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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

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EDITED BY

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continues to flow on, also through Holland's plains, and to lave the thirst of countless souls. Even among the men of denial two lines distinguish themselves with sufficient clearness, the one, that which runs upwards, the other, that which makes for below. With regard to the second of these, it can already be foreseen that even the very last point must yet be attained: Atheism and the unbridled license of the flesh. We know indeed from the Apostolic word that the great Apostacy must come, and that no testimony in defence of the fiercely assaulted faith, however powerful, can avail to preserve the professing Church from the great tribulation which awaits her not long before the approaching end. But among the better disposed, whose countenance though veiled is turned towards the everlasting East, begin already to be witnessed preludes of a worthier future, and it is manifest for many a one who is not hopelessly blinded that the spirit which always denies does, as an inevitable consequence, ultimately stand self-condemned. "Magna est veritas, et prævalebit" was for years the motto of one of the organs of unbelief in our country ("De Dageraad"); much more fitting are these words, as the triumphant language of quiet strength, in the lips of those who in their own experience know the gospel to be the power of God unto salvation. The assurance of faith, however, far from dispensing in any degree with the necessity of zeal and effort, calls and impels thereto with a force such as nothing else can exert. For the triumph of the kingdom of God in Holland everything depends on the question whether Christians, and especially the ministers of the Church, understand the signs of the times and show themselves really on a level with their vocation, now more than ever sublime. Not, as the disputing scribes and Pharisees in the days of Christ, to weary themselves and the congregation with things "which minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith;"* but as the good Samaritan, in presence of the growing misery of the age, to gird themselves for the labor of ministering love, and in the strength of this love to save what is still to be saved, to bind up what is wounded, and to manifest to the opponent by the very glow of charity on which side is to be found the highest truth and the inviolable right, in the midst of all the conflict of parties and of opinions—that is the great task to which the Church must feel herself supremely called. If the Lord makes us faithful to this vocation His own word will be verified afresh: "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice;" and, with greater justice than this last quarter of the nineteenth century will assuredly the first of the twentieth speak of a truly *Christian and God-glorifying* HOLLAND.

Utrecht, 1880.

J. J. VAN OOSTERZEE.

The following is the paper (see p. 729) of the REV. PROF. LEROY J. HALSEY, D. D., LL. D., of Chicago, Illinois, on

CHURCH DISCIPLINE: ITS PROVINCE AND USE.

Under the Presbyterian Ecclesiastical System, Discipline properly falls into two distinct departments, each having its own tribunal of original jurisdiction, and its own sphere of administration. The first relates to the conduct of the ministry, and is committed to the hands of the Presbytery as its proper tribunal. The second relates to the conduct of the membership, including elders and deacons, and is entrusted to the hands of the Session of each particular congregation. In this paper we shall confine our remarks to the second of these applications of Discipline, as it is exercised by the Pastor and Ruling Elders of the local church over the body of members committed to their parochial oversight, and amenable to their authority.

In discussing the true Province and Use of Church Discipline, three points must claim attention, namely:

- I. The Extent and Limitations of Discipline.
- II. The proper Ends to be secured by it.
- III. The best Means of securing those ends.

The last will demand special consideration as involving many important practical questions.

* 1 Tim. i. 4.

I. As to the extent to which discipline is to be applied, and the limitations that restrict it, it is sufficient to say that the Scriptures are the ultimate standard of duty, not less than of doctrine. The law of Christ, therefore, as revealed in Scripture, must be the supreme and final test of all Christian conduct and opinion, both for the church member and the church office-bearer. Hence there can be no legitimate exercise of discipline, except within the limits of things clearly prohibited by the law of Christ. All rules of ecclesiastical discipline must be in full accordance with the supreme law of Christ, as it regards things approved or condemned by that law; and no act of discipline is of binding authority on the conscience which is in anything contrary to his law or beyond it. This important principle is emphatically set forth in that memorable declaration of the Westminster Confession of Faith: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also."

The same equitable principle is also fully recognized in the Presbyterian Book of Discipline. Discipline is well defined as the exercise of that authority and the application of that system of laws which the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed in his Church. It has been appointed for the removal and prevention of offences. This is its true scriptural idea. But in defining what an offence is, this authority tells us that "an offence is anything in the principle or practice of a church member which is contrary to the word of God: or which, if it be not in its own nature sinful, may tempt others to sin, or mar their spiritual edification. Nothing, therefore, ought to be considered by any judicatory as an offence, or admitted as matter of accusation, which cannot be proved to be such from Scripture, or from the regulations and practice of the Church founded on Scripture, and which does not involve those evils which discipline is intended to prevent."

