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PERSWASIVE

To frequent

COMMUNION.

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By

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Perſuasive

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I COR II. 26, 27, 28.

For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do ſhew the Lord's death till he come.

Wherefore whoſoever ſhall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and bloud of the Lord.

But let a man examine himſelf, and ſo let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

Y design in this Argument is, from the conſideration of the Nature of this Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and of the perpetual Uſe of it to the end of the world, to awaken men to a ſenſe of their Duty, and the great obligation which lyes upon them to the more frequent receiving of it. And there is the greater need to make men ſenſible of their duty in this particular, becauſe

in this last Age by the unwary discourses of some, concerning the nature of this Sacrament, and the danger of receiving it unworthily; such doubts and fears have been raised in the minds of men as utterly to deter many, and in a great measure to discourage almost the generality of Christians from the use of it; to the great prejudice and danger of mens souls, and the visible abatement of piety by the gross neglect of so excellent a means of our growth and improvement in it; and to the mighty scandal of our Religion, by the general disuse and contempt of so plain and solemn an Institution of our blessed Lord and Saviour.

Therefore I shal take occasion as briefly and clearly as I can to treat of these *Four* points.

First, Of the *Perpetuity* of this Institution; this the Apostle signifies when he saith, that
 I Cor. 11. 26. *by eating this bread, and drinking this cup, we do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

Secondly, Of the *Obligation* that lyes upon all Christians to a frequent observance of this Institution; this is signified in that expression of the Apostle, *as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup*; Which expression considered and compared together with the practice of the Primitive Church, does imply an obligation upon Christians to the frequent receiving of this Sacrament.

Thirdly, I shal endeavour to satisfy the *Objections* and *Scruples*, which have been raised in the minds of men, and particularly of many devout and sincere Christians, to their great discouragement from their receiving this Sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought: Which *Objections* are chiefly grounded upon what the Apostle says, *Wherefore whosoever shal eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord: and doth eat and drink damnation to himself.*

Fourthly, What *Preparation* of our selves is necessary in order to our worthy receiving of this Sacrament: which will give me occasion to explain the Apostle's meaning in these words, Ver. 28, But let a man examine himself, and so

so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

I. For the Perpetuity of this Institution, implied in those words, *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come*; or the Words may be read imperatively, and by way of precept, *Shew ye forth the Lord's death till he come*. In the three verses immediatly before, the Apostle particularly declares the Institution of this Sacrament, with the manner and circumstances of it, as he had received it, not only by the hands of the Apostles, but, as the Words seem rather to intimate, by immediate Revelation from our Lord himself, Ver. 23. *For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you; that the Lord Jesus in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks he brake it, and said, take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner, also he took the cup when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new Testament in my blood: this do as often as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me*. So that the Institution is in these Words, *This do in remembrance of me*. In which words our Lord commands his Disciples after his Death, to repeat these occasions, of *taking and breaking and eating the Bread, and of drinking of the cup*, by way of solemn Commemoration of Him. Now whether this was to be done by them once only, or oftner; and whether by the Disciples only, during their lives, or by all Christians afterwards in all successive Ages of the Church, is not so certain, merely from the force of these words, *Do this in remembrance of me*: But what the Apostle adds, puts the matter out of all doubt, that the Institution of this Sacrament was intended, not only for the Apostles, and for that Age, but for all Christians, and for all Ages of the Christian Church; *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*; that is, until the time of his second coming, which will be at the end of the World. So that this Sacrament was designed to be a standing Commemoration of the Death and Passion of our Lord till he should come to Judgment; and consequently the Obligation that lyes upon

Christians to the observation of it is perpetual, and shal never cease to the end of the World.

So that it is a vain conceit and meer dream of the Enthusiasts, concerning the *seculum spiritus sancti*, the Age and dispensation of the holy Ghost, when, as they suppose, all humane teaching shal cease, and all external Ordinances and Institutions in Religion shal vanish, and there shal be no further use of them: Whereas it is very plain from the New Testament, that Prayer, and outward Teaching, and the use of the two Sacraments, were intended to continue among Christians in all Ages. As for Prayer, (besides our natural obligation to this duty, if there were no revealed Religion) we are by our Saviour particularly exhorted to Watch and Pray, with regard to the day of Judgment, and in consideration of the uncertainty of the time when it shal be: And therefore this will always be a Duty incumbent upon Christians till the day of Judgment, because it is prescribed as one of the best ways of preparation for it. That *Outward Teaching* likewise and Baptism were Intended to be perpetual, is no less plain, because Christ hath expressly promised to be with the Teachers of his Church in the use of these Ordinances to the end of the World. (*Matth. 28. 19, 20. Go and Disciple all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Ghost: and lo, I am with you always to the end of the World.*) Not only to the end of that particular Age, but to the end of the Gospel-Age, and the consummation of all Ages, as the phrase clearly imports, And it is as plain from this Text, that the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* was intended for a perpetual Institution in the Christian Church, till the second coming of Christ, *viz.* his coming to judgment: Because *St. Paul* tells us, that by these Sacramental Signs the Death of Christ is to be represented, and commemorated till he come. *Do this in remembrance of me, for as oft as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death till he come.*

And if this be the End and Use of this Sacrament, to be a solemn remembrance of the Death and Sufferings of
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our Lord, during his absence from us; that is, till his coming to Judgement, then this Sacrament will never be out of date till the second coming of our Lord. The consideration whereof should mightily strengthen and encourage our Faith, in the hope of Eternal Life, so often as we partake of this Sacrament; since our Lord hath left it to us as a memorial of himself till he come, to translate his Church into Heaven, and as a sure pledge that he will come again at the end of the World, and invest us in that Glory, which he is now gone before to prepare for us. So that as often as we approach the Table of the Lord, we should comfort our selves with the thoughts of that blessed time, when we shall eat and drink with him in his Kingdom, and shall be admitted to the great Feast of the Lamb, and to eternal Communion with God, the Judge of all, and with our blessed and glorified Redeemer, and the holy Angels, and the Spirits of Just men made perfect.

