

The Dissenter's Reasons for Separating From the Church of England.

by John Gill

The church of England is not a true church of Christ because of its human constitution, corrupt doctrine, and lack of discipline.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:42, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 1:8-9, Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 Timothy 3:15, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 10:25, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "Separation from the Church", "True Church vs. Established Church"

Description

John Gill addresses the reasons for the Dissenters' separation from the Church of England, emphasizing that their decision is rooted in conscience rather than contention. He critiques the Church's human constitution, national form, and the corrupt doctrine preached, arguing that true churches should be congregational and consist of faithful believers. Gill also highlights issues with the administration of sacraments, the lack of biblical governance, and the Church's historical persecution of dissenters. He asserts that the Church of England fails to meet the biblical standards for a true church, leading to their justified dissent.

Transcript

The

DISSENTER'S REASONS FOR SEPARATING FROM

The Church Of England,

Occasioned By

A Letter wrote by a Welch Clergyman on the Duty of Catechizing Children.

Intended chiefly for the Dissenters of the Baptist Denomination in Wales.

Whereas Dissenters from the church of England are frequently charged with schism, and their separation is represented as unreasonable, and they are accounted an obstinate and contentious people; it may be proper to give some reasons why they depart from the Established church; by which it will appear that their separation does not arise from a spirit of singularity and contention, but is really a matter of

conscience with them; and that they have that to say for themselves, which will sufficiently justify them, and remove the calumnies that are cast upon them; and our reasons are as follow.

I. We dislike the church of England because of its Constitution, which is human; and not divine: it is called The church of England as by law Established; not by the law of God, but by the law of man: it is said to be the best constituted church in the world, but we like it never the better for its being constituted by men: a church of Christ ought to be constituted as those we read of in the Acts of the Apostles, and not established by Acts of Parliament; as the articles, worship, and discipline of the church of England be; a parliamentary church we do not understand; Christ's kingdom or church is not of this world; it is not established on worldly maxims, nor supported by worldly power and policy.

II. We are not satisfied that the church of England is a true church of Christ because of the form and order of it; which is national, whereas it ought to be congregational, as the first Christian churches were; we read of the church at Jerusalem, and of the churches in Judea besides, so that there were several churches in one nation; and also of the churches of Macedonia, and likewise of Galatia, and of the seven churches of Asia, which were in the particular cities mentioned; yea of a church in an house, which could not be national; there were also the church at Corinth, and another at Cenchrea, a few miles distant from it, and a sea-port of the Corinthians.

A church of Christ is a congregation of men who are gathered out of the world by the grace of God, and who separate from it and meet together in fume one place to worship God; and to this agrees the definition of a church in the xixth Article of the church of England, and is this; "The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men:" which is against herself; for if a congregation, then not a nation; if a congregation then it must be gathered out from others; and if a congregation, then it must meet in one place, or it cannot with any propriety be so called; as the church at Corinth is said to do (1 Cor. 11:18, 20; 14:23), but when and where did the church of England meet together in one place? and how is it the visible church of Christ? where and when was it ever seen in a body together? is it to be seen in the King, the head of it? or in the Parliament, by whom it was established? or in the upper and lower houses of Convocation, its representatives?

To say, that it is to be seen in every parish, is either to make a building of stone the church, which is the stupid notion of the vulgar people; or to make the parishioners a church, and then there must be as many churches of England as there are parishes, and so some thousands, and not one only. III. We object to the matter or materials of the church of England, which are the whole nation, good and bad; yea, inasmuch as all the natives of England are members of this church, and are so by birth, they must in their original admission, or becoming members, be all bad; since they are all conceived and born in sin, and great part of them as they grow up are men of vicious lives and conversations; whereas a visible church of Christ ought to consist of faithful men, as the above mentioned Article declares, that is, of true believers in Christ and such were the materials of the first Christian churches; they were made up of such as were called to be saints, sanctified in Christ Jesus, and faithful brethren in him; as were the churches at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Colosse: there were churches of saints; but the church of England is a church of the world, or consists for the most part of worldly men; and therefore we cannot hold communion with it.

