

# A TREATISE OF RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS



## UNDERSTANDING THEIR OFFICE AND DUTY

1 Tim. 5.17. Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour.

1 Tim. 3.13. They that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

BY JAMES GUTHRIE



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## Table of Contents

Scottish Covenanters - James Guthrie (bio) .....	3
The PREFACE.....	7
TO THE CHRISTIAN READER.....	9
CHAPTER I. <i>Of their Names</i> .....	10
CHAPTER II. <i>Of the Institution of Ruling Elders</i> .....	11
CHAPTER III. <i>Of the Vocation or calling of Ruling Elders</i> . ....	13
CHAPTER IV. <i>Of the Duties of a Ruling Elder</i> . ....	14
CHAPTER V. <i>Of the Duties of their Calling which are more private</i> .....	16
CHAPTER VI. <i>Of these Duties which are more public, and which they are to perform jointly with others</i> .....	17
CHAPTER VII. <i>Of the duty of elders in censuring scandals and scandalous persons, and receiving of penitents</i> . ....	19
CHAPTER VIII. <i>Of Deacons. Of their names</i> . ....	22
CHAPTER IX. <i>Of the Institution of Deacons</i> .....	22
CHAPTER X. <i>Of the calling of Deacons</i> .....	23
CHAPTER XI. <i>Of their Duty. First of their conversation</i> .....	23
CHAPTER XII. <i>Of the Duties of their Calling</i> .....	24
Endnotes:.....	25

## Scottish Covenanters - James Guthrie (bio)

From "An Outline Of Scottish 'Covenant History' In The 17th Century" From Jock Purves' book Fair Sunshine

Some of our Zaccheus-like men, as full of faith and as unerring in aim as David, have, like him, been slayers of giants. James Guthrie was one of them He and Cromwell knew each other, and the mighty Puritan referred to him as 'the short little man who could not bow.' Covenanter and Puritan! Shall we ever see their like again? What a glorious heritage they have left to us, though somewhat now 'the wild boar from the wood doth waste it.'

As Joses, by the generosity of his character, won the name of Barnabas, Son of Consolation, so James Guthrie, by the stability of his character, earned the name of Sickerfoot [Sure of Foot]. And such indeed was he until he mounted the ladder to the scaffold, where he spoke for an hour, surefooted on the Rock, dying firm in his Covenanting principles. In life and death, he fulfilled the Scripture, 'steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.'

One day a friend would have had him compromise a little. Said he, 'Mr Guthrie, we have an old Scots proverb, "Jouk [duck] that the wave may gang oure ye! Will ye nae jouk a wee bit" ' And gravely Guthrie replied, 'There is nae jouking in the Cause of Christ!' And so it was. That unbending, surefooted, non-ducking soldier of God held his head high until it was taken from him, and shamefully set aloft upon a pike above the thronging Netherbow Port of Edinburgh. There it bleached for twenty-seven years, till lover of the free Gospel Sandie Hamilton, a student for the Covenanting ministry, climbed the sombre Port at the risk of his life, and taking down the skull, buried it reverently away.

James Guthrie had much whereof he might have trusted in the flesh, amongst which was a very liberal education, given not with the object of making him a Covenanting minister. But, meeting with 'yours in his sweet Lord Jesus, Samuel Rutherford,' all he had learned against the non-conforming Presbyterians vanished forever, and among them he became a preacher of the Gospel in 1638, the year when the National Covenant was signed. His name, too, is set there on that great spiritual Magna Charta. While on his way to pen his name, he met the hangman. This moved him somewhat, and, feeling that it was prophetic, it made him walk up and down a little before he went forward. But his signature is there in martyr lustre with the honoured names of those thousands of others on that great parchment of deerskin, 'the holiest thing in all Scotland, a vow registered in Heaven.' Two months before he died, he boldly confessed to the Parliament, 'I am not ashamed to give God the glory that until 1638 I was treading other steps.'

The last twelve years of his life were spent in Stirling, the grey fortress town whose castled rock is ever a symbol of him. Here he lived and devotedly wrought for Christ and His Kirk. Steady in

temper, he believed in the loosening up of the knots of any argument before engaging in further reasoning. Fervent in spirit, and not slothful in business, he was careful, loving and true. An undaunted fighter in a worthwhile cause, and a hater of everything lower than true godliness, such as he was soon, and always, in conflict with the loose-living King Charles Stuart and his like Committees. He utterly refused such a profane ruler any authority in the affairs of the Church. Although dismissed after one big trial, his refusal to allow the king any power over the conscience of a Christian was made much of against him in his last trials, ten years later.

He helped to write the searching pamphlet, *The Causes of the Lord's Wrath against Scotland*, and this paper was the principal pretext for his condemnation and execution. It had the honour of being put on a par with *Lex Rex* by Samuel Rutherford, and copies of both books were publicly burned by the common hangman. To hold a copy of either work was treason against King and government. The purpose of these writings was said to be 'to corrupt the minds of his majesty's loyal subjects, to alienate and withdraw them from that duty of love and obedience that they owe unto his sacred person and greatness, stirring them up against his majesty and kingly government, and containing many things injurious to the king's majesty's person and authority.' But, above all that base slander, the principles they taught are those upon which the true British Constitution is based. It was a noxious doctrine that Erastus taught when he averred that a king was sovereign and supreme in all matters temporal and spiritual, and that if a Church exercised powers of government and discipline in her own lawful sphere, it broke in on the authority of the magistrate. Every page of the proscribed books is for the Crown Rights of the Redeemer In His Church, the freedom of the conscience, and against the so-called Divine Right of Kings.

The wordy indictment set forth against James Guthrie gives some vivid idea of his amazing activity. 'He did contrive, complot, counsel, consult, draw up, frame, invent, spread abroad or disperse - speak, preach, declaim or utter divers and sundry vile seditious and reasonable remonstrances, declarations, petitions, instructions letters, speeches, preachings, declamations and other expressions tending to the vilifying and contemning, slander and reproach of His Majesty, his progenitors, his person, majesty, dignity, authority, prerogative royal, and government'

Shortly after the Restoration of Charles II, in 1660 Guthrie, with others, was apprehended and cast into prison. In February of 1661, he was tried, and in April of that year he made a defence before the well-named Drunken Parliament. It concludes with these words, 'My Lord, my conscience I cannot submit But this old crazy body and mortal flesh I do submit, to do with it whatsoever ye will, whether by death, or banishment, or imprisonment, or anything else; only I beseech you to ponder well what profit there is in my blood. It is not the extinguishing of me or of many others that will extinguish the Covenant or work of the Reformation since 1638. My blood, bondage or banishment will contribute more for the propagation of these things than my life in liberty would do, though I should live many years.' At the close of this speech, some members withdrew, saying that they would have no part in his death, and one made a strong appeal urging banishment But his judges were baying for his blood, and he, with Captain William Govan, a fit companion, was sentenced to be hanged at Edinburgh Cross on 1 June 1661. The head of Guthrie was to be stuck on a pike high above the Netherbow Port, his estate

confiscated, and his family arms torn. The head of Govan, pike-stuck, was likewise to be high up on the West Port. On receiving this sentence, Guthrie said to the members of the Drunken Parliament, 'My Lords, let never this sentence affect you more than it does me, and let never my blood be required from the King's family.' But it was required, with the blood of many others, in the fullness of time.

While lying in the Tolbooth, he saw Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyle, 'not afraid,' as Argyle said, 'to be surprised by fear,' going forth with Christian dignity to his martyrdom. Said Guthrie, 'Such is my respect for your Lordship that were I not under sentence of death myself I could cheerfully die for your Lordship.' There was but a week between their meeting and their parting. He told his wife, 'I am more fortunate than the Great Marquis, for my Lord was beheaded, but I am to be hanged on a tree as my Saviour was.' His wife wept sorely when for the last time she parted from him. 'I do but trouble you,' she said. 'I must now part from you.' And he replied, 'Henceforth I know no man after the flesh'

James Cowie, his dear friend and manservant, was with him in the Tolbooth, and he tells us that James Guthrie ever kept through his busy life his own personal fellowship with Christ, in the fresh joyous bloom of his new birth, as if he had been but a young convert; and thus it wondrously was till his last day on earth dawned, and the summer sun streamed in through the iron bars of his cell windows. Sure-of-Foot arose at about four o'clock for worship, and was asked by Cowie how he was. 'Very well,' said Guthrie. 'This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.' Soon was to be fulfilled the prophecy of his godly cousin, William Guthrie, of Fenwick, author of the spiritual classic, *The Christian's Great Interest*. He had said, 'Ye will have the advantage of me, James, for ye will die honourably before many witnesses with a rope about your neck, and I shall die whinging upon a wee pickle straw. '[die groaning on his bed].'" This was the day and the Lord had made it, and his confessed desire - called by him a lust - that he should die for his Saviour, was to be granted.

