

A Presbyterian View of the Difference with Independency

BUT the Independent government seems to be a far more excellent way, and it is embraced by many godly and precious people and ministers.

Answer 1. What true excellency is there at all in the whole Independent government, save only in those particulars wherein it agrees with the presbyterial government; and only so far as it is presbyterial? therefore the presbyterial government is equally, yea primarily and principally excellent. Wherein is the excellency of the Independent way of government? Have they only those officers which Christ himself hath appointed pastors and teachers, ruling elders and deacons? So the Presbyterians. Have they those spiritual censures, of admonishing, excommunicating, and receiving again into communion, which Christ ordained in his church, for guarding his ordinances, and well-guiding of the flock? So the Presbyterians. Have they Congregational presbyteries duly elected and constituted, for the exercise of all acts of government proper and necessary for their respective congregations? So the Presbyterians. Have they liberty of electing their own officers, pastors, elders and deacons? So the Presbyterians. Have they power to keep the whole lump of the church from being leavened, and purely to preserve the ordinances of Christ from pollution and profanation, etc? So the Presbyterians, etc. So that wherein soever the Independent government is truly excellent, the Presbyterial government stands in a full equipage and equality of excellency.

2. What one true excellency is there in the whole Independent government in any one point, wherein it really differs from the Presbyterial government? Take for instance a few points of difference.

In the Independent government.

No other visible Church of Christ is acknowledged but only a single congregation meeting in one place to partake of all ordinances.

In the Presbyterial government.

One general visible Church of Christ on earth is acknowledged, and all particular churches, and single congregations are but as similar parts of that whole.

PRESBYTERIAN VIEW OF DIFFERENCE WITH INDEPENDENCY

The matter of their visible Church must be (to their utmost judgment of discerning) such as have true grace, real saints.

Their Churches are gathered out of other true visible Churches of Christ, without any leave or consent of pastor or flock, yea, against their wills, receiving such as tender themselves, yea, too often by themselves or others, directly or indirectly seducing disciples after them.

Preaching elders are only elected, not ordained.

Ruling elders also preach.

The subject of church-government is the *cætus fidelium* or community of the faithful.

The church-officers act immediately as the servants of the Church, and deputed thereby.

All censures and acts of government are dispensed in single congregations ultimately, independently, without all liberty of appeal from them to any superior church-assembly; so the parties grieved are left without remedy.

There are acknowledged no authoritative classes or synods, in common, great, difficult cases, and in matters of appeals, but only suasive and consultative, and in case advice be not followed, they proceed only to a non-communication.

The matter of the Church invisible are only true believers, but of the Church visible persons professing true faith in Christ, and obedience to him, according to the rules of the Gospel.

Parochial churches are received as true visible Churches of Christ, and most convenient for mutual edification: gathering churches out of churches, hath no footsteps in Scripture, is contrary to apostolical practice; is the scattering of churches; the daughter of schism, the mother of confusion, but the stepmother to edification.

Preaching elders are both elected and ordained.

Ruling elders only rule, preach not, 1 Tim. 5: 17.

The subject of church-government is only Christ's own church-officers.

The church-governors act immediately as the servants of Christ, and as appointed by him.

All censures and acts of government are dispensed in congregational presbyteries subordinately, dependently, with liberty of appeal in all cases to presbyterial or synodal assemblies; where parties grieved have sufficient remedy.

There are acknowledged, and with happy success used not only suasive and consultative, but also authoritative classes and synods in cases of great importance, difficulty, common concernment or appeals; which have power to dispense all church-censures, as need shall require.

Let these and such like particulars in the Independent way, differing from the Presbyterian be duly pondered, and then let the impartial and indifferent reader judge, whether they be not the deformities, at least the infirmities of that way.

3. How many true excellencies are there in the way of the Presbyterian government, wherein it utterly surpasses the Independent government? Read but the particulars of the former parallel in the Presbyterian government, and then consider how far this transcends, yea, how the Independent government is indeed no government at all, to the Presbyterian government; wherein is to be found such ample provision, and that according to the Word of God; for comely order against confusion; for peace and unity of the Church against schism and division; for truth of the faith against all error and heresy; for piety and unblameableness against all impiety and scandal of conversation; for equity and right against all maladministrations, whether ignorant, arbitrary or tyrannical; for the honour and purity of all Christ's ordinances against all contempt, pollution and profanation; for comfort, quickening and encouragement of the saints in all the ways of Christ; and consequently for the honour of God and our Lord Jesus Christ in all the mysterious services of his spiritual sanctuary: All which rich advantages how impossible is it they should ever be found in the Independent government so long as it continues Independent? And what though some pious ministers and people embrace the Independent way? This dazzles not the eyes of the intelligent but of the infirm; we are to be regulated by Scripture-warrant, not by human examples. The best of saints have failed in ecclesiastical affairs; what a sharp contention was there betwixt Paul and Barnabas, Acts 15: 39 etc.? what a dangerous dissimulation was there in Peter, the Jews, and Barnabas. Gal. 2: 11, 12, 13, etc.? and therefore it is not safe, prudent, or conscientious to imitate all the examples of the best, and yet how few are those that have engaged themselves in the Independent way, in comparison to the multitudes of precious ministers and people inferior to them neither in parts, learning, piety, nor any other spiritual gift, who are for the Presbyterian way of church-government. Notwithstanding let all the true Israel of God constantly follow not the doubtful practices of unglorified saints, but the written pleasure of the most glorious King of saints; and as many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be on them and upon the Israel of God.