And the same consideration should likewise make us afraid to receive this Sacrament unworthily, without due Preparation for it, and without worthy effects of it upon our Hearts and Lives. Because of that dreadful sentence of condemnation, which at the second coming of our Lord shall be past upon those, who by the profanation of this solemn Institution trample under foot the Son of God, and contemn the blood of the Covenant; that Covenant of Grace and Mercy, which God hath ratified with Mankind by the Blood of his Son. The Apostle tells us, that *he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.* This indeed is spoken of temporal Judgment (as I shall shew in the latter part of this Discourse.) but the Apostle likewise supposeth, that if these temporal Judgments had not their effect, to bring men to repentance, but they still persisted in the profanation of this holy Sacrament, they should at last *be condemned with the world.* For as he that partaketh worthily of this Sacrament, confirms his interest in the promises of the Gospel, and his Title to eternal life; so he that receives this Sacrament unworthily, that is, without due reverence, and without fruits meet

meet for it; nay, on the contrary, continues to live in sin whilst he commemorates the death of Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, this man aggravates and seals his own damnation, because he is guilty of the body and blood of Christ, not only by the contempt of it, but by renewing in some sort the cause of his sufferings, and as it were *Crucifising to himself afresh the Lord of life and glory, and putting him to an open shame.* And when the great Judge of the World shall appear, and pass final sentence upon men, such obstinate and impenitent Wretches as could not be wrought upon, by the remembrance of the dearest love of their dying Lord, nor be engaged to leave their sins by all the ties and obligations of this holy Sacrament, shall have their portion with *Pilate and Judas, with the chief Priests and Souldiers,* who were the betrayers and murthers of the Lord of life and glory; and shall be dealt withall as those who are in some sort *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* Which severe threatening ought not to discourage men from the Sacrament, but to deterr all those from their sins, who think of engaging themselves to God by so solemn and holy a Covenant. It is by no means a sufficient reason to make men to fly from the Sacrament, but certainly one of the most powerfull arguments in the world, to make men forsake their sins; as I shall shew more fully in the *third* head of this Discourse.

II. The Obligation that lyes upon all Christians to the frequent observance and practice of this Institution. For though it be not necessarily implied in these words, as oft *as ye eat this bread and drink this cup;* yet if we compare these words of the *Apostle* with the usage and practice of Christians at that time, which was to communicate in this holy Sacrament, so often as they solemnly met together to worship God, they plainly suppose and recommend to us the frequent use of this Sacrament, or rather imply an obligation upon Christians to embrace all opportunities of receiving it. For the sense and meaning of any Law or Institution is best understood by the general practice, which follows immediatly upon it.

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And to convince men of their obligation hereunto, and to engage them to a suitable practice, I shall now endeavour with all plainness and force of perswasion I can : And so much the more, because the neglect of it among Christians is grown so general, and a great many persons from a superstitious awe and reverence of this Sacrament, are by degrees fallen into a profane neglect and contempt of it.

I shall briefly mention a *threefold* Obligation lying upon all Christians to frequent Communion in this holy Sacrament, each of them sufficient of It self, but all of them together of the greatest force imaginable, to engage us hereunto.

1. We are obliged in point of indispensable duty, and in obedience to a plain precept, and most solemn institution of our blessed Saviour, that great *Lawgiver*, who is *able to save and to destroy*, as *St. James* calls him : He hath bid us, *Do this*. And *Saint Paul* who declares nothing in this matter, but what he tells us he *received from the Lord*, admonisheth us to do it *often*. Now for any man that professeth himself a Christian, to live in the open and continued contempt or neglect of a plain Law and Institution of *Christ* is utterly inconsistent with such a profession. To such our Lord may say as he did to the *Jews*, *why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say*. How far the ignorance of this Institution, or the mistakes which men have been led into about it, may extenuate this neglect is another consideration. But after we knew our Lord's will in this particular, and have the Law plainly laid before us, there is no cloak for our sin. For nothing can excuse the wilfull neglect of a plain Institution from a downright contempt of our Saviour's Authority.

2. We are likewise obliged hereunto in point of Interest. The benefits which we expect to be derived and assured to us by this Sacrament are all the blessings of the new Covenant, the forgiveness of our sins, the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit, to enable us to perform the conditions of this Covenant required on our part ; and the comforts of God's holy Spirit to encourage us in well-doing,
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and to support us under sufferings; and the glorious reward of eternal life. So that In neglecting this Sacrament we neglect our own interest and happiness, we forsake our own mercies, and Judge our selves unworthy of all the blessings of the Gospel; and deprive our selves of one of the best means and advantages of confirming and conveying these blessings to us. So that if we had not a due sense of our *duty*, the consideration of our own *interest* should oblige us, not to neglect so excellent and so effectual a means of promoting our own comfort and happiness.

