon all religion, is for religious people, differing upon minor points, to jest about each other's practices.

***2. Let us avoid religious bigotry and prejudice.***

By bigotry, I mean such an arrogant attachment to our opinions and denomination, as alienates our affections from Christians of another name, and leads us to conclude there is little excellence or piety, except in our own communion. Some Christians are so shortsighted by prejudice, that they cannot discern the most splendid exhibitions of moral excellence, if they are at the least removed from their own denomination. The consideration, that a man is not of *their* party, is sufficient, in their evil eye—to dim the luster of an example which angels admire, and to eclipse that living luminary, which, to the eye of Heaven, shines with most radiant glory. Their moral vision has so long and so intently pored over the minute distinctions of our party, as to have acquired a contraction of power, which prevents them from comprehending and admiring, as they would otherwise do, the grander features of Christianity in general.

I know not a proof of true piety more decisive, and more pleasing, than that quick perception and fervent admiration of the beauties of holiness, which lead a man to recognize and love them, wherever they are seen, whether in his own denomination or in others. "The evil to be deplored in the present state of the church, is the unnatural distance at which Christians stand from each other, the spirit of sects, the disposition

to found their union on the wood, hay and stubble of human inventions, or disputable tenets—instead of the eternal Rock, the faith once delivered to the saints. Surely, surely, we shall find a sufficient bond of union, a sufficient scope for all our sympathies, in the doctrine of the cross." –Robert Hall.

***3. We should abstain from all intrusive controversy, or underhand proselytism.***

I will not deny that there are occasions when our distinctive opinions may be brought forward with propriety and advocated with zeal; when 'silence' would be lukewarmness, and not candor. But to be ever intruding our distinctive opinions upon the attention of others, and to be always seeking after opportunities of controversy, is as disgusting as it is pernicious! For while it offends others, it is sure to do harm to our own spirit.

Regarding the irreligious part of our population as an immense moral desert, surely there is scope enough for our zeal, to reclaim this immense waste, and convert it into the garden of the Lord, without employing our energies in altering the position of those plants and trees, which are already flourishing in the sacred enclosure. It is a far more honorable and useful kind of zeal, to convert sinners into Christians; than real Christians of one name, into real Christians of another name.

**Secondly. I shall now speak of the conduct of Christians to the members of other churches—of their OWN denomination.**

It does not infrequently happen, that where two or more churches of the same denomination exist in a town, *a most unhappy, unscriptural, disgraceful temper is manifested towards each other.* All the feelings of envy, jealousy, and ill will, are cherished and displayed with as much, or more bitterness than two rival tradesmen would exhibit in the most determined opposition of interests. This is peculiarly the case *where two churches have been formed, by a schism, out of one.* Oftentimes the feud has been perpetuated through one generation, and has been bequeathed to the generation following. Can it be that these are churches of saints? Can it be that these are all one in Christ? Can it be that these are churches, whose *rule* is the word of Christ, whose *conduct* is the image of Christ, whose *end* is the glory of Christ!!

Shame, public, deep, indelible shame on such churches! Is it thus that churches quarrel—to find sport for their enemies? By all the regard which is due to the authority of the Lord Jesus, by all the constraining influence of his love, let such churches be impelled to terminate their hateful strifes, which are not more dishonorable to the cause of religion in general, than they are injurious to the interests of piety within their own immediate sphere



of action. With what bitter taunts, with what sarcastic triumph do profane and infidel spectators point to such scenes, and ironically exclaim, "*See how these Christians love one another!*"

Let us guard against this evil where it does not exist, and endeavor to suppress it where it does. Let us not look with envy and jealousy on the growing prosperity of other societies. Let us not consider their success as in any degree encroaching upon ours. If we succeed more in our own church, let us be thankful—but not boastful! If *others* take precedence, let us be stirred up to affectionate, holy emulation—but not to envy and jealousy!

A worthy minister, who used to preach a week-day lecture in the city of London, heard a friend expressing his regret that it was so ill attended. "Oh, that," replied the minister, "is of little consequence, as the gospel is preached by several others in the same neighborhood; and in such a situation, for anyone to be very desirous that people should come and hear the gospel from *him*, instead of others, seems as unreasonable, as it would be for one of the shopmen in a large shop, to wish all the customers to come to his particular part of the counter. If the customers come at all, and the goods are purchased, in so far as he feels an interest in the prosperity of the shop, he will rejoice."

Beautiful and rare example of true humility, pure zeal and genuine love to Christ! Look at this, you ministers and churches, who quarrel with your neighbor Christians, and scarcely speak well of them, because they prosper! Shall we feel mortified when immortal souls are saved, because we are not the instruments of their conversion? Shall we say, if we cannot gather them into *our* church, let them not be gathered? If two rival *physicians*, who had each as much as he could do, when the plague was raging in a town, looked with envy and grudging on each other's success, what would we say of *their* spirit? But such a temper in these circumstances is far less criminal, than the envious disposition of some ministers and their flocks.

There should be a *spirit of mutual affection* between the members of different churches. They should love as brethren; and that this might not be disturbed, they should avoid, when they meet in their respective social circles, *all detracting and uncharitable reference to the others*. Nothing is more common than for the Christians of one church to make the circumstances and faults of those of another church, the leading topics of conversation. Thus the coals of strife are kindled between these *Christian* churches, and every one present lends his breath to fan the flame. It is melancholy indeed, when our houses are thus converted into

temples for the god of this world,  
the divider of the brethren; and  
our family altar is lent for an  
offering of scandal at his shrine.

Ministers, and leading people in the  
church, should always set their  
faces against this mischievous  
gossip. *All comparisons between  
the talents of the ministers, and  
the respectability of their churches,  
should be carefully abstained from!*  
This is sure to do harm. It is right  
for every church member to be  
attached to his own pastor—and he  
may very innocently think that his  
minister is the best preacher in the  
town—but it is insulting and  
mischievous to express his opinion  
to those who prefer another pastor  
or church.

Also, it is common for the pulpit to  
be converted into a source of the  
most disgusting adulation, and for  
a 'ministerial flatterer' to flatter the  
pride of his flock—by telling them  
how superior they are to all others  
in affluence, liberality, and  
influence. Such fawning, to say  
nothing of its baseness, is  
exceedingly injurious. What is  
intended as a compliment to one  
church is felt as an insult by all  
others in its vicinity. All boasting  
should be most conscientiously  
refrained from, both on the part of  
ministers and people. If they are in  
a state of spiritual prosperity, let  
them be thankful—but not vain-  
glorious or proud of themselves.  
"Love does not envy—it does not  
boast, it is not proud." 1 Cor. 13:4.  
The apostle delivered a very keen

rebuke on those who are the trumpeters of their own fame, when he said, "In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since *many are boasting* in the way the world does, I too will boast. You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise!" 2 Cor. 11:17-19

*Church members should never resent by coldness, and aloofness of behavior, the conduct of those who leave THEIR church, to join another church in the same town.* They have a right to exercise their own judgment as well as we do. And in their view, at least, have as good reason for preferring the pastor to whom they go, as we have for continuing with the one they leave. They may separate too hastily, and not on sufficient grounds—but that is their concern, not ours. I have known cases in which both the minister and his flock have refused even the civilities of ordinary communion to those who have left their church to associate with another. This is a most pitiful and unchristian disposition.

