

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE RESOLVED;

VIZ.,

WHETHER, WHERE A CHURCH OF CHRIST IS SITUATE, IT IS THE DUTY OF THE WOMEN OF THAT CONGREGATION, ORDINARILY, AND BY APPOINTMENT, TO SEPARATE THEMSELVES FROM THEIR BRETHREN, AND SO TO ASSEMBLE TOGETHER, TO PERFORM SOME PARTS OF DIVINE WORSHIP, AS PRAYER, ETC., WITHOUT THEIR MEN?

AND THE ARGUMENTS MADE USE OF FOR THAT PRACTICE, EXAMINED.

BY JOHN BUNYAN.

EDITOR'S ADVERTISEMENT.

This exceedingly rare tract was first published in 1683, and was not reprinted, either separately, or in any edition of Bunyan's works. The public are indebted to the owner of a copy in perfect preservation, who kindly lent it, with a painful prohibition that he is to remain unknown; but with full allowance to any one who wishes to collate it with this new edition, by applying to the editor.

At the time this case was drawn and submitted to Mr. Bunyan for his opinion, he was one of the most popular preachers in the kingdom, and universally esteemed in all the churches of Christ, for his profound knowledge of the sacred Scriptures. This may account for such a case being sent to him, in preference to those illustrious divines, who for learning and talent have been unrivalled in any age.

The Reformation had progressed through state impediments so slowly, that the masses of the people were involved in the grossest darkness. So Mr. Keach complained— "The church is but *newly* come out of the wilderness of popish darkness; and not so fully neither as to be as clear as the sun; as in due time she shall."^[1] The era of the commonwealth let loose a flood of religious light and liberty: those who had just emerged from the darkness of Popery, and those who had received, implicitly, and without investigation, their religion from the formal services of the Liturgy, were now alarmed with the thunder of faithful exhortations, *personally* and prayerfully to examine the sacred Scriptures, upon pain of everlasting death. A light so new, and so marvellous, dazzled and perplexed those who rushed into it, without earnest prayer for divine guidance. They were like men who had been born and brought up in a dark, a deep, a noisome mine, when, suddenly emerging into light, are overpowered by its splendour. Long and sharp was the controversy whether singing ought to be used in public worship; whether the seventh day of the week or the first was to be consecrated; whether ministers were to be paid for their services; and in this case, to define the privileges and duties of women as helpers in the gospel; and it is surprising that this question is almost as *new* now as it was *then*. It is thus stated— "Whether it is the duty of the women of the churches of Christ to separate themselves from their brethren, and, as so separate, to perform divine worship by themselves."

It appears that some females in Bedford were in the habit of thus meeting, under the advice of a Mr. K. They held prayer meetings for special purposes, at the imminent risk of imprisonment; but whether, in these meetings, they exhorted, or preached to each other, does not appear. John Bunyan was applied to for advice, which he plainly gives. He was a stern advocate for scriptural authority in all things pertaining to divine worship; and one who, in regarding the invaluable virtues of women, most admired retiring modesty as the loveliest adornment of the female character. The terms he uses, and the spirit in

which he writes, intimate plainly that his own wife, who was remarkable for her devotion to God and her affectionate attachment to her husband, was also the most obedient of her sex.

In this tract we find no unmeaning gallant fribbling, but the solemn language of one who had death and judgment before his face. He conducts the inquiry with great care, as becomes a subject of such universal interest: and the great majority of Christians remain to this day his disciples. The Society of Friends is an exception, as to females being admitted to the ministry; while the Wesleyan Methodists have gained a most beneficial influence, by embracing, to the full extent, Bunyan's notions of rendering available the tender zeal, in comparatively private labours, of their pious females, in spreading the hallowed influences of Christianity.

The Society of Friends stands upon high ground in justifying its practice in allowing females to minister in holy things. J. J. Gurney says— "Friends believe it right, freely and *equally* to allow the ministry of both sexes." His reason is— "That all true ministry is under the immediate spirit of the influence of Christ: therefore we are bound to make way for the exercise of the gift of all persons that the Spirit may direct into this service. We dare not say to the modest and pious female, "Thou shalt not declare the word of the Lord," when we believe that an infinitely higher authority has issued a directly opposite injunction."^[2]

The difference arises as to the more public work of the ministry in proclaiming or preaching the kingdom of Christ to the world. In the ordinary ministry, by teaching the young—by a godly conversation—by visiting and praying with the sick and afflicted—by encouraging the inquirers and directing their way to the kingdom of heaven,—in these important duties there appears to be neither male nor female in Christ Jesus—all are equal.

John Bunyan would have united to a great degree with John Gurney in these sentiments. But as our Lord appointed no female evangelists, or apostles, or missionaries; and as the Holy Ghost has directed, that all bishops or elders should be married MEN, it would appear a strange innovation to place a female in the pastoral office. Bunyan believed that God usually commissions men and not women to this important work. J. J. Gurney fully admits that women "are forbidden to usurp authority over the man," and therefore no active part is assigned to them in public assemblies for the settlement of the affairs of the church.^[3] The women's meetings were established for the purpose of exercising a wholesome care over their own sex.^[4] "That faithful women should be helps to the men in the service of truth, as they are outwardly in civil and temporal things."^[5] And to this who can refuse his hearty AMEN.

There is too much sectarian spirit in all our controversies. Reader, in considering this subject, endeavour to forget for the time those opinions in which you have been trained. Examine the question by the Word alone, and may the Holy Spirit inscribe upon your hearts that divine record, which is to be found only in the Christian system: "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

G. OFFOR.

THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY

TO THOSE GODLY WOMEN CONCERNED IN
THE FOLLOWING TREATISE.

HONOURED SISTERS,

'Tis far from me to despise you, or to do anything to your reproach. I know you are beloved of God for the sake of Christ, and that you stand fixed for ever by faith upon the same foundation with US. I also know that the Lord doth put no difference betwixt male and female, as to the communications of his saving graces, but hath often made many of your sex eminent for piety; yea, there hath been of you, I

speaking now of ordinary Christians, that for holiness of life have outgone many of the brethren: Nor can their virtuous lives but be renown and glory to YOU, and conviction to those of US that have come behind you in faith and holiness. The love of women in spirituals, as well as naturals, oftentimes outgoes that of men.

When Christ was upon earth, we read not that any man did to, and for him, as did the woman that was a sinner, Joanna, Susanna, and many others (Luke 7:36-38, 8:1-3). And as they have shewed themselves eminent for piety, so for Christian valour and fortitude of mind, when called of God to bear witness to, and for his name in the world: as all histories of that nature doth sufficiently testify. They were WOMEN, as I take it as well as men, that were tortured, and that would not accept of deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection (Heb 11:35). Wherefore I honour and praise your eminency in virtue; and desire to be provoked by the exceeding piety of any of you, in all holy conversation and godliness.

And although, as you will find, I have not without a cause, made a question of the lawfulness of your assembling together, by yourselves, to perform, without your men, solemn worship to God: yet I dare not make you yourselves the authors of your own miscarriage in this. I do therefore rather impute it to our leaders, who whether of a fond respect to some seeming abilities they think is in you for this, or from a persuasion that you have been better than themselves in other things; or whether from a preposterous zeal, they have put you upon a work so much too heavy for you: I shall not at this time concern myself to inquire into. But this is certain, at least it is so in my apprehension, that in this matter you are tempted by them to take too much upon you.

I am not insensible but that for my thus writing, though I thereby have designed your honour and good order; I am like enough to run the gauntlet among you, and to partake most smartly of the scourge of the tongues of some, and to be soundly brow-beaten for it by others: specially by our author, who will find himself immediately concerned, for that I have blamed him for what he hath irregularly done, both with the Word, to you, and me. I look also to be sufficiently scandalized, and counted a man not for prayer, and meetings for prayer, and the like; but I will labour to bear them with patience, and seek their good that shall be tempted to abuse me.

I had not, indeed I had not, spoke a word to this question in this manner, had not Mr. K. sent his paper abroad, and amongst us, for the encouraging this practice with us, in opposition to our peace. I do not say he designed our breach, but his arguments tended thereto; and had not our people been of a wise and quiet temper, his paper might have set us into a flame. But thanks be to God, we are at quiet, and walk in love, notwithstanding the LIFTS that have been to make us do otherwise. There are also the mouths of some opened against me for this, who lie at wait for occasions, and shew that they are glad to take them before they are given by me: to whom I now shew by this ensuing discourse, that I had a reason to do what I did.

I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Jesus Christ: to whom be honour and glory for ever. And remain, your faithful friend and brother to pray for you, to love you in the gospel, and to do you what Christian service I can,

JOHN BUNYAN.

The Women's Prayer Meeting

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE RESOLVED, &c.