IV. We are dissatisfied with the doctrine preached in the church of England, which generally is very corrupt, and not agreeable to the word of God; and therefore cannot be a true church of Christ, which ought to be the pillar and ground of truth; for the visible church of Christ, as the 19th article runs, is "a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached;" of which pure word, the

doctrines of grace are a considerable part; such as eternal election in Christ, particular redemption by him, justification by his imputed righteousness, pardon through his blood, atonement and satisfaction by his sacrifice, and salvation alone by him, and not by the works of men; the efficacy of divine grace in conversion, the perseverance of the saints, and the like; but these doctrines are scarce ever, or but seldom, and by a very few, preached in the church of England: since two thousand godly and faithful ministers were turned out at once, Arminianism has generally prevailed; and scarce any thing else than Arminian tenets and mere morality are preached, and not Christ and him crucified, and the necessity of faith in him, and salvation by him; wherefore we are obliged to depart from such a communion, and seek out elsewhere for food for our souls.

And though the xxxix Articles of the church of England are agreeable to the word of God, a few only excepted; yet of what avail are they, since they are seldom or ever preached, though sworn and subscribed to by all in public office; and even these are very defective in many things: There are no articles relating to the two covenants of grace and works; to creation and providence; to the fall of man; the nature of sin and punishment for it; to adoption, effectual vocation; sanctification, faith, repentance, and the final perseverance of the saints; nor to the law of God; Christian liberty; church-government and discipline; the communion of the saints; the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment.

V. We dissent from the church of England, because the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's supper are not duly administered in it, according to the word of God, and so is not a regular church of Christ; for, as the above Article says, "The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which -- the sacraments be duly ministered, according to Christ's own ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same:" but the said ordinances are not duly administered in the church of England, according to the appointment of Christ; there are some things which are of necessity requisite to the same, which are not done; and others which are of necessity requisite, which are enjoined, and with which we cannot comply.

First, The ordinance of Baptism is not administered in the said church, according to the rule of God's word: there are some things used in the administration of it, which are of human invention, and not of Christ's ordination; and other things absolutely necessary to it, which are omitted; and indeed the whole administration of it, has nothing in it agreeable to the institution of Christ, unless it be the bare form of words made use of, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, etc. 1.

The sign of the cross used in baptism is entirely unscriptural, an human invention, a rite and ceremony which the Papists are very fond of, and ascribe much unto; and indeed the church of England makes a kind of a sacrament of it, since the minister when he does it says, that it is done "in token, that hereafter he (the person baptized) shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier unto his life's end:" this is such an human addition to a divine ordinance, as by no means to be admitted. 2.

The introduction of sponsors and sureties, or godfathers and godmothers, is without any foundation from the word of God; it is a device of men, and no ways requisite to the administration of the ordinance: besides, they are obliged to promise that for the child, which they cannot do for themselves, nor any creature under heaven; as "to renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so as not to follow or be led by them; and constantly believe God's holy word, and obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of his life." 3.

The prayers before and after baptism may well be objected to, suggesting that remission of sins and regeneration are obtained this way; and that such as are baptized are regenerated and undoubtedly saved: in the prayer before baptism are these words; "We call upon thee for this infant, that he coming to thy holy baptism, may receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration;" and when the ceremony is performed, the minister declares, "that this child is regenerate, and grafted in the body of Christ's church;" and in the prayer after it, he says, "We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy holy Spirit:" and in the rubric are these words; "It is certain by God's word, that children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved;" yea in the Catechism, the person catechized is instructed to say, that in his baptism he "was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven:" which seems greatly to favor the popish notion, that the sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*, upon the deed done.

