

Ordinances, whereof the church is the only subject and the only object, cannot be administered authoritatively but by officers only,—

- (1.) Because none but Christ's stewards have authority in and towards his house as such, 1 Cor. iv. 1; 1 Tim. iii. 15; Matt. xxiv. 45;
- (2.) Because it is an act of office-authority to represent Christ to the whole church, and to feed the whole flock thereby, Acts xx. 28; 1 Pet. v. 2.

There are no footsteps of any such practice among the churches of God who walked in order, neither in the Scripture nor in all antiquity.

But it is objected, by those who allow this practice, "That if the church may appoint or send a person forth to preach, or appoint a brother to preach unto themselves, then they may appoint him to administer the ordinance of the supper."

*Ans.* Here is a mistake in the supposition. The church,—that is, the body of it,—cannot send out any brother authoritatively to preach. Two things are required thereunto, collation of gifts and communication of office; neither of which the church, under that consideration, can do to one that is sent forth. But where God gives gifts by his Spirit and a call by his providence, the church only complies therewith, not in communicating authority to the person, but in praying for a blessing upon his work.

The same is the case in desiring a brother to teach among them. The duty is moral in its own nature; the gifts and call are from God alone; the occasion of his exercise is only administered by the church.

It is further added, by the same persons, "That if a brother, or one who is a disciple only, may baptize, then he may also administer the Lord's supper, being desired of the church."

*Ans.* The supposition is not granted nor proved; but there is yet a difference between these ordinances,—the object of the one being professors, as such, at large; the object of the other being professors, as members of a particular church. But to return,—

4. It is incumbent on them to *preserve the truth or doctrine of the gospel* received and professed in the church, and to defend it against all opposition. This is one principal end of the ministry, one principal means of the preservation of the faith once delivered unto the saints. This is committed in an especial manner unto the pastors of the churches, as the apostle frequently and emphatically repeats the charge of it unto Timothy, and in him unto all to whom the dispensation of the word is committed, 1 Epist. i. 3, 4, iv. 6, 7, 16, vi. 20; 2 Epist. i. 14, ii. 25, iii. 14–17. The same he giveth in charge unto the elders of the church of Ephesus, Acts xx. 28–31. What he says of himself, that the "glorious gospel of the blessed God was committed unto his trust," 1 Tim. i. 11, is true of all pastors of churches, according to their measure and call; and they should all

aim at the account which he gives of his ministry herein: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," 2 Tim. iv. 7. The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth;" and it is so principally in its ministry. And the sinful neglect of this duty is that which was the cause of most of the pernicious heresies and errors that have infested and ruined the church. Those whose duty it was to preserve the doctrine of the gospel entire in the public profession of it have, many of them, "spoken perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Bishops, presbyters, public teachers, have been the ringleaders in heresies. Wherefore this duty, especially at this time, when the fundamental truths of the gospel are on all sides impugned, from all sorts of adversaries, is in an especial manner to be attended unto.

Sundry things are required hereunto; as,—(1.) *A clear, sound, comprehensive knowledge of the entire doctrine of the gospel*, attained by all means useful and commonly prescribed unto that end, especially by diligent study of the Scripture, with fervent prayer for illumination and understanding. Men cannot preserve that for others which they are ignorant of themselves. Truth may be lost by weakness as well as by wickedness. And the defect herein, in many, is deplorable. (2.) *Love of the truth* which they have so learned and comprehended. Unless we look on truth as a pearl, as that which is valued at any rate, bought with any price, as that which is better than all the world, we shall not endeavour its preservation with that diligence which is required. Some are ready to part with truth at an easy rate, or to grow indifferent about it; whereof we have multitudes of examples in the days wherein we live. It were easy to give instances of sundry important evangelical truths, which our forefathers in the faith contended for with all earnestness, and were ready to seal with their blood, which are now utterly disregarded and opposed, by some who pretend to succeed them in their profession. If ministers have not a sense of that power of truth in their own souls, and a taste of its goodness, the discharge of this duty is not to be expected from them. (3.) *A conscientious care and fear of giving countenance or encouragement unto novel opinions*, especially such as oppose any truth of whose power and efficacy experience hath been had among them that believe. Vain curiosity, boldness in conjectures, and readiness to vent their own conceits, have caused no small trouble and damage unto the church. (4.) *Learning and ability of mind to discern and disprove the oppositions of the adversaries of the truth*, and thereby to stop their mouths and convince gainsayers. (5.) *The solid confirmation of the most important truths of the gospel*, and whereinto all others are resolved, in their teaching and ministry. Men may and do oftentimes prejudice, yea, betray the truth, by the weakness of their pleas for it. (6.) *A diligent watch*