From this it appears that there are two very different classes of offences, which may subject church members to formal discipline: first, those which involve acts sinful in themselves, as, for example, breaches of the Decalogue, like theft, adultery, profanity; and, secondly, those which are contrary to church order, injurious to others, and which mar the spiritual edification of the body, as, for example, all those indulgences in worldly pleasure and amusement, which, though not sinful *per se*, are often sinful from excess, and inexpedient. On the first class there can be no difference of opinion among Christians, and but little danger of a misapplication of discipline. On the second there is always room for much caution, and for a very wise discretion in the administration of formal discipline. Some evangelical churches have questioned whether it is ever wise to apply the rules of a rigid discipline to this second class of transgressions, and they virtually ignore them. As Presbyterians, we may well hesitate before we exact a rigid enforcement of the rules of formal discipline for acts which are proved to be sinful only by inference, or are shown to be such merely on the ground of inexpediency. We may have no hesitation in thinking them wrong in a church member. But then it is not every wrong thing that ought to be punished by a church court in an act of formal discipline. There may be a better, though less formal, way to reach and rectify the wrong.

In fact, our Book of Discipline wisely cautions the church tribunals against entertaining accusations for offences not sustained by the Scriptures, or for which there is not sufficient evidence; inasmuch as nothing tends more to weaken the authority of all discipline, and in the end to render discipline more injurious, than the original offence. If it should be said that the church authorities may think these offences of the second class injurious to the peace and purity of the Church, and therefore fitting subjects for its formal discipline, the answer is, that the church tribunals have no right to think that wrong and actionable which Christ himself has not condemned. We ought not to make a law binding on the conscience of the member and subjecting him to church censures where the Scriptures lay down no law. If

we do, and subject men to punishment, on points as extra-judicial, as the singing or the not singing of a particular form of praise to God, then it is the Church itself, and not the individual, who commits the offence. In all such cases discipline is perverted from its true intent, and becomes a great wrong.

If these views be correct and scriptural, then we see clearly what should be the legitimate province, extent and limitations of church discipline. It has no province whatever outside of the Scriptures, or outside of those principles and duties in the life of a church member on which Christ, through his word, has uttered a clear and certain voice. Points of doubtful interpretation do not belong to its sphere. Points of merely inferential criminality, or of merely conventional and self-imposed impropriety and inexpediency, ought not to be included within its law. All these can be best regulated and rectified by being left to the conscience of the church member under the teaching of the word of God and the authorized instructions of the pulpit. While church discipline must take cognizance only of such offences as are clearly condemned in Scripture, it does not follow that every departure from duty in a Christian is to be made a matter of church discipline. If so, the Church would have perpetual employment on the single labor of disciplining its members, even the best of them. Much has to be left to the self-discipline of the individual conscience, according to the principle laid down by St. Paul: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth." If, however, the tribunals of the church should undertake to enforce this higher law of the individual conscience upon its members by discipline, what then would become of the liberty and the conscience?

It is easy to see how a too rigid exercise of discipline may be pushed to that extent in which it would defeat its own ends by destroying the free and enlightened action of the individual conscience, or else of bringing that conscience into a state of sullen opposition, and even of open defiance, to all church authority. Where this is the case, the remedy is certainly worse than the disease.

Hence we conclude that while church discipline is a good and necessary thing, and while it covers the whole life and conduct of the Christian professor as long as he lives, it must not itself create offences by being extended to acts or opinions not clearly condemned in the word of God. It is not to be denied that this unlawful extension of its province, and consequent abuse of its high function to the detriment of the cause of Christ, was not unfrequently witnessed in former times even in good and orthodox churches. Perhaps it is not wholly unknown in our own times. Church discipline is very wide and very useful in its place; but it has three important limitations which should never be lost sight of. First, it should be restricted to those acts and principles of the church member which can be clearly shown from the word of God to be wrong; that is, sinful in themselves as violations of God's law, inconsistent with Christian character, and injurious to the peace, purity and spirituality of the Church. Secondly, in its form of judicial process it ought always to be confined to those cases, even of flagrant offences, where the preliminary means, as enjoined by our Saviour, Matt. xviii. 16, have first been used to reclaim the offender. And, thirdly, it should in all cases of judicial process be restricted to those offences for which there is in the hands of the session sufficient proof of the guilt of the offender.