The occasion of my meddling in this manner with this controversy, is this. After I had, for reasons best known to myself, by searching found, that those called the women's meetings wanted for their support, a bottom in the word: I called them in our fellowship into question. Now having so done, my reasons for so doing, as was but reason, were demanded; and I gave them, to the causing of that practice with us to cease. So subject to the word were our women, and so willing to let go what by that could not be proved a duty for them to be found in the practice of. But when I had so done, by what means I know not, Mr. K., hearing of my proceeding in this matter, though I think he knew little of question or answer, sets pen to paper, and draws up four arguments for the justification of these meetings. The which, when done, were sent down into our parts; not to me, but to some of his own persuasion, who kept them, or sent them, or lent them whither they thought good: And so about two years after, with this note immediately following, they were conveyed to my hand.

Bro: Bunyan, This enclosed, was sent to me from godly women, whose custom for a long time hath been to meet together to pray: who hearing of your contrary opinion, sent this. It came from Mr. K., who would desire to know what objections you have against it: and he is ready to give his further advice. Pray be pleased to give your answer in writing, for Mr. K. expects it.

Your friends in the Lord,
S. B. S. F.

Pray be pleased to leave your answer with S. F. ^[6]in Bedford.

Now having received the papers, and considering the contents thereof: I was at first at a question with myself, whether the thing was feigned, or true; and to that purpose, writ to these women again: but calling to mind, that I had heard something of this before, I concluded there was ground to believe, as I do, [that it was true, and not feigned:] And so resolved to answer his demand and expectation. But to say nothing more as to this, I will next present you with the arguments he sent, and then with my manner of handling of them.

Mr. K.'s Arguments for Female Prayer Meetings.

He begins with this question, Whether women fearing God may meet to pray together, and whether it be lawful for them so to do? Which done, he falls to a wonderment, saying, It seems very strange to me, that any who profess the fear of God, can make any question touching the lawfulness thereof: The rule for praying being so general to all, and there being so many instances for the practice thereof, upon several occasions in the word of God, for their encouragement therein.

He next presents us with his arguments, which are in number *four*, but in verity not one, to prove that thing for the which he urgeth them: as I hope to make appear by that I have done.

First, saith he, If women may praise God together for mercies received for the church of God, or for themselves? then they may pray together: The proof whereof is plain (Exo 15:20,21). If it be objected the case was extraordinary, and that Miriam was a prophetess; To which I answer, That the danger of ruin and destruction, and our deliverance from it, if the Lord grant it, cannot be looked at but as extraordinary. The designs of ruin to the church, and servants of God, being as great as at that time when God delivered his people from the hand of Pharaoh. ^[7] And will call for praises, if the Lord please to send it, as then. And whereas it is further objected, that Miriam was an extraordinary person. To which I answer, That the duty itself of praising God for

the mercy, was incumbent upon all, in as much as they were partakers of the mercy. And the same spirit of Christ that was in her, is also in all his servants: given for the same end, both to pray for mercies we stand in need of, and to praise God for [them].

Second, If women have in imminent danger to themselves and the church of God, prayed jointly together for deliverance, and God hath answered and approved of the same: then may women jointly pray together. The instance we have is famous (Esth 4:16). We there see she and her maidens did pray and fast together, and the Lord gave a gracious answer and deliverance.

Third, If God hath in gospel times promised the pouring out of his Spirit to women, to that very end that they may pray together apart from men; then it is not only their liberty, but duty to meet and pray together. But God hath promised his Spirit to that end (Zech 12:10-13). Which Scripture is plain is a promise of gospel times. And it is to be noted that the text doth not in the singular number, say He shall pray apart, and his wife apart; but THEY shall pray apart, and THEIR wives apart. And (Mal 3:16) God takes notice of all them that speak often together, and call upon his name.

Fourth, If God hath so approved of women's meeting together to pray in gospel times, as then, and at that time to take an advantage to make known to them his mind and will concerning Jesus Christ: then it is lawful for women to pray together. But God hath so approved of their meeting to pray together (Acts 16:13). By which text it appeareth it was a frequent practice for women to meet and pray together.

These are Mr. K.'s arguments; the conclusion of his paper follows. And besides all these particular instances, says he, what means those general rules to build up one another in our most holy faith, and pray in the Holy Ghost (Jude 20). But it extends to all that believe, both men and women; unless any will say women are not to be built up in their most holy faith. Therefore let not any hinder you from a duty so incumbent upon you in a special manner, in such a day as this is. Cannot many women that have used this practice, by experience, say, they have met with the Lord in it, and have found many blessed returns of prayer from God, both to themselves and the church, wherein God hath owned them? Therefore what God hath borne witness to, and approved of, let no man deter you from. Pray turn to the Scriptures quoted, which I hope will give you full satisfaction.

Mr. Bunyan's Answer.

These are his arguments, and this his conclusion, in which I cannot but say, there is not only boldness, but flattery. Boldness, in fathering of his misunderstanding upon the authority of the word of God: and flattery, in soothing up persons in a way of their own, by making of them the judges in their own cause: the which I hope to make farther appear anon.

For since his women in their letter told me that Mr. K. expects my answer, I count myself called to shew the unsoundness of his opinion. Indeed he would, as they insinuate, confine me to answer by writing. But his papers have been I know not where, and how to put check to his extravagancies, that also, I know not, but by scattering mine [answer] abroad. And as I will not be confined to an answer in writing: so neither to his methods of argumentation. What scholar he is, I know not; for my part, I am not ashamed to confess, that I neither know the mode nor figure of a syllogism, nor scarce which is major or minor. Methinks I perceive but little sense, and far less truth in his arguments: also I hold that he has stretched and strained the holy Word out of place, to make it, if it might have been, to shore up his fond conceits. I shall therefore, first take these texts from the errors to which he hath joined them, and then fall to picking the bones of his syllogisms. ^[8]

But as I shall not confine myself to his mode and way of arguing, so neither shall I take notice of his question upon which he stateth the matter in controversy. But shall propound the same question here,

which, for the substance of it, was handled among us, when the thing itself was in doubt among us, namely,

Whether, where a church of Christ is situate, it is the duty of the women of that congregation, ordinarily, and by appointment, to separate themselves from their brethren, and so to assemble together, to perform some parts of divine worship, as prayer, &c. without their men?

This was our question, this we debated, and this Mr. K. might have sent for, and have spoken to, since he will needs be a confuter. And, courteous reader, since I have here presented thee with the question, I will also present thee with the method which I took when I handled it among my brethren.

First, I opened the terms of the question.

Second, Then shewed what assemblies they were that used to perform divine worship to God.

Third, And so shewed whose prayers in such worship was used, or by Paul and others desired.

First, By church of Christ, I mean, one gathered or constituted by, and walking after the rule of the Word of God. By situate, I mean, where such church shall happen to be, in whole, *or in the parts thereof*. By separating, I mean, their meetings together by appointment of their own, and as so met, to attempt to perform divine worship [by] prayer without their men.

Second, To shew what manner of assemblies they were that used to perform divine worship to God of old. Now I find that there have been three sorts of assemblies, in which divine worship has been performed.

1. It has been performed in mixed assemblies; in assemblies made up of saints and sinners. I say divine worship has been performed in such assemblies, for, that there, the saints have been edified, sinners convinced and converted, and made to confess their sins, to the glory of God. Of these assemblies we read (Matt 5:1, 13:1, 23:1; Mark 4:1, 2:1, 6:2, 10:1; Luke 5:1, 8, 12:1, 13:1, 15:1, 20:1; 1 Cor 14:23). And in many other scriptures.

2. I also find that the church, by herself, or as distinct from the world, have met together to perform it by themselves (Mark 4:34; Acts 2:1-4, 13:1,2; 15:4, 20:7; John 20:19-26).

3. I find also that assemblies for divine worship have been made up of the elders, and principal brethren of the church, none of the rest of the congregation being present (Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1; Acts 1:3, 2:17,18; Gal 2:1,2) with several other scriptures beside. But in all the Scripture, I find not that the women of the churches of Christ, did use to separate themselves from their brethren, and as so separate, perform worship together among themselves, or in that *their* congregation: or that they made, by allowance of the Word, appointment so to do. Thus far therefore this must stand for a human invention, and Mr. K. for the promoter thereof.

Third, This done, in the third place, I come to shew you whose prayers, or by whose mouth prayer in such assemblies, as are above proved lawful, used to be made, or by Paul or others were desired.

1. Whose prayers were used, or who was the mouth? and I find them called the prayers of the church in general, or of the principal men thereof in particular (Judg 2:4,5, 20:8,26; Joel 1:14, 2:15-17; Acts 12:5, 13:1-3).

2. Also when Paul, or others, desired that prayers should be made of others for them. They either desired the prayers of the church in general, or of the brethren in particular (but never desireth, or biddeth a woman's meeting, that prayers might there be made for them). (1.) He desireth the prayers of the church in general (Col 4:2; Phil 1:19, 4:6; 1 Thess 5:17; Heb 13:18). (2.) Or if he desireth prayers of certain persons, he only calls upon the men and brethren in particular; but never upon a woman by name nor sex to do it (1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1; Rom 15:30; 1 Tim 2:8). Nor was, as I said, the apostle alone

in this thing. Christ speaks a parable to this end, that MEN ought always to pray (Luke 18:1). James saith, the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous MAN (5:16). Moses sent the young men to sacrifice (Exo 24:5). And the people in the time of Zacharias, sent their MEN to pray before the Lord (Zech 7:2). I do not believe that by any of these the prayers of women are despised, but by these we are taught, who, as the mouth in assemblies to pray, is commended unto us.