**There are duties to be performed by the church in its *collective* capacity towards other churches of the same denomination.**

1. *We should own them as churches of Christ, cherish the most friendly and fraternal feelings towards them, and hold Christian*

communion with them in all the duties of our common faith and practice.

Such appears to have been the feelings of the primary churches. "The churches of Christ greet you." Rom. 16:16. "Your sister church here in Rome sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark." 1 Pet. 5:13. "You are taught by God to love one another, and you do it towards all the brethren in Macedonia." 1 Thes. 4:9, 10.

2. We should *receive their members when recommended to us, and freely grant honorable recommendations of our members to them.*

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me." Romans 16:1-2. "As for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ. Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it." 2 Cor. 8:23-24

3. We should *co-operate with neighboring churches* for promoting the spread of the gospel, either by local or general institutions.

Many objects of vast importance to the spread of the gospel in the world can be accomplished by the *union* of churches, which cannot be effected without it. Union is power. Places of worship may be opened, the faithful ministry of the word introduced, and churches planted in dark, benighted villages; while all the grand and noble institutions which are organized to save a perishing world, may by this means receive additional support. United fires brighten each other's blaze, and increase each other's intensity; and thus the association of churches enkindles each other's zeal, and provokes one another to love and good works. Nor is *zeal* the only Christian virtue promoted by such unions; brotherly *love* is cherished and excited. The presence of messengers from other churches at the annual meetings of our societies, produces a friendly feeling and brotherly interest, not unlike that which a family experiences, when gathered together at their reunion. One great end of assembling the males of the Jewish nation three times a year before the ark, was to keep up a brotherly feeling between the different and distant parts of the nation. Nothing is so likely to cherish the fire of love, as the fuel supplied by works of zeal.

4. We should be willing to *give and receive ADVICE* in cases of difficulty and importance.

Of course, the independence of the churches, and the right of private

judgment, should be vigilantly watched, and sacredly preserved. We have no dominion over each other's conduct, any more than over each other's faith. The idea of 'control' is as repugnant to Scripture, as it is to reason. And we are to resist unto blood, striving against the usurpation of foreign compulsory interference. But *advice* does not imply control. The dread which has been felt of the simple act of one church's asking the advice of a neighboring minister, or an association of ministers, in cases of extreme difficulty—shows a fear of domination, which is perfectly childish. How consistent with all the dictates of reason, and all the proceedings of civil life, is it, for two parties in a state of perplexity, to ask the opinion of a third; or for one individual in difficulty, to solicit the advice of another. When a minister and his flock are in some critical situation, let them jointly agree to lay their affairs before some two or three neighboring ministers and laymen of sound judgment, for counsel and direction; and how often, by this simple, rational, scriptural process, would a society be brought back from the brink of ruin—to peace and safety!

But what if they should not take the advice thus given by the third party? They must then be left to themselves, and would be but where they were before. The disposition which scorns to ask, and refuses to take advice, savors

far more of the pride of self-sufficiency, than the love of peace; and of the temper which courts interminable anarchy rather than be indebted for the restoration of order, to the opinions and persuasions of another. Men who stand out side of the 'mist of passion', can see more than those who are enveloped in the fog.

5. We should take a *deep interest in the welfare of other churches*, and in a suitable and proper manner express our sympathy, and afford to them our assistance.

We should at our church meetings remember in prayer, the cases of such as are in circumstances of affliction; and in the event of the death of a pastor, how consoling would it be to a bereaved church, to receive letters of condolence from neighboring churches! There is one way, in which the most effectual help may be rendered by one church to another—I mean, *financial assistance granted from such as are wealthy—to those who are poor*. We are informed, Acts 11:29, 30, that the disciples at Antioch sent financial gifts, according to their abilities, to the poor saints in Judea. "Now about the money being collected for the Christians in Jerusalem: You should follow the same procedures I gave to the churches in Galatia." 1 Cor. 16:1.

I am aware, that this is sometimes done out of a fund, raised by the joint contributions of the churches



in a county or district association— but how great would be the effect produced, if a church, in its individual capacity, were from year to year to send a donation to some poor community in its neighborhood! What a lovely display of Christian feeling would this be! How would it endear the churches to each other! It would assist those to gain an efficient and settled minister, who, probably— but for such help, would only enjoy the precarious labors of occasional and incompetent preachers. The comfort of many faithful and laborious ministers would be thus promoted, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ enlarged.

The rich churches in our large cities, and in the country, who, without effort, can raise for your own pastors ample salaries—I appeal to your liberality, on behalf of those many churches scattered up and down the land, which are withering for the lack of a little of that wealth, which you could spare, without lessening the comfort, either of your minister, or your families. I would not rob the funds of Missionary, or Bible Societies, to replenish the little store of gospel ministers at home—but I will say, that no foreign objects should be allowed to interfere with the claims of those deserving and holy men, who are laboring for souls amid all the ills of poverty, and all the cares and woes which such ills must necessarily entail.

Where is the favored individual, into whose lap the 'bounty of Heaven' has poured the abundance of riches, and into whose heart divine grace has introduced the mercy which is full of good fruits? Here let him find an object worthy of his wealth and of his zeal. Let him become the nursing father of our poor churches. *If he spends two thousand pounds a year in this way, he may give forty pounds a year to fifty ministers.* What a means of usefulness! How many infant churches would smile upon him from their cradle; and, as they turned upon him their eyes glistening with gratitude, would exclaim, "My Father, my father!" In how many church-books would his name be enrolled, amid the benedictions and prayers of the saints!

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **THE PASTOR'S WIFE**

A station so honorable, so important, so responsible, must necessarily be attended with duties—numerous, difficult, and of great consequence. *As a wife*, she should be a bright pattern of all that tender affection, that unsuspecting confidence, that cheerful obedience, that undivided devotedness to her husband's comfort, which such a relationship implies—a lovely, spotless

exhibition of marital virtue. No man is in greater need of all the force of marital sympathy and love, than a faithful minister!

*As the **female head of the family**, she should direct her household affairs with judgment, and be a model of order, neatness, and domestic discipline.* A minister derives some degree of respectability from the state of his family. Home scenes, according as they are lovely or repulsive, form a beauteous halo around—or dark specks upon, the orb of his public character. It is required of him that he should rule well his own household—but in this he is *dependent upon his wife*. What a disgrace is it that his house should be such a scene of disorder, as to disgust, by its confusion, the more respectable part of his friends! Some people, if we were to judge from their habits, and their homes, seem to have been born *out of due time*; they look as if the era of their existence were the reign of chaos. ORDER is heaven's first law, and the laws of heaven certainly should govern the habitations of its ministers.

If a **mother**, a minister's wife should *strive to excel in every maternal excellence*. How often is it the case, that a minister's children are talked of almost to a proverb, for their rudeness, ill behavior, and wickedness! In such instances, much blame must be attached to the *mother*!

In her own **personal character**, there are two traits which should appear with peculiar prominence, and shine with attractive luster in a minister's wife; these are PIETY and PRUDENCE.

Her **piety** should not only be sincere—but *ardent*; not only unsuspected—but eminently conspicuous. Her habits, her conversation, her whole deportment, should bear the deep, bright impress of heaven. She should be the holiest, most spiritual woman in the church! Her *prudence* should equal her piety. Without the former, even the latter, however distinguished, would only half qualify her for her important station.

