

Exchange of Records Among Jurisdictions

The Customs and Usages of the Constitutional Presbyteries – Exchange of Transaction and Disciplinary Records

Records of discipline should be distributed among the presbyteries so that members, congregations, and ministers seeking to transfer have a full and informed background on the request. Here are the Biblical grounds for the practice.

1. **Colossians 4:10**

Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

We are of the opinion, that Paul is confirming a letter they had already received in Colosse. There may have been some question regarding Marcus (this is the same John Mark who previously deserted Paul and Barnabas on a missions journey). But the letter was written from Marcus' previous charge that in spite of any previous notions to the contrary, he was now a minister in good standing. Paul here endorses that letter apparently saying that Marcus was with him (which would explain the nominative case).

2. **Philemon 12-13**

Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

It is not clear that Onesimus is being regarded as a minister of the word and sacraments so much as he has been a helper to Paul in Paul's ministry. Nevertheless, as he returns to Colosse, Paul told (the pastor?) Philemon to receive him. The indication or implication is that Philemon was under no particular obligation to receive Onesimus without this letter. But with the letter, Paul appealed to both Onesimus' repentance and to Philemon's relationship to him (Paul).

3. **Acts 15:22-23**

Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

Here there is an instance of a synod writing a letter not to commend certain teachers, but to warn against receiving them or their teaching. The entire context is well-known to us, as many of us regard Acts 15 to be the *locus classicus* of synodical government.

4. **Acts 28:21**

And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

This reference may be a little more obscure, but allow me to expatiate. The church did not "begin" at Pentecost, but takes its being from the church of the OT, though with the reforms of Christ. Here we see an example (not as weighty as a precept, admittedly) in a negative way. The Jews of Rome did not know what to do with Paul because they had not received any communications from the Jews of Jerusalem. The important thing to note here is that they would have expected to hear from the Jews at Jerusalem and seemingly were willing to agree that what the Jews at Jerusalem had begun in their proceedings against Paul could be continued by another branch of the church at Rome. I am aware that it is dangerous to conclude anything from the example of an apostate church. If that were the only proof we had, I would certainly agree. But this is simply an indication that the churches of Christ in the Mediterranean basin were following a procedure well-known to the Jews of that day in sending letters with or about ministers or those presently under charges.

5. 1 Corinthians 16:3

And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

Here is an example, together with Acts 11:27-30, of an offering being taken up and sent with delegates who would also carry letters of their approval to do this task. The churches not only authorized couriers; it authorized them in such a way that it was expected that other churches, on a parity with them, would accept their credentials.

6. Romans 16:17

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

There are more ways than one to "mark" someone. But a letter is as good a way as any; and whatever means is chosen of marking them -- it is clear that such should be marked by the church...not only for the reclamation of the offenders, but also so that we may be enable to avoid them, as Paul says.

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