

The theory of the Baptists has been recently espoused by some very eminent divines occupying high places in the Presbyterian Church, and defended with ability and zeal. But their argument is fallacious, and their objects either nugatory or unnecessary. Their idea of the Church is grounded on the phrase in the Creed,—“the communion of saints,” which they take, contrary to the fact, to be a description of the Church. The church in the Creed, and the communion of saints, are two different things. The former denotes the visible church, the latter belongs to the invisible, and found its way into the Creed long after the former. They further appeal to the use of the word church, and to the descriptions of the church, found in the New Testament, such as the term “holy;” “called to be saints;” “the Church of God which is in Corinth,” and so forth; and affirm that these can apply to none but true believers. But they overlook the well-known fact that many of these terms are ambiguous, especially the term holy, which denotes both federal and absolute holiness. These and similar expressions by no means imply that whilst the general character of the church was holy every individual in it was holy also. For the same Apostle who employs these terms and applies them to the church, was well aware, that, in every church, the character of some did not accord with these spiritual designations. The truth is, that the advocates of this theory have overshot the mark and pushed their argument quite too far. Their object is to show that there is no spiritual ground for church establishments, especially for the Romanist theory of the church. But to do this it was neither necessary nor good policy to adopt a false position, which serves only to weaken an argument. Their object can be better and more successfully accomplished on our principles; that is, acting under the authority which Christ the Head of his Church has given her for managing all her spiritual concerns, to exclude all unworthy persons from her communion; to admit only on the ground of a profession of faith in Christ and obedience to him; and to deny all right to the privileges of the church under any circumstances whatever, apart from moral fitness.

The same line of argument has been more recently employed, to resist the encroachments of the civil power. Now, with all deference to the judgment of excellent men, I would say, neither is it necessary, even for this object, to adopt such a position. In fact it may have some efficacy in the other case; it can be of little service in this. It is not easy to resist the interference of the civil courts, especially where there may be a disposition to overstep the limits of their proper jurisdiction. Our voluntary churches are indeed pure, religious associations; but their existence as *visible organizations*, can not be maintained without involving the question of civil rights. And if a dispute about these should arise, what is to prevent an appeal to the civil courts? I apprehend, the plea that Christ is the Head of the Church, and that in all church matters we are acting under the authority of her living Head, will not avail to protect us from state interference; unless we take stricter ground, and, by express regulations, guard against *all appeal* to the civil courts. Let us frame our constitution,—always in accordance with the scripture, as Paul says, “Dare any of you go to law before the unjust,” in such a way as will preclude an appeal to the civil courts; and in all our decisions