

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 31.-Of Synods and Councils.

IV. All Synods or Councils, since the Apostles times, whether general, or particular, may erre; and, many have erred. Therefore, they are not to be made the Rule of Faith, or practise; but, to be used as an Help in both¹.

Question 1.—*May all Synods and Councils since the Apostles' days err; and have not many actually erred?*

Answer.—Yes. Eph. 2:20; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 2:5; 2 Cor. 1:24. Thus does the Popish church err maintaining that councils confirmed, and solemnized by the Pope's authority, cannot err, neither in explaining doctrines of Faith, nor in delivering precepts, and rules of manners, common to the whole Church. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because, all the Priests, Levites, and Prophets of the Jewish church, who had the same promises which the Christian church has now under the New Testament, 1 Cor. 10:3, 4; 2 Sam. 7:16; Isa. 49:15, 16; together with the High Priest have sometimes erred, as is clear from the following Scriptures: Isa. 56:10, 11; Jer. 6:13; 14:14; Hos. 9:7-9; Mic. 3:9. The Lord's Prophets that were immediately guided, and inspired by him, must be excepted. 2.) Because, councils under the Old Testament, lawfully called, have often times erred, 2 Sam. 6:1, 3; Jer. 26:7-9; 1 Kings 22:6. And under the New Testament, John 9:35; 11:47, 48, 52; Matt. 26:57, 59, 65, 66; Acts 4:5, 6, 17, 18. 3.) Because, the Pope cannot show proof of infallibility, Rom. 3:4. 4.) Because, it is foretold in the New Testament, that many pastors, and teachers shall become false prophets, and turn seducers; and that Antichrist shall sit in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God, Matt. 24:24; Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Pet. 2:1, 2; 2 Thess. 2:4. 5.) Councils have no authority except when and insofar as their decrees square with the Word of God and are found to agree by a serious and religious examination, Deut. 4:2; Isa. 8:20; Gal. 1:8, 9; 1 Thess. 5:21. For since they represent the church militant on earth in epitome, they are no more placed beyond all risk of erring (whether in doctrine or morals) than the church herself. Since there is no infallible member of her here, it is absurd to ascribe infallibility to the entire body. 6.) It is most evident, that many councils approved and authorized by the Pope, have most foully erred, and that some have openly contradicted others. For example, the Council of Constantinople, convened under the Emperor Leo, determined that the images set up in temples were to be thrown down and broken to pieces, *cf.* Ps. 97:7. Shortly after, the Council of Nice, 787 A.D., which was assembled by Irene, through dislike of the former, decreed that images were to be restored, *cf.* Ex. 20:4-6. Which of the two councils shall we acknowledge to be lawful? The latter has usually prevailed, and secured a place for images in churches. But Augustine maintains that this could not be done without the greatest danger of idolatry. Epiphanius, at a later period, speaks much more harshly. He says, it is an unspeakable abomination to see images in a Christian temple, *cf.* Lev 26:1. Could those who speak thus approve of that council if they were alive in the present day?

¹ Eph. 2:20; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 2:5; 2 Cor. 1:24.

Question 2.—*Are Synods and Councils, though not the rule of faith and practice, yet to be used as a help in both?*

Answer.—Yes. Acts 15:6; 16:4. Thus do the Independents, and other Sectaries err maintaining that Synods and Councils are of no use, much less a help in matters of faith and practice. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) If the apostles who by peculiar privilege had received from God infallibility in the faith, still were unwilling to give sentence concerning the contention about legal ceremonies unless a council was first called, Acts 15:5, 6; how much more should pastors of a later age, who are liable to error, contribute aid and demand mutual help? Prov. 19:20; 24:6. 2.) When any doctrine is brought under discussion, there is not a better or surer remedy than for a council of true pastors, elders, and brethren to meet and discuss the controverted point, Prov. 15:22. There will be much more weight in a decision of this kind, to which the pastors of churches have agreed in common after invoking the Spirit of Christ, than if each, adopting it for himself, should deliver it to his people, or a few individuals should meet in private and decide, Acts 15:23-25. 3.) When such have assembled in one place, they deliberate more conveniently in common, fixing both the doctrine and the form of teaching it, lest diversity give offence, Acts 15:28-31. 4.) Paul prescribes this method of determining doctrine, 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:16. For when he gives the power of deciding to a single church, he shows what the course of procedure should be in more important cases—namely, that the churches together are to take common cognizance. And the very feeling of piety tells us, that if any one trouble the Church with some novelty in doctrine, and the matter be carried so far that there is danger of a greater dissension, the churches should first meet, examine the question, and at length, after due discussion, decide according to Scripture, which may both put an end to doubt in the people, and stop the mouths of wicked and restless men, so as to prevent the matter from proceeding farther.