3. We are likewise particularly obliged in point of Gratitude to the carefull observance of this Institution. This was the particular thing our Lord gave In charge, when he was going to lay down his life for us, *Do this in remembrance of me.* Men use religiously to observe the charge of a dying freind, and unless it be very difficult and unreasonable, to do what he desires: But this is the charge of our best freind (nay of the greatest friend and benefactor of all mankind) when he was preparing himself to die in our stead, and to offer up himself a sacrifice for us; to undergo the most grievous pains and sufferings for our sakes, and to yield up himself to the worst of temporal Deaths. That he might deliver us from the bitter pains of eternal Death. And can we deny him any thing he asks of us who was going to do all this for us? Can we deny him this? so little grievous and burthensome In it self; so infinitely beneficial to us? Had such a friend, and in such circumstances bid us do some great thing, would we not have done it? How much more when he hath only said, *Do this in remembrance of me?* when he hath only commanded to us one of the most natural and delightfull Actions, as a fit representation and memorial of his wonderfull Love to us, and of his cruel sufferings for our sakes; when he hath only enjoyned us, in a thankfull commemoration of his goodness, to meet at his table, and to remember what he hath done for us; to look on him whom we have pierced, and to resolve to grieve, and wound him no more? Can we without the most horrible ingratitude neglect this dying charge of our Sovereign
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and our Saviour, the great friend and Lover of souls? A command so reasonable, so easie, so full of blessings and benefits to the faithfull observers of it!

One would think it were no difficult matter, to convince men of their duty in this particular, and of the necessity of observing so plain an Instruction of our Lord, that it were no hard thing to persuade men to their interest, & to be willing to partake of those great & manifold blessings, which all Christians believe to be promised and made good to the frequent and worthy Receivers of this Sacrament. Where then lyes the difficulty? What should be the cause of all this backwardness, which we see in men to so plain, so necessary, and so beneficial a duty? The truth is, men have been greatly discouraged from this Sacrament, by the unwary pressing and inculcating of two great truths; *the danger of the unworthy receiving of this holy Sacrament,* and *the necessity of a due preparation for it.* Which brings me to the

III. Third Particular I proposed, which was to endeavour to satisfy the *Objections* and *Scruples*, which have been raised in the minds of men, and particularly of many devout and sincere Christians, to their great discouragement from the receiving of this Sacrament, at least so frequently as they ought. And these *Objections*, I told you, are chiefly grounded upon what the Apostle sayes v. 27. *Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* And again v. 29. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.* Upon the mistake & misapplication of these Texts have been grounded Two *Objections*, of great force to discourage men from this Sacrament, which I shall endeavour with all the tenderness and clearness I can to remove. *First*, That the danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, it seems the safest way not to receive at all. *Secondly*, That so much Preparation and worthiness being required in order to our worthy receiving, the more timorous sort of devout Christians can never think themselves duly enough qualified for so sacred an Action.

1. That

1. That the danger of unworthy receiving being so very great, It seems the safest way wholly to refrain from this Sacrament, and not to receive it at all. But this Objection is evidently of no force, if there be (as most certainly there is) as great or a greater danger on the other hand, *viz.* in the neglect of this Duty: And so though the danger of unworthy receiving be avoided by not receiving, yet the danger of neglecting and contemning a plain Institution of Christ is not thereby avoided. Surely they in the *Parable* that refused to come to the *Marriage-feast* of the *King's Son*, and made light of that gracious invitation were at least as faulty as he who came without a wedding-garment. And we find in the conclusion of the *Parable*, that as he was severely punished for his disrespect, so they were destroyed for their disobedience. Nay of the two, it is the greater sign of contempt wholly to neglect the Sacrament, than to partake of it without some due qualification. The greatest Indisposition that can be for this holy Sacrament is ones being a bad man, and he may be as bad, and is more like to continue so, who wilfully neglects this Sacrament, than he that comes to it with any degree of reverence and preparation, though much less than he ought: And surely it is very hard for men to come to so solemn an ordinance without some kind of religious awe upon their spirits, and without some good thoughts and resolutions, at least for the present. If a man that lives in any known wickedness of life, do before he receive the Sacrament set himself seriously to be humbled for his sins, and to repent of them, and to beg God's grace and assistance against them; and after the receiving of it, does continue for some time in these good resolutions, though after a while he may possibly relapse into the same sins again; this is some kind of restraint to a wicked life, and these good moods and fits of repentance and reformation are much better than a constant and uninterrupted course of sin: Even this righteousness, which is but as *the morning cloud and the early dew*, which so soon passeth away, is better than none.

And indeed scarce any man can think of coming to the
 Sacrament,

Sacrament, but he will by this consideration be excited to some good purposes, and put upon some sort of endeavour to amend and reform his life; and though he be very much under the bondage and power of evil habits, if he do with any competent degree of sincerity (and it is his own fault if he do not) make use of this excellent means and instrument, for the mortifying and subduing of his lusts, and for the obtaining of God's grace and assistance, it may please God by the use of these means, so to abate the force and power of his lusts, and to imprint such considerations upon his mind, in the receiving of this holy Sacrament, and preparing himself for it, that he may at last break off his wicked course, and become a good man.