His two little children, Sophia and William, came to see him. Taking five-year-old William on his knee, he said to him, 'Willie, the day will come when they will cast up to you that your father was hanged. But be not thou ashamed, lad. It is in a good cause.' Little Sophia and her mother were banished from the country, and part of the savage sentence was that the children and their posterity should be beggars forever - which was to reckon without Him who takes beggars from the dunghill and sets them among princes, and who will not see the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread. On that fatal afternoon of the day of his father's death, while children more knowing were running at the sound of the drum's frightening tattoo, it was with difficulty that little Willie Guthrie was restrained by James Cowie from playing in the streets.

With hands tied together, James Guthrie walked slowly up the High Street to the city cross. Broad-shouldered William Govan kept pace beside him. The one was nearly fifty, the other not yet out of his thirties. Greatheart and Valiant for Truth were to be seen once again upon the human scene. Soon they were upon the scaffold above the serried rows of glittering steel, and Sickerfoot, who had been offered a bishopric and had refused it, stepped forward with loving zeal to give his last message. The great crowd stood hushed to hear him say, 'I take God to record upon my soul, I would not exchange this scaffold with the palace and mitre of the greatest

prelate in Britain. Blessed be God who has shown mercy to me such a wretch, and has revealed His Son in me, and made me a minister of the everlasting Gospel, and that He hath deigned, in the midst of much contradiction from Satan, and the world, to seal my ministry upon the hearts of not a few of His people, and especially in the station where I was last, I mean the congregation and presbytery of Stirling. Jesus Christ is my Life and my Light, my Righteousness, my strength, and my Salvation and all my desire. Him! O Him, I do with all the strength of my soul commend to you. Bless Him, O my soul, from henceforth even forever. Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.' A copy of his last testimony was handed by him to a friend, for his son William when he should come to years. Then further up the ladder of death he went, exclaiming, 'Art not Thou from everlasting, O Lord my God. I shall not die but live.' And in the last seconds before he was with Christ, Mr Sickerfoot, as sure of foot and as full of faith as Joshua, lifted the napkin from his face, crying, 'The Covenants! The Covenants! They shall yet be Scotland's reviving.'

Captain William Govan, intently watching, stood by. His martial shoulders were squared. Gazing lovingly at the dangling dead minister of Christ, he thought of Calvary's Tree. 'It is sweet! It is sweet!' he cried, 'otherwise how durst I look with courage upon the corpse of him who hangs there, and smile upon these sticks and that gibbet as the very Gates of Heaven.' The hangman had him prepared. The brave soldier taking a ring from a finger, gave it to a friend, asking him to carry it to his wife, and to tell her that he died in humble confidence and found the Cross of Christ sweet, and that Christ had done all for him, and that it was by Him alone that he was justified. Someone called to him to look up to the Lord Jesus, and he smilingly said, 'He looks down and smiles at me.' As he ascended the ladder there rang out from him across the crowds these words: 'Dear friends, pledge this cup of suffering as I have done before you sin, for sin and suffering have been presented to me and I have chosen the suffering part.' The rope adjusted, he ended his witness with, 'Praise and glory be to Christ forever.' A little pause, a little prayer, the signal given, and all was over, and he too swung in the fresh summer air. Another who had magnified Christ in life, had magnified Him also in death.

Later, friends came for the bodies from which the heads had been removed. They were lovingly laid out and arranged for burial, while the heads were put up in grisly fashion above the Netherbow and West Ports.

Day by day, week by week, little feet pattered over the cobbles to the Netherbow, and young pained wondering eyes looked up at the head high above them, and returning to what home he had, little Willie Guthrie would hide himself away for hours, saying, when found, 'I've seen my faither's heid! I've seen my faither's heid!' In childhood, boyhood, and youth, in summer suns and winter storms, he saw the head that was given for Christ: 'my faither's heid !' He, too, was for Christ Jesus and the Covenants, spending much time alone in prayer, a serious seeker after God.' He became a scholar of excellent promise, and bent his steps after his father to a suffering ministry. But he sickened and died, and his young head was laid in the earth while the bleached skull of his father still witnessed high above the Netherbow Port of Edinburgh.

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William Guthrie of Fenwick endeavoured to go to the execution of his valued cousin, but he was prevented from doing so by fellow-believers. They feared for his life. This truly wonderful man of God, banished from his church, died a few years later 'whinging upon a wee pickle straw.' He had a complication of diseases, and passed away in great agonies, but was uncomplaining in his suffering. He said, 'The Lord has been kind to me, notwithstanding all the evils I have done, and, I am assured, that though I should die mad, I shall die in the Lord. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord at all times; but more especially when a flood of errors, snares, and judgements are beginning or coming on a nation, church or people.' A student under Samuel Rutherford, he received through him his call to the ministry in something of the fear and terror of the Lord. This turned to a joy and peace in believing which thrilled and filled him to the end. Only forty five when he died, he was accounted in Scotland the greatest preacher of his day. He was the means of bringing thousands to Christ, and of establishing thousands in Christ. His lasting monument is his book, *The Christian's Great Interest*, a true spiritual classic. On this we have the word of John Owen, 'and, for a divine [taking out of his pocket a small gilt copy of Guthrie's treatise], that author I take to be one of the greatest divines that ever wrote. It is my vade mecum; I carry it and the Sedan New Testament still about me. I have written several folios, but there is more divinity in it than in them all.' The famous Welsh-English Puritan, in lowliness of mind, was esteeming another better than himself. But what a commendation, to get such a word from John Owen, 'a scribe every-way instructed in the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; in conversation he held up to many, in his public discourses to more, in his publications from the press to all, who were set out for the celestial Zion, the effulgent lamp of evangelical truth to guide their steps to immortal glory.

## The PREFACE

THE Lord whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem, hath in the depths of his wisdom spoken by terrible things in righteousness against this nation, he hath brought us down wonderfully, and hath made our breach wide as the sea, who can heal us! our bruise is incurable, and our wound is grievous; for the Lord hath wounded us with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, because our sins were increased, he hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst of us, which causeth us to err in every work, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit, and we eat every man the flesh of his own arm, for all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out {303} still, the yoke of our transgression is bound by his hand, they are wreathed, and come up upon our neck, and in the day of our calamity, he hath covered us with a cloud in his anger, that like blind men in the dark we grope for the wall, and cannot find either our sin or our duty: some cry, that there be many of our prophets who have not discovered our iniquity to turn away our captivity: others complain, that not a few of them, have seen for us false burdens and causes of banishment; what shall we do whilst it's thus with us? surely it is meet to be said unto God, shew me why thou contendest with me, I have born chastisement, I will not offend any more, that which I see not, teach thou me, if I have done iniquity, I will do no more; until the Lord shall reveal it unto us, and make us wise in heart to understand this, and speak to us that we may declare it, for what the land mourns. It is fit that in the things of the Lord's controversy, and of our duty whereto we have already attained, we walk