There are things which give disgust to many Dissenters, that are for infant-baptism; but some of us have greater reasons than these against the administration of baptism in the church of England; for, 4. The subjects to which it is administered are not the proper ones, namely infants; we do not find in all the word of God, that infants were commanded to be baptized, or that ever any were baptized by John, the first administrator of that ordinance, nor by Christ, nor by his apostles, nor in any of the primitive churches: the persons we read of, that were baptized in those early times, were such as were sensible of sin, had repentance for it, and had faith in Christ, or professed to have it; all which cannot be laid of infants: nor can we see, that any argument in favor of infant-baptism can be drawn from Abraham's covenant, from circumcision, from the baptism of households, or from any passage either in the Old or New Testament.

Moreover, 5. We cannot look upon baptism as administered in the church of England, to be valid, or true Christian baptism; because not administered in a right way, that is, by immersion, but either by sprinkling or pouring water, which the rubric allows of in care of weakness; nor do we understand, that it is ever performed in any other way, at least, very rarely; whereas we have abundant reason to believe, that the mode of immersion was always used by John the Baptist, and by the apostles of Christ, and by the churches of Christ for many ages.

Secondly, There are many things in the administration of the Lord's supper, which we think we have reason to object unto, and which shew it to be an undue one: and not to take notice of the bread being ready cut with a knife, and not broken by the minister, whereas it is expressly said, that Christ brake the bread, and did it in token of his broken body; nor of the time of administering it, at noon, which makes it look more like a dinner, or rather like a breakfast, being taken fasting, than a supper; whereas to administer it in the evening best agrees with its name, and the time of its first institution and celebration; but not to insist on these things. 1.

Kneeling at the receiving of it is made a necessary requisite to it, which looks like an adoration of the elements, and Foetus to favor the doctrine of the real presence; and certain it is, that it was brought in by pope Honorius, and that for the sake of transubstantiation and the real presence, which his predecessor Innocent the iiird had introduced; and though the church of England disavows any such adoration of the elements, and of Christ's corporal presence in them; yet inasmuch as it is notorious that this has been abused, and still is, to idolatry, it ought to be laid aside; and the rather sitting should be used, since it is a table-gesture, and more suitable to a feast; and was what was used by Christ and his apostles, and by the primitive churches, until transubstantiation obtained; or however, since kneeling at most is but an indifferent rite, it ought not to be imposed as necessary, but should be left to the liberty of persons to use it or not. 2.

The ordinance is administered to all that desire it, whether qualified for it or not; and to many of vicious lives and conversations; yea the minister, when he intends to celebrate it, in the exhortation, which in the book of Common Prayer he is directed to use, says; "unto which, in God's behalf, I bid you, all that are here present, and beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, that ye will not refuse to come thereto." Whereas it cannot be thought, that all present, every one in a public congregation, or in a parish, are fit and proper communicants; and there are many persons described in the word of God, we art not to eat with (1 Cor. 5:2).

Yet the rubric enjoins, "that every parishioner shall communicate, at the least, three times in the year;" and directs, "that new-married persons should receive the holy communion at the time of their marriage, or at the first opportunity after it;" though none surely will say, that all married persons are qualified for it. 3. This sacred ordinance is most horridly prostituted, and most dreadfully profaned, by allowing and even obliging persons, and these often times some of the worst of characters, to come and partake of it as a civil test, to qualify them for places of profit and trust; whereas the design of this ordinance is to commemorate the sufferings and death of Christ, and his love therein; to strengthen the faith of Christians, and increase their love to Christ and one another, and to maintain communion and fellowship with him and among themselves. 4.

This ordinance is sometimes administered in a private house, which took its rise from laying of private mass; and to sick persons, to whom it seems to be given as a viaticum, or a provision for the soul in its way to heaven; and to two or three persons only, and even in some cases to a single person; whereas it is a church-ordinance, and ought to be administered only in the church, and to the members of it. VI. As the church of England has neither the form nor matter of a true church, nor is the word of God purely preached, and the ordinances of the gospel duly administered in it; so neither is it a truly organized church, it having such ecclesiastical officers and offices in it, which are not to be found in the word of God; and which is another reason why we separate from it.