One word more, The women in the time of Jeremiah the prophet, when they had made their cakes to the queen of heaven, (though the thing which they did was as right in their own eyes, as if they had done true worship indeed) and was questioned by the prophet for what they had done, could not justify what they had done as to the act, but by pleading, They did it not “*without their men*” (Jer 44:17-19).

Thus having premised these few things, I shall now come more directly to discourse of the question itself, TO WIT, Whether, where a church of Christ is situate, it is the duty of the women of that congregation, ordinarily, and by appointment, to separate themselves from their brethren, and as so separate, to assemble together to perform divine worship, [by] prayer, without their men?

This was our question, and this I will now give a negative answer unto. For I find not in Christ’s testament any command so to do; no nor yet example: and where there is none of these, it cannot be a duty upon them; no, nor yet liberty, but presumption to attempt it.

The command, says Mr. K., is general to all. But I answer, yet limited, and confined to order and manner of performance. Women may, yea ought to pray; what then? Is it their duty to help to carry on prayer in public assemblies with men, as they? Are they to be the audible mouth there, before all, to God? No verily, and yet the command is general to all to pray. Women of the respective churches of Christ, have no command to separate themselves from the men of their congregations, to perform prayer in their own company without them, and yet the command is general to all to pray. We must therefore distinguish of [between] persons and performances, though we may not exclude either. The manner also, and order in which such and such duties must be done, Mr. K. knows is as essential, in some cases, as the very matter of worship. But we will come to my reasons for my dissenting from Mr. K. in this. After which I will consider his arguments, and the scriptures that he would under-prop them with. As for my reasons for my dissenting from him, they are these:—

First, To appoint meetings for divine worship, either in the whole church or in the parts of it, is an act of power: which power, resideth in the elders in particular, or in the church in general. But never in the women as considered by themselves. Mr. K. indeed doth insinuate that this power also resided in them; for he saith, God hath in gospel times promised the Spirit to women to that very end, that they may pray together, apart from men. Now if the Spirit is given them to THIS very end, that they may do it apart from men, then they have a power residing in themselves to call their own sex together to do it. And what brave doings will such a conclusion make, even the blind himself will perceive. But further of this anon; meanwhile we will attend [to] our own assertion. Namely, “that to call the church, or parts thereof together, to perform divine worship to God, is an ACT of POWER, which power resideth in the church in general, or in the elders in particular.” We will treat of the last first.

1. For the eldership, Moses and Aaron of old were they, with the priests, that were to call the church together to perform divine worship to God, and that both as to the whole, or as to the parts of it (Num 10:7,8; Deut 4:14, 31:11,12; Exo 4:29, 12:21, 17:5). Also, in after times, they were the elders and chief of the church, that did it (Josh 24:1; Ezra 10:5-9; Acts 14:27, 15:3). Or,

2, if their calling together to perform divine worship, was not by the elders alone: yet it was by the power that resided in the church for that thing, who jointly ordered the same (Judg 20:8,18; Ezra 3:1; Zeph 2:1-3; Acts 12:12; 1 Cor 5:4, 11:20). All these are plain cases. But never, as I ever did read of in the Bible, did women, ordinary believing ones, assume this power of the elders, or of the church, to themselves.

If it be asked, Who did appoint that meeting made mention of in Acts 12:12?

I answer, It was appointed by the power of the church, who, for her own conveniency, if she cannot come all into one place at once to perform the duty, as it is not likely four or five thousand should, in times of persecution, which was their case, [they] may meet some here, some there, for their edification and comfort. Compare verse 5 with 12 and 17. Nor do I question the lawfulness of this or that part of the church's assembling together for prayer: though the elders, and greatest part of the brethren, be absent. If, first, such MEN that call such assemblies are countenanced by the elders, or church, to do it (1 Tim 2:8; 2 Tim 2:22). But that the sisters of this or that church, may call their own sex together to perform such worship by themselves to God (for this is the thing in debate) I find no warrant for.

Second, Because this kind of worship, when done in and by a company, is MINISTERIAL to that company, as well as petitionary to God. That is, they that, as the mouth in assemblies pray to God, teach that assembly, as well as beg mercies of him. And I find not that women may assemble to do thus. That such prayer is a kind of ministering in the word to standers by, consider well 1 Corinthians 14:15-19. Wherefore let them keep silence in the church, and in the parts thereof, when assembled to worship God.

In all public worship by prayer, teaching is set on foot, two ways: 1. By propounding to that assembly the things that must, by agreement, be prayed for. 2. And by proving them to suit with the will of God, that prayer may be made in faith (1 John 5:14).

1. For all such prayer must be made for the things agreed upon first; and consequently for things that by the word are proved good, and suitable for the seasons, persons, or things, for or about which such prayers are made. For they that have meetings for prayer, without this, pray at random, and not by rule.

"If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask [according to God's will] it shall be done for them," saith Christ, "of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt 18:19). Now, I say, if things prayed for in assemblies must first be jointly agreed upon, then must such things, by some one, or more of that assembly, be first propounded, expounded, and proved to be good by the word. Good for such persons, seasons, or things, for which such prayer is made. And, besides, the gifts required to do this, if this is not teaching I am out. And yet this must first be done to instruct all present, to help their faith, and to quicken their spirits *to*, and *in* that worship. That they may as one man have their eyes unto the Lord (Zech 9:1). But that this power is given to women, to ordinary believing ones that are in the highest account in churches, I do not believe. I do not believe they should minister to God in prayer before the whole church, for then I should be a Ranter or a Quaker; nor do I believe they should do it in their own womanish assembly, for the reason urged before. And I will add, if brethren not heretofore called by the church to open scriptures, or to speak in the church to God in prayer,^[9] are not at first to be admitted to do this, but before the elders or principal brethren, that they may hear and judge (1 Cor 14:26-29). How can it be thought to be meet or lawful for women, of whom it must be supposed, that they have received no such gifts, that they should use this power? I say, how can it be imagined that the women should be bound of God to do this in such sort as doth utterly exclude the elders and all the men in the congregation from a possibility of understanding and of judging of what they do? And yet this is the doctrine of Mr. K.; for he saith, "That the Spirit of God is promised to women to this very end, that they may pray together, apart from men." But God is not the author of this confusion in the churches.

2. But secondly, As teaching by prayer in assemblies, is thus set on foot; so every one also that shall in such meetings be the mouth of the whole, to God, ministereth so, doctrine to that assembly, as well as presenteth petitions to God. Else how can that assembly say AMEN at their prayer or giving of thanks? For to say AMEN is an effect of conviction, or of edification received of the stander by, from him that now is so ministering in that assembly before God (1 Cor 14:15-17). Yea, I believe that they that pray in assemblies, or that shall give thanks for mercies received there, ought to labour to speak, not only with fervency of words, but with such soundness of doctrine while they mention, urge, or plead the promise with God, that that whole assembly may be enlightened, taught, taken, and carried away in their spirits, on the wing of that prayer, and of faith, to God, whose face they are come to seek, and whose grace they

are gathered together to beg. Now this is called praying and praising, to the teaching and edifying of others, as by the scripture afore named is made appear (1 Cor 14:14-19). But by what word of God the sisters of the respective churches may set up this way of teaching of one another in their assemblies, I am ignorant of.

Third, The Holy Ghost doth particularly insist upon the inability of women, as to their well managing of the worship now under consideration, and therefore it ought not to be presumed upon by them. They are forbidden to teach, yea to speak in the church of God. And why forbidden, but because of their inability. They cannot orderly manage that worship to God, that in assemblies is to be performed before him; I speak now of our ordinary believing ones, and I know none extraordinary among the churches. They are not builded to manage such worship, “they are not the image and glory of God, as the men are” (1 Cor 11:7). They are placed beneath, and are called the glory of the man. Wherefore they are weak, and not permitted to perform public worship to God. *When our first mother, who was not attended with those weaknesses, either sinful or natural, as our women now are, stept out of her place but to speak a good word for worship, you see how she was baffled, and befooled therein; she utterly failed in the performance, though she briskly attempted the thing. Yea she so failed thereabout, that at one clap she overthrew, not only, as to that, the reputation of women for ever, but her soul, her husband, and the whole world besides* (Gen 3:1-7). The fallen angel knew what he did when he made his assault upon the woman. His subtilty told him that the women was the weaker vessel. He knew also that the man was made the head in worship, and the keeper of the garden of God. The Lord God took the man, said unto the man, commanded the man, and made him keeper of the garden (Gen 2:15-17). Wherefore the management of worship belonged to him. This, the serpent, as I said, was aware of. And therefore he comes to the woman, says to the woman, and deals with the woman about it, and so overcomes the world. Wherefore it is from this consideration that Paul tells Timothy that he permitted not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. But to call the church or parts thereof together, to perform solemn worship, and in such a call to exclude or shut out the men, is an usurping of that authority over them to a high degree. And he renders the reason of this his prohibition thus, “For Adam was first formed, then Eve, [and therefore had the headship in worship]. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression” (1 Tim 2:13,14). But again, it should seem, methinks, if women must needs be managers of worship in assemblies, they should do it, as Eve, before Adam, in presence of the men: But that I think none will allow, though that would be the way best to correct miscarriages; how then should it be thought convenient for them to do it alone. If children are not thought fit to help to guide the ship with the mariners, shall they be trusted so much as with a boat at sea alone. The thing in hand is a parallel case.