by the same rule, and mind the same thing. I do suppose, that all of us are of one mind in this, that our corrupt mixtures in church-members and church-officers, are one main cause, why so much wrath is gone forth from the Lord against us, and doth abide upon us. The Lord's design upon Scotland for a long time past seems to have been to purge his house, and as to have his ordinances pure, so to have his people and his officers also pure; "I mean not of a higher pitch than the doctrine and policy of our church doth reach, because (I fear {304} not to say it) the measuring line of the sanctuary hath been stretched over these, to give unto them due scripture dimensions, concerning the qualification of church-members, and church-officers: if in these things our practice were agreeable to our rule, we needed not be ashamed, but might speak with our enemies in the gate, and answer him that reproacheth us, our sin is, that being weighed in our own balance, we are found too light; how many church-members are there in Scotland, whom our church discipline (if conscientiously wielded) would cut off as rotten, how many church-officers, whom that discipline would cast out as unsavoury salt?" we have rejoiced in our pride, and been haughty because of the Lord's holy mountain, Zeph. 3.11; But have not so zealously cared, that holiness to the Lord might be engraven in all the pots of his house, Zech. 14.20,21. We have boasted of a reformation of the ordinances, without seeking as really to reform church-officers, and church-members, according to the pattern thereof. Pure ordinances are indeed things precious and excellent, (and what soul among us that hath any measure of the true zeal of the Lord's house, can behold the defacing of these, and not make it the matter of their lamentation) yet these are but means subordinate to a more high and super-excellent end, to wit, that we may thereby be brought with open face to behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and be changed unto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord, that we may all come unto the unity of the faith, unto {305} the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It is true, that all members of the church visible will not be living and lively stones in the Lord's temple, neither doth the rule of church constitution, hold out or cast out all who are not really such; but this is the great scope that all of us ought to level at, that all the Lord's people may be holy, that all who profess faith in Jesus Christ, may walk as becomes the gospel of Jesus Christ. And how shall this be attained, unless these who bear the vessels of the Lord, and to whom the charge of holy things be committed be holy, the sons of Levi must be purified and purged as gold and silver, before they offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness, when that is done, then are the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem pleasant unto the Lord. "I acknowledge that we were once upon a fair way for purging the house of God in this land, they who interrupted us shall bear their burden; but what was done in this thing, was not more refreshing to gracious hearts, than it was sorely repined at, and opposed by others, (a sin that provoked the Lord to stop the current of so rich a mercy) therefore do many now make haste again to intrude themselves upon the congregations whence they were once justly cast out, and not a few amongst the people love to have it so, as though there were a conspiracy" to return to Egypt, and to build again the walls of Jericho, and repair the ruins of Edom. I do also acknowledge it with thankfulness unto the great {306} Shepherd of souls, "that there is a great company of gracious men amongst the officers of his church, who walk in the ways of the Lord and keep his charge, but there be also many that neither do so, nor know how to do it; to say nothing of ministers; it is more than manifest that there is a generation of ignorant, slothful, earthly-minded men, who bear the name of elders and deacons in many congregations, and where such bear rule, what can be expected, but that the people should perish for want of knowledge, and holiness be despised, and lie in the dust, and



congregations still abide in too swarthy a temper. If we might find grace in the Lord's sight, to be throughly convinced of this great church-evil, whence many church-evils flow, and be brought with some measure of sincerity to endeavour the remedy thereof, what a branch of hope might it be, that our reproach should be taken away, and we become a people instructed in the way of the Lord, and walking to the praise and commendation of the gospel, which is now evil spoken of, because of the ignorance and loose conversation of many among us: therefore am I bold as pressed in spirit (albeit one of the weakest and most unworthy) to offer this little treatise, with an eye upon this end; and let me without offence beseech all the ministers, elders, deacons, congregations, presbyteries, and assemblies of this church in the bowels of the Lord Jesus Christ; yea, let me obtest them by the blood of the everlasting covenant, by their zeal of the Lord's honour, by the credit of the {307} gospel, by their love to souls, and" by the fury of the Lord, which he hath caused to rest upon us, because he purged and we would not be purged and as they desire the Lord should bring us again, and cause us stand before him, and leave us a remnant, and give us a nail in his holy place; that they would each of them in their stations, endeavour to take forth the precious from the vile, and purge the Lord's house in this land from corrupt officers and corrupt members; Oh, will we not be made clean? when will it once be?

## TO THE CHRISTIAN READER

THE inducement that persuaded me first to write, and then to publish this little treatise of *ruling elders and deacons*, were chiefly these, (1.) The sensible impression that the Lord hath made upon my spirit, as also (I know) upon the spirits of the godly of the land, of the great prejudice that comes to this poor church by a multitude of men in these offices, who neither know their duty, nor make conscience to perform it. (2.) The vindicating the doctrine of our church concerning these church-officers, that mouths of such who speak evil may be stopped, and others who stumble may be satisfied. (3.) The pressing desire of brethren, ministers, and elders in the presbytery and congregation where the Lord had set me; all which did receive some spirit and life, when I found my name among those to whom the general assembly of {308} this church did commit and recommend this work long ago.

I have endeavoured to handle it with as much plainness and evidence of truth, and as shortly, without wronging of the matter as I could: it is not unlike that some may think, that I have done no great business, because I have brought no new thing. I acknowledge that it is so; what I have said is for the matter (I trust) and in many things for the words too, the doctrine of the scriptures, and of protestant divines, and of our church in the acts and policy thereof; I have but put together in one, and digested into some method what was lying scattered before, that these who either could not, nor would not be at the pains, to search for such things may now have them at their hand. Others may look upon this treatise as not plain enough, or as not so exact, full, and perfect as it ought to be; with these I shall not contend, I have done what I could, at least what I conceived best in order to the ends I propounded to myself: if others shall find favour of the Lord to do better, I shall bless his name on their behalf, and receive and make use of their pains with thankfulness. And some may happily think, that there is here too much laid upon ruling elders, more than they shall be able or willing to undertake; yea, more than the Lord

doth require of them, most of the things that are mentioned by us being incumbent to ministers rather than to elders. It is true what is said of elders' duty, is also the duty of ministers, for whatsoever the elder ought to do by virtue {309} of his calling, that also ought the minister to do and somewhat more, but so far as we know, nothing is spoken here of the elder, that doth not belong to him; if through ignorance or want of ability, or neglect, or custom, elders have not done these things, it is that which ought to be helped, it is now high time for them to awake, and to know and own and follow their duty; and for the church of God in Scotland, to know how much she hath smarted under the hands of ignorant and slothful, yea and scandalous men; we would not always satisfy ourselves "with disguised and histrionical men, puffed up with titles or with idols, dead in sins to be elders; but would seek after holy men, who being endued with faith in God, and walking in obedience, God authorizing them, and the church his spouse choosing them, and calling them, undertake the government thereof, that they may labour to the conservation and edification of the same in Christ;"<sup>1</sup> neither need the qualification, or multitude, or difficulties of the particulars here spoken of, discourage or scare any: It is not so much the measure as the truth of the thing that is to be looked at. We have set down what a *ruling elder* ought to be, in regard to the whole extent of his charge, sundry particulars whereof the most part of ruling elders are seldom called to exercise, and if they be in some measure fitted for these parts of the charge which God calls them to exercise, and follow the same with singleness of heart, they may believe that they shall {310} be assisted, and accepted of God in Jesus Christ; the employment is not theirs but the Lord's, from whom they may expect both their furniture and also their reward; let them arise and be doing, and the Lord shall be with them.

## CHAPTER I. *Of their Names.*

WHAT is necessary to be understood concerning ruling elders may be taken up in the explication of these four, (1.) Their name. (2.) Their institution. (3.) Their calling. (4.) Their qualification and duty.

The word elder<sup>2</sup> in the scripture doth signify divers things, (1.) It signifieth old men, or men come to age, 1 Tim. 5.1, *Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren.* (2.) It signifies those who have lived in the times of old. Matt. 15.2, *Why do thy disciples transgress the {311} tradition of the elders.* (3.) It is taken for honourable and worthy men. Isa. 3.2, *The Lord of hosts doth take away from Jerusalem and Judah the prudent and the ancient.* (4.) It is the name of spiritual officers in the house of God; Acts 14.23, *And when they had ordained them elders in every city:* In this last signification it is taken in this place, for these who bear rule in the house of God, who are called elders because of the knowledge, gifts, experience, prudence and gravity, wherewith they ought to be endowed.

