

David Dickson's
Truth's Victory Over Error
Chapter XXXI. (Part 2.)
Of Synods and Councils.

QUESTION I — Continued.

Ought there to be such Assemblies for the Government and further edification of the Church, as are called Synods and Councils?

Yes.... [Resuming discussion from last time with reasons to demonstrate this point: that the *Brownists* and *Independents* err in affirming that every particular congregation has in itself the full power of church government, and that Presbyteries and councils have only power to counsel, but no power of jurisdiction over particular congregations.]

(5) 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 *common-wealth*, 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. And in bodies both *Natural* and *Politick* the *parts* ought to be subject to the *whole*, for the good of both. Beside there are, and will be very many *Ecclesiastick affairs* which will concern many *Congregations* equally and alike, which cannot be determined by any one.

(1st) Because, the *Pastors* and *Presbyters* of particular *Congregations* will stand in need each one of another's help and assistance mutually. (2ndly) Because, cases and difficulties may occur, more entangled, and intricate, than can be settled and composed by the *Governors* of any one *Congregation*. (3rdly) Seeing particular *Congregations* which lie nigh one to another, ought to shun divisions, and differences, and to live in *peace* and *unity*, it follows manifestly, that there ought to be *Synods* or *Councils*, consisting of the *Presbyters* of many *particular congregations*, which ought to be *subordinate*, to these *Councils*, and *Synods*.

(6) From Christ's own precept, and command, *Tell the Church*; *Matth.* 18.15-17. For if our *blessed Lord* 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*. For our *blessed Lord* hath 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*. Nay, surely, since Christ hath consulted so much the conversion of one *brother*, that hath sinned, and gone astray; much more will he look to the good, and conversion of a *whole Congregation*.

(7) Because, any one single *congregation*, with one *Pastor* only, hath not the power of *Ordination*, an

instance whereof cannot be given, either from *Precept*, or *Practice*, in all the *New Testament*. Nay, the *Ordination of Ministers*, in the *New Testament*, was always performed by a *College of Pastors associate* together: *Acts* 6.6. *Acts* 13.1-3. *1 Tim.* 4.14.

(8) Because, from this doctrine of the *Independents* these and the like absurdities will follow:

First, that the *Prophets* must be *censured*, and *judged* by way of *authority*, not by other *Prophets*, but by the *multitude* and *vulgar* of the *Congregation*, which is contrary to *1 Cor.* 14.32.

(2) That all the *Councils*, in the times of the *Apostles*, which were *convocated* upon necessary occasions for *matters* which concerned many *churches alike*, were but *during the time*, and extraordinary, and so not *obliging succeeding churches*, though the occasions, and causes, why these *Councils* were *convocated* then, are, and will be to the end of the world.

(3) That private *Believers*, must be the *Bishops* of their own *Bishops*, *Watchmen* of their own *Watchmen*. No communion or fellowship among *Ecclesiastick Ministers*. That single and *particular churches*, though they have defiled, and puddled themselves, with the most black, and ugly *Heresies*, with the most abominable faults, and vices, yet are not liable to any *Ecclesiastick Censure*, but must be referred, to the immediate *judgment* of Christ, at the last Day.

(4) That a *College of Pastors*, and *Presbyters* convened together from several *congregations*, shall have no more power of the *keys of the kingdom of Heaven*, than any one *particular man*, that is able to look to the good of his *brother*.

(5) That a *Pastor*, out of his own *Congregation*, hath no power to administer the *Sacraments*, or to preach the *Word*, or exerce any *Ministerial Act*. — From which *Absurdities*, it follows evidently, that this kind of *Church Government* [asserted by the Brownists and Independents] labors under a manifest defect of the *Means of Propagating the Gospel*.

(6) That Christ, hath as many visible bodies, as there are *particular congregations*. That Men and Women, are to be accounted *Members* only of a *particular congregation*, and not of the *Church-Catholick*. And that those who are *excommunicated*, are only casten out of a *particular congregation* not out of the *Church Universal*. [Which is all contrary to *John* 10.16.]

Quest. II. “MAY not the Ministers of the Church of themselves, by virtue of their office, meet in Assemblies, with other fit Persons upon delegation from their Churches, when Magistrates are open enemies to the Christian Religion?”

Yes. *Acts* 15.2, 4, 22, 23, 25.

Well then, do not the Erastians err, who maintain, that the Ministers of the Gospel have no right or power in themselves, or by virtue of their office to meet in a Synod, or Council?

Yes.

By what reasons are they confuted?

(1) Because, the Church of GOD, in the *primitive times*, had power in themselves, to convocate their own *Assemblies*, for *Worship* and *Government*, not only without, but against the consent of the *civil Magistrate*, as is evident from the *Acts of the Apostles*, and *Church Histories*. (2) Though the power, and right of meeting in *church Assemblies* be visible in the *constitution*, and *exercise*, yet it is *intrinsic* and *within the church*, as well as the power of *Preaching*.