

## CONFESSION OF FAITH.

### CHAPTER 30.-Of Church Censures.

III. Church Censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending Brethren, for deterring of others from the like offences, for purging out of that Leaven which might infect the whole Lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the Gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer his Covenant, and the Seals thereof to be prophaned by notorious and obstinate offenders<sup>1</sup>.

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Question 1.—*Are Church censures necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offended brethren and for deterring of others from the like offences?*

*Answer.*—Yes. 1 Cor. 5 *chapter*. Thus do the Donatists, Novations, Cathari (the so-called “Puritans” of the ancient church), and certain sects of Anabaptists err, who maintain such rigor in Church censures as to deny that the lapsed may be reclaimed or that their penitence may be acknowledged only by God. They are confuted because the Scriptures frequently testify that the edification of the Church of Christ is that for which Christ gave church government and all other ordinances of the New Testament (including this of discipline) to his Church. This is cleared by the following considerations: 1.) Because the apostle, when speaking of this power generally declares the grand and general immediate end thereof to be *affirmatively*, edification of the Church; *negatively*, not the subversion or destruction thereof, 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10. 2.) In like manner, when particular acts of government and particular ordinances are mentioned, the edification of the Church, at least of her members, is propounded as the great end of all. Thus, we see *admonition* is for edification that an erring brother may be gained, Matt. 18:15,16 *and* to deter others from similar sins, Tit. 1:13; 1 Tim. 5:20. Likewise, *absolution* is also for edification, lest the penitent party be swallowed up in too much sorrow, 2 Cor. 2:7.

Question 2.—*Are Church censures necessary for purging out that leaven that might infect the whole lump?*

*Answer.*—Yes. 1 Cor. 5:6. Thus do the Socinians, Anabaptists, Quakers, and other sectaries err, who deny that any church censures should be inflicted upon offenders. Likewise, the Erastians do err, maintaining that there should be no suspension from the Lord’s table, or excommunication from the church. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the power of the keys, is given to the ministers of the church, wherewith not only by preaching of the word, but also by church censures, they open and shut the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 16:19; 18:17. 2.) Because he that offends publicly, and after admonition persists pertinaciously in his sin, should be esteemed as a publican and heathen, Matt. 18:17. 3.) Because the apostle says that we ought to note such an one as will not obey and have no company with him, 2 Thess. 3:14. Now, to note him must be either by excommunication or some other church censure. 4.) Because the apostolic church, being moved with the same reasons, which now are, used the power of the keys,

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<sup>1</sup>1 Cor. 5 *chapter*; 1 Tim. 5:20; Matt. 7:6; 1 Tim. 1:20; 1 Cor. 11:27-34 *with* Jude 23.

and excluded from the sacrament, men that were manifestly contumacious and wicked, 1 Cor. 5:2,3; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Thess. 3:6,14.

Question 3.—*Are Church censures necessary for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the Gospel?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Matt. 7:6. Thus do the Antinomians and Libertines err, who maintain, that it makes no difference whether those professing the Gospel live an holy life. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) The apostle admonishes the Corinthians to deliver such an offender over “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”, 1 Cor. 5:4. Now, church censures being Christ’s ordinances ought to be administered in his name faithfully—this is to vindicate his honor. 2.) This same apostle informs us that he exercised church censures for the vindicating of the holy profession of the Gospel, 1 Tim. 1:20.

If a church has become so degenerate and if the elders are so ungodly that they permit offenses to go unpunished—and thus oppose the godly who excel in orthodoxy and a virtuous life—and use the keys of God’s kingdom against them, such application of censure is of none effect to those who are censured unjustly, and is deemed null and void by other godly members as well. Such use of censure is not according to the ordinance of Christ, but contrary to it, Prov. 26:2. This curse will rather come down upon the heads of those who grieve the hearts of the righteous by their treachery and who strengthen the hands of the ungodly, Ezek. 13:21,22.

Question 4.—*Are Church censures necessary for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer his Covenant, and the Seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders?*

*Answer.*—Yes. 1 Cor. 11:27-34 with Jude 23. Thus do the Socinians, Anabaptists, Quakers, Erastians, Antinomians, Libertines and other sectaries err who deny these censures in whole or in part—whether for pretended liberty or license. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Christ himself warned not to give that which is holy to those who are unclean, Matt. 7:6. Now what is more holy than his Covenant and the signs and seals thereof? 2.) The prophet Jeremiah warns that failure to exercise faithful Church censures procures God’s judgments in withholding his manifold blessings to his Covenant people, Jer. 5:25,26. 3.) Paul tells us that faithful Church censures would prevent the outbreakings of God’s wrath falling justly upon the Church, 1 Cor. 11:30,31.