The officers in the house of God<sup>3</sup> who in the scriptures are called by the name of elders are of several sorts, preaching elders or ministers, teaching elders or doctors, and ruling or governing elders, all these three are oftentimes in the New Testament comprised under the general name

of elders, Acts 15.6,22, and 20.17; 1 Pet. 5.1. It is the ruling elder whom we have now to do with; who is so called,<sup>4</sup> not because the power of ruling and governing the church belongs to him alone, for it belongs to the preaching and teaching elders, or to the ministers and doctors; but because to rule and govern is the principal and chief part of his charge and employment, it is the highest act of his office; It is not competent for him to preach, that belongs to the pastor or minister, nor to teach, that belongs to the doctor; but his office is comprised within the compass of ruling and governing {312} the church; and therefore he is called the governing or ruling elder: The apostle in the epistle to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 8, calleth him, *him that ruleth*, and 1 Cor. 12.28, he calls them *governments*, putting the abstract for the concrete, governments for governours. Thus then we have the proper or right name of these church officers, which serves to correct a twofold mistake: The first is, of these who either out of ignorance, or disdain, do call them lay-elders, as if they were a part of the people only and not to be reckoned among the officers of the Lord's house, whom the Popish church in their pride, and others following them calls the clergy, that is, the Lord's inheritance, in opposition to the laity or people whom they look upon, as base and much inferior to the other in worth and excellency, whereas all the Lord's people are his portion, *and the lot of his inheritance*, Deut. 32.9; 1 Pet. 5.3. The second mistake is, of these who do call these only ruling elders, who sit in presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies, allowing to others the name of elders, but not of ruling elders: But every elder in the Lord's house is a ruling elder because the power and exercise of rule and government belongs to every elder, though some of them upon special occasions be called to a more eminent exercise of it, than others. {313}

## CHAPTER II. *Of the Institution of Ruling Elders.*

THE institution<sup>5</sup> of the office of ruling elder is divine, it is not an ordinance of man but of God. The Lord Jesus Christ upon whose shoulders the government is, and who is faithful in all his house, hath in his eternal wisdom thought fit to appoint such an officer in his house, for the right and orderly governing thereof. It is true, that by the sloth, or rather by the pride of teachers, whilst they alone would seem to be somewhat, and by the policy of Satan, and inadvertence of the church, these officers were for many ages together, out of use in the Christian church. But certain it is, that both the Jewish synagogue, and after, the Christian church had seniors, or elders, without whose counsel nothing was done in the church: That the Jewish church had such, appears from 2 Chron. 19.8; Jer. 29.1; Matt. 16.21,22,23,26,57,59; Acts 4.5. And that the Christian church also had them in the primitive and purest times thereof, appears from the testimony of ancient writers,<sup>6</sup> as may be found by these who will take {312} pains to search into these things. But we have a more sure word for the divine institution of elders in the christian church; than any testimony of man, to wit, the testimony of God in the scriptures of the New Testament. The first place of scripture is, Rom. 12.6-8, *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth on exhortation; he that gives, let him do it with simplicity: he that ruleth, with diligence, he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.* In which text, the apostle doth first comprehend all the several kinds of ordinary standing officers in the church of God

under two general heads, to wit, prophecy, whereby is meant the ordinary faculty of right understanding and expounding the scriptures, and ministry, under which is comprehended all other church officers and employments: To each of these the apostle addeth their general duties, to wit, that he who prophesieth, should do it according to the proportion of faith, *i.e.* according to the measure of the knowledge of the word of faith, that he hath received of God. And he that ministers, let him wait on his ministering, *i.e.* let him not do it negligently or slothfully, but faithfully and diligently. Then he subdivides these two generals, into the special offices contained under them; he divides him that prophesieth, into him that teacheth and him that exhorteth, or into {315} the doctor, to whom the word of teaching, or instruction belongs, and the pastor, to whom the word of exhortation is competent. Under him that ministereth, he comprehends, first him that giveth, by whom is meant the deacon, who is appointed for the supply of the poor. *Secondly*, him that ruleth, by whom can be meant no other than the ruling elder, seeing an ordinary ruling officer in the church, who is different from the pastor and teacher is here spoken of by the apostle.

The second place of scripture that proves the office of ruling elders, 1 Cor. 12.28, *And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, afterward miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, kinds of tongues.* Some of the Bibles of the late English translation read *helps in government*, but cross [*contrary*] to the text in the first language that bears *helps, governments*, as two distinct things, and therefore in other editions of that translation, this is helped. In this text the apostle reckons several officers of the church, some extraordinary, which were to continue but for a season, such as apostles, prophets, powers or miracles, gifts of healing, kinds of tongues: Some ordinary, which were to continue in his church to the end of the world and these are teachers, or the ordinary church officers, who are exercised in the word: *helps, i.e.* the deacons, who are appointed for the help and relief of the poor; and *governments, i.e.* the governing and ruling elders; for it is clear from the words, that the {316} apostle by governments doth mean a church officer whom God hath set in his church, for ruling and governing thereof; now this cannot be any other of the church officers, for these he hath named besides, and therefore it remains that it is the ruling elder.

The third place of scripture is 1 Tim. 5.17, *Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they that labour in the word and doctrine.* Which text doth hold forth and distinguish two sorts of elders in the church to whom the Lord Jesus hath committed the power of ruling; one sort who do also labour in the word and doctrine, to wit, pastors and teachers: Another sort who do only rule, and doing it well, are counted worthy of double honour, and these are the ruling elders of whom we speak. From this that the office of the ruling elder is of divine institution,<sup>7</sup> we gather these conclusions, First that it is not a thing arbitrary and indifferent for such to wait upon their charge, yea or not as they please, or as their attendance may contribute for their own or their friends particular which is the custom of too many elders; but that they are bound in conscience diligently to attend and follow the duties thereof, whether they be such as they ought, to the several members of the congregation, or the keeping of session, or presbytery, and other assemblies {317} of the church, when they are called and desired thereto.

*Secondly*, That elders ought to do their office, not formally and hypocritically for the fashion only, but sincerely and honestly as in the sight of God, by whom they are called unto this holy calling, and to whom they must render an account of their discharge of this great trust.

*Thirdly*, They ought not to domineer over their fellow-brethren and elders, but carry themselves humbly and serviceably, as these who are appointed of the Lord Jesus for ministering unto, and edifying his body the church.

*Fourthly*, That they ought to carry themselves with that authority, holiness, gravity, and prudence, that becomes these who are called of God to bear rule in his house.

*Fifthly*, That elders once lawfully called to the office, and having gifts from God meet to exercise the same, (unless they be removed therefrom because of miscarriages) are still elders, though haply in congregations where many qualified men may be found some may be permitted for a time to surcease from the exercise of the charge, and others be put in their room,<sup>8</sup> as was among the Levites under the law, in serving in the temple by courses.

*Sixthly*, That people ought to *obey such as these who have the rule over them, and to submit themselves, because they wait for their souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief*, Heb. 13.17. {318} *Yea, they would know them as these who are over them in the Lord, and do admonish them, and esteem them very highly in love for their works sake*, 1 Thes. 5.12,13.

### **CHAPTER III. *Of the Vocation or calling of Ruling Elders.***

AS no man is to intrude in any employment, without a lawful calling, so much less ought any man to intrude himself without a calling, into any sacred function in the house of God: Heb. 5.4.<sup>9</sup> Therefore before any take upon him to exercise the office of ruling elder, he ought to be lawfully called thereunto. This calling is inward and outward; the inward calling is the testimony of a good conscience, concerning some measure of ability and gifts for the charge, and a sincere and honest inclination and purpose to employ these gifts, for the honour of God, the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the good of souls.

The outward calling is to be after the same manner with that of other church officers, and it stands in their election, and in the trial of their carriage, gifts, and admission to the charge. The election is to be made by the congregation wherein they are to bear charge, Acts 6.3,5, and 14.23. {319}

That it may be gone about in the more orderly way<sup>10</sup> it is fit that a nomination be made by the minister and eldership of the congregation of the persons fittest, and best qualified for the employment, and that the names of the persons nominated by them be publicly intimated to the congregation, and they desired, in case of their not being satisfied, as having exception, or

knowing others better qualified, to represent the same to the minister and eldership. If there be no eldership in the congregation, a nomination may be made either by the presbytery or by the most judicious and godly members of the congregation; particularly masters of families, together with the minister, or one or more ministers of the presbytery, in case of the congregation's want of a minister.