But, on the other hand, as to those who neglect this Sacrament, there is hardly any thing left to restrain them from the greatest enormities of life, and to give a check to them in their evil course; nothing but the penalty of humane laws, which men may avoid, and yet be wicked enough. Heretofore men used to be restrained from great and scandalous vices by shame and fear of disgrace, and would abstain from many sins, out of regard to their honour and reputation among men: But men have hardened their faces in this degenerate Age, and those gentle restraints of modesty which governed and kept men in order heretofore, signify nothing now a-days. Blushing is out of fashion, and shame is ceased from among the children of men.

But the Sacrament did always use to lay some kind of restraint upon the worst of men; and if it did not wholly reform them, it would at least have some good effect upon them for a time: If it did not make men good, yet it would make them resolve to be so, and leave some good thoughts and impressions upon their minds.

So that I doubt not but it hath been a thing of very bad consequence, to discourage men so much from the Sacrament, as the way hath been of late years; and that many men who were under some kind of check before, since they have been driven away from the Sacrament, have quite let loose the reins, and prostituted themselves

selves to all manner of impiety and vice. And among the many ill effects of our past confusions, this is none of the least; That in many congregations of this Kingdom, Christians were generally dissuaded and deterred from the Sacrament, upon a pretence that they were unfit for it; and being so, they must necessarily incur the danger of unworthy receiving; and therefore they had better wholly to abstain from it. By which it came to pass, that in very many places this great and Solemn Institution of the Christian Religion was almost quite forgotten, as if it had been no part of it, and the remembrance of Christ's death even lost among Christians: So that many Congregations in England might justly have taken up the complaint of the Woman at our Saviour's sepulchre, *They have taken away our Lord, and we know not where they have laid him.*

But surely men did not well consider what they did, nor what the consequence of it would be, when they did so earnestly dissuade men from the Sacrament. 'Tis true indeed the danger of unworthy receiving is great; but the proper Inference and conclusion from hence is not, that men should upon this consideration be deterred from the Sacrament, but that they should be affrighted from their sins, and from that wicked course of life, which is an habitual indisposition and unworthiness. *St. Paul.* Indeed (as I observed before) truly represents, and very much aggravates the danger of the unworthy receiving of this Sacrament; but he did not deter the *Corinthians* from it, because they had sometimes come to it without due reverence, but exhorts them to amend what had been amiss, and to come better prepared and disposed for the future. And therefore after that terrible declaration in the *Text*, *whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,* he does not add, therefore let Christians take heed of coming to the Sacrament, but let them come prepared and with due reverence, not as to a common meal, but to a solemn participation of the body and blood of Christ;

But

Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

For, if this be a good reason to abstain from the Sacrament, for fear of performing so sacred an action in an undue manner, it were best for a bad man to lay aside all Religion, and to give over the exercise of all the duties of piety, of prayer, of reading and hearing the Word of God; because there is a proportionable danger in the unworthy and unprofitable use of any of these. *The prayer of the wicked* (that is, of one that resolves to continue so) *is an abomination to the Lord.* And our Saviour gives us the same caution concerning hearing the Word of God; *Take heed how ye hear.* And *St. Paul.* tells us, that those who are not reformed by the doctrine of the Gospel, *It is the savour of death,* that is, deadly and damnable to such persons.

But now will any man from hence argue, that it is best for a wicked man not to pray, not to hear or read the Word of God, lest by so doing he should endanger and aggravat his condemnation? And yet there is as much reason from this consideration to perswade men to give over praying, and attending to God's Word, as to lay aside the use of the Sacrament. And it is every whit as true, that he that prays unworthily, and hears the word of God unworthily, that is, without fruit and benefit, is guilty of a great contempt of God, and of our blessed Saviour; and by his undevout prayers, and unfruitful hearing of God's Word, does further and aggravat his own damnation: I say, this is every whit as true, as he that eats and drinks the Sacrament unworthily is guilty of a high contempt of Christ, and *eats and drinks his own judgment,* so that the danger of the unworthy performing this so sacred an action is no otherwise a reason to any man, to abstain from the Sacrament, than it is an Argument to him to cast off all Religion. He that unworthily useth or performs any part of Religion is in an evil and dangerous condition; but he that casts off all Religion plungeth himself into a most desperat state, and does certainly damn himself to avoid the danger of damnation: Because he that casts off all Religion

Religion, throws off all the means whereby he should be reclaimed and brought into a better state. I cannot more fitly illustrate this matter than by this plain Similitude. He that eats and drinks intemperately endangers his health and his life, but he that to avoid this danger will not eat at all, I need not tell you what will certainly become of him in a very short space.

There are some conscientious persons who abstain from the Sacrament, upon an apprehension that the sins which they shall commit afterwards are unpardonable. But this is a great mistake; our Saviour having so plainly declared, that all manner of sin shall be forgiven men, except the blasphemy against the holy Ghost; such as was that of the *Pharisees*, who as our Saviour tells us blasphemed the Holy Ghost, in ascribing those great miracles which they saw him worke, and which he really wrought by the Spirit of God, to the power of the Devil. Indeed to sin deliberately after so solemn an engagement to the contrary is a great aggravation of sin, but not such as to make it unpardonable. But the neglect of the Sacrament is not the way to prevent these sins; but, on the contrary, the constant receiving of it, with the best preparation we can, is one of the most effectual means to prevent sin for the future, and to obtain the assistance of God's grace to that end. And if we fall into sin afterwards we may be renewed by repentance; *for we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins*; and as such, is in a very lively and affecting manner exhibited to us, in this blessed Sacrament of his body broken, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins. Can we think that the primitive Christians, who so frequently received this holy Sacrament, did never after the receiving of it fall into any deliberate sin? undoubtedly many of them did; but far be it from us to think, that such sins were unpardonable, and that so many good men should because of their careful and conscientious observance of our Lord's Institution unavoidably fall into condemnation.