Her **prudence** should display itself in all her conduct towards her *husband*. She should be very careful not to make him *dissatisfied with the situation he occupies*. Many a minister has been rendered uncomfortable in a situation of considerable usefulness, or has been led to leave it against the convictions of his judgment, by the capricious prejudices of his wife; whose ambition has aspired to something higher, or whose love of change has coveted something new.

A minister's wife should consult her husband's usefulness, and be willing to live in any situation, however self-denying its circumstances may prove, where this is promoted. And considering

the influence she has over his decisions, she should be very careful how she employs it *in those seasons when a change is contemplated*. Her prudence should render her extremely careful, *not to prejudice her husband's mind against any individual who may have, designedly or unintentionally, injured her*. In not a few cases, have pastors been drawn into contention with some of their friends, by the imprudent conduct of their wives, who, possessing a morbid sensibility to be easily offended—have reported, amid much exaggeration, affronts which they ought not to have felt—or, feeling, ought to have concealed. Instead of acting as a *screen*, to prevent these petty vexations from reaching his ear, they have rendered their tongues a *conductor*, to convey them to his bosom! They should hide many things of this kind, which it is not important he should know; and soften others things, of which he cannot be ignorant.

In all cases *where her husband is the direct object of a supposed or real injury*, a minister's wife should be very cautious how she acts. Intended by nature, and inclined by affection, to be a partisan and an advocate in her husband's cause, so far as truth and holiness will allow—she should, at the same time, endeavor rather to *mitigate than exasperate* the displeasure of his mind. Her breath, in such cases, if imprudently employed, may fan a flame which, in its

progress, may consume all the prosperity of the church, and half the reputation of her husband. Let her therefore *govern her own spirit*, as the best means of aiding to govern his. Let her calm, conciliate, and direct his mind—which may be too much enveloped in the mist of passion, to guide itself. Let her not go from house to house, dropping sparks and scintillations from a tongue set on fire by hell. If her husband be the head of a faction, let her not envenom their minds with bitter words, which are sure to be rendered still more bitter, by the lying gossipers who carry them to the opposite party. Prudence in a pastor's wife would have often saved a church from division!

A minister's wife *should never betray the confidence reposed in her by her husband, and report the opinions, views, and feelings, which he has communicated in the seasons of their private conversation*. The secrets lie as deposits in her bosom, are to be as sacredly preserved and guarded, as the ring, which, on the morning of their union, he placed upon her finger.

Prudence is to be displayed in all her conduct *towards the church*. Probably, the chief part of this virtue lies in *a proper government of the **tongue!*** A very large proportion of the disturbances which agitate the surface, and extend their influence to the very depths of society, arise from

imprudent language. There appears to be, in one half of society, an incurable propensity to **tattle** what is to the disadvantage of their neighbors; and in the other half, an indestructible appetite to **relish the slander**, when it is gossiped. Now a minister's wife should most anxiously guard against this propensity in herself, and most assiduously labor to abate this appetite in others. Let her, wherever she goes, remember, that there are many waiting and watching for her words, which they will be sure to reverberate with the mimicry, though not with the fidelity—of an 'echo'.

Let *her* tongue never deal in sarcasm, satire, invective, censure, or slander. Let it be an invariable rule with her, **to speak badly of no one!** *She should never appear fond of receiving ill reports from others.* If she has a taste of this kind, gratification enough will be found for her. Like a queen bee, she has no need to roam abroad in quest of honey—she may sit at home in indolent repose, while the whole hive of gossips and tattlers will collect for her an exuberant supply! Let her rather discourage these humming, 'busy bees'—and convince them that she has neither ear for their buzz, nor taste for their honey!

Let her never *betray a secret*, which she has been compelled to receive; nor become umpire between two contending parties,

since, in whatever way her decision is pronounced, she is almost sure to offend one of them. She should avoid, as much as possible, the *appearance* of favoritism. Some there must be, with whom she will be more intimate than others—but this fact, if it be known, would be but little understood.

Her **friends** should be always such, *as by the common consent of the church, would be allotted to her*. Of course, they should not be 'mere minions' selected to sustain the character of fawning flatterers, purveyors of tattle, or tools of selfishness. In all her deportment towards the church, she should maintain a *dignified* consciousness of her station, blended with the greatest *affability* and *affection*. The *law of kindness* should be on her lips, and all her conduct should be so many displays of the meekness of wisdom. Her *dignity* should prevent the wealthiest people from being intrusive with her. Her *kindness* should make the poorest people feel that she is accessible.

Without being a busy-body, and meddling with the concerns of others, she should *make the interests of her friends her own*. Her *advice* and assistance should always be granted when *asked*—but never distributed in a way that would render it unwelcome and little valued. Her influence should be discreetly exerted *in forming the general piety, and godly habits of the younger women*. She should



be the friend of the poor, and be often seen in the chambers of those who are visited with sickness. With so much to engage her attention, she will have little leisure for *visits of useless show—or expensive get togethers*. Such she ought not to be expected to keep up, for **her time can be more usefully and piously employed**. For visits of mere gossip, or etiquette, she ought not to be put in requisition—and if she is, she should resist the attempt which is thus made to enslave her, by the "chains of fashion or of folly." She is the wife of a man—*whose master is God; whose business is the salvation of souls; whose scene of labor is the church of Christ—and the consequences of whose exertions, whether they succeed or fail, are infinite and eternal! Let her act accordingly!*

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **DEACONS**

The institution of the deacon's office arose from a seemingly accidental circumstance which occurred in the church at Jerusalem, the particulars of which are recorded in the 6th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.\* The original design of this office, was to administer the bounty of the church. The first deacons were simply the *almoners* of their

brethren. They dispensed the charities of the rich, for the relief of the poor. And this, whatever has been added by the usages of the churches, must still be considered as its *paramount duty*. What a lovely and attractive view does it give us of Christianity, and how strikingly characteristic of its merciful nature, to behold it solemnly instituting an office, the chief design of which is, the comfort of its poorer followers! Where shall we find anything analogous to this in other systems? Paganism and Mohammadanism have nothing like it.

\* Some people are of opinion that this occurrence was not the origin of the deacon's office, and that the individuals there mentioned, are to be viewed, not as officers of the church—but merely as stewards of a public charity, who were appointed for a special occasion, and not as a general and authoritative precedent. It is said, in support of this opinion, that these individuals are not *called* deacons by the sacred historian, and that, in consequence, they cannot be proved to have been such. It is also contended, that Paul does not specify, in his epistle to Timothy, the duties of a deacon in such a way as to identify the office with what Luke, in the 6th of Acts, has stated to be the duties of the individuals there selected for the primitive church.

In reply to this, I contend that this was the origin of the deacon's

office, and on the following grounds—

1st. Church history informs us, that the office was always considered, from the very earliest ages, as designed for the relief of the poor. If so, how natural is it to trace up its origin to the circumstance alluded to, which so easily accounts for it.

2nd. The solemnity with which the seven people were set apart to their office, *that is*, with prayer and imposition of hands, looks as if their appointment was to be considered as a standing and authoritative precedent.

3rd. If this be not the origin of the deacon's office, where shall we find the account? and what is still stronger, if this be not the institution, Paul has given directions about an office, the duties of which are, in that case, not mentioned in the Word of God. He has certainly said nothing himself of its design—a circumstance which is strongly presumptive of the truth of my view of the case, since his silence seems to imply that the duties of the deacon were already too well known to need that he should specify them. His very omission is grounded on some previous institution. Where shall we find this—but in Acts 6?