II. The proper ends or uses of church discipline, as stated in our Presbyterian standards, are the removal of offences, the vindication of the honor of Christ, the promotion of the purity and general edification of the Church, and also the benefit of the offender himself. This statement might be condensed and simplified by reducing the four ends to two, namely, the purity of the Church and the benefit of the offender; because offences will be removed, the honor of Christ be vindicated, and the general edification be best promoted, when the purity of the Church and the good of the offender are secured by discipline. The aim of all discipline should be to do this; that is, to maintain on the one hand the spiritual purity and welfare of the whole membership, and on the other the reformation and salvation of the offending party.

In discussing this branch of the subject, it is necessary to advert to a distinction which is not always sufficiently made, or is at least too often ignored. It is the two different senses in which the term *discipline* may be employed: or rather, the two distinct things, each highly important, which are covered by the one word *discipline*. There are two different, but real exercises of disciplinary authority over every church, with which the pastor and session are charged. One is the narrower and formal discipline, which is exercised, after the offence occurs, for its rectification and removal by regular process in the church court. Thus far, in the present paper, we have used the term discipline only in this narrow, formal, and official signification.

But it is obvious that the term has another signification and a broader application. There is lodged in the Church tribunal, and exercised by it a wider disciplinary authority, which, though less formal in its use, is not a whit the less real and salutary than that more special exercise of official authority which we may distinguish as the discipline of actual process. Now, it would be a most impotent conclusion to say there is no discipline in a church, or that church courts have lost or relaxed the reins of discipline, because there are no trials in the church, no offenders arraigned on charges of delinquency before the bar of the session. Complaint is sometimes heard that we have fallen upon sad times, there is no longer any exercise of discipline in the Church, and justice and equity have fallen in the street, while truth cannot enter.

But in all this it may be found that discipline, so far from being a nullity, has been only exerting its best influences and reaching its highest ends. The best remedy for offences is to prevent their occurrence. And the highest and best end and use of disciplinary authority in a church, is when the general supervision of the pastor and elders is so complete, so vigilant, so perpetual, and so judicious over all its members, that no formal trials will occur, because none will be needed. It is a legitimate end of formal discipline to remove offences when they occur. But it is a still higher end of that general, silent, informal, yet potential disciplinary authority which is perpetually going out from the judgment-seat of a wise and faithful church session, to anticipate and prevent all flagrant offences, all cases which, from neglect or injudicious treatment, would be likely to call for formal judicial process. Probably more than half the cases which are allowed to grow until they result in formal church trials, might have been easily healed up or prevented altogether, had there been a wise, watchful, and incessant exercise of this general supervisory discipline.

Instead, therefore, of lamenting, as did the eminent and gifted Professor M. Vinet, as far back as his times, that discipline is no longer compulsory in the modern Church, that it is a word without meaning in our ecclesiastical institutions, and that the law of the Church is a dead letter, having no external sanctions to rest upon, since its penalties can no longer be enforced, we should rather conclude that a true discipline is now but passing into the higher and better stages of moral suasion and preventive power. What can a formal church trial do, half so potential in sustaining discipline, as that silent but ubiquitous moral power which goes out from the ceaseless watch and care of a faithful pastor and a large judicious bench of elders, whose eyes are over all the flock, and whose influence is backed by their own consistent lives? Discipline would seem to be not in a state of neglect and decadence, but at its highest perfection, when its government is so popular and so respected that a vast congregation of a thousand or fifteen hundred communicants is held together in love and unity so firmly that not one member, in a course of years, will dare to break the bond of common brotherhood by an offence calling for judicial process. However it may be with the discipline of the churches of Great Britain and Continental Europe, this is certainly true of very many churches of our own order in America.

We should say, then, that the infrequency, and even the complete cessation of flagrant cases of actual disciplinary process before the church session, instead of being taken as an indication that all discipline has fallen in the streets, may be but the proof that discipline, in the broader sense, has been doing its work effectually and attaining its most useful ends in rendering such trials needless: and that the church is, in fact, in a healthful state of spiritual growth.