To draw to a conclusion of this matter; such groundless fears and jealousies as these may be a sign of a good meaning, but they are certainly a sign of an injudicious mind. For if we stand upon these Scruples, no man perhaps was ever so worthily prepared to draw near to God in any duty of Religion, but there was still some defect or other in the disposition of his mind, and the degree of his preparation. But if we prepare our selves as we can, this is all that God expects. And for our fears of falling into sin afterwards, there is this plain answer to be given to it; that the danger of falling into sin is not prevented by neglecting the Sacrament, but increased; because a powerfull and probable means of preserving men from sin is neglected. And why should not every sincere Christian, by the receiving of this Sacrament, and renewing his Covenant with God, rather hope to be confirmed in goodness, and to receive further assistances of God's grace and holy Spirit, to strengthen him against sin, and to enable him to subdue it; than trouble himself with fears, which are either without ground, or if they are not, are no sufficient reason to keep any man from the Sacrament? We cannot surely entertain so unworthy a thought of God, and our blessed Saviour, as to imagine that he did institute the Sacrament, not for the furtherance of our Salvation, but as a snare, and an occasion of our ruine and damnation. This were to pervert the gracious design of God, and to turn the cup of Salvation into a cup of deadly poison to the souls of men.

All then that can reasonably be inferred from the danger of unworthy receiving is, that upon this consideration men should be quickned to come to the Sacrament with a due preparation of mind, and so much the more to fortifie their resolutions of living suitably to that holy Covenant, which they solemnly renew every time they receive this holy Sacrament. This consideration ought to convince us of the absolute necessity of a good life, but not to deter us from the use of any means which may contribute to make us good. Therefore (as a learned *Divine* says very well) this Sacrament can be neglected by none but those that

do not understand it, but those who are unwilling to be tryed to their duty, and are afraid of being engaged to use their best diligence to keep the commandments of Christ: And such persons have no reason to fear being in a worse condition, since they are already in so bad a state. And thus much may suffice for answer to the *first Objection* concerning the great danger of unworthy receiving this holy Sacrament! I shall proceed to the

Obj. 2. ²*Second Objection*, which was this; That so much preparation and worthiness being required to our worthy receiving, the more timorous sort of Christians can never think themselves duly enough qualified for so sacred an Action.

For a full answer to this Objection, I shall endeavour briefly to clear these *Three things*. *First*, That every degree of Imperfection in our preparation for this Sacrament is not a sufficient reason for men to refrain from it. *Secondly*, That a total want of a due preparation, not only in the degree but in the main and substance of it, though it render us unfit at present to receive this Sacrament, yet it does by no means excuse our neglect of it. *Thirdly*, That the proper inference and conclusion from the total want of a due preparation, is not to cast off all thoughts of receiving the Sacrament, but immediately to set upon the work of preparation, that so we may be fit to receive it. And if I can clearly make out these *three things*, I hope this Objection is fully answered.

I That every degree of Imperfection in our preparation for this Sacrament is not a sufficient reason for men to abstain from it; for then no man should ever receive it: For who is every way worthy, and in all degrees and respects duly qualified, to approach the presence of God in any of the duties of his Worship and Service? Who can *wash his hands in innocency*, that so he be perfectly fit to approach God's Altar? There is not a man on earth that lives and sins not. The Graces of the best men are imperfect, and every imperfection in grace and goodness is an imperfection in the disposition & preparation of our minds
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for this holy Sacrament: But if we do heartily repent of our sins, and sincerely resolve to obey and perform the terms of the Gospel, and of that Covenant which we entered into by Baptism, and are going solemnly to renew and confirm by our receiving of this Sacrament, we are at least in some degree, and in the main qualified to take of this holy Sacrament; And the way for us to be more fit is to receive this Sacrament frequently, that by this spiritual food of God's appointing, by *this living bread which comes down from heaven* our souls may be nourished in goodness, & new strength and vertue may be continually derived to us, for the purifying of our hearts, and enabling us to run the ways of Gods commandments with more constancy and delight. For the way to grow in grace, and to be strengthened with all right in the inner man, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which by Christ Jesus are to the praise and glory of God, is with care and conscience to use those means which God hath appointed for this end: And if we will neglect the use of these means, it is to no purpose for us to pray to God for his grace and assistance. We may tire our selves with our devotions, and fill heaven with vain complaints, and yet by all this importunity obtain nothing at God's hand: Like lazy beggars that are always complaining and always asking, but will not work, will do nothing to help themselves, and better their condition, and therefore are never like to move the pity and compassion of others. If we expect God's grace and assistance, we must work out our own salvation in the carefull use of all these means which God hath appointed to that end. That excellent degree of goodness, which men would have to fit them for the Sacrament, is not to be had but by the use of it. And therefore it is a preposterous thing for men to insist upon having the end before they will use the means that may further them in the obtaining of it.