4th. The *reason* of the appointment in question, is of *permanent* force, *that is*, that those who minister in

the Word, should not have their attention diverted by temporal concerns; and, therefore, seems as if a *permanent office* was then established.

5th. I would ask any one who takes a different view from that which I hold, what are the duties of the deacons mentioned by Paul? If he reply, as I think he must, "To attend to the concerns of the poor," I would still inquire how he knows that. If he answers, The testimony of ecclesiastical history—I would still ask, On what is the immemorial usage of the church could be founded, if not on the fact mentioned by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles?

By a reference to the origin of the office, we shall learn how widely some religious communities have departed from the design of this simple, merciful, and useful institution. "Those who perverted all church orders," says Dr. Owen, "took out of the hands and care of the deacons, that work which was committed to them by the Holy Spirit in the apostles, and for which end alone their office was instituted in the church, and assigned other work unto them, whereunto they were not called and appointed. And whereas, when all things were swelling with pride and ambition in the church, no sort of its officers contenting themselves with their primitive institution—but striving by various degrees to be somewhat, in name and thing, that was high and aloft,

there arose from the name of this office the *meteor* of an *arch deacon*, with strange power and authority never heard of in the church for many ages. But this belongs to the mystery of iniquity, whereunto neither the Scripture nor the practice of the primitive churches, do give the least countenance. But some think it not inconvenient to *sport themselves* in matters of church order and constitutions." (Owen on Church Government)

The church of England, which retains some of the corruptions of the church of Rome, has imitated her in the total alteration of this office. In that communion, the deacon is not a secular—but a spiritual officer, and his post is considered as the first grade in the ascent to the episcopal throne. He is a preacher, and may baptize—but not administer the eucharist. He is, in fact, half priest, half layman, and does not altogether put off the laic, nor put on the cleric character, until his second ordination to the full orders of the priesthood. The church-warden and the overseer share between them the office of the deacon.

Abuses of this office, however, are not confined to the churches of Rome and of England—but may be found in the ecclesiastical polity of those who separate from both. What is the deacon of some of our independent communities? Not simply the laborious, indefatigable, tender-hearted dispenser of the

bounty of the church, the inspector of the poor, the comforter of the distressed; no—but "the bible of the minister, the patron of the and the wolf of the flock;" an individual, who, thrusting himself into the seat of government, attempts to lord it over God's heritage, by dictating alike to the pastor and the members; who thinks that, in virtue of his office, his opinion is to be law in all matters of church government, whether temporal or spiritual. This man is almost as distant from the deacon of apostolic times, as the deacon of the Vatican. Such men there have been, whose spirit of domination in the church has produced a kind of *diaconophobia* in the minds of many ministers.\*

\* The author writes from observation, not from experience; besides the eight deacons with whom he acts at present, he has already outlived eight more, and both the dead and the living have been his comfort and joy.

I do beseech those who bear this office to look to its origin, and learn that it is an office of service, which gives no authority, or power, or rule in the church, beyond the special work for which it is appointed, and that is, *to provide for the comfort of the poorer brethren*. This is their business. It is true, that by the usages of our churches, many things have been added to the duties of the office, beyond its original design—but this is mere matter of expediency.

It is often said that the duty of the office is to serve tables; the table of the Lord, the table of the minister, and the table of the poor. If it be meant that this was the *design* of its appointment, I deny the statement, and affirm that the table of the poor, is the deacon's appropriate and exclusive duty. Whatever is conjoined with this, is *extra diaconal* service, and vested in the individual, merely for the sake of utility. Such increase of their duties, I admit, is wise and proper. We need people to take care of the comfort of the minister—to provide for the holy feast of the Lord's supper—to direct the arrangements of all matters connected with public worship; and who so proper for this, as the brethren who already fill an office, of which temporalities are the object and design? But these are all *additions* to the paramount duty of the deacon, which is to *take care of the poor*.

Let it not be thought, that this is exhibiting the office in a naked, and meager, and degrading point of view; or as shorn of the beams of its brightest glory. What can be a more happy or more honorable employment, than to distribute the alms of the brethren, and visit the habitations of the poor, like angels of mercy, with words of peace upon their lips, and the means of comfort in their hands? A faithful, laborious, affectionate deacon, must necessarily become the object of justly deserved regard in the church, and be looked up to

with the esteem and veneration, which are paid by a grateful dependent family to their father. The poor will tell him their wants and woes, spiritual and temporal; and ask his advice with implicit confidence. He will move through the orbit of his duty amid the prayers and praises of his brethren, and in measure may adopt the language of Job, "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, then it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor who cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was *a father to the poor*, and the cause which I knew not, I searched out."

Surely, surely, here is honor, much pure, legitimate, exalted honor. Such a man must be, and *ought* to be a person of influence in the society—but it is the influence of *character*, of *goodness*, of *usefulness*. Let him have his periodical visitations of the poor. Let him go and see their wants and woes in their *own* habitations, as well as bid them come and tell their sorrows in *his*. Let him be full of compassion and tender hearted; let his eyes drop pity, while his hands dispense bounty; let him be affable and kind as well as attentive. And such a man shall lack neither honor nor power among his brethren; although, at



the same time, he is peaceful as a dove, meek as a lamb, and gentle as a little child.

The apostle is very explicit in his statement of the *qualifications* which the deacons should possess. "Likewise must the deacons be grave," *that is*, men of serious and dignified deportment; "not double tongued," *that is*, sincere, not addicted to duplicity of speech; "not given to much wine; not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," *that is*, attached to the doctrines of the gospel, and exhibiting their holy influence in a spotless life; "and let them also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Let them be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." 1 Tim. 3:8-13.\*

\*The allusion made to the deacons' wives, appears to me to be a mistranslation, and in the original refers to a class of female office bearers in the primitive church. "*Even so the women.*" As the manners of the Greeks and Romans, and especially of the Asiatics, did not permit men to have much communion with women of character, unless they were relations, it was proper that an order of female assistants should be instituted for visiting and privately instructing the young of their own sex, and for catechizing females of any age. And as the church was then much persecuted,

and many of its members were often condemned to languish in a prison, these holy women were, no doubt, peculiarly useful in visiting the captive Christians, and performing for them many kind offices which *their* sex can best render. Such a one, in all probability, was Phoebe, mentioned Rom. 16:1. Such were the widows spoken of 1 Tim. 5. Such were Euodia and Syntyche, Phil. 4:3. Clement of Alexandria reckons *widows* among ecclesiastical people. "There are many precepts in Scripture for those who are chosen, some for priests, others for bishops, others for deacons, others for widows." Pliny, in his celebrated Epistle to Trajan, is thought to refer to deaconesses, when, speaking of two female Christians whom he put to the torture, he says, "they were called deaconesses."

Deacons should remember, that *all* these qualifications should be found embodied, as much as possible, in *each individual*, holding the office; and not merely some in one and some in another, until the character is formed by the joint number—but not in each member of the diaconry. Some have contended for plurality of elders in a church, because it is impossible to find all the qualifications of a Christian elder stated by the apostle, in *one* person. We are to look for one excellence in one man, and another in the second, and what is lacking in one will be made up in another, until their defects

and attainments are made to unite, like the corresponding parts of a dovetail joint. I confess, however, that this way of making church officers, as it were by patchwork, appears to me a most absurd idea.