Fourth, If the weightiness of *this* worship be, as indeed it is, so great, that the strongest and best able to perform it do usually come off with blushing, and with repentance for their shortness, as to the well performance thereof; though they engage therein by good and lawful authority; what will they do who are much weaker here, and when, as Eve, they set to it in a way of usurping of authority, and of their own head and will. To offer strange fire with incense, which was a type of prayer, you know what it cost Nadab and Abihu, though men, and the sons of Aaron. [Yet] Mr. K. cries the sisters, the women, the women’s meetings, and the like, and how they have prevailed with heaven. Poor man, I am sorry for his weakness, and that he should show that himself is so *nunnish*^[10] in such a day as this.

But to return, as all worship in assemblies ought to be performed with the most exact order and solemnity; so this of prayer with that, if possible, that is more than all the rest; and therefore this makes it more heavy still. When men preach they have to do with men, but when they pray in assemblies they have to do both with men and with God at once. And I say, if it be so great a matter to speak to men *before* God; *how* great a matter is it to speak to men and God at once; to God by way of petition, and to men by way of instruction. But I am persuaded if those most fond of the women’s meetings for prayer were to petition the king for their lives, they would not set women to be their advocates to him; specially

if the king should declare beforehand by law, that he permitted not a woman in an open auditory to speak before him.

There are also many temptations that attend the duty of praying in assemblies, especially those that are immediately employed therein. These temptations, they awake, are aware of, are forced to wrestle with, and greatly to groan under. Wherefore we put not the weak upon this service; not the weak, though they be men; not they in the presence of the strong. How then should the weakest of all be put upon it, and that when together by themselves. Men, though strong, and though acting by lawful authority in this, are not able, but with unutterable groans, to do it: how then shall all those that attempt it without that authority, perform it as acceptable worship to God? This work, therefore, is as much too heavy for our women now, as that about which Eve engaged in at first, was too heavy for her. But,

Fifth, If this worship may be managed by the sisterhood of the churches, being congregated together in the absence of their men: of what signification is it that man is made head of the woman as well in worship as in nature? (1 Cor 11:3,7). Yea more, why are the elders of the churches called watchmen, overseers, guides, teachers, rulers, and the like? If this kind of worship may be performed, without their conduct and government? (Eze 3:17, 33:7; Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11; Psa 28:72; Heb 13:17).

1. Why is man made the head of the woman in worship, in the worship now under debate, in that worship that is to be performed in assemblies? And why are the women commanded silence there, if they may congregate by themselves, and set up and manage worship there? Worship was ordained before the woman was made, wherefore the word of God at the first did not immediately come to her, but to him that was first formed, and made the head in worship (Gen 2:16-18; 1 Cor 14:35,36). And hence it is that women are so strictly tied up to this headship; that if they will learn, they must ask their husbands at home (v 35), not appoint meetings of their own sex to teach one another. “But what must they do that have unbelieving ones? and what must they do that have none?” Answer, Let them attend upon those ordinances that God has appointed for the building up and perfecting of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-13), and learn as the angels do (Eph 3:10; 1 Peer 1:12).

2. But I say, if they must do as Mr. K. says, they are in duty bound, to wit, meet by themselves apart from their men, and as so met, perform this most solemn worship to God: how shall the elders and overseers, the watchmen, rulers, and guides in worship, perform their duty to God, and to the church of God, in this, since from this kind of worship they are quite excluded, and utterly shut out of doors: unless it be said, that to watch, to oversee, and to guide, in the matter and manner of performance of this worship in assemblies, is no part of the watchman or overseer’s work; or in their lawful absence, the work of the principal men of the church. Nor will the faithful and dutiful overseer leave worship, no, not in the best part of the congregation assembled to worship, to be performed by every weak brother, though I believe it might with more warrant be left to them, than to the strongest among our ordinary ones of the other sex.

Also our elders and watchmen covet, if we have unbelievers to behold, that our worship be performed by the most able. How then shall it be thought that they should be so silly, to turn a company of weak women loose to be abused by the fallen angels? Can it be thought that their congregation, since they have it without a command, shall fare better among those envious spirits than those that are lawfully called shall fare before the world? Watchman, watchman, see to thy duty, look well to the manner of worship that is to be performed according to thy commission. Trust not Eve, as Adam did, with worship, and with its defence. Look that all things be done in worship as becomes thee—a head, both in nature and by office—and leave not so solemn a part of worship as prayer, in company, is, and ought to be accounted to be done; thou canst by no means tell how. Watch in and over all such worship thyself. Be diligent to know the state of thy flocks, whether they be flocks of men, or women; and look well to thy herds, and thou shalt have milk enough, not only for men and babes, but also for the maintenance and life of thy maidens. So that they need not go with their pitchers to seek water there

where their God has not sent them (Prov 27:23-27). Besides the shepherds' tents is provision sufficient for them (Cant 1:8). But, for a conclusion of this, I will ask this man, If he doth not, by pleading for these women's meetings, declare, that the women, without their men, are better able by themselves to maintain divine worship, than the men are without their elders? forasmuch as he himself will not allow that the men should always perform worship without his oversight and inspection, and yet will plead for the women to have such worship in their congregation, among themselves, excluding for ever the men therefrom. For, saith he, the Spirit is promised to be given to them to that very end, that they may meet together to pray apart without their men.

And now for Mr. K.'s arguments, which, as I said, are in number four.

1. We will take the scriptures from them; and,
2. Then pick the bones of their carcasses.

Yet in my taking of the scriptures from his arguments, I will do it in a way that is most to his advantage, making of each of them as formidable an objection as I can against myself.

Objection.

Miriam took a timbrel in her hand, and went out, and all the women went out after her, praising God with timbrels and dances for their deliverances. Therefore the women of the churches of Christ may appoint meetings of their own, as separate from their brethren, and then and there perform divine worship, [by] prayer, in that, their congregation, without their men (Exo 15:20,21).

Answer

1. Miriam was a prophetess: and, I suppose, that none of our women will pretend to be such. And though Mr. K. labours to get over this, by saying that the work of praising was incumbent upon all: yet by his leave, judgment, and discretion, and a spirit of conduct suitable to the duty, as we read of, was found among the women in none but she. Why is it else said, Miriam led them forth; Miriam the prophetess did it. Another, by Mr. K.'s argument, might have done it as well. Thus degrades he the prophetess, that he may get favour with the ordinary women, and prompt them on to a work that he has a superstitious affection for.

2. But his assertion is of no weight. The women were not left in that extraordinary service to the spirit of ordinary believers. Nor can I count it but crooked dealing to bring in extraordinary persons, in their extraordinary acts, to prove it lawful for ordinary persons to do that which is not commanded them.

3. But though Miriam did go forth, or come out with the women, yet not from the men, into some remote place in the wilderness to worship by themselves. She rather went or came out, and the women followed her from the place by the sea, where now they were, after Moses, to sing as her sex became her; for she, though an extraordinary woman, might not make herself an equal with Moses and Aaron, therefore she came behind in worship, yet with the body of the people, as it is said, "So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea" (Exo 15:22). Women, though prophetesses, must wear some badge or other of inferiority to those that are prophets indeed (1 Cor 11:3-9). And I choose to understand that Miriam did this. (1.) Because the text last mentioned says so. (2.) Because Miriam, and all the women, did sing with the words of the men, verse 1 compared with 21. (3.) For that they did sing them after the men, as taking them from their mouth. For, saith the text, Miriam answered them, and so handed it down to them of her sex, saying, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously" (vv 1,21). (4.) For that she commanded the women that they should sing the same song: hence it is called the song of Moses, not of Miriam (Rev 15:3). (5.) From all which I conclude, that Miriam did not draw the women away into some such place where neither Moses, nor Aaron, nor the elders of Israel could see, behold, and observe

their manner of worship. But that she, as her modesty became her, did lead them out from that place where they were, to sing, and to dance, and to praise God, after the men. (6.) This scripture therefore favoureth not this man's opinion, to wit, "That it is the duty of the women of the churches of Christ to separate themselves from their brethren, and as so separate, to perform divine worship by themselves."

Objection.

Esther, the queen, performed, with her maidens, this duty of prayer, without their men: therefore the women of gospel churches may separate themselves from their brethren, and perform it among themselves (Esth 4:16).

Answer.