"It must needs be that offences come," said our Saviour. And when they do come, whether from the world without or the church within, the appointed guar-

dians of the church should do what they can to remove the offence, even though it be the painful duty of cutting off their own members. But there is higher and better work for a church to do than that of arraigning and trying its offending brethren. It is the work of extending over and around its members that shield of protective influences, and that anticipative and controlling discipline, which will prevent them from becoming offenders, and thus prevent the stern necessity of resorting to a formal censure. Thus we should say that one great end of church discipline, perhaps the very greatest of all, is the removal of offences by forestalling and preventing them.

In all this, however, let us not be understood as aiming to disparage or set aside the narrower discipline of actual and formal process before the church courts. Our only aim is to show that this painful duty should be a last resort, and that which should be regarded as the strange work of the church. The position here maintained is that when it can be avoided, it should be avoided: and that when, through the wise supervision of the pastor and eldership, and through what we call the anticipative and preventive exercise of disciplinary authority, it is in fact prevented, then all the true ends and uses of discipline are as effectually secured, and as satisfactorily secured, as though there had been ever so many cases of actual process instituted and issued. Here, if anywhere, is brought to pass the old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

If the true ends of discipline by process be the removal of offences, the vindication of the law of Christ, the maintaining of the purity and growth of the Church, and the spiritual welfare of the offending party, certainly all these ends are fully reached by the wider discipline which forestalls and prevents the evils. To prevent the evil is really to gain the good. In many cases, to foresee and heal a breach by wise counsel, is to save the offender and preserve both the purity and peace of the church. Still, it must always be clearly understood that the discipline of actual process, which may at any moment summon a gross offender before its bar, is not dead. It is only held in reserve for extreme cases, and as a last resort. It is held where God holds his own rod of judgment for the rebellious and incorrigible. That is its legitimate place, and there it will be felt to do good.

III. How can the ends of discipline be best secured? This is the point of chief practical importance. It is one on which our church tribunals need all the lights of experience, and the perpetual guidance of that wisdom which cometh from above. The whole theory of the Presbyterian Church, as a spiritual body of believers separated from the world, and set for the defence and propagation of the pure doctrine of Christ, assumes that a thorough discipline is needed, and that a thorough discipline must be maintained in all its congregations. There can be no question that such is the requirement both of the Presbyterian standards and of the Scriptures. The Church is the pillar and ground of the truth. Its membership forms a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. They are in the world but not of it: and they are all under spiritual discipline.

It is not to be denied, however, that in many cases more harm than good is done by a mal-administration of discipline. It is sometimes so rigidly enforced, so unjust and impotent in its decisions, that the ends of discipline are defeated rather than conserved. The offender, so far from being reclaimed, is only driven from the congregation, and his friends with him. Whole families have been known to quit the communion and take refuge in other bodies, because of the too severe and unjust treatment of a single member. Such cases, when they occur, not only weaken the body, but bring much public opprobrium upon the church and its mode of discipline. Facts of this character render it of the utmost moment that our Church authorities should consider well the question of an improved administration of discipline.

1. On this branch of the subject, the first important rule to be insisted on is, that which the Book of Discipline itself lays down, namely, "That private offences ought not to be immediately prosecuted before a church court, because the objects of discipline may be quite as well, and in many cases much better, attained by a different course; and because a public prosecution in such circumstances would tend unnecessarily to spread the knowledge of offences, to exasperate and harden offenders, to

extend angry and vexatious litigation: and thus to render the discipline of the church more injurious than the original offence." Still further, says the Book, "No complaint or information on the subject of personal and private injuries shall be admitted, unless those means of reconciliation and of privately reclaiming the offender have been used, which are required by Christ in Matt. xviii. 15, 16. And in case of offences, which though not personal, are private—that is, known only to one, or a very few—it is proper to take the same steps as far as circumstances admit."

Nothing could be wiser, safer, and more in accordance with the principles of natural justice, as well as the spirit of Christ, than these weighty counsels of our fundamental law. It is lamentable that they are so often departed from, or at least imperfectly complied with in important cases brought before our church tribunals. It cannot be doubted that these principles, if honestly and rigidly applied, would settle amicably many of the prosecutions which take place before our Sessions and Presbyteries. It cannot be doubted that these equitable maxims of the law of Christ, if fully adhered to in all cases of private and personal offences, would altogether forestall and prevent many prosecutions which hitherto have been suffered to take public form, engender animosity and scandal in the community, and so bring reproach and detriment upon the Church. If this venerable book of Church order should ever be revised, perhaps there could be no better amendatory clause added to these wise provisions than one which should make it an actionable offence on the part of the church courts themselves, when they set aside, or virtually slur over, this essential law of the kingdom of God. The peace and purity of the Church are not likely to be promoted by any rigid process of disciplinary censure which begins by violating so plain a maxim of the Divine Master as that which enjoins that breaches among brethren should be settled in the spirit of forbearance and forgiveness.