The deacons, from their being officers in the church, although their office refers to temporalities, and also from their being generally acquainted with the affairs of the church, will be considered by every wise and prudent minister, as his privy council in his spiritual government, and should be always ready to afford him their advice in a *respectful* and *unobtrusive* manner. "Christian brethren," said a preacher on this subject, "give to the minister I love, for a deacon, a man in whose house he may sit down at ease, when he is weary and loaded with care; into whose bosom he may freely pour his sorrows, and by whose lips he may be soothed when he is vexed and perplexed; by whose illuminated mind he may be guided in difficulty; and by whose liberality and cordial cooperation, he may be animated and assisted in every generous undertaking." And I would add, who would do all this in the spirit of humble, modest, and unauthoritative affection.

In the transactions of church business, the deacons should exert no other influence than that which arises from the esteem and affection in which they are held by the people. All personal and official authority should be abstained

from. Their opinion should ever be stated with pre-eminent modesty; for if it be a wise one, its wisdom will commend itself to the judgment of the people, whose hearts are already prepared by affection and esteem to yield to its influence. Whereas, **the wisest opinion, if delivered dogmatically, will often be resisted, merely because it is attempted to be imposed.**

If a man deserves influence, he will be sure to have it without seeking it, or designedly exerting it; if he does not deserve it, and still seeks it, he is sure to be resisted.

The deacon's duty to the people, is to promote, so far as he is able, the happiness of individuals, and the welfare of the church. In his communion with them, **he should be firm and unbending in principle—but kind and conciliatory in temper and in manner.** In those parts of his office, which are sometimes very irksome and arduous, from the difficulty of serving all according to their wishes, he should guard against everything which even appears to be harsh and unkind. More especially should he do this, when he finds it impossible, in consistency with his duty to others, to fulfill their desires. The apparently insignificant circumstance, which will often occur in our congregations, of being unable to accommodate an individual, or a family, with a seat, may be mentioned with so much

kindness, and with such sincere regret that it is so, as to lead the individual, or the family, patiently to wait for a more favorable opportunity; or it may be done, although without design, in a tone of so much indifference, as to lead the disappointed applicant to relinquish the hope of success, and to leave the church. The secret charm by which the deacon's office may be rendered comfortable to himself, and beneficial to others, is that golden precept of inspiration, "Let everything be done with love!" Or, as Doddridge better translates the passage, "Let all your affairs be transacted in love!" 1 Cor. 16:14.

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **CHRISTIAN PARENTS**

The station occupied by Christian parents, is exceedingly important, and therefore very responsible. We naturally look to the families of professing Christians for the materials with which the "spiritual house" is to be repaired amid the spoliations of sin and death. A large proportion of our members are the children of the godly, and our churches would be still more enriched with the fruits of domestic piety, if that piety itself were more ardent and more exemplary. It is impossible to urge in terms too strong, the sacred duties of Christian parents. *Their* influence

on the prosperity of the church is greater than is generally conceived, or can be fully stated.

The DUTIES of Christian parents primarily relate to their **CHILDREN**. It is the command of God to train them up in the fear, and nurture, and admonition of the Lord. Let your first, and deepest, and most lasting solicitude be for the formation of their *religious* character, and the *salvation of their souls*. Let this regulate all your conduct towards them. Let it impel you to adopt a system of instruction and discipline, which shall have a close and constant bearing on their moral and religious habits. Let it guide you in the choice of *schools* where they are to be educated, the families into which they are to be apprenticed. Act so, as that they may clearly discern, that your most ardent prayer, your most anxious concern, is, that they may be *truly godly*. They should see this interwoven with all your conduct towards them; and behold a uniform, consistent, constant effort to accomplish this object. Let them hear it expressed in your advice and prayers, and see it manifested in all your arrangements.

Alas! alas! how many children of church members are there, who, if they were asked the question, "What is your father and mother's chief concern for you?" would be obliged to reply, "That I might excel in fashionable accomplishments, and make a

figure in the drawing room." There appears to me to be, at the present moment, a most criminal neglect, on the part of Christian parents, of the pious education of their children. Everything is sacrificed to the lighter and more frivolous accomplishments of the female character, and to the literary and scientific acquisitions of boys. *Godliness is a secondary matter.* But ought it to be so? Ought it not rather to be the *one thing needful* for our children, as well as for ourselves?

That Christian who would carry on a system of religious education with success, should enforce it with all the commanding influence of a **holy example**. Let your children see all the "beauties of *holiness*," reflected from your character, and the grand outline of Christian morality filled up with all the delicate touches and varied coloring of the Christian *temper*. The heathens had their little shrines of their gods, which they kept in their own habitation, to remind them of the objects of their religious veneration and trust. Instead of these household gods, you are to be to your families-- lovely images of the great Jehovah! Let your children have this conviction in their hearts, "If there be but two real Christians in the world, my father is one, and my mother is the other." It is dreadful—but not uncommon for children to employ themselves in contrasting the appearance which their parents make at the Lord's

table and at their own; in the house of God, and at home.

FAMILY PRAYER should be performed with great *punctuality*, *constancy* and *seriousness*. It is of course presumed that every Christian does pray with his household. It should not be performed so late in the evening that the family are more fit for sleep than devotion, nor so late in the morning, as for business to interrupt it. It should ever be conducted with the most solemn devotion, and never rendered tedious by *extreme length*. It should be very simple, and have *special* reference to the case of the *children*. That it might be performed with regularity, parents should rarely *sup away from home*. It is a disgrace for a Christian parent to be often seen in the streets at eleven o'clock at night.

Christian parents should resist the entrance of **worldly conformity** into their families. Expensive entertainments, mirthful parties, vain and frivolous amusements, showy modes of dress, should be most cautiously avoided. True religion will not dwell amid such scenes; her refined and spiritual taste is soon offended, and she retires. A Christian's habits should be simple and spiritual. If it be his aim to approach as nearly as possible to the manners of the world without actually being numbered with its votaries, his children will be restrained with difficulty, on the godly side of the



line of demarcation, and be perpetually longing and trying to push onward towards worldliness. The miserable efforts, made by some professing Christians, to be thought people of *taste* and *fashion*; to live half way between the tradesman and the gentleman, show how badly they bear the Christian yoke, and how nearly they are resolved to cast it away as an encumbrance. We should despise these things wherever we see them, if they did not demand claims upon our *pity*, still stronger than those upon our *scorn*. When a worldly temper has crept into the circle of a Christian family, piety retires before it, and the spirit of error soon enters to take possession of the desolate home!

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **YOUNG CHRISTIANS**

These generally form a very considerable class of our members, and have duties to perform appropriate to their age and station. They should be very watchful against the sins to which the ardor and inexperience of their years may expose them. They should flee *youthful lusts*, and be very cautious to abstain from *vanity* and *self-conceit*. Their introduction at so early a period to the church, is very apt, in some cases, to inflate them with pride, to invest them with self-importance,

and impair that modesty of deportment, which is the loveliest ornament of their character. In all their conduct towards the church, there should be an amiable *retiredness* of disposition. They should be *seen* at the church meetings—but very rarely *heard*. It is difficult to conceive of a more disgusting or mischievous spectacle, than a young member *dogmatically* stating his opinion, and *pertinaciously* enforcing it, before men who were grey in the service of God, before his head was covered with the down of infancy.

Young Christians should be very careful not to form *matrimonial connections*, in opposition to the apostolic injunction, "not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Both reason and revelation unite their testimony against the practice of Christians marrying *ungodly people*. What an interruption to marital comfort, what an obstacle to domestic piety, what an injury to the cause of religion, does such a practice bring with it!