1. Esther was in the house of the king's chamberlain, and could not at this time come to her brethren; No, not to her uncle, Mordecai, to consult how to prevent an approaching judgment. Yea, Mordecai and she were fain to speak one to another by Hatach, whom the king had appointed to attend upon the queen (vv 5-9). So she could by no means, at that time, have communion with the church. No marvel, therefore, if she fasted with her maidens alone: for so she must now do, or not do it at all. But I will here ask this, our argumentator, whether Esther did count it a burden or a privilege thus now to be separated from her brethren, and so forced to perform this work as she did? If a privilege, let him prove it. If a burden, he has little cause to make use of it to urge that, her practice then, for a ground to women that are at liberty, to separate from their brethren to perform such worship by themselves in *their* company, without their men.

2. We do not read that she desired that any of the women that were at liberty should come from the men to be with her; whence we may gather, that she preferred their liberty to worship with men, far beyond a woman's meeting. She counted that too many, by herself and her maidens, were in such bondage already.

3. Neither did she attempt to take that unavoidable work upon herself, but as begging of the men that she might, by their faith and prayers, be borne up therein; clearly concluding that she did count such work too hard for women to perform by themselves, without the help of men (vv 15,16).

4. Besides this woman's meeting, as Mr. K. would have it, was made up of none but the queen and her household maids, and with but few of them; nor will we complain of our honest women when the case is so that they cannot go out to the church to do this, if they pray with their maids at home.

5. But what if Esther did pray with her maids in her closet, because she could not come out to her brethren. Is it fair to make the necessity of a woman in bondage a law to women at liberty? This argument, therefore, is erroneous, and must not have this text to show it up; we therefore take it away from his words and proceed to a sight of his next.

Objection.

But it is said by the prophet Zecharias, that the Spirit is promised to be given, in New Testament times, to women, that they may pray together apart from men (Zech 12:11-13).

Answer.

The text says nothing so, but is greatly abused by this man. Indeed, it says their wives shall mourn apart, but it saith not, they shall do so together. Yea, that they shall separate themselves by the dictate of God, from their brethren, to do so, is that which this text knows nothing of. Sometimes many may be together, apart from others; but why Mr. K., to serve his purpose, should rack and strain this text to justify his woman's meeting, I see no reason at all. My reason against him is, for that the *look here* upon him whom we have pierced, which is to be the cause of this mourning, is to be by an immediate revelation of

the Holy Ghost, who doth not use to tell before hand when he will so come down upon us. But such a meeting as Mr. K. intends must be the product of consultation and time. "I will pour," saith God, "upon the house of David - the spirit of grace and of supplications: and then they shall look"; that is, when that spirit so worketh with them as to enable them so to do. Now, I say, I would know, since this mourning is to be the effect of this look, and so before one is aware (Cant 6:12), whether Mr. K. can prove that these women were to have an item beforehand, when they should have this look. But as it would be ridiculous thus to conclude, so as ridiculous is it to think to prove his women's meetings from hence.

Nor doth the conclusion that he hath made hereupon prove more but that he is ignorant of the work of the Spirit in this matter, or that his fondness for the women's meetings hath made him forget his own experience. For how can one that never had but one such look upon Jesus Christ, draw such a conclusion from hence. And that all those women should have this look at the same time, even all the women of the house of David and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that they might, all of them, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, separate themselves from their men to hold a woman's meeting or meetings by themselves for this, is more fictitious than one would imagine a man should dream. If he says that the women have a promise to have this look when they please, or that they are sure to have it because it is entailed to THEIR meeting, for this seems to come nearest his conclusion: yet what unavoidable inconveniences will flow therefrom, I leave to any to judge. But I take this mourning to be according as another of the prophets says, "They shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity" (Eze 7:16). All those souls, therefore, that shall be counted worthy to have *this look* shall mourn apart, or by themselves, when they have it. For though a man cannot appoint to himself when he will repent of his sins, or when the Holy Ghost will work, yet he shall repent indeed; he shall do it, I say, when HE doth so work, not staying till another can do so too. And since our own iniquity will then make us best consider our own case, mourning apart, or every one for their own iniquity, is most naturally proper thereto. And this is the mourning that shall be in the house of David, Jerusalem, the church, both with men and women, at all times when the Holy Ghost shall help us to look upon him whom we have pierced. Pray God give Mr. K. and myself more of these looks upon a crucified Christ, for then we shall understand this and other such like scriptures otherwise than to draw such incoherent inferences from them as he doth.

Objection.

"Women were wont in gospel times to meet together to pray. Therefore the women in gospel churches may separate themselves from their brethren to perform divine worship by themselves without their men" (Acts 16:13). This is another of his scriptures, brought to uphold this fancy: But,

Answer

1. It is not said that the women of churches met together alone to pray. But that Paul went down to a river-side where prayer was wont to be made, and spake unto the women that resorted thither. It looks therefore most agreeable to the word, to think that there the law was read by the Jewish priests to the proselyted women of that city, and that prayer, as was their custom in all such service, was intermixed therewith. But this is but conjectural. And yet, for all that, it is better grounded, and hath more reason on its side, than hath any of this man's arguments for the opinion of his women's meetings. But,

2. There was there at that time no gospel church of Christ, nor before that any gospel ministry, consequently no church obedience. Should it then be granted, that there were none but women at that meeting, and that their custom was to meet at that river-side to pray, it doth not therefore follow, that their practice was to be a pattern, a rule, a law to women in churches, to separate from their brethren, to perform divine worship, in their own woman's congregation without their men.

3. There was there no gospel believer. Lydia herself, before Paul came thither, had her heart shut up against the faith of Jesus Christ; and how a company of strangers to gospel faith, should in that their doing, be a pattern to the women in churches, a pattern of Christian worship, I do not understand.

4. If Paul's call to Philippi had been by the vision of a woman, or woman's meeting: what an argument would this man have drawn from thence to have justified his women's meetings? But since it was by a man, he hath lost an argument thereby. Though he, notwithstanding, doth adventure to say, that God so approved of that meeting, as then, and at that time, to take advantage to make known his mind and will to them concerning Jesus Christ.

5. And now I am in, since Mr. K. will needs have this scripture to justify such a practice, I wonder that he so lightly overlooked Paul's going to that meeting, for thither he went to be sure (Acts 16:13-16). Yea how fairly, to his thinking, might he have pleaded, that Paul by this act of his, was a great lover, countenancer and commender of those he calls the women's meetings. Paul went to the women's meeting at Philippi, therefore it is lawful for the women of gospel churches to separate from their brethren, and to congregate by themselves for the performance of some parts of divine worship. I say how easily might he have said this, and then have popt in those two verses above quoted, and so have killed the old one? ^[11]For the word lies liable to be abused by the ignorance of men, and it had been better than it is, if this had been the first time that this man had served it so, for the justification of his rigid principles; but when men, out of a fond conceit of their own abilities, or of prejudice to them that contradict their errors, are tempted to shew their folly, they will not want an opportunity from false glosses put upon the text, to do it.

6. But Paul went to that company to preach Christ's gospel to them, not for that they merited his coming, but of the grace of God, as also did Peter and John, when at the hour of prayer they went up into the temple, and Paul into the synagogue at Antioch (Acts 3:1-3, 13:14-16). But as fairly might this man have urged, that the healing of the lame man that lay at that time at the gate of the temple, and the conversion of them by Paul at Antioch, was by the procurement of the prayers of the sisters and by their reading of the law in that synagogue at Antioch, as to argue as he has done, that God was so well pleased, or so well approved of that woman's meeting as he feigns it at Philippi, as to send, &c. to them his minister.

7. But again, that this woman's meeting should be so deserving, and that while they were without the faith of Christ, as to procure a gospel minister to be sent unto them, that Christ might to them be made known, and yet that so few of them should be converted to the faith, seems a greater paradox to me. For we read not that one of the women then, or of them of the town, that did use to go to that meeting (for Lydia was of Thyatira), was ever converted to Christ; brethren we read of several, but we hear not of any one more of those women (v 40). But Lydia worshipped God, therefore her practice might prevail. Although it is said she worshipped God, yet she was but a proselyte, as those Acts 13 were, and knew no more of Christ than the eunuch did (Acts 8). But hold, she had faith, will that make all practice acceptable; yea, law and commandment to others, and the work of those that have none, meritorious? But we must touch upon these things anon.

Objection.

"But (saith Mr. K.) Malachi 3:16 doth countenance these meetings."

Answer.

Not at all; though Mr. K. has pleased to change a term in the text, to make it speak his mind; for he has put out *thought*, and put in *call*; but all will not do his work; for when he has done what he can, it will be difficult to make that scripture say, It is the duty of women in gospel churches to separate from their brethren, to perform divine worship among themselves.

Objection.

“But Jude 20 doth justify these meetings, except,” saith he, “any will say, women are not to be built up in their most holy faith.”

Answer.