2. The total want of a due preparation, not only in the degree, but in the main and substance of it, though it render us unfit at present to receive this Sacrament, yet does it by no means excuse our neglect of it. One fault may

draw on another, but can never excuse it. It is our great fault that we are wholly unprepared, and no man can claim any benefit by his fault, or plead it in excuse or extenuation of this neglect. A total want of preparation and an absolute unworthiness is impenitency in an evil course, a resolution to continue a bad man, not to quit his lusts, and to break off that wicked course he hath lived in: But is this any excuse for the neglect of our duty, that we will not fit our selves for the doing of it with benefit and advantage to our selves? A father commands his son to ask him blessing every day, and is ready to give it him; but so long as he is undutiful to him in his other actions, and lives in open disobedience, forbids him to come in his sight. He excuseth himself from asking his fathers blessing, because he is undutiful in other things, and resolves to continue so. This is just the cause of neglecting the duty God requires, and the blessings he offers to us in the Sacrament, because we have made our selves incapable of so performing the one as to receive the other, and are resolved to continue so. We will not do our duty in other things, and then plead that we are unfit and unworthy to do it in this particular of the Sacrament.

3. The proper inference and conclusion from a total want of due preparation for the Sacrament, is not to cast off all thoughts of receiving of it, but immediately to set about the work of preparation, that so we may be fit to receive it. For if this be true, that they who are absolutely unprepared ought not to receive the Sacrament, nor can do it with any benefit; nay by doing it in such a manner render their condition much worse, this is a most forcible argument to repentance and amendment of life. There is nothing reasonable in this case, but immediately to resolve upon a better course, that so we may be meet partakers of those holy Mysteries, and may no longer provoke God's wrath against us by the willfull neglect of so great and necessary a duty of the Christian Religion. And we do willfully neglect it, so long as we do willfully refuse to fit and qualifie our selves for the due and worthy per-

performance of it. Let us view the thing in a like case; A pardon is graciously offered to a rebel, he declines to accept it, and modestly excuseth himself, because he is not worthy of it. And why is he not worthy? Because he resolves to be a rebel, and then his pardon will do him no good, but be an aggravation of his Crime. Very true; and it will be no less an aggravation that he refuseth it for such a reason, and under a pretence of modesty does the most imprudent thing in the world. This is just the case, and in this case there is but one thing reasonable to be done, and that is, for a man to make himself capable of the benefit as soon as he can, and thankfully to accept of it: But to excuse himself from accepting of the benefit offered, because he is not worthy of it, nor fit for it, nor ever intends to be so, is as if a man should desire to be excused from being happy, because he is resolved to play the fool and to be miserable. So that whether our want of preparation be total, or only to some degree, it is every way unreasonable. If it be in the degree only, it ought not to hinder us from receiving the Sacrament; If it be total, it ought to put us immediatly upon removing the impediment, by making such preparation as is necessary to the due and worthy receiving of it. And this brings me to the

IV. Fourth and last thing I proposed, *viz.* What preparation of our selves is necessary in order to the worthy receiving of this Sacrament. Which I told you would give me occasion to explain the *Apostle's* meaning in the last part of the Text, *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.* I think it very clear from the occasion and circumstances of the *Apostle's* discourse concerning the Sacrament, that he does not intend the examination of our state, whether we be Christians or not, and sincerely resolved to continue so; and consequently that he does not here speak of our habitual preparation by the resolution of a good life. This he takes for granted, that they were Christians and resolved to continue and persevere in their

Christian profession : But he speaks of their actual fitness and worthiness at that time when they came to receive the Lord's Supper. And for the clearing of this matter, we must consider what it was that gave occasion to this discourse. At the 20th verse of this Chapter he sharply reproveth their irreverent and unsuitable carriage at the Lord's Supper. They came to it very disorderly, *one before another*. It was the custom of Christians to meet at their *Feast of Charity*, in which they did communicate with great sobriety and temperance ; and when that was ended, they celebrated the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Now among the *Corinthians* this order was broken ; the rich met and excluded the poor from this common feast : And after an irregular feast (*one before another* 'eating his own supper as he came) they went to the Sacrament in great disorder ; *One was hungry*, having eaten nothing at all ; *Others were drunk*, having eaten intemperately ; and the poor were despised and neglected. This the Apostle condemns as a great profanation of that solemn institution of the Sacrament, at the participation whereof they behaved themselves with as little reverence, as if they had been met at a common Supper or Feast. And this he calls, *not discerning the Lord's body*, making no difference in their behaviour between the Sacrament and a common meal ; which irreverent and contemptuous carriage of theirs he calls, *eating and drinking unworthily* ; for which he pronounceth them *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*, which were represented and commemorated in their *eating of that bread and drinking of that cup*. By which irreverent and contemptuous usage of the body and blood of our Lord, he tells them that they did incur the judgment of God ; which he calls, *eating and drinking their own judgment*. For that the word *xplōs*, which our *Translatours* render *damnation*, does not here signifie eternal condemnation, but a temporal Judgment and chastisement in order to the prevention of eternal condemnation, is evident from what follows ; *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Judgment to himself* :

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And then he says, *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep*: That is, for this irreverence of theirs, God had sent among them several diseases, of which many had died. And then he adds, *For if we would Judge our selves, we should not be judged. For if we would Judge our selves*; whether this be meant of the publick Censures of the Church, or our privat censuring of our selves, in order to our future amendment and reformation is not certain. If of the latter, which I think most probable, then Judging here is much the same with *examining our selves*. ver. 28 And then the Apostle's meaning is, that if we would censure and examine our selves, so as to be more careful for the future, we should escape the Judgment of God in these temporal punishments: *But when we are judged; we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. But when we are Judged*; that is, when by neglecting thus to judge our selves, we provoke God to judge us; *we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*; that is, he inflicts these temporal judgments upon us to prevent our eternal condemnation. Which plainly shews that the judgment here spoken of is not eternal condemnation. And then he concludes, *wherefore, my Brethren, when ye come together to eat, carry for one another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home. that ye come not together unto judgment*: Where the Apostle plainly shews both what was the crime of unworthy receiving, and the punishment of it. Their crime was, their irreverent and disorderly participation of the Sacrament; and their punishment was, those temporal judgements which God inflicted upon them for this their contempt of the Sacrament.