There is one way, in which young Christians may bring great reproach upon the cause of God, and that is by engaging the affections of a female, and then abandoning her. This is a species of cruelty which certainly deserves, and always receives, the severest reprobation. It is dishonorable in a man of the world, much more in a church member.

## Christian Fellowship

By John Angell James, 1822

### RICH CHRISTIANS

It is true our churches do not *abound* with such people—but, enriched as our cause is with the principles of divine truth, and patronized by the smiles of Heaven, we can dispense with the blazonry and patronage of secular distinctions.

There are men, however, who, amid the accumulations of increasing wealth, remain firmly attached to the principles of the gospel, and who delight to lavish their fortunes in supporting the cause they love and espouse. Let them consider it as their incumbent duty, to consecrate no small portion of their affluence, not merely in propagating the principles of Christianity abroad—but upholding *the cause of truth* at home. The erection of chapels, the support of seminaries, the maintenance of poor ministers, the establishment of churches--should with them be objects of deep concern.

Let them, in order to abound more and more in such efforts, as well as to exhibit a bright example of pure and undefiled religion, avoid all *unnecessary worldly conformity, and all expensive modes of living*. Something is due to their rank and

station—but more than is *necessary*, ought not to be conceded. There is, in the present age, a disposition, even in professing Christians, to a showy and expensive style of living, which cannot be more effectually repressed, than by the plain and simple habits of those who are known to have an easy access to all the elegancies and splendors of life. "Tell those who are **rich** in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone. But their trust should be in the living God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and should give generously to those in need, always being ready to share with others whatever God has given them. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of real life." 1 Tim. 6:17-19.

Such was the admonition of Paul to Timothy, from which we gather, that rich Christians ought to be far more anxious to give--than to hoard their fortunes. When we enter their mansions and see magnificence in every room, luxury on every table; when we see their extravagant dress and decor, we cannot help saying, "How much ought a disciple of Jesus, who lives in this manner, to give away to the cause of religion and humanity, before he is justified in such an expenditure." There appears to me

to be yet lacking a *proportionate* liberality on the part of the *rich*. *Their* giving bears no comparison with those of the middle classes, and of the poor. The former give of their abundance, the latter of their little; at most, the former only give of their *luxuries*—but the latter, their *comforts* and *necessaries*.

Rich Christians should be exceedingly attentive to the *needs* and *comforts* of their *poorer brethren*. There is a great lack of this in the churches of Christ. "If one of you has enough money to live well, and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help—how can God's love be in that person?" 1 John 3:17. Such people should carefully and tenderly inquire into the condition of the poor, and not content themselves with a monthly contribution at the Lord's supper, to be disposed of by the deacons. And it would be well if the deacons were often to go to the habitations of the more affluent members of the church, and lay before them the case of their destitute brethren.

The more wealthy members should be very cautious *not to assume undue power in the government of the church*. The distinctions of wealth have no place in the kingdom of Christ. No haughty airs, no proud scorn of the opinions of others less affluent than themselves, no overbearing urgency in stating their own views, should ever be seen in their conduct in the transactions of

church business. Their superior wealth, if not attended with a spirit of domination, is sure in every case to procure for them all the deference that is compatible with the independence of the church.

In short, the VICIES to which rich Christians are more particularly exposed, and against which they should vigilantly guard, are pride, haughtiness, love of money, idleness, self-indulgence, luxury, extravagance, worldly conformity, ecclesiastical domination, and oppression of the poor.

The VIRTUES they are called to exercise are gratitude to **God**; humility and meekness to **men**; frugality and temperance towards **themselves**; and liberality, together with tender sympathy to their poorer brethren, and a generous regard to the support of the cause of pure religion and general benevolence.

## **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

## **POOR CHRISTIANS**

**Contentment** with such things as they have, and an *unmurmuring submission* to the appointment of Providence, are most obviously their duty, and should be conspicuously manifested in all their deportment. It should not appear as if they thought it hard,

that their lot was cast in the 'humble valley of poverty'. A cheerful resignation to the irremediable ills of their station, a frame of mind that looks as if they were so grateful for the blessings of 'grace'—as to be almost insensible to the privations of poverty, is one of the ways in which poor Christians may signally glorify God.

The poor should watch against an **envious** spirit. "But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie." James 3:14.

The poor should be conspicuous for their **industry**, nor wish to eat the bread of idleness. "Even while we were with you, we gave you this rule: "Whoever does not work should not eat." Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and wasting time meddling in other people's business. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we appeal to such people—no, we command them: Settle down and get to work. Earn your own living." 2 Thes. 3:10-12. The poor have no right, therefore, to expect, that in consequence of their association with a Christian church, they are in any measure released from the obligation of the most unwearied industry. They are not to be supported in idleness, nor ought they to look for any financial allowance while *able to provide for themselves and their family*. The religion of Jesus Christ was never

intended to establish a system of *religious pauperism*. It is to be feared, that not a few have entered into Christian fellowship on purpose to *share its funds*. This is a dreadful case, wherever it occurs, and should make all the poor members of our churches tremble at the most distant approximation to such a crime.

The only times in which Christians should feel that they have claims upon the funds of the church, are when sickness or old age has incapacitated them for labor; or when the produce of their industry is too scanty to procure the necessities of life. \*

\* It is a question that has been sometimes agitated, whether it is right for a church to allow the members to apply for assistance from the town. Such a question, however, may be set at rest by a law, which, where it really exists, allows of no farther appeal; I mean the law of *necessity*. Some churches are composed in a great measure of poor people, and even of the remainder who are not poor, there are few above the rank of small tradesmen. In this case, when trade is bad, and disease is prevalent, it is next to impossible, if not quite so, for the church to relieve all the needs of its members. But setting aside this extreme case, what law is violated, what obligation is broken through, by our members' applying for a portion of that property, which is collected for them no less than



others, and to which they are legally entitled in common with others? There can be nothing wrong on the part of the poor themselves in applying for this relief, unless they are so well provided for by the church as not to need it. In this case their application would be manifestly an imposition. The only question is, whether a church, tolerably favored with affluent members, ought to allow such application. It would certainly be an act of great generosity in such a church, to render their members independent of assistance from the town—but I do not see by what law this is actually their duty. We stand in a double relationship to the poor, as fellow-citizens and fellow Christians; in our former connection we may ask for them a share of a civil fund, while in the latter we relieve them from a still more sacred source. The poor by entering our churches do not forfeit any of their *civil* rights, and since they are legally entitled to the assistance of their fellow-subjects; it is not necessary that we should take upon ourselves, as *Christians*, those burdens which others are bound to sustain as *citizens*.

The poor should not be **exorbitant** in their expectations of relief; and should the bounty of the church flow less freely towards them than they have reason and right to look for, they should not indulge in the language of reproach and complaint. Not that they are forbidden in mild and modest

language to represent their situation to the deacons.

They should be particularly careful not to manifest an *encroaching* and **begging disposition**. I have known cases, in which the greatest disgust and the most unconquerable prejudice have been excited against individuals, by their proneness to beg of everyone who visited them, until at length their fellow-members, wearied *too soon*, it must be admitted, with the language of perpetual complaint and petition, have stopped visiting them altogether.