How fain would the man lay hold on something, only he wants divine help, that is, the word of God, to bottom his things upon. But doth the apostle here at all treat of the women and their meetings, or are they only the beloved; and to be built up, &c. speaks he not there to the church, which consisteth of men and women? and are not men the more noble part in all the churches of Christ? But can women no other way be built up in their most holy faith, but by meetings of their own without their men? But, Building up YOURSELVES, I suppose is the thing he holds by. But cannot the church, and every woman in it, build up themselves without their woman’s meetings? wherefore have they the word, their closet, and the grace of meditation, but to build up themselves withal? He saith not, “Build up one another,” but if he had, it might well have been done without a woman’s meeting. But anything to save a drowning man. This text then is written to the church of Christ, by which it is exhorted to faith and prayer; but it speaks not a word of a woman’s meeting, and therefore it is fooling with the word to suggest it. I cannot therefore, while I see this impertinent dealing, but think our argumentator dotes, or takes upon him to be a head of those he thinks to rule over. The woman’s letter to me also seems to import the same, when they say, “Mr. K. would desire to know what objections you have against it (his arguments), and he is ready to give his further advice.”

Thus having taken from his arguments those holy words of God which he has abused, to make them stand; I come next to the arguments themselves, and intend to pick their bones for the crows.

Istly,

He saith, “That the same spirit that was in Miriam, is also in all God’s servants for the same end, both to pray for mercies we stand in need of, and to praise God for mercies received.”

Answer.

1. But the question is, whether Miriam did, as she led out the women to dance, act only as an ordinary saint. And if you evade this, you choose the tongue of the crafty, and use the words of deceit; for she managed that work as she was “Miriam the prophetess”; and in your next, pray tell your women so.

2. But as Miriam the prophetess, she did not lead the women from their men, to worship in some place remote by themselves, as we have shewed before.

2dly,

He saith, “That God hath promised to pour out his Spirit in gospel times to that very end, that women might pray together apart from men.”

Answer.

1. Not mentioning again what was said before: I add, if by *men*, he means the brethren, the prophet will not be his voucher, for he neither saith nor intimates such a thing.

2. And how far short this saying is, of making of God and his holy prophet, the author of schism in worship, and an encouragement unto schism therein, it is best in time that he looks to it. For if they may withdraw to do thus at one time, they may withdraw to do thus at another. And if the Spirit is given to

them to this very end, that they may go by themselves from the church, to perform this divine worship at one time, they may, for what bounds this man has set them, go by themselves to do thus always. But, as I said, the whole of this proposition being false, the error is still the greater.

3dly,

“God,” saith he, “hath so well approved of women meeting together to pray in gospel times, as then, and at that time, to take occasion to make known his mind and will to them concerning Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:13).

Answer.

Let the reader consider what was said before, and now it follows; if this assertion be true, then the popish doctrine of merit is good, yea the worst sort of it, which is, works done before faith. For that we read of none of these women save Lydia feared or worshipped God; and yet saith he, God so approved of that meeting as then, and at that time, to send them his gospel, which is one of the richest blessings; nor will it help to lay Cornelius, now in my way, for the deservings here were, for ought we read, of women that feared not God. Here Lydia only bare that character; it is said SHE worshipped God, but she was not *all* the women. But Mr. K. saith thus of them all. I know also there was faith in some in Messias to come, though when he came, they knew not his person; but this is not the case neither; these women, who held up as he feigned, this meeting, were not as we read of, of this people.

4thly,

He said, “That Esther and her maids fasted and prayed, and the Lord gave a gracious return, or answer and deliverance.” That is, to the church, that then was under the rage of Haman.

Answer.

Let the reader remember what was said before, and now I ask this man,

1. Whether Mordecai and the good men then did not pray and fast as well as she? And if so, Whether they might not obtain at least, some little of the mercy, as well as those women? If so,

2. Whether Mr. K., in applying the deliverance of this people to the prayer of the queen and her maids, for he lays it only there, be not deceitfully arguing, and do not tend to puff up that sex, to their hurt and damage! Yea whether it doth not tend to make them unruly and headstrong? But if they be more gently inclined to obedience, no thanks to Mr. K.

3. And if I should ask Mr. K. who gave him authority to attribute *thus* the deliverance of this people, to who and what prayers he please, I suppose it would not be easy for him to answer. The text saith not that the prayers of these women procured the blessing. But Mr. K. hath here a woman’s meeting to vindicate, and therefore it is that he is thus out in his mind. Prayers were heard and the church was delivered. And I doubt not but that these good women had hand and heart in the work. But should all be admitted that Mr. K. hath said as to this also, yet this scripture, as hath already been proved, will not justify his woman’s meeting.

5thly,

“He makes his appeal to the women, if they have not obtained, by their prayers in these their meetings, many blessed returns of prayer from God, both to themselves and the church of God.”

Answer.

I count this no whit better than the very worst of his paper, for besides the silliness of his appeal, by which he makes these good women to be judges in their own cause, his words have a direct tendency in them to puff them up to their destruction. I have wondered sometimes, to see when something

extraordinary hath happened to the church of God for good, that a few women meeting together to pray, should be possessed with a conceit, that they fetched the benefit down from heaven, when perhaps ten thousand men in the land prayed for the mercy as hard as they. Yea I have observed, that though the things bestowed, were not so much as thought of by them, yet they have been apt to conclude that their meeting together has done it. But poor women, you are to be pitied; your tempter is to bear the blame, to wit, this man and his fellows.

I come now to some objections that may yet be thought on: and will speak a word to them.

Objection.

It is said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (matt 18:20).

Answer.

To gather together in Christ’s name, is to gather together by his authority; That is, by his law and commandment (Acts 4:17,18,30, 5:28,40; Col 3:17). But we have no law of Christ, nor commandment, that the women of *this* or *that* church, should separate themselves from their brethren, to maintain meetings among themselves, for the performing of divine worship: and therefore such meetings cannot be in his name; that is, by his authority, law, and commandment; and so ought not to be at all.

Objection.

“But women may, if sent for by them of their own sex, come to see them when they are sick, and when so come together, pray in that assembly before they part.”

Answer.

The law of Christ is, “Is any sick among you? let him [and the woman is included in the man] call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him,” &c. And to this injunction there is a threefold promise made. (1.) “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick.” (2.) “And the Lord shall raise him up.” (3.) “And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (John 5:14,15). And considering, that this advice is seconded with so much grace: I think it best in all such cases, as in all other, to make the word of God our rule.

Objection.

“But women have sometimes cases, which modesty will not admit should be made known to men, what must they do then?”

Answer.

Their husbands and they are one flesh, and are no more to be accounted two. Let them tell their grief to them. Thus Rachel asked children of her husband, and went not to a nest of women to make her complaint to them (Gen 30:1). Or let them betake themselves to their closets, with Rebecca (Gen 25:20-23). Or if they be in the assembly of the saints, let them pray in their hearts, with Hannah. And if their petition be lawful, I doubt not but they may be heard (1 Sam 1:13).

Our author, perhaps, will say, I have not spoken to his question; which was, “Whether women, fearing God, may meet to pray together? And whether it be lawful for them so to do?”

But I answer, I have: with respect to all such godly women as are in the churches of the saints (1 Cor 14:33-35 compared with vv 15-17). And when he has told us, that his question respected only those out of churches, then will I confess that I did mistake him. Yet he will get nothing thereby, forasmuch as his question, to be sure, intends those in special. Also his arguments are for the justifying of that their

practice. Now the reason why I waved the form of his question, was, because it was both scanty and lean of words, as to the matter of the controversy in hand: also I thought it best to make it more ample, and distinct, for the edification of our reader. And if after all, Mr. K. is not pleased at what I have done, let him take up the question, and answer it better. The man perhaps may fly to the case of utter necessity, and so bring forth another question, to wit, whether, if the men of a church should all die, be murdered, or cast into prison: the women of that church may not meet together to pray? And whether it be not lawful for them so to do? But when he produceth a necessity for the putting of such a question, and then shall put it to me; I will, as God shall help me, give him an answer thereto.

But, may some say, Our women in this do not what they do of their own heads, they are allowed to do what they do by the church.

I answer, *No church allowance is a foundation sufficient to justify that which is neither commanded nor allowed by the word.* Besides, who knows not, that have their eyes in their heads, what already has, and what further may, come into the churches, at such a gap as this. And now to give the reader a cautionary conclusion.

Caution 1.

Take heed of letting the name, or good show of a thing, beget in thy heart a religious reverence of that thing; but look to the word for thy bottom,^[12] for it is the word that authorizeth, whatever may be done with warrant in worship to God; without the word things are of human invention, of what splendour or beauty soever they may appear to be. Without doubt the Friars and Nuns, and their religious orders, were of a good intent at first, as also compulsive vows of chastity, single life, and the like. But they were all without the word, and therefore, as their bottom wanted divine authority, so the practice wanted sanctity by the Holy Ghost. The word prayer is, of itself, in appearance so holy, that he forthwith seems to be a devil that forbids it. And yet we find that prayers have been out of joint, and disorderly used; and therefore may by one, without incurring the danger of damnation, be called into question; and if found without order by him, he may labour to set them in joint again (Matt 6:5-8, 23:14; James 4:3).