The scripture knows nothing of Archbishops and Diocesan Bishops, of Archdeacons and Deans, of Prebends, Chantors, Parsons, Vicars, Curates, etc. The only two officers in a Christian church are Bishops and Deacons; the one has the care of the spiritual, the other of the temporal affairs of the church; the former is the same with Pastors, Elders, and Overseers; and such men ought to be of sound principles, and exemplary lives and conversations; and moreover ought to be chosen by the people; nor should any be imposed upon them contrary to their will: this is an hardship, and what we cannot submit to: and it is a reason of our reparation, because we are not allowed to choose our own pastors.

VII. The church of England has for its head a temporal one, whereas the church of Christ has no other head but Christ himself. That our lawful and rightful sovereign King GEORGE is head of the Church of England, we deny not; he is so by Act of Parliament, and as such to be acknowledged; but then that church can never be the true church of Christ, that has any other head but Christ; we therefore are obliged to distinguish between the church of England and the church of Christ.

A woman may be, and has been head of the church of England, but a woman may not be head of a church of Christ; since she is not allowed to speak or teach there, or do any thing that shews authority over the man (1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim.2:11, 12). VIII. The want of discipline in the church of England, is another reason of our dissent from it. In a regular and well-ordered church of Christ, care is taken that none be admitted into it but such as are judged truly gracious persons, and of whom testimony is given of their becoming conversations; and when they are in it, they are watched over, that their walk is according

to the laws and rules of Christ's house; such as sin, are rebuked either privately or publicly, as the nature of the offense is; disorderly persons are censured and withdrawn from; profane men are put out of communion, and heretics, after the first and second admonition, are rejected: but no such discipline as this is maintained in the church of England.

She herself acknowledges a want of godly discipline, and wishes for a restoration of it; which is done every Lent season, and yet no step taken for the bringing of it in: what discipline there is, is not exercised by a minister of a parish, and his own congregation, though the offender is of them, but in the Bishop's Court indeed, yet by laymen; the admonition is by a let of men called Apparitors, and the sentence of excommunication and the whole process leading to it by Lawyers, and not Ministers of the word.

IX. The Rites and Ceremonies used in the church of England, are another reason of our separation from it. Some of them are manifestly of pagan original; some favor of Judaism, and are no other than abolished Jewish rites revived; and most, if not all of them, are retained by the papists; and have been, and still are, abused to idolatry and superstition. Bowing to the east, was an idolatrous practice of the heathens, and is condemned in scripture as an abominable thing (Ezek. 18:15, 16).

Bowing to the altar, is a relic of popery, used by way of adoration of the elements, and in favor and for the support of transubstantiation, and the real presence; and therefore by no means to be used by those that disbelieve that doctrine, and must be an hardening of such that have faith in it. Bowing, when the name of Jesus is mentioned, is a piece of superstition and will-worship, and has no countenance from (Phil. 2:10). The words should be rendered in, and not at the name of Jesus; nor is it in the name Jesus, but in the name of Jesus, and so designs some other name, and not Jesus; and a name given him after his resurrection, and not before, as the name of Jesus was at his birth; and besides some are obliged to bow in it, who have no knees in a literal sense to bow with, and therefore bowing of the knee cannot be meant in any such sense.

And as for such ceremonies which in their own nature are neither good nor bad, but indifferent, they ought to be left as such, and not imposed as necessary; the imposition of things indifferent in divine service as necessary, as if without which it could not be rightly performed, is a sufficient reason why they ought not to be submitted to: such and such particular garments worn by persons in sacred office, considered as indifferent things, may be used or not used; but if the use of these is insisted on, as being holy and necessary, and without which divine worship cannot rightly be performed, then they ought to be rejected as abominable.