The trial is to be by the minister and eldership of the congregation,<sup>11</sup> or in case of the want of these, by the presbytery: And they are to be tried both in regard of their conversation, that it be blameless and holy, and also in regard of their knowledge and experience in the things of God, and of the affairs of his house, and of their ability and prudence for government; It is true that the trial of elders in their knowledge and gifts required for their charge, hath not been much in use in this church; It being taken for granted, that conscience would be made of making choice of such as had knowledge and {320} were able and fit, or that if any ignorant, or not able and fitted, were nominated that some of the congregation upon the intimation of their names would except against them, but by this means it hath come to pass that many ignorant and unqualified men have been admitted elders in many congregations, to the great detriment of religion, and no small reproach of our church: The apostle, 1 Tim. 3.10, speaking of deacons, which is the lowest rank of the officers of the church, requires that these also first be proved, then let them use of the office of a deacon, being found blameless: And the same reasons and grounds that plead for the trial of a minister pleads also for the trial of elders in a way suitable to the qualifications required in them. Their admission<sup>12</sup> is to be by the minister of the congregation, or one appointed by the presbytery, in the presence of the whole congregation, with the preaching of the word, concerning their duty, and with prayer and humiliation, concerning the spirit of their calling to be poured out upon them, and that the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in their hands: At which time they are solemnly to engage themselves before the Lord, to be faithful, and diligent and watchful over the flock committed to their charge, and in all the duties of that holy and honourable employment; and the people are also to engage themselves to obey them, and to submit themselves to {321} them in the Lord, and to honour them, and highly esteem them in love for their work's sake.

## **CHAPTER IV. *Of the Duties of a Ruling Elder.***

THE duties of a ruling elder be of two sorts, some that are personal, and relate to his conversation as a Christian, others that are official, and relate to his ruling as an office-bearer in the house of God. His personal qualifications,<sup>13</sup> or the duties of his conversation are the same with these which the apostle requires in the conversation of a minister, 1 Tim. 3.2-7, and 6.11; Titus 1.6-8. In which scriptures under the name<sup>14</sup> of *episcopos*, or an overseer, he comprehends all these officers who have the oversight and charge of souls,<sup>15</sup> and sets down what manner of persons he would have them to be in regard of their conversation and carriage: I shall speak of these things with application to the ruling elder. That the ruling elder ought to be of a blameless and Christian conversation is above question, but that it may be more distinctly known what the Holy Ghost requires of such in regard of their conversation: I {322} shall from these scriptures show, first what the apostle would have them not to be, *2dly*, what he would have them to be.

The things of the *first* sort are these: (1.) A ruling elder must not be given to wine, they must not be lovers nor followers of strong drink, nor debord in riot and excess, nor tittle away time in ale-houses and taverns. (2.) He must not be a striker nor a brawler, nor given to quarrelling and contentions. (3.) He must not be covetous nor greedy of filthy lucre, for, *The love of money is the root of all evil, which while some covet after, they err from the faith, and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.* (4.) He must not be a novice, or one newly come to the faith, lest *he be puffed up with pride, and fall into the condemnation of the devil,* the spirits of novices are not yet well ballasted, nor brought low enough by frequent exercises of the cross and so come to be more easily puffed up, therefore there is need that he be an exercised soldier of Jesus Christ, and one who by experience is taught to know the wiles of the devil, and is able to endure hardness. (5.) He must not be self-willed, adhering pertinaciously, and without reason to his own judgment, and refusing to hearken to the judgment of his brethren, though sound and wholesome. (6.) He must not be soon angry, whether upon real or convinced causes of provocation.

The things of the second sort be these, first, He must be blameless, *i.e.* One who walks without offence towards God and men. (2.) If married, {323} *He must be the husband of one wife;* such a one who shuns all unlawful lusts, satisfying himself with, and keeping himself within the bounds of the remedy provided of God. (3.) He must be vigilant, watchful over his own soul, that no temptation prevail upon him; watchful unto every good duty, and to take hold of every opportunity of well doing. (4.) He must be sober, and temperate, of a sound and humble mind, moderating his own appetite and affections, and satisfying himself with a moderate use of the creatures, and of the things of this world. (5.) He must be of a good behaviour or modest, of a grave and staid, yet of an affable and courteous carriage, neither light nor vain, to the losing of his authority, and rendering himself contemptible, nor sullen, and self-pleasing, to the discouraging and scaring away of the flock, by his needless distance and austerity. (6.) Given to hospitality, ready to receive strangers to his house, especially the poor, and those who are of the household of faith. (7.) *Apt to teach, i.e.* A man of knowledge, and able to instruct others, one who hath a ready and willing mind to teach others, which is not so meant as if it were requisite for the ruling elder to be endued with the gift of exhortation and instruction competent to the pastor and teacher, or that he may and ought to employ himself therein, but of that fitness and ability to teach that is competent to his calling, which he must be ready and willing to exercise so far as belongeth thereto. (8.) Moderate, in the first language *epiekes*, rendered patient, {324} 1 Tim 3. Not rigorous nor exacting the height of the law in his dealings, but in his own particular of a condescending nature, and remitting something of strict justice. (9.) Patient, one who without wearying, waits on his duty notwithstanding of difficulties, and doth bear the delays, intractableness, and injuries of others. (10.) *One who rules well his own house*, having his children in subjection with all gravity, to which the apostle adds this reason, *If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?* 1 Tim. 3.5. The church of God is of larger extent than one family, and the duties to be performed in it, be of greater eminency and difficulty, and require more skill, wisdom, and courage, than these that are to be performed in a family. The ruling well of his own house, doth import not only ability for doing of it, but also that he makes conscience of, and actually performs these duties that are required for the right and well ordering of a Christian family, to teach and instruct his children and servants in the knowledge of God, to take care of their sanctifying the Lord's day, of their profiting in



godliness, of their seeking of God, and of their ordering their conversation aright, to read the scriptures, and sing psalms, pray in the family, and to exhort, admonish, rebuke, and comfort all that are of his household, as their condition requires; for if these duties lie upon all masters of families who profess this gospel, than in a special way upon elders, who are appointed to stir up and go before others in the {325} performance thereof. (11.) A love of good men, one whose soul cleaves to those who fear God, having such in estimation above all others, cherishing them, and conversing ordinarily and familiarly with them. (12.) He must be just, one who is straight and upright in all his dealings among men, deceiving no man, defrauding no man, withholding nothing from any man that is due to him, but giving to every man his own. (13.) Holy, careful to express the life of religion, and power of godliness in all his conversation. (14.) He must be one who holds fast the faithful word that he hath been taught; one who is stable in the faith, holding fast the truth of God, without wavering or turning aside to error. Lastly, He must be one who hath good report of these who are without, lest he fall into reproach and snare of the devil, *i.e.* he must be such a one whose blameless conversation, and sober and Christian walking doth extort a testimony even from these who know not God, and who doth by well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, that if any speak evil of him as of an evil doer they may be ashamed who speak falsely against his good conversation in Christ. The apostle comprehends all these summarily in two sentences, 1 Tim. 4.12, *Be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*, 1 Tim. 6.11, *But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.* {326}