I am not of the number of them that say, “What profit should we have if we pray unto God?” (Job 21:15). But finding no good footing in the word for that kind of service we have treated about above, and knowing that error and human inventions in religion will not offer themselves, but with wiped lips, and a countenance as demure as may be, and also being persuaded that this opinion of Mr. K. is vagrant, yea a mere alien as to the scriptures, I being an officer, have apprehended it, and put it in the stocks, and there will keep it, till I see by what authority it has leave to pass and repass as it lists, among the godly in this land.

Caution 2.

Yet by all that I have said, I never meant to intimate in the least, but that believing women are saints as well as men: and members of the body of Christ. And I will add, that as *they*, and *we*, are united to Christ, and made members of his mystical body, the fulness of him that fills all in all, so there is no superiority, as I know of, but we are all one in Christ. For, the man is not without the woman, nor “the woman without the man, in the Lord,” (1 Cor 11:11) nor are we counted “as male or female” in him (Gal 3:28; Eph 1:23). Only we must observe that *this* is spoken of that church which is his true mystical body, and not of every particular congregation of professing Christians. The churches of Christ *here* and there are also called his body. But no church *here*, though never so famous, must be taken for that of which mention was made afore.^[13] As Christ then has a body mystical, which is called his members, his flesh, and his bones (Eph 5:30), so he has a body politic, congregations modelled by the skill that his ministers have in his word, for the bearing up of his name, and the preserving of his glory in the world against Antichrist. In *this* church, order and discipline, for the nourishing up of the true mystical body of

Christ, has been placed from the foundation of the world. Wherefore in *this*, laws, and statutes, and government, is to be looked after, and given heed unto, for the edification of *that* which is to arrive at last to a perfect man: to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (1 Cor 12:27-30; Eph 4:11-13).

Now, where there is order and government by laws and statutes, there must, of necessity, be also a distinction of sex, degrees, and age. Yea, offices and officers must also be there, for our furtherance and joy of faith. From which government and rule our ordinary women are excluded by Paul; nor should it, since it is done by the wisdom of God, be any offence unto them.

In this church there are oftentimes many hypocrites, and formal professors, and heresies, “That they which are approved may be made manifest” (1 Cor 11:19). These therefore being there, and being suffered to act as they many times do, provoke the truly godly to contend with them by the word; for that these hypocrites, and formal professors, naturally incline to a denial of the power of godliness, and to set up forms of their own in the stead thereof (Mar 7:6-9; 2 Tim 3:5).

And this is done for the sake and for the good of those that are the true members of the body of Christ, and that are to arrive at his haven of rest: from whom those others at last shall be purged, and with them, all their things that offend. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear let him hear” (Matt 13:43).

This church, that thus consisteth of all righteous, that are so in God’s account: they are to have a house in heaven, and to be for God’s habitation there. Who, then, shall be governed by their head without those officers and laws that are necessary here. And both at last shall be subject to him, that sometime did put all things under Christ, that God may be all in all (John 14:1-3; Eph 2:21; 1 Cor 15:23-27). Wherefore, my beloved sisters, this inferiority of yours will last but a little while. When the day of God’s salvation is come, to wit, when our Lord shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, these distinctions of sexes shall be laid aside, and every pot shall be filled to the brim. For with a *notwithstanding* you shall be saved, and be gathered up to that state of felicity if you continue in faith, and charity, and holiness, with sobriety (1 Tim 2:15).

Caution 3.

I doubt not at all of the lawfulness of women’s praying, and that, both in private and public: only when they pray publicly, they should not separate from, but join with the church in that work. They should also not be the mouth of the assembly, but in heart, desires, groans, and tears, they should go along with the men. In their closets they are at liberty to *speak* unto their God, who can bear with, and pity them with us; and pardon all our weakness for the sake of Jesus Christ.

And here I will take an occasion to say, there may be a twofold miscarriage in prayer, one in doctrine, the other in the frame of the heart. All are too much subject to the last, women [more easily] to the first. And for this cause it is, at least so I think, that women are not permitted to teach, nor speak in assemblies, for divine worship, but to *be* and to *learn* in silence (1 Cor 14:33-35, 15:33). For he that faileth as to the frame of his spirit, hurteth only himself: but he that faileth in doctrine corrupteth them that stand by. Let the women be alone with Rebecca in the closet; or, if in company, let her, with Hannah, speak to herself and to God; and not doubt, but if she be humble, and keep within compass, she shall be a sharer with her brethren in the mercy.

Caution 4.

Nor are women, by what I have said, debarred from any work or employ, unto which they are enjoined by the word. They have often been called forth to be God’s witnesses, and have borne famous testimony for him against the sons of the sorceress and the whore.^[14] I remember many of them with comfort, even of these eminent daughters of Sarah, whose daughters you also are, so long as you do

well, and are not afraid with any amazement (1 Peter 3:1-6). What by the word of God, you are called unto, what by the word is enjoined you do; and the Lord be with you.

But this of the women's meetings; since, indeed, there is nothing for its countenance in the word, and since the calling together of assemblies for worship is an act of power, and belongeth to the church, elders, or chief men of the same: let me intreat you to be content, to be under subjection and obedience, as also saith the law. We hold that it is God's word that we are to look to, as to all things pertaining to worship, because it is the word that authorizeth and sanctifieth what we do.

Caution 5.

WOMEN! They are an ornament in the church of God on earth, as the ANGELS are in the church in heaven. Betwixt whom also there is some comparison, for they cover their faces in acts of worship (Isa 6:2; 1 Cor 11:10). But as the angels in heaven are not Christ, and so not admitted to the mercy-seat to speak to God, so neither are women on earth, [but] the man; who is to worship with open face before him, and to be the mouth in prayer for the rest. As the angels then cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, with faces covered in heaven: So let the women, cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, with their faces covered on earth: Yea, thus they should do, because of the angels. "For this cause ought the woman to have power," that is a covering, "on *her* head, because of the angels" (1 Cor 11:10). Not only because the angels are present, but because women and angels, as to their worship, in their respective places, have a semblance. For the angels are inferior to the great man Christ, who is in heaven; and the woman is inferior to the man, that truly worships God in the church on earth.

Methinks, holy and beloved sisters, you should be content to wear this power, or badge of your inferiority, since the cause thereof arose at first from yourselves. It was the woman that at first the serpent made use of, and by whom he then overthrew the world: wherefore the women, to the world's end, must wear tokens of her underlingship in all matters of worship. To say nothing of that which she cannot shake off, to wit, her pains and sorrows in child-bearing, which God has riveted to her nature, there is her silence, and shame, and a covering for her face, in token of it, which she ought to be exercised with, whenever the church comes together to worship (Gen 3:16; 1 Tim 2:15; 1 Cor 11:13; 1 Tim 2:9).

Do you think that God gave the woman her hair, that she might deck herself, and set off her fleshly beauty therewith? It was given her to cover her face with, in token of shame and silence, for that by the woman sin came into the world (1 Tim 2:9). And perhaps the reason why the angels cover their faces when they cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, in heaven, is to shew that they still bear in mind, with a kind of abhorrence, the remembrance of their fellows falling from thence. Modesty, and shame-facedness, becomes women at all times, especially in times of public worship, and the more of this is mixed with their grace and personage, the more beautiful they are both to God and men. But why must the women have shame-facedness, since they live honestly as the men? I answer, In remembrance of the fall of Eve, and to that the apostle applies it. For a woman, necessity has no law, to shave her head, and to look with open face in worship, as if she could be a leader there, is so far from doing that which becomes her, that it declares her to have forgot what God would have her for ever with shame remember.

Caution 6.

In what I have said about the women's meetings, I have not at all concerned myself about those women, that have been extraordinary ones, such as Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna, or the rest, as the daughters of Philip the evangelist, Priscilla, the women that Paul said laboured with him in the gospel, or such like; for they might teach, prophecy, and had power to call the people together so to do. Though this I must say concerning them, they ought to, and did, notwithstanding so high a calling, still bear about with them the badge of their inferiority to them that were prophets indeed. And hence it is said,

under pain of being guilty of disorder, that if they prayed in the church, or prophesied there, with their head uncovered, they then dishonoured their head (1 Cor 11:5).

The prophetesses were below the prophets, and their covering for their heads was to be worn in token thereof, and perhaps it was for want of regard to this order, that when Miriam began to perk it ^[15] before Moses, that God covered her face with a leprous-scab (Num 12:10). Hence these women, when prophets were present, did use to lie still as to acts of power, and leave that to be put forth by them that were higher than they. And even Miriam herself, though she was one indeed, yet she came always behind, not only in name but worship, unless when she was in her own disorders (Num 12:1).

And it is worth your farther noting, that when God tells Israel that they should take heed in the plague of leprosy, that they diligently observed to do what the priest and Levites taught them, that he conjoins with that exhortation, that they should “remember what God did unto Miriam by the way” (Deut 24:8,9). Intimating surely that they should not give heed to women, that would be perking up in matters of worshipping God. Much less should we invest them with power to call congregations of their own, there to perform worship without their men.