Nor can we like the surplice ever the better for being brought in by pope Adrian, A. D. 796. The cross in baptism, and kneeling at the Lord's-supper, have been taken notice of before. X. The book of Common Prayer, set forth as a rule and directory of divine worship and service, we have many things to object to. 1. Inasmuch as it prescribes certain stunted set forms of prayer, and ties men up to the use of them: we do not find that the apostles of Christ and the first churches used any such forms, nor Christians for many ages; and of whatever use it can be thought to be unto persons of weak capacities, surely such that have spiritual gifts, or the gift of preaching the gospel, can stand in no need of it, and who must have the gift of prayer; and to be bound to such pre-composed forms, as it agrees not with the promise of the Spirit of grace and supplication, so not with the different cases, circumstances, and frames that Christians are sometimes in; wherefore not to take notice of the defectiveness of these prayers, and of the incoherence and obscurity of some of the petitions in them; the frequent tautologies and repetitions, especially in the Litany, so contrary to Christ's precept in Matthew 6:7 are sufficient to give us a distaste of them. 2.

Though we are not against reading the scriptures in private and in public, yet we cannot approve of the manner the Liturgy directs unto; namely, the reading it by piece-meals, by bits and scraps, so mangled and curtailed as the Gospels and Epistles are: we see not why any part of scripture should be omitted; and the order of these being an invention of a Pope of Rome, and the fixing them to matins and even-songs smelling so rank of popery, no ways serve to recommend them to us: not to take notice of the great impropriety of calling passages out of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Malachi, and the Acts of the apostles, by the name of Epistles: but especially it gives us much uneasiness to see lessons taken out of the Apocrypha, and appointed to be read as if of equal authority with the sacred scriptures; nay not only out of the books of Baruch, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus, but out of the histories of Tobit, Judith, Susanna, Bel and the dragon, and such lessons out of them as contain the most idle and fabulous stories. 3.

The book of Common Prayer, enjoins the reading of the book of Psalms in the corrupt translation of the Vulgate Latin, used by the papists; in which there are great omissions and subtractions in some places; as every where, the titles of the Psalms are left out, and in all places there words Higgai and Selah, and the last verse of Psalm 72 and in others, there are manifest additions, as in Psalm 2:12; 4:8; 13:6; 22:1, 31; 39:12; 132:4; 136:27; 147:8 and three whole verses in Psalm 14, whereas nothing should be taken from, nor added to the word of God; some sentences are absurd and void of sense, as Psalm 58:8; 68:30, 31; and in others the sense is perverted, or a contrary one given, as in Psalm 17:4; 18:26; 30:13; 105:28; 106:30; 107:40; and 125:3.

This translation of the Psalms stands in the English Liturgy, and is used and read in the churches in England. 4. It directs to the observation of several fasts and festivals, which are no where enjoined in the word of God, and for which it provides collects, gospels and epistles to be read: the fasts are, Quadragesima or Lent, in imitation of Christ's forty days fast in the wilderness, Ember weeks, Rogation days, and all the Fridays in the year; in which men are commanded to abstain from meats, which God has created to be received with thanksgiving.

The festivals, besides, the principal ones, Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide, are the several saints days throughout the year; which are all of popish invention, and are either moveable or fixed, as the popish festivals be; and being the relics of popery makes us still more uneasy and dissatisfied with them. 5. Besides the corruptions before observed in the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's supper, in the order for the Visitation of the Sick stands a form of Absolution, which runs thus; "And by his (Christ's) authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost;" which is a mere popish device; Christ having left no such power to his church, nor committed any such authority to any set of men in it; all that the Ministers of Christ have power or authority to do, is only ministerially to declare and pronounce, that such who believe in Christ shall receive the remission of sins, and that their sins are forgiven them; and that such who believe not shall be damned. 6.