## **CHAPTER V. *Of the Duties of their Calling which are more private***

THE duties of their calling<sup>16</sup> are these that belong to their watching over and ruling of the flock, and they be of two sorts; some that they are to perform by themselves alone, and so may be *more private duties*; others that they are to perform jointly with the rest of the overseers of the house of God and may be called *more public.*<sup>17</sup> The duties of their calling that be more private, are all these that private Christians are bound to perform each of them unto another by the law of charity and love, and these are, first to *instruct one another*, John 4.29; Acts 18.26. Secondly, to *exhort and stir up one another, to provoke unto love and good works*, Heb. 10.24,25. Thirdly, to *admonish and rebuke one another*, Lev. 19.17. First privately, and if they will not hearken, then before witnesses; and if yet they will not hearken, then to tell the church; and if they will not hear the church, then let them be to us as heathens and publicans, Matt. 18.15-17. Fourthly, To comfort the afflicted, {327} and to support the weak, 1 Thes. 5.11. Fifthly, To those who are fallen, Gal. 6.1. Sixthly, To reconcile these who are at variance, Matt. 5.9. Seventhly, To pray one for another, Jude 20. Eighthly, To visit the sick, and these who are in bonds and distress, Matt. 25.36. All these duties elders are to perform to the several members of the congregation, by virtue of their calling. The scriptures do expressly mention some of them as incumbent unto them, to wit, *admonishing these over whom God hath set them*, 1 Thes. 5.12; *Visiting and praying over the sick*, James 5.14; *Feeding the flock* by instruction, exhortation, rebuke, and comfort in such a way as is competent to their station, Acts 20.28. The rest we may warrantably gather by analogy and proportion from these; If private Christians be obliged



thereto, much more are Christian elders who have the charge of souls, in a special way obliged thereto. These things are well expressed in the sixth chapter of the second book of discipline: *As the pastors and doctors (say they) should be diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the word; so the elders should be careful in seeking of the fruit of the same of the people. It appertains to them to assist the pastor in examination of them that come to the Lord's table. Item, in visiting the sick; they should cause the acts of the assemblies as well particular as general, to be put in execution carefully; they should be diligent in admonishing all men of their duty, according {328} to the rule of the evangel; things that they cannot correct by private admonition, they should bring to the eldership.*

From what hath been said concerning these duties of ruling elders, these three things follow; First, That they ought to be men of such abilities, as are in some measure able to instruct, exhort, admonish, rebuke, comfort, pray, and do these duties now mentioned. Secondly, That it is needful for them, not only to have some measure of ability for these things, but also to have some measure of dexterity, wisdom, experience, tenderness in following the same. Thirdly, That they be well acquainted with the condition of the congregation, and the members thereof, and therefore be careful to observe their carriage, and frequently to visit and take inspections of families, that they may instruct the ignorant, exhort the negligent, admonish the slothful, and rebuke those who walk disorderly, comfort the afflicted, establish those who waver, visit the sick, encourage these who do well, and see piety and godliness promoted in families, and every one edifying another in love, walking in the fear of the Lord, and comfort of the Holy Ghost. {329}

## **CHAPTER VI. *Of these Duties which are more public, and which they are to perform jointly with others.***

THE duties of elders which are more public,<sup>18</sup> and which they are to perform jointly with others, are these which lie upon them in the assemblies or courts of the church which are made up of preaching elders, teaching elders, and ruling elders: These assemblies are in our church of four sorts; either they are of the elders of particular congregations, which is the church session, or of the elders of more congregations than one, lying near together, which is the presbytery, or of the elders of more presbyteries than one, which is the provincial synod, or of the elders commissioners from all the presbyteries in the land, which is the general or national assembly: To these we may add a fifth sort, to wit, that which is made up of elders from all or divers nations professing the faith of Jesus Christ.

Whilst we speak of elders; of which the assemblies of the church are made up, we mean all sorts of elders; ministers, doctors, and ruling elders. It is true, that in the congregations of our church because of the want of maintenance, {330} there be few or no doctors, or teaching elders distinct from pastors or ministers, who perform the duties both of the preaching elder, and of the teaching elder, only in the schools of divinity are such.

In all assemblies of the church,<sup>19</sup> ruling elders being thereto rightly called, have power to sit, write, debate, vote, and conclude in all matters that are handled therein, Acts 15.2, and 6.22,23.

The things which be handled in the assemblies of the church, be either matters of faith, matters of order, matters of discipline, or that which concerneth the sending of church officers, according to which they have a fourfold power: (1.) That which is called *dogmatic*, whereby they judge of truth and error, in points of doctrine, according to the word of God only. (2.) That which is called *diatactick*, by which they discern and judge of the circumstances of these things that belong to the worship of God, as times, places, persons, and all such particulars in ecclesiastick affairs as are not determined in the word according to the general rules thereof, concerning order and decency, avoiding of scandal, doing all to the glory of God, and to the edifying of the church. (3.) That which is *critic* or *corrective*, by which censures are exercised upon the scandalous and obstinate, and such as are penitent again admitted to the ordinances, fellowship {331} and society of the church. (4.) That which is called *exousiastick*, by virtue of which they send, authorize and give power to church officers to serve in the house of God. All these assemblies are not to exercise all these powers, but to keep themselves within their due bounds, the inferior leaving these things that are of more common concernment to the superior; but in all these powers ruling elders have a share and do put forth the same in exercise, according to the measure that belongs to the assembly whereof they are members, Acts 15.6,22,23. Howbeit the execution of some decrees of the church assemblies; such as the imposition of hands; the pronouncing the sentence of excommunication, the receiving of penitents, the intimation of the deposition of ministers, and such like do belong to ministers alone.

These being the duties and powers of ruling elders in the assemblies of the church, it's requisite that they be endued with such abilities and qualifications as are needful for the exercising thereof; but because all ruling elders are not always called to sit in all these assemblies: but one from every session sufficeth to the presbytery and provincial synods, and a few from every presbytery and from greater congregations or burghs therein to the general assembly, as also a few from the whole church throughout a land to a more universal assembly; therefore, though it is to be wished and endeavoured, that all elders may have due qualifications for all these things, and though special care is to be taken {332} every where to choose the most qualified, yet in particular congregations men may be chosen elders who have not such measure of all these qualifications; they being otherwise men of blameless and christian conversation, and having such a measure of knowledge, and prudence, as is fit for governing that congregation, and judging of the things that are handled in the session thereof, which for the most part are matters of scandal, and trying and admitting of penitents; but if there be any who are not of a blameless and christian conversation, and have not some measure of these qualifications required by the word of God in a ruling elder, no congregation ought to choose any such, nor any session or presbytery to admit them to the charge, for it is not seemly that the servants of corruption should have authority to judge in the kirk of God, and if any such have been admitted, they are to endeavour the removal of them, as they would not partake of their sin, and be found guilty before the Lord of the blood of souls, which cannot but suffer prejudice through negligence or ill guiding of such men.

## CHAPTER VII. *Of the duty of elders in censuring scandals and scandalous persons, and receiving of penitents.*

BECAUSE the government and duty of elders in congregations, lies for most part {333} in censuring scandals and scandalous persons, and trying and admitting of penitents; therefore it is fit to speak somewhat of their right of following their duty in these things.

(1.) For the persons about whom their censures are to be exercised,20 it is all the members of the congregation indifferently and impartially without respect of persons, the rich as well as the poor, the high as well as the low, their friends, kinsmen, alliance, neighbours and acquaintances as well as others. James (chapter 2,) sharply reproveth these who *have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory with respect of persons*, by preferring the rich to the poor; and Solomon says that *divers weights and divers measures are an abomination to the Lord*, must it not then be worthy of rebuke to have the censures of our Lord Jesus with respect of persons, and to weigh the rich and poor, the high and the low in divers balances, by taking notice of the one, and passing by the other. (2.) It is incumbent to them to exercise their power, not only over the people of the congregation, but also over these of their own number, as all christians, so they in a special way who are yoke-fellows in the work of the Lord, ought to consider and admonish one another,21 and if any of them be found negligent or insufficient, or do in any thing miscarry to the offence of the gospel and blaming of the eldership, {334} he is to be censured by the minister, or ministers, and the rest of the elders, as the degree of his offence doth require. The apostle Paul, Acts 20.28, gives charge to all elders to take heed to themselves as well as to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers. (3.) As all sorts of scandalous persons whether in the congregation or amongst themselves: so all sorts of scandals and offences are to be taken notice of by them; The Apostle, 2 Thes. 3.6, commands that *we withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly*, and amongst disorderly walkers, he doth, verse 11, reckon *idle persons*, who do not work at all, but are busy bodies; intimating to us, that even these scandals and disorders, which are by many little taken notice of, and looked upon as no faults, ought to be taken notice of by the church, that all her members may walk honestly, and as it becomes the gospel of Jesus Christ. The acts of our church doth appoint, that whatsoever it be that might spot that christian congregation, ought not to escape either admonition or censure: so in the order of ecclesiastick discipline, 1567. Two great neglects there be that by ignorance or custom have crept in amongst elders in many congregations: [1.] That they do not take notice of the omission of duties, as well as of the commission of faults; as for instance, if there be any member of the congregation who lives idly, and waits not upon his calling, who is not given to prayer, who is not charitable to the poor, who waits not upon the publick ordinances; if there {335} be any master or family who prays not in his family, who does not bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; or, [2.] That they do not take notice of the commission of faults, and scandals of all sorts, but of some few only; such as fornication, adultery, and profaning of the Lord's day, and suffering many others, such as tippling, drunkenness, filthy communications, lying, cursing, swearing, oppression, reproaching

of piety, and godliness, &c.[22](#) to pass without observation. (4.) Elders are to take heed, that they bring in no civil questions and debates before the assemblies of the church, and that they do not use nor inflict any civil mulct, or punishment, upon persons convict of scandal, these being proper to the civil magistrate; the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the censures thereof being spiritual, and not of this world, John 18.36.