Now this being, I think, very plain; we are proportionably to understand the precept of examination of our selves, *before we eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. But let a man examine himself*; that is, consider well with himself what a sacred Action he is going about, and what behaviour becomes him, when he is celebrating this Sacrament instituted by our Lord in memorial of his body and blood,

bloud, that is, of his death and passion; And if heretofore he hath been guilty of any disorder and irreverence (such as the *Apostle* here taxeth them withall) let him censure and *Judge himself* for it, be sensible of and sorry for his fault, and be carefull to avoid it for the future; and having thus *Examined himself*, let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. This, I think, is the plain sense of the *Apostle's* discourse; and that if we attend to the scope and circumstances of it, it cannot well have any other meaning.

But some will say, Is this all the preparation that is required to our worthy receiving of the Sacrament, that we take care not to come drunk to it, nor to be guilty of any irreverence and disorder in the celebration of it? I answer in short, this was the particular unworthiness with which the *Apostle* taxeth the *Corinthians*, and which he warns them to amend, as they desire to escape the Judgments of God, such as they had already felt for this irreverent carriage of theirs, so unsuitable to the holy Sacrament: He finds no other fault with them at present in this matter, though any other sort of irreverence will proportionably expose men to the like punishment. He says nothing here of their habitual preparation, by the sincere purpose and resolution of a good life, answerable to the rules of the Christian Religion; this we may suppose he took for granted. However, it concerns the Sacrament no more than it does Prayer or any other religious Duty. Not but that it is very true, that none but those who do heartily embrace the Christian Religion, and are sincerely resolved to frame their lives according to the holy rules and precepts of it, are fit to communicate in this solemn acknowledgment and profession of it. So that it is a practice very much to be countenanced and encouraged, because it is of great use, for Christians by way of preparation for the Sacrament to examine themselves in a larger sense than in all probability the *Apostle* here intended; I mean, to examine our past lives and the actions of them, in order to a sincere repentance of all our errors and miscarriages, and to fix us in the steady purpose and resolution of a better life; particularly, when
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we expect to have the forgiveness of our sins sealed to us, we should lay aside all enmity and thoughts of revenge, and heartily forgive those that have offended us, and put in practice that universal love and charity which is represented to us by this holy Communion. And to this purpose we are earnestly exhorted in the publick office of the Communion by way of due preparation and disposition for it, *to repent us truly of our sins past, to amend our lives, and to be in perfect charity with all men, that so we may be meet partakers of those holy mysteries.*

And because this work of examining our selves concerning our state and condition, and of exercising repentance towards God, and charity towards men is incumbent upon us as we are Christians, and can never be put in practice more seasonably, and with greater advantage, than when we are meditating of this Sacrament, therefore besides our habitual preparation by repentance, and the constant endeavours of a holy life, it is a very pious and commendable custom in Christians before their coming to the Sacrament, to set a part some particular time for this work of examination. But how much time every person should allow to this purpose, is matter of prudence; and as it need not, so neither indeed can it be precisely determined. Some have greater reason to spend more time upon this work than others, I mean these, whose accounts are heavier, because they have long run upon the score, and neglected themselves; and some also have more leisure and freedom for it, by reason of their easie condition and circumstances in the world; and therefore are obliged to allow a greater portion of time for the exercises of piety and devotion. In general, no man ought to do a work of so great moment & concernment slighty and perfunctorily. And in this, as in all other actions, the end is principally to be regarded. Now the end of examining our selves is to understand our state and condition, and to reform whatever we find amiss in our selves. And provided this end be obtained, the circumstances of the means are less considerable; whether more or less time be allowed to this work, it matters not

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so much, as to make sure that the work be throughly done.

And I do on purpose speak thus cautiously in this matter, because some pious persons do perhaps err on the stricter hand, & are a little superstitious on that side in so much that unless they gain so much time to set a part for solemn preparation, they will refrain from the Sacrament at that time, though otherwise they be habitually prepared. This I doubt not proceeds from a pious mind; but as the *Apostle* says in another case about the Sacrament, *Shall I praise them in this? I praise them not.* For provided there be no wilfull neglect of due preparation, it is much better to come so prepared as we can, nay I think it is our duty so to do, rather than to abstain upon this *punctilio*. For when all is done, the best preparation for the Sacrament, is the general care and endeavour of a good life; and he that is thus prepared may receive at any time when opportunity is offered, though he had no particular foresight of that opportunity. And I think in that case such a one shall do much better to receive than to refrain, because he is habitually prepared for the Sacrament, though he had no time to make such actual preparation as he desired: And if this were not allowable, how could Ministers communicate with sick persons at all times, or persuade others to do it many times upon very short and sudden warning?