It appoints some things merely civil, as ecclesiastical and appertaining to the ministry, and to be performed by ecclesiastical persons and ministers, and provides offices for them: as, 1. Matrimony; which seems to favor the popish notion of making a sacrament of it; whereas it is a mere civil contract between a man and a woman, and in which a minister has nothing to do; nor do we ever read of any priest or Levite, that was ever concerned in the solemnization of it between other persons, under the Old Testament, or of any apostle or minister of the word, under the New; not to say any thing of the form of it, or of the ceremonies attending it. 2.

The Burial of the Dead; which is a mere civil action, and belongs not to a gospel-minister, but to the relations of the deceased or other neighbors, friends or acquaintance (Matthew 8:21, 22; Acts 8:2): nor is there any necessity for a place to be consecrated for such a purpose. Abraham and Sarah were buried in a cave, Deborah under an oak, Joshua in a field, Samuel in his house, and Christ in a garden (Gen. 23:9; 35:8; John 24:30; 1 Sam. 25:1; John 19:41). Nor do the scriptures ever make mention of any service being read, or of any divine worship being performed at the interment of the dead; and was any thing of this kind necessary, yet we must be obliged to object unto, nor could we comply with, the service used by the church of England on this occasion; we cannot in conscience call every man and woman, our dear brother, or our dear sister, as some who have lived vicious lives, and have not appeared to have had true repentance towards God or faith in Christ, have been called; or "commit their bodies to the ground in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life;" since we know there will be a resurrection to damnation as well as to eternal life; nor can we give thanks to God on account of many, "that it has pleased him to deliver them out of the miseries of this sinful world;" nor join in the following petition, which seems to favor the popish notion of praying for the dead; "beseeching -- that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul," etc.

XI. We cannot commune with the church of England, because it is of a persecuting spirit; and we cannot think such a church is a true church of Christ: that the Puritans were persecuted by it in Queen Elizabeth's time, and the Dissenters in the reign of King Charles the second, is not to be denied; and though this spirit does not now prevail, this is owing to the mild and gentle government of our gracious sovereign King GEORGE, the head of this Church, for which we have reason to be thankful; and yet it is not even now quite clear of persecution, witness the Test and Corporation-acts, by which many free-born Englishmen are deprived of their native rights, because they cannot conform to the church of England; besides, the reproaches and revilings which are daily cast upon us, from the pulpit and the press, as well as in conversation, shew the same: and to remove all such calumnies and reproaches, has been the inducement to draw up the above reasons for our dissent; and which have been chiefly occasioned by a late Letter on the duty of Catechizing Children, in which the author, is not content highly to commend the church of England, as the purest church under heaven, but reflects greatly on Dissenters, and particularly on such whom he calls rebaptizers; and repeats the old stale story of the German Anabaptists, and their errors, madnesses and distractions; and most maliciously insinuates, that the people who now go by this name are tainted with erroneous principles; for he says, they spread their errors in adjacent countries, which are not fully extinguished to this day: whereas they are a people that scarce agree with us in any thing; neither in their civil nor in their religious principles, nor even in baptism itself; for they were for the repetition of adult-baptism in some cases, which we are not: and used sprinkling in baptism, which we do not: the difference between them and us is much greater than between the papists and the church of England; and yet this letter-writer would think it very hard and unkind in us, should we rake up all the murders and massacres committed by Paedobaptists, and that upon principle, believing that in so doing they did God good service; I mean the Papists, who are all Paedobaptists; and yet this might be done with as much truth and ingenuity, as the former story is told: and besides, the disturbances in Germany were begun by Paedobaptists; first: by the Papists before the reformation, and then by Lutherans after it, whom Luther endeavored to dissuade from such practices; and even the disturbances in Munster were begun by Paedobaptist ministers, with whom some called Anabaptists joined, and on whom the whole scandal is laid. But what is all this to us, who as much disavow their principles and practices, as any people under the heavens? nor does our different way of thinking about baptism any ways tend to the same.

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