(5.) In the taking notice of offences,[23](#) they are to observe this order: If the offence be private, and known to but a few, then are they in the first place to admonish the offender privately, and if he hearken to the admonition and amend it, needs go no further nor be dilated to the church; if he do not hearken nor amend, then is the elder to take with him some of his brethren, and to admonish the offender before witnesses, and if he hearken, the church needs not be acquainted {336} therewith, but if he despise this second admonition, then he is to be dilated by the elders to the church, that he may be called before the session, and convicted and censured by them; this is the order commanded, and prescribed by Jesus Christ,[24](#) Matt. 18.15-17. If the offence be publick and open, then is the offender without such previous admonition to be dilated to the session, that according to the apostle's rule, 1 Tim. 5.20, *They that sin (meaning openly) may be rebuked before all, that others may fear.*

(6.) In these dilations, they are to take heed that they do not, upon every rumor or jealousy, or suspicion, bring men to be questioned publicly as scandalous walkers, but first to be careful to make diligent and prudent enquiry about the truth of the matter, and to see if it can be proven by witnesses, or that the scandal thereof, be common and flagrant, or attended with pregnant likelihoods and presumptions of truth, before they bring it in publick, that so it may appear to the congregation, and to the party themselves, that they are not questioned and challenged without cause.

(7.) In the matter of dilation and censure, they are in the fear of God and in the simplicity and sincerity of their hearts, to take heed that fear or favour, or solicitations, or threatenings, or gifts, or bribes, make them not pass by, or wink at the fault of any, and that passion, or malice, or private quarrels, and particulars make them not to dilate, or rip up, or censure the miscarriage {337} of any, and that they carry with all tenderness and compassion, and moderation towards the offender, that they may approve themselves to his conscience, that nothing puts them on to dilate him, and proceed against him, but the conscience of duty, and a desire to gain his soul, and to purge the church of scandals, Gal. 6.1; 2 Cor. 4.2. It's high provocation before the Lord, for a church-officer to abuse the power given him of God, for edifying of his body the church, unto the satisfying his own passions and corrupt affections.

(8.) They are to take heed, that they do not use the censures of the church as a bodily punishment or penance to satisfy for sin, but a spiritual medicine, for humbling and gaining of the soul; all church censures, even excommunication itself, which is the most terrible and destroying-like censure, being ordained of God for this end, 1 Cor. 5. The apostle commands to *deliver the incestuous person to Satan*, not that he may satisfy for his sin, but that the *spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The word satisfaction may admit of a tolerable construction in church-censures, in order to the removing of the scandal before men; but this being so much abused in the popish church and the hearts of men, being so prone to

turn gospel repentance, to a mere legal penance, and to conceive, that by mere outward submission and obedience to the censures of the church, that the guilt of their sin is done away before God. Therefore elders would carefully shun every thing that {338} may give occasion to the fostering this pernicious opinion, and take pains to instruct offenders in the true nature and ends of the censures of the kirk.

(9.) A great part of elders' work,[25](#) is to travail and take pains with scandalous persons who are now convict, to bring them to repentance, by seasonable and frequent conference; instructing, exhorting, and admonishing them, until they perceive some measure of true and earnest humiliation wrought in them for their sin, and them fitted to evidence and declare the same in publick before the congregation, that so the scandal may be removed.

(10.) They are not to desire or appoint any to profess repentance before the congregation, until the signs of repentance appear in them. The incestuous Corinthian sorrowed exceedingly before the apostle did anything concerning the receiving of him; and the discipline of our church appoints ministers and elders sharply to examine these who offer themselves to repentance, what fear and terror they have of God's judgments, what hatred of sin, and sorrow for the same, and what sense and feeling they have of God's mercies? in the which if they be ignorant, they ought diligently to be instructed; *for it is (say they) but a mocking to put such to publick repentance, who neither understand what sin is, what repentance is, what grace is, nor by whom God's mercies and favours are purchased?* And that after {339} he is instructed in these things, and brought to have some taste of God's judgments, especially of his mercies in Jesus Christ, he may be presented before the publick church; these things are set down in the form and order of publick repentance, appointed by the assembly 1567.

Lastly, when the signs and evidences of true and unfeigned repentance do appear in these who have offended, elders would shew themselves ready and willing to receive them with all tenderness and compassion, and to forgive and comfort them, and confirm their love towards them, 2 Cor. 2.7,8.

The number of elders in every congregation,[26](#) cannot be well limited or determined, but it is to be more or less, according to the quantity of the congregation, and necessities and condition of the people, and as men qualified and fit for the charge can be found. It hath been an evil custom in some congregations, that rather than they would want any of their wonted number, they would choose unqualified men, and that in several congregations, the office of elder hath been given to these of the richer and higher sort as due to such (though happily of no experience in the things of Jesus Christ, and in many things of an untender and blameworthy conversation) because of their condition in the world, or conceiving that their secular power and credit was the best means to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and men qualified with knowledge and experience in the things pertaining to souls, {340} and of a christian and Godly carriage have been passed by, because of a mean condition in the world. Better it is, that the number be few, before we choose the ignorant and scandalous; and that they be of a low degree, if godly; than of a high degree, if otherwise.

That elders may the more conveniently discharge their duty;<sup>27</sup> It is convenient that the congregation be divided into so many parts and that some competent part be assigned to the more peculiar care and inspection of every elder; yet so, as he neglect not to take heed to all the flock of God, over which the Holy Ghost hath made him an overseer.

## CHAPTER VIII. *Of Deacons. Of their names.*

THAT we may also understand what doth belong unto deacons, we shall speak of them shortly, after the same order. (1.) Of their name. (2.) Of their institution. (3.) Of their calling. (4.) Of their duty and qualification.

The word deacon,<sup>28</sup> largely taken, signifies any servant or minister, Matt. 23.11. Therefore in the New Testament it doth sometimes comprehend all church officers, even the apostles themselves, 1 Cor. 3.5. Because every church-officer is appointed of God, for perfecting of {341} the saints, for the work of the ministry, (*eis ergon diakonias*) and edifying the body of Christ. When we speak of deacons in the kirk,<sup>29</sup> it is not taken in this large sense, for any church-officer of whatsoever sort, but for a certain kind of church-officers distinct from pastors, teachers, and elders, to whom the collection and distribution of the goods of the church doth belong, for the supply of the necessities of the poor.

## CHAPTER IX. *Of the Institution of Deacons.*

THE institution of the office of deacon in the church of Christ, is divine; it is a special ordinance and appointment of Jesus Christ, that there should be deacons in his house, Acts 6.3. The apostle gives command to the disciples to choose out among themselves men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom, whom they may appoint over the business of the poor, which was accordingly done, as may be seen in the 5th and 6th verses of that chapter: Neither was this a temporary institution upon this particular occasion, for the church of Jerusalem only, but for all the churches of Christ to the end of the world;<sup>30</sup> therefore the apostle Paul in several of his epistles to the {342} churches, doth mention them, Rom. 12.8. He exhorteth *him that gives* or imparts (*i.e.* the deacon, to whom the care of giving and distributing is committed) to do it with simplicity, 1 Cor. 12.28. He recons helps (*i.e.* deacons who are appointed for helping the poor) among these officers whom God hath set in his church: and writing to the Philippians he directs his epistle to all the saints in Christ, with the bishops (or overseers, under whom he comprehends ministers, teachers, and elders) and to the deacons, chapter 1, verse 1. 1 Timothy, wherein he gives rules concerning the qualification and carriage of all church-officers, he treats of the deacon at large, chapter 3, verses 8-13.