**Cleanliness** is a very incumbent duty of the poor. Their cottages may be lowly—but certainly need not be dirty! Filthiness is one species of vice, and cleanliness is not only *next* to godliness—but a *part* of it. The credit of religion often depends on *little* things, and this is one of them!

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **CHRISTIAN TRADESMEN**

A very large number of our church members are engaged in the pursuits of trade, manufacturing, or commerce; and from their very calling are exposed to peculiar dangers, which must be met with proportionate vigilance.

It is highly incumbent upon them to take care against a **worldly spirit**. They are in extreme peril of losing the power of godliness from their hearts, and joining the number of those, of whom it is said, in the expressive language of Paul, that "they mind earthly things." Such people look upon the possession of wealth as "the one thing needful." It is their chief object of pursuit, the chief source of happiness. Nothing modifies or mitigates the desire for riches. They are of the earth, earthy. Now certainly a Christian tradesman is, or ought to be, of another spirit than this. He should be industrious, frugal, and persevering in his attention to the concerns of this world—but still there should be in his mind, an ultimate and supreme regard to the possession of everlasting life. He ought not to be, slothful in business—but then he must be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. He should be seen to unite the *diligent tradesman* and *sincere Christian*; and to be *busy* for *both* worlds. The men of this world should be constrained to say of him, "This man is as attentive to business, and as diligent in it as we are—but we can perceive in all he does, an inflexible regard to morality, and an invariable reference to piety. We can discover no lack of diligence or prudence—but it is perfectly evident, that his heart and highest hope are in heaven. He is neither so elated in prosperity, nor so depressed in adversity, as we are. **He has some secret source of**

**happiness**, of which we are not possessed; and his eye is upon some driving force, which we do not recognize. He is a *Christian* as well as a *tradesman*."

What a testimony! Who can obtain a higher one? Who should seek less?

There are many snares to which a Christian tradesman is peculiarly exposed in the *present* mode of conducting business. The stream of trade no longer glides along its old accustomed channel, where established and ordinary causes impelled its motions and guided its course—but under the violent operation of new and powerful impulses, it has of late years veered from its course, and, with the rapidity of a torrent or the force of an inundation, has swept away the restraint of religious principle, and carried a deluge of **dishonesty** over the moral world.

It is quite time for Christian tradesmen to return, in their mode of conducting business, to the sound principles of Christian morality. Let them beware of *excessive speculation*; and where the property with which they trade, is scarcely their own, let them err rather on the side of caution than of enterprise. Let them beware of all dishonorable means of propping up a sinking credit. Let them view with abhorrence those practices which are resorted to only by rogues and swindlers. Let them tremble and blush at a single effort

to extricate themselves from difficulty, which the world would condemn as unfair or dishonorable. Let their motto be, "whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Phil. 4:7.

A Christian should be careful not to conceal, *too long*, the fact of his being in a state of *insolvency*. A false pride, or a foolish hope, has led many to the dishonor of their profession, to go on floundering in difficulties, while every struggle has only carried them farther and farther into the current of ruin, until at length their fortune and their character have sunk together, to rise no more. I do not say that a man ought in every case to call his creditors together the moment that he discovers he cannot pay twenty shillings in the pound—but he certainly ought to do it without delay, as soon as he ceases to hope that he shall ultimately do so.

Every Christian tradesman *should be very watchful against those artifices, violations of truth, and unfair advantages, which many resort to in the selling of their articles*. It might indeed have become the 'general practice'—but tricks of trade, if contrary to truth and honesty, are clear and flagrant violations of godly duty. **No prevalence of 'custom' can**

**make that right, which in itself is wrong.** The standard of a Christian's morality is the Bible; and whatever is opposed to that, he must avoid and abhor.

A tradesman who makes a profession of religion, *should be most eminent for justice, truth, honor, and generosity*--in all his dealings. His religion should be seen in all his conduct. "I know nothing of that man's creed," said a person of a religious tradesman with whom he dealt, "because I never asked him what he believed—but a more honorable, punctual, generous tradesman, I never met with in my life. I would as soon take *his word* for a thousand pounds, as I would another man's *bond* for a shilling. Whatever he promises he performs, and on time, also." This is adorning the doctrine of God his Savior in all things.

It is very dishonorable, when a Christian tradesman *is actuated by a spirit of envy and jealousy towards others*, and when he employs ungenerous means to prevent their success. No one has an exclusive monopoly, except in the case of patents. Others have as much right to live where they like, as we have. It is *their world*, as well as ours; and to employ our wealth in any case to ruin them, by *underselling*, is a spirit totally incompatible with the essence of religion, and the nature of Christian fellowship. Such an envious person deserves

excommunication, not only from the church of God—but from the society of rational creatures!

It is perfectly obvious, that the tradesman *ought to regulate his expenditure by his income*. The man who lives beyond his resources is a robber and a thief. His extravagance is supported by the property of others; and as it is taken without their consent, it is a felony, for which he is answerable, if not at the court of man, yet certainly at the tribunal of God!

### **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **THE TRUE NATURE OF CHURCH POWER**

"I will build **My church**." Matthew  
16:18

In our conversation upon the subject of church government, it is very common to talk of the power or authority of our churches. But in what does this power really consist, and how far does it extend? Every church has certainly an unquestionable right to regulate all its own temporal and spiritual affairs, to the entire exclusion of all human interference and control whatever. But we must be careful not to carry the idea of independence so far as to trench upon the dominion of Jesus Christ.  
**The power of a church is simply**

**a right to put their own interpretation upon the laws of Christ, and to obey his laws, in the way which they think will be most agreeable to him.**

This is neither understood nor remembered with as much distinctness as it should be. Hence it is a very usual thing for churches at their stated, or occasional meetings, to consider themselves as met to *make* laws, and set in order the affairs of the spiritual kingdom; and a great deal is said about "*our* church," and "the rules that we have established in *our* church." OUR church?! When did it become OURS? **The church is Christ's!** The rules *WE* have established?! The sole right of *making* laws, is with Him to whom the church belongs! The church is a kingdom, of which Christ is *sole* monarch! The New Testament is his spiritual *code*, and all the power we have, is to execute the laws which he has already established. In the whole business of church government, we are to acknowledge the authority, and consider ourselves as doing the will of Christ. Nothing is left to *our* will, to our wisdom, to *our* caprice—but in all things we are to be guided by the law of Jesus, laid down in his word!

In the choice of officers, in the admission of members, in the exercise of discipline, we are not to act upon views and principles of our own—but are to be guided by those we find in the New



Testament. We have no power to *legislate*—but merely to *interpret* the law, and obey. When we meet, Christ is in the midst of us, not only by his essential presence—but by his revealed will; and every authoritative voice is hushed—but that which speaks to us from the sacred canon. When a member is proposed, we are not to ask, "Is he such an one as we think will add respectability to our communion? is he of long standing in the ways of God? is he peculiar in his habits?" but, "Is he such an one as Christ has received?" When a measure is submitted for our adoption, we are not first to inquire into its policy—but whether it is in exact accordance with the general principles and spirit of the New Testament. Every act of church government must be an explicit acknowledgment of the authority of Jesus, as King in Zion, and an act of obedience to his laws.

It is impossible for this sentiment to be stated too frequently or too forcibly. It lays the axe to the root of all the errors on church government, which have crept into the world. The papacy, and the episcopacy, with other ecclesiastical corruptions, may be traced to a lack of proper views of the nature of church power. Let it once be admitted that a church of Christ has a right of *legislating* beyond what is written in the New Testament, and there is no such thing as limiting the exercise of this right, until the authority of Christ is superseded, and his

church is converted into a mere secular institution.

