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ON PASTORAL RULE.

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There is such a thing as pastoral rule. Many Congregationalists deny it; some in boldly avowed theory, and more, practically. Whether openly expressed or not, the idea is too rife that the whole Christian brotherhood is on a dead level of perfect equality. Independency is too much regarded as the right of every one to do just as he pleases. This is the false idea of liberty both in Church and State. Independence of law, independence of rule,—this is what the multitude desiderate, whether the sphere of action be religious or political. “They despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.”

Freedom and independence rightly understood, imply the right to live and act under accepted law and chosen rulers. For every man to do what is right in his own eyes, is anarchy. It is so in the state, as a little reflection will suffice to convince anyone capable of reasoning on the subject. It is so likewise in the church. Social order is the offspring of wise rule. Ecclesiastical order comes of the same parentage. Social peace is the fruit of social order, and peace in the church cannot co-exist with disorder there. “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” “Order is Heaven’s first law.”

To many Congregationalists it is quite sufficient justification of any ecclesiastical action, that it was done “by vote of the church,” without stopping to inquire whether it was authorized by the Divine statute-book; while others regard everything of the sort as a very common proceeding, having no weight except that of an aggregate human opinion. The first is the extreme of superstition, and the second is the extreme of lawlessness. The truth lies midway between them. A church is a Divinely-constituted kingdom, a little *imperium in imperio*, tracing its existence and powers to a celestial origin, and having a prescribed and limited jurisdiction. It cannot *make* laws. Indeed no human authority can do that. It can only administer laws, already made by a wisdom and power higher than those possessed by mortal man. Church action which cannot be justified by inspired statute, is entirely destitute of weight, while church action that can be and is so justified, has the sanction and authority of heaven behind it. Not to unguided, random human decisions, but to procedure dictated by inspired truth, and harmonious with the Divine will, does the language of our Lord apply:—“Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven.” A Christian church is a believing assembly, with Christ in the midst. Christ is there not only as the church’s Redeemer to bestow blessings, but he is there as the church’s Monarch, to exercise absolute sway. And the pastor truly called to his work, and legitimately elected to office, is Christ’s ambassador. He represents and acts for the Master. It is his to maintain Christ’s authority, to expound Christ’s word, to