

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 31.-Of Synods and Councils.

I. For the better Government, and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such Assemblies, as are commonly called Synods or Councils¹.

Question 1.—*For the better Government, and further edification of the Church, ought there to be such Assemblies, as are commonly called Synods or Councils?*

Answer.—Yes. Acts 15:2,4,6. Thus do the Brownists and Independents err maintaining that every particular congregation or church has, in itself, the full power of the keys, without subordination, or subjection to any classical or synodical meeting. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the apostolic church referred all weightier matters, which did equally concern many congregations, to the free suffrages and votes of the apostles, pastors, and select brethren, and not to the determination of any one particular church, or congregation, Acts 15:23-25; 6:2,3. 2.) Because it is evident from Scripture, that there have been many particular churches, and congregations, subordinate to one presbytery, *cf.* Gal. 1:2. For in the church of Jerusalem it is manifest, that there were more than one congregation, Acts 2:46; 11:22. First, from the multitude of believers, who were of a greater number than could be of one congregation, for hearing the word and communicating, Acts 2:41,42; 5:14; 6:1-7; 21:20. 3.) From the multitude of pastors, and ministers, whose pains and labours many churches required, Acts 1:12-14,26; 2:1,14,37,42; 4:31,34,35,37; 6:2; 8:14. 4.) From the diversity of tongues among the disciples at Jerusalem, which were given, not only for the edification of those that were of that church; but also for signs and wonders to others, who were without, and not of that church, Acts 2:8-11. 5.) It is manifest from this, that in those days they had no churches or meeting houses built, but only met and convened in private houses and upper rooms, Acts 1:13; 2:46.

The same is also true of the church of Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth, from the Acts of the Apostles, and other places of Scripture. All these congregations, were ruled and governed by one college of pastors, Acts 15:4. This is evident: 1.) Because all these particular congregations are called but one church, Acts 18:22; 16:5. 2.) Because in that one church, there were church presbyters, who were called governors, not of any one particular congregation, but of the church, which was made up of many particular churches, Acts 20:17; 15:2,3; 13:1-3. 3.) Because the presbyters did meet together for governing the church, and performed acts of jurisdiction, which concerned the whole church in common, Acts 11:30 *compared with* 4:35,37 & 21:18,20-25 & 13:1-3. 4.) Because the Jewish church, which was a body politic, had, in every city, synagogues subordinate to one supreme council or great synagogue, which was at Jerusalem, Deut. 17:8,12; 2 Chron. 19:8,11; Ex. 18:22,26. Seeing therefore dangers and difficulties, for preventing and healing of which the Lord has appointed and set up in that church such a government, may be as great, if not greater, in his church, under the New Testament, than was then: and seeing the Lord no less consulted the good of his church now, than he did

¹ Acts 15:2,4,6.

of old, it follows, that there must be councils, no less under the New Testament than under the Old, to which, particular churches ought to be subordinate, Heb. 13:8. *First*, From the light of nature and right reason; for the law of nature directs to a diversity of courts, namely, where there is any rule or government in a city or commonwealth, and orders the inferior courts to be subordinate to the superior, the lesser to the greater, and appeals to be made from them to the greater, *cf.* Acts 25:11, 12. And in bodies both natural and political, the parts ought to be subject to the whole for the good of both, *cf.* Acts 19:40. Besides there are, and will be, very many ecclesiastical affairs, which will concern many congregations equally and alike, which cannot be determined by any one, Acts 15:2. *Second*, Because pastors and presbyters of particular congregations will stand in need each one of another's help and assistance mutually, Acts 20:17, 28. *Third*, Because cases and difficulties may occur, more entangled and intricate than can be settled and composed by the governors of any one congregation, Prov. 11:14. *Fourth*, Seeing particular congregations which lie near one another, ought to shun divisions and differences, and to live in peace and unity—it follows manifestly, that there ought to be synods and councils, consisting of the presbyters of many particular congregations, which ought to be subordinate to these councils and synods, 1 Cor. 16:1. *Fifth*, From Christ's own precept and command, Tell the church, Matt. 18:15-17. Now, if Christ appointed that for a single brother's offence (he trespassing against God or his brother, for gaining of him, and removing the scandal), he be brought before the church, it follows by consequence, that the same course ought to be taken, when any one particular congregation offends against another, and remains obstinate in their scandalous opinion and practice, *cf.* Matt. 6:26 [the principle of arguing from the lesser to the greater]. For our blessed Lord has sufficiently prescribed a remedy in this place, for removing of all scandals and offences, whether of one brother against another, or of one congregation against another, Matt. 25:40. Indeed, surely, since Christ has consulted so much the conversion of one brother that has sinned, and gone astray, much more will he look to the good and conversion of a whole congregation, *cf.* Jon. 4:10, 11. *Sixth*, Because any one single congregation, with one pastor only, has not the power of ordination, an instance whereof cannot be given, either from precept or practice, in all the New Testament, *cf.* 1 Tim. 4:14 [πρεσβυτέριον] *with* Luke 22:66 [elders; πρεσβυτέριον] *and* Acts 22:5 [elders; πρεσβυτέριον]. In the New Testament, the ordination of ministers was always performed by a college of pastors associated together, Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 4:14.