2. The second practical suggestion which may here be made, is that in disciplinary investigations and prosecutions all hasty action, all rash speaking, all personal prejudice and passion, and all partisan judgments on the part of the session itself, ought to be studiously set aside. If the members of the tribunal cannot divest themselves of such feelings, they should be deemed incompetent to sit in judgment on the case; they should give way to more calm and impartial men; they should refer the case to a higher court. It is better to have no investigation, and no prosecution, than to have it under such circumstances. Incompetency in the church session, by reason of prejudice, and of the inconsistent worldly lives of one or more of its members, is, no doubt, one prolific cause of that insubordination under discipline, and that public contempt for discipline, which is sometimes exhibited in our congregations. The offending parties and their friends, instead of acquiescing in the condemnatory sentence of a tribunal thus constituted, have been too often ready to set at naught and defy its censure, saying, "Physician, heal thyself," or, "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam from thine own eye."

In all matters of ecclesiastical polity, we have no higher individual authority on this side of the Atlantic than the venerated servant of God, Dr. Samuel Miller, who filled the chair of Professor of Church Government in the Theological Seminary at Princeton for some half a century, dating from its foundation. On this special point of deliberation and caution in proceeding with a case of discipline before the session, we can give no wiser maxims than in the following weighty words from his work on the "Ruling Elder:—"

"If the maintenance of discipline be all important to the interests of true religion, it is a matter of no less importance that it be conducted with mildness, prudence, and wisdom. Rashness, precipitancy, undue severity, malice, partiality, popular fury, and attempting to enforce rules which Christ never gave, are among the many evils which have too often marked the dispensation of authority in the Church, and not unfrequently defeated the great purpose of discipline. To conduct it aright is, undoubtedly, one of the most delicate and arduous parts of ecclesiastical administration; requiring all the piety, judgment, patience, gentleness, maturity of counsel, and prayerfulness which can be brought to bear upon the subject."

3. Another practical suggestion which should commend itself to the attention of all pastors and sessions, as well as to their congregations, is, that far more stress

should be laid than has hitherto been laid upon the exercise of what we have here denominated the general informal discipline, that is, the precautionary and preventive discipline of the church courts. It is easy to see how this, under the lead of an active pastor and a wide-awake body of efficient Ruling Elders, all in hearty sympathy with the spirit of their high calling and their great work, might become so operative and so potential over every family and every member of a congregation as in time to render the further discipline of trial process a strange and uncalled-for thing. Who can say that this would not be the highest normal condition of a church of Jesus Christ? Would a church in a state of continued revival all the year round, be likely to need the discipline of actual process? Now it is the privilege of a church, as it is of the individual Christian, to live in this revived state; and there are some churches in the world which have been brought up to that very condition.

One can form some good idea of the practical working of this general supervision over a large congregation scattered through a great city, by reading such a treatise as that of Dr. David King, of Glasgow, on the "Ruling Eldership of the Christian Church." In this fine little work a plan is given, in detail, for the districting of the whole congregation, assigning to each member of a large session his particular part for visitation and oversight, with regular monthly meetings of the eldership for business, and another monthly meeting for devotional purposes, all presided over by the pastor. It is easy to see what would be the salutary influence and results of a plan like this, faithfully carried out, from month to month and year after year, by an efficient eldership, under the eye of a faithful, active pastor. A disciplinary authority, as widespread and potential as it is watchful, would be perpetually going out, and exerting its restraining influence over every visited family and every tenderly cared-for member of the body. The discipline, as loving as it is salutary, would be felt to be no hardship, no usurpation. It would, in fact, be virtually transferred from the judgment seat of the church tribunal to the homes and hearts of the people.