## **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **MODE OF CONDUCTING CHURCH MEETINGS**

Every well regulated church will have its solemn and stated meetings for conducting the business necessarily connected with its existence and progress. Many ministers have imbibed a prejudice against these meetings, and, like Charles the First, who, not finding the parliament as suppliant as he could wish, determined to govern without parliaments altogether--*they* have resolved to rule without calling the church together, except, at least, on extraordinary emergencies. I admit that church meetings have been abused—but this has been more frequently the *fault of the pastor*, than the people. They have sometimes exhibited scenes of confusion, little recommendatory of the democratic form of church government. This, however, is not the error of the system—but the improper way in which it is administered. When ignorance or imprudence is elevated to the chair, order and decorum cannot be looked for in the assembly.

It would conduce to the order of church meetings, if it were much

inculcated by the pastor, and generally understood by the people, that they were meetings for **devotion**, and not for **debate**. They should ever be attended with the usual services of a prayer meeting, *that is*, with singing, supplication, and ministerial exhortation. If business is to be done, it should be thus introduced, and transacted in the spirit, and amid the services of devotion. These times of assembling should be *periodical*; for when they are only occasional, they lose the character of devotional seasons, and assume the form of business meetings, to which the members come prepared for protracted and general discussion.

The admonition of the apostle is always in season—but never more so than in reference to the times of the assembling of the saints, "Let every man be **slow to speak**." And when any one does deliver his opinion, it should not be in a prating, dogmatic manner—but in few words, modestly spoken. Not only the pastor—but the people themselves, should discourage those forward, obtrusive spirits, to whom no music or melody is so pleasant as the sound of their own voice. *Talking* assemblies soon become *disorderly* ones. A wise and prudent minister will set his face against them; and a wise and prudent church will support him in this conduct.

It is, of course, no less the interest than the duty of the church, *to*

*support, at all its meetings, the just and scriptural authority of the pastor.* He should ever be addressed in the most courteous and respectful manner, and every expression of rudeness should be marked with the disapprobation of the members present.

## **Christian Fellowship**

By John Angell James, 1822

### **ADMISSION OF MEMBERS TO THE CHURCH**

#### **WHO ARE WE TO RECEIVE?**

When an individual is known to be desirous of fellowship, information of this should be conveyed without delay to the pastor, who, upon conversing with the person, and making suitable inquiries about his character and conduct, may mention him as a candidate for fellowship. No member should bring forward a candidate in opposition to the opinion of the pastor. It is of course to be expected, that he will never reject an individual—but upon grounds which appear to him to be quite sufficient, and which he will, without hesitation or reserve, communicate to the person himself.

On the part of the church, there is sometimes a very unscriptural reluctance to receive people into membership, until after they have had *a long trial of their Christian*

*steadfastness and integrity.* It is very common for some members to exclaim in surprise, when the name of a candidate is mentioned to them in secret, "What, is *he* going to be proposed to the church? Why, he has not been converted three months." I wish these over-cautious Christians to tell me, what length of time *ought* to elapse after conversion, before the individual is introduced to communion? Has Jesus Christ stated any term of probation, which we must pass through before we are received into the church? Certainly not. What right have we then to fix upon any? Is it not establishing terms of communion, which *he* has not established? Is not this a direct invasion of his authority? If we consult the precedents furnished by the practice of the apostles, they most decisively condemn the overstrained caution of those, who would put a Christian upon the trial of a year or two, before he is admitted to communion.

In the book of Acts, the very **day** in which a man professed himself a Christian, he was added to the church. In fact, his joining himself to the church, was his profession. I would have every step taken to inquire into the knowledge, faith, and conduct of an individual who proposes himself for fellowship; and if they are satisfactory, I would admit him, although he had been converted but a single month; and I call upon the person who would refuse to join in such admission, to

show on what ground he acts. Let him not talk about the necessity of caution, and the possibility of being deceived; this is very true—but it must not be allowed to interfere with the rules which Christ has laid down for the government of his church.

OUR views of policy cannot improve HIS institutions, and ought not to oppose the practice of his apostles. The rule of our proceeding is simply this, "**We must receive those whom we think the Lord has received.**"

Abandon this rule, and we have no directory for our conduct. One person may think a year's trial enough—but another may think two years' necessary. It is truly shocking to see how many excellent and exemplary Christians are kept by some churches, month after month, at a distance from the fellowship of the faithful, under the pretense of *testing their steadfastness*. "We must not take the children's bread," say these ultra cautious disciples, "and cast it to the dogs." **Nor have you a right to starve the children--any more than you have to pamper the dogs!** Our rule is this, "evidence of personal piety, whether that evidence be the result of a month or a year."

The LORD'S SUPPER is intended no less for babes than fathers in Christ; and who will contend that the right way to treat a new born infant, is to neglect him, and leave him to himself, to see whether he

will live? To nurse and feed him are the ordained means to preserve his life. It is precisely the same in spirituals as in temporals. And if it be proper to say of a child that died in consequence of neglect, that he would have lived if proper care had been taken, it is not less correct to say of some people that once appeared hopeful—but afterwards returned to the world—that perhaps, they would have proved honorable Christians, had they not been neglected by the church.

The same unscriptural caution is sometimes displayed towards those converts, who are *young in years*. It is surprising to see what a panic some members are thrown into, when a *young* person is proposed as a candidate for fellowship; and if they happen to discover that the youth is only fifteen or sixteen years of age, they seem to feel as if the church was either going to be profaned or destroyed. Is there, then, a *biblical age* of membership? Is the same rule established in the kingdom of Christ, which is observed in the kingdoms of the world, and everyone considered as unfit for the privileges of citizenship, until he arrives at the age of one and twenty? If not, what right have we to speak or think about the age of a candidate? *Piety* is all we have to inquire into; and whether the individual be fourteen, or forty--**we are to receive him, provided we have reason to suppose, "that Christ has received him."**

The **MODE OF ADMISSION** is various in different churches. On this subject we have no other scriptural guide than mere general principles. The *church* is to receive the member, and any mode which they may adopt to ascertain the sincerity of his piety, is lawful, provided that it is not so rigid as to deter people from applying for admission. In every case, the church ought to have the means of ascertaining the piety of the individuals; without this there can be no real communion. In some churches, the *pastor only* examines the candidate—but this is too great a power to delegate to any one person--and too great a responsibility for any man willingly to incur. In other churches, the individuals are examined *before the body of the brethren*. Another plan is, for the *pastor and two of the brethren to converse with the candidate in private*, and then state their opinion to the assembled church. In addition to this, some churches require a *written statement* of the religious views and feelings of the candidate. To make this an *inflexible standard* of admission, is unscriptural and absurd, since many cannot write at all, and others are so unaccustomed to commit their thoughts to writing, that their letters are so incoherent as to be scarcely fit to be read in public. It is admitted that there are some advantages connected with the plan.



It is deeply interesting to hear a simple, artless account of a sinner's conversion; and by his particularizing the very sermons which were the means of his conversion, he helps in no small degree to raise the pastor in the estimation of the church, by these proofs of his usefulness and success, and to endear him to their hearts.

"In most of our American churches, candidates are required to appear before the assembled church, and detail the methods of grace by which God brought them to his knowledge and service." (*Choules*)