From the divine institution of deacons, we gather, (1.) That the deacon is a distinct officer from the elder;<sup>31</sup> it is a defect and fault in some congregations, that they put no difference betwixt these two, but so confounds and mingles them together as if they were both one, either



appointing none for the office of deacon, but leaving that charge also upon the elders, or else giving the deacons the same power and employment with the elders. It's true, whatsoever the deacon may do by virtue of his office, that same may be done by an elder, as whatsoever is done by an elder may be done by a minister; because the higher and more eminent offices in the church doth include the powers of the lower. It's also true, that the deacons may assist in judgment with the minister and elders, and be helping to {343} them in these things that concern the oversight of the congregation, by information and advice; yet it is necessary that congregations should so far regard the ordinance, and reverence the wisdom of God, in appointing these officers, as to have both elders and deacons, and to preserve them distinct in their actings and operations, not giving to the deacon, or suffering him to assume the elder's office. (2.) That deacons are not to count light of this employment, or any others to esteem lightly of them, because they are called thereunto, and do exercise the same; but that they themselves, and all others ought to look upon it as one of these holy and honourable employments, which the wisdom of God hath thought fit to appoint in his house, for supplying the necessities of his saints. The Lord Jesus Christ himself did not disdain to wash his disciples feet; angels are all of them ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for their sakes who are appointed to be heirs of salvation: Why then should any think it below them to serve in the church of Christ, and to minister to the saints in this employment, 1 Tim. 3.13.

## **CHAPTER X. *Of the calling of Deacons.***

NONE is to step into this office, but he that is lawfully called thereto;<sup>32</sup> Unto their calling {344} it is needful, First, That they have abilities and gifts fit for the charge, together with an honest purpose of heart to serve the Lord faithfully in the discharge of the same, by seeking his honour, and the good of the church. (2.) That they be chosen by the congregation in which they are to serve, which choice is to be made after the same manner as that of the ruling elders. (3.) That trial be taken by the minister and elders, concerning their conversation, that it be blameless and holy: and concerning their gifts, that they have that tenderness, discretion, dexterity, and prudence, that is fit for that employment, and that they be admitted to their charge with prayer and supplication, and opening of the word concerning their duty publicly in the congregation, where they are solemnly to engage themselves to be faithful in the trust committed to them of God, Acts 6.3,5,6; 1 Tim. 3.10.

## **CHAPTER XI. *Of their Duty. First of their conversation.***

THEIR duty is either that which concerns their conversation, or their office and calling; for their conversation, the apostle shews what it must be, 1 Tim. 3.8-12. They must not be double-tongued, nor liars, nor dissemblers, nor deceivers. (2.) They must not be given to much wine, nor tipplers, nor drunkards, {345} nor lovers, nor followers of strong drink. (3.) They must not be greedy of filthy lucre, nor such as are covetous, and whose hearts run after the things of the

world. (4.) They must be grave men of a posed and staid carriage, and not of a light and vain behaviour. (5.) They must be such as hold fast the mystery of faith in a pure conscience, *i.e.* who do not only know the doctrines of the gospel, but do hold fast the faith thereof without wavering, and study to have a good conscience, in walking answerably thereto. (6.) They must be the husband of one wife, such as abstain from all unlawful lusts, satisfying themselves with the remedy allowed of God. (7.) They must be such as rule their own house and their children well, such as command and instruct their children and household to keep the way of the Lord, going before them in the practice of piety and godliness, and all holy and religious duties.

## CHAPTER XII. *Of the Duties of their Calling.*

THE duties that deacons are bound to perform in their calling,<sup>33</sup> may be reduced to these heads: (1.) That they be careful to take exact notice of such as are poor in the congregation, and have not wherewith to maintain themselves. (2.) That they be careful from time to time to collect and receive from the several members {346} of the congregation and strangers that come among them, what the Lord shall incline their hearts to give for a supply of the necessities of the poor, and in a seasonable and Christian way to stir up and exhort to charity and liberality, that the more may be given. (3.) That which is received and collected by them, be faithfully delivered that it may be put in the treasury of the congregation. (4.) That they do timeously make known the several conditions and necessities of the several poor within the congregation to the church session, that provision may be appointed accordingly for each of them, that so the poor may not be put to begging, to the grief of their spirits, and reproach of the gospel. (5.) That they be careful, honestly and in simplicity, without respect of persons, to distribute and deliver to the poor what is appointed for supply of their necessities; and if they be orphans and young ones, or such who have no knowledge or understanding, nor ability to dispose and order the things that concern their food and raiment; That the deacons honestly employ and bestow what is given for their use, that they may be supplied in these things. (6.) That they be careful that what belongs to the poor be not dilapidated, nor applied to any other use: and if that there be any stock in the church treasure, it be improven to the best advantage, for the benefit and use of the poor: Yet so that the poor be rather always supplied, than moneys treasured up for a vain show. (7.) That they be careful to take notice of these who are sick that they may acquaint {347} the ministers and elders therewith for visiting of them, and if that they be poor their necessities may be supplied.

That deacons may the more conveniently discharge their duty: It's fit that some part of the congregation be assigned to every one of them, for the better inspection of the poor thereof, and that the diets of collecting for the poor be divided amongst them.

The number of deacons in every congregation is to be according to the proportion of the congregation, and of the poor therein: and tho' there be no necessity of an equal number of elders and deacons, yet it is fit that each elder have some deacon to be assisting to him in the bounds of which he hath more peculiar inspection, that so both the one and the other may



discharge their duty, with the greater facility to themselves, and with the greater benefit and advantage of the congregation.

F I N I S.

## Endnotes:

- [1.](#) Junius Eccles. *l. c.* 3.
- [2.](#) The 2nd Book of Discipline, c. 6. s. 1. Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland, part. 1, cap. 1.
- [3.](#) The 2nd Book of Discipline, chap. 6. sect. 1.
- [4.](#) The 2nd Book of Discipline, chap. 6, sect. 3.
- [5.](#) The 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 6, section 2.
- [6.](#) Ambros. Com. on 1 Tim. 5.1; Tert. in his 34. chap. of Apol.; Basil. Mag. Com. on Isa. 3.2; Her. on that same place; Aug. ep. 1. 37.; Greg. con. Cels. lib. 3; Aug. lib. 3. contra Crescen. chap. 56.
- [7.](#) 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 3, section 13-16. Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland, part 1, chapter 2, pages 11 & 17.
- [8.](#) 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 6, section 3.
- [9.](#) 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 3.
- [10.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, head 8, touching the Election of Elders and Deacons.
- [11.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, head 8.
- [12.](#) See the manner of electing and admitting Ministers and Elders prefixed to the Old Psalm Book.
- [13.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, head 8. 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 6.
- [14.](#) The manner of electing Ministers and Elders.
- [15.](#) Jun. Eccles. lib. 2, chapter 2, chapter 3.
- [16.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, head 8; 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 6.

[17.](#) Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland, part 1, chapter 2; part 1, page 15; Junius Eccles. lib. 2. cap. 3. pag. 107.

[18.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, head 8; 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 6; The Office and Duty of Elders prefixed to Psalms.

[19.](#) 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 6 and chapter 7.

[20.](#) 1st Book of Discipline concerning persons subject to discipline. 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter i. 7.

[21.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, head 8.—The weekly assembly of ministers, elders, and deacons, prefixed to the old psalm book.

[22.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, chapter 7, section 6.

[23.](#) The order of Ecclesiastick Discipline, appointed by the assembly, 1561. And in the order of excommunication, commanded to be printed by the assembly, 1571.

[24.](#) 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 6, section 12.

[25.](#) The Form and order of Publick Repentance prefixed to the old Psalm book.

[26.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, chapter 6, section 4.

[27.](#) Acts of the Assembly, 1646.

[28.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, chapter 8.

[29.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, chapter 8.

[30.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, chapter 8.

[31.](#) 1st Book of Discipline, chapter 2, page 74.

[32.](#) 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 8.

[33.](#) 2nd Book of Discipline, chapter 8.