And indeed we cannot imagine that the primitive Christians, who received the Sacrament so frequently, that for ought appears to the contrary they judged it as essential and necessary a part of their publick worship as any other part of it whatsoever, even as their Hymns & Prayers, and reading and interpreting of the Word of God: I say we cannot well conceive how they who celebrated it so constantly, could allot any more time for a solemn preparation for it, than they did for any other part of divine worship: And consequently that the *Apostle*, when he bids the *Corinthians* examine themselves, could mean no more than that considering the nature & ends of this Institution

on they should come to it with great reverence; and reflecting upon their former miscarriages in this matter, should be carefull upon this admonition to avoid them for the future, and to amend what had been amiss; which to do requires rather resolution and care than any long time of preparation.

I speak this, that devout persons may not be Intrigled in an apprehension of a greater necessity than really there is of a long & solemn preparation every time they receive the Sacrament. The great necessity that lyes upon men is to live as becomes Christians, and then they can never be absolutely unprepared. Nay I think this to be a very good preparation; and I see not why men should not be very well satisfied with it, unless they Intend to make the same use of the Sacrament that many of the Papists do of Confession and Absolution, which is to quit with God once or twice a year, that so they may begin to sin again upon a new score.

But because the Examination of our selves is a thing so very usefull, and the time which men are wont to set apart for their preparation for the Sacrament is so advantageous an opportunity for the practice of it; therefore I cannot but very much commend those who take this occasion, to search and try their ways, and to call themselves to a more solemn account of their actions. Because this ought to be done sometime, and I know no fitter time for it than this. And perhaps some would never find time to recollect themselves, and to take the condition of their souls into serious consideration, were it not upon this solemn occasion.

The sum of what I have said is this, that supposing a person to be habitually prepared by a religious disposition of mind, and the general course of a good life, this more solemn actual preparation is not always necessary; And it is better when there is an opportunity to receive without it, than no to receive at all: But the greater our actual preparation is, the better. For no man can examine himself too often, and understand the state of his soul

soul too well, and exercise repentance, and renew the resolutions of a good life too frequently. And there perhaps no fitter opportunity for the doing of all this than when we approach the Lord's table, there to commemorate his death, and to renew our Covenant with him to live as becomes the Gospel.

All the Reflection I shal now make upon this Discourse shall be from the consideration of what hath been said earnestly to excite all that profess and call themselves Christians to a due preparation of themselves for this holy Sacrament, and a frequent participation of it, according to the Intention of our Lord and Saviour in the Institution of it, and the undoubted practice of Christian in the primitive and best times, when men had more devotion, and fewer scruples about their duty.

If we do in good earnest believe, that this Sacrament was Instituted by our Lord in remembrance of his dying love, we cannot but have a very high value and esteem for it upon that account. We think so often as we read the Institution of it, these words of our dear Lord, *Do this in remembrance of me*, and consider what he who said them did for us, this dying charge of our best friend, should stick with us, and make a strong impression upon our minds: Especially if we add to these, those other words of his, not long before his death, *Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends; ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you*. It is a wonderful love which he hath expressed to us, and worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance. And all that he expects from us, by way of thankful acknowledgment, is to celebrate the remembrance of it by the frequent participation of this blessed Sacrament. And shal this charge, laid upon us by him, who laid down his life for us, lay no obligation upon us to the solemn remembrance of that unparalleled kindness, which is the fountain of so many blessings and benefits to us? It is a great sign we have no great sense of the benefit, when we are so unmindfull of our Benefactor, as to forget him days without number.

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the obligation he hath laid upon us, is so vastly great, not only beyond all requital, but beyond all expressions; for if he had commanded us some very grievous thing, we ought with all the readiness and cheerfulness in the world to have done it; how much more when he hath imposed upon us so easie a commandment, a thing of no burthen, but of immense benefit? When he hath only said, to us; Eat, O friends; and Drink, O beloved? When he only invites us to his table, to the best and most delicious feast that we can partake of on this side heaven? If we seriously believe the great blessings which are there exhibited to us, & ready to be conferred upon us, we should be so far from neglecting them, that we should heartily thank God for every opportunity he offers to us of being made partakers of such benefits. When such a price is put into our hands shal we want hearts to make use of it? We think we should long with *David* (who saw but the shadow of these blessings) to be satisfied with the good things of God's house, and to draw near his altar; and should cry out with him, *O when shal I come and appear before thee! my soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord, and my flesh crieth out for the living God.* And if we had a just esteem of things, we should account it the greatest infelicity and judgment in the world to be debarred of this priviledge, which yet we do deliberately and frequently deprive our selves of.

We exclaim against the Church of Rome with great impatience, and with a very just indignation, for robbing the People of half of this blessed Sacrament, and taking from them the *cup of blessing*, the *cup of salvation*; and yet we can patiently endure for some moneths, nay years, to exclude our selves wholly from it. If no such great benefits and blessings belong to it, why do we complain of them for hindring us of any part of it? But if there do, why do we by our own neglect deprive our selves of the whole?

In vain do we bemoan the decay of our graces, and our slow progress and improvement in Christianity, whilst we wil-

wilfully despise the best means of our growth in goodness. Well do we deserve that God should send leanness into our souls, and make them to consume and pine away in perpetual doubting and trouble, If, when God himself doth spread a Table for us, and set before us the bread of life; we will not come and feed upon it with joy and thankfulness.

FINIS.