We might learn something on this point from the analogies of the family and the school-room. The discipline of the church is indeed well illustrated in the discipline of a well-regulated school, and of a well-ordered Christian home. Everybody knows that in the school and the family the discipline is not the less perfect, but the more perfect, when there are but few if any displays of its badges of authority and its vigorous inflictions of punishment. Time was when it was otherwise, both in school-rooms and home circles; but we are now learning a better way. There is an ancient saying, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." We apprehend that as many children have been spoiled with the rod as without it. Far be it from us to under-rate the wisdom of Solomon, or depart from any precept of the word of God. The rod has been, and it is to this day, a very proper symbol of authority, both for the family and the school. It would be unwise to repudiate it. But the question is, what is the true place of the rod—that is, the best place for it? In former days it was thought to hold a very prominent place in all schools and families; and that discipline would be wholly relaxed without it. Its proper place was in the hand of the parent, or on the desk of the schoolmaster, displayed before the eyes of all urchins, and on the backs of not a few. But we are coming to think now that the best place for the rod is to be left growing on the tree in the orchard, fresh and green, until it is needed.

We have had somewhat the same idea as to the infliction of church censures, at least for the minor offences; that is, in all those cases which do not involve deep criminality as transgressions of the law of God. As the best ordered Christian families and the best disciplined schools are those in which the law of love and kindness predominates, rendering little or no punishment necessary, so every Christian church ought to rise to this higher plane of individual self-government without the infliction of penalties. And it is the province of a wise superintending discipline to bring a whole body of God's children to this high spiritual condition.

As for offenders of the other class—those wilful and incorrigible transgressors of the law of Christ, who will not listen to the voice of exhortation, and who cannot be won by kindness and forbearance long-continued—upon their heads alone let the

rod of church censure, and if need be of exclusion, fall. Every society has a right to protect itself against unworthy members. Christ and his apostles have clearly recognized that right in the Church, and have enjoined it as a duty to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them. St. Paul said to the Galatian Church, "He shall bear his judgment that troubleth you, who-soever he be. I would that they were even cut off which trouble you." In his First Epistle to the Corinthians he enjoined upon the Church "to put away from them the wicked person who had been guilty of grievous sin, and to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh." But even in these extreme cases, as we learn from the Second Epistle, he urged moderation and forbearance, and recommended to the Church to forgive and restore the repentant offender, lest "he should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." The necessity, however, of a rigid discipline, as the last resort, after all milder methods have failed, ending in the excommunication of the unworthy, is laid down in positive and explicit terms by St. Paul in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians: "Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us."

4. One more suggestion must be made. It is that more deliberation and less haste should be shown by the church session in the admission of communicants into the church. The safest way to avoid cases of judicial discipline is to guard the entrance to the Lord's table, and to keep out the materials for such discipline. It is at the reception of members that the evil of an unconverted, inconsistent and worldly membership begins. If our pastors and elders would have a pure and spiritual church, fully consecrated to the Lord's work, and worthy of the Lord's table, they must examine well the candidates for admission, and keep out the unworthy. If they would maintain the discipline of the body in all its high requirements, let them avoid lowering it by hasty admissions, or accommodating it to suit the demands of the wealthy and the worldly-minded.

Here, precisely, is the baneful root of the evil. Too many people, especially in seasons of revival and high excitement, are brought into the Church on the most partial examination, and with little or no evidence of a saving work of grace. In the eagerness to multiply converts and to swell the communion roll, they have been hurried into the Church, without any test of character or any time for probation. The result is a worldly membership, needing constant watchful care, and liable at any moment to lapse into worldly sins. Too many people, again, come into the Church from the ranks of the wealthy and the worldly, as it were dictating their own terms and making something like a conscience compromise between the Church and the world. The result is not only a worldly but a most unmanageable membership.

Now the early Church avoided this rock of danger. They made no half-way covenants, no compromises with the world, no concessions to the rich and the great. They guarded most sacredly the entrance to the Lord's table. They preferred to have a small membership, pure, spiritual and consecrated to God, rather than to swell the ranks of the Church by large numbers of the unconverted. But in our times, in the eager ambition to multiply numbers, our Presbyterian Churches are rapidly departing from the old standard of a pure and spiritual body, and virtually falling into the practice of the Methodist six months probationary membership. As to the policy of this new and hasty method of receiving members, we have nothing here to say. We leave it with those who like it, and who originated it. It is enough for us to say, that it is not Presbyterian, and that it is wholly inconsistent both with the theory and history of the Presbyterian Church. If, therefore, our church sessions would conserve the highest interests of the Presbyterian Church, in the maintenance of a pure membership, a high spiritual discipline and a steady growth, unmarred by the drawback of unworthy members and judicial prosecutions, let them return to the old custom of carefully examining and cautiously receiving all applicants for membership.