Yet, will I say, notwithstanding all this, that if any of these high women had, but we never read that they did, separate themselves, and others of their own sex with them, apart to worship by themselves: or if they had given out commandment so to do, and had joined God’s name to that commandment, I should have freely consented that our women should do so too, when led out, and conducted in worship, by so extraordinary a one. Yea more, If any of these high women had given it out for law, that the women of the churches in New Testament times, ought to separate themselves from their men, and as so separate, perform divine worship among themselves: I should have subscribed thereto. But finding nothing like this in the word of God, for the sanctifying of such a practice: and seeing so many scriptures wrested out of their place to justify so fond a conceit: and all this done by a man of conceit, and of one that, as his sisters say, expects my answer: I found myself engaged to say something for the suppressing of this his opinion.

But to return to the good women in the churches, and to make up my discourse with them.

First, These meetings of yours, honourable women, wherein you attempt to perform divine worship by yourselves, without your men, not having the authority of the word to sanctify them, will be found will-worship, in the day when you, as to that, shall be measured with that golden reed, the law of God. And “who hath required this at your hand?” may put you to your shifts for an answer, notwithstanding all Mr. K. has said to uphold you (Isa 1:12; Rev 11:1).

Secondly, These meetings of yours need not be; there are elders or brethren in all churches, to call to, and manage this worship of God, in the world: if you abide in your subjection and worship as you are commanded.

Thirdly, These meetings of yours, instead of being an ornament to the church in which you are, are a shame and blemish to those churches. For they manifest the unruliness of such women, or that the church wants skill to govern them (1 Cor 14:23). Have you not “in your flock a male?” (Mal 1:14).

Fourthly, Suppose your meetings in some cases were lawful, yet since by the brethren they may be managed better, you and your meetings ought to give place. That the church together, and the brethren, as the mouth to God, are capable of managing this solemn worship best: consider—1. The gifts for all such service are most to be found in the elders and leading men in the church: and not in the women thereof. 2. The spirit for conduct and government in that worship, is not in the women, but in the men. 3. The men are admitted in such worship, to stand with open face before God, a token of much admittance to liberty and boldness with God, a thing denied to the women (1 Cor 11:4,5). 4. For that when meetings for prayers are commanded, the men, to be the mouth to God, are mentioned, but not in ordinary women, in all the Scriptures. Where the women and children, and them that suck the breasts are called, with the bride and bridegroom, and the whole land, to mourn: yet the ministers, and elders, and chiefest

of the brethren, are they, and they only, that are bid to say, "Spare thy people, O Lord! and give not thine heritage to reproach" (Joel 1:13,14, 2:15-17). 5. The word for encouragement to pray believingly in assemblies is given to men. And it is the word that makes, and that sanctifies an ordinance of God: men, therefore, in all assemblies for worship, should be they that should manage it, and let others join in their places.

Objection.

But the woman is included in the man, for the same word signifies both.

Answer.

1. If the woman is included here, let her not exclude the man. But the man is [by them] excluded: The man is excluded by this woman's meeting from worship; from worship, though he be the head in worship over the women, and by God's ordinance appointed to manage it, and this is an excluding of the worst complexion (1 Cor 11:3).

2. Though the woman is included, when the man sometimes is named, yet the man is not excluded, when himself as chief is named. But to cut him off from being the chief in all assemblies for worship, is to exclude him, and that when he for that in chief is named.

3. The woman is included when the man is named, yet but in her place, and if she worships in assemblies, her part is to hold her tongue, to learn in silence; and if she speaks, she must do it, I mean as to worship, in her heart to God.

4. Nor, do I think, that any woman that is holy and humble, will take offence at what I have said; for I have not in anything sought to degrade them, or to take from them what either nature or grace, or an appointment of God hath invested them with: but have laboured to keep them in their place. And doubtless to abide where God has put us, is that which not only highly concerns us, but that, which becomes us best. Sisters, I have said what I have said to set you right, and to prevent your attempting to do things in such sort unto which you are not appointed. Remember what God did to Miriam, and be afraid.

Be as often in your closets as you will; the oftener there the better. This is your duty, this is your privilege: this place is sanctified to you for service by the holy Word of God. Here you may be, and not make ordinances interfere, and not presume upon the power of your superiors, and not thrust out your brethren, nor put them behind your backs in worship.

Be also as often as possibly you can, in worship, when the church, or parts thereof, are assembled for that end, according to God's appointment. And when you are there, join with heart and soul with your brethren in all holy petitions to God. Let the men in prayer be the mouth to God, and the women list after with groans and desires. Let the men stand with open face in this worship, for that they are the image and glory of God, and let the women be clothed in modest apparel, with shame-facedness, in token of the remembrance of what has been touched afore.

When women keep their places, and men manage their worshipping of God as they should, we shall have better days for the church of God, in the world (Jer 29:10-14). Women are not to be blamed for that they are forward to pray to God, only let them know their bounds; and I wish that idleness in men be not the cause of their putting their good women upon this work. Surely they that can scarce tie their shoes, and their garters, before they arrive at the tavern, or get to the coffee-house door in a morning, can scarce spare time to be a while in their closets with God. Morning closet-prayers are now, by most London professors, thrown away; and what kind of ones they make at night, God doth know, and their conscience, when awake, will know; however I have cause, as to this, to look at home: And God mend me and all his servants about it, and wherein we else are out.

I have done, after I have said, that there are some other things, concerning women, touching which, when I have an opportunity, I may also give my judgment. But at present, I intreat that these lines be taken in good part, for I seek edification, not contention.

FOOTNOTES:

^[1] “Breach Repaired,” a defence of singing in public worship, then newly and partially introduced. 1700, p. 2.

^[2] Distinguishing Practices of Friends, p. 280-1.

^[3] P. 495.

^[4] P. 509.

^[5] Sketch of Friends’ Discipline, p. 35.

^[6] Probably a female branch of the family of John or Samuel Fenn, hatters at Bedford, who, in 1670, were cruelly persecuted for suffering a meeting for religious worship to take place in the house of John Fenn. Not only all their stock of hats, materials, and tools, but the whole of their household furniture was seized and carried off to satisfy ruinous fines. One John Bardolf was also cruelly persecuted for Christ’s sake at the same time.—Vide Narrative of Arbitrary Proceedings at Bedford, 4to, 1670, in the editor’s possession.

^[7] In times of such severe trial and suffering to our pilgrim forefathers, they knew the value of prayer; and at the risk of property, liberty, and even life, held frequent meetings to implore their God and Father to mitigate their sufferings, and to have mercy upon their cruel persecutors. Not only working tools and stock, but commonly all the furniture, was taken from the Christians, while their ministers and members, both men and women, were imprisoned in miserable jails. One of these, Mr. Robert Kalder, dying, was buried in the churchyard; but those furious bigots dug up his naked body, and dragged it to the gates of his former residence, leaving it there, a frightful spectacle to his widow and family. They had meetings for prayer; and how does it become their descendants in the faith to have days of thanksgiving and nights of praise?—See Broadmead Records and Crosby’s History of Baptists, vol. ii., p. 240.—Ed.

^[8] “Syllogism,” a form of reasoning, consisting of three propositions, having this property; that the conclusion necessarily follows from the two premises: so that if the first and second be granted, the conclusion must be granted in like manner. No wonder that Bunyan neither understood nor was awed by this hard word. Armed with holy Writ, he goes to work “to pick the bones of the syllogism.”—Ed.

^[9] Much stress was, and is now, laid in many churches upon the necessity of all persons, before praying or preaching in public, being guided by the opinion of the church. The taking advice in so important a step must be proper; but any *pledge* to abide by it, contrary to the conscientious conviction of the individual, would be a violation of the duty of private judgment. If in their ministrations they were false or foolish, the church must exercise discipline; but if they became useful, surely no objection could be urged as to the validity of their call to the ministry, because the church had not been first consulted or had advised them not to proceed. The desire—the ability, by sound views of divine truth, and a happy way of illustrating and enforcing them—with the opportunity of so doing, is the divine call to this holy work.—Ed.

^[10] “So nunnish,” a singular mode of expression, alluding to the nuns being separated from the world, and shut up by themselves. They were not permitted to exercise the priestly office. Father confessors and chaplains were appointed for these duties.—Ed.

^[11] To have said that the spirit of divination, which was cast out, was so far killed by virtue of a female prayer meeting, would have been as true as to have said, that these meetings were limited to females only.—Ed.

^[12] “Bottom,” or foundation.

^[13] A dangerous error, originating in the sectarian pride of Antichrist, prevails to a very great extent. It is that some one visible church, or set of united churches, is the mystical body of Christ, and entitled to be called THECHURCH Every congregation of pious men and women, united together in the faith, is a church of Christ. But THE church comprises all the saints of God who ever lived—live now, or will live on the earth; until their number is completed, and this creation shall give place to the new heavens and the new earth. Every church is as distinct as it is equal; whether it meet at Corinth, Rome, or Ephesus, at London or Edinburgh. Be it Episcopalian, Independent, Presbyterian, Baptist, or a church of the Society of Friends; each is entitled, according to the New Testament, to equal honour and privilege.—Ed.

^[14] The usual appellations of Popery.—Ed.

^[15] “To perk it,” to hold up her head with affected superiority or spiritual pride.—Ed.