



MISS T. B. 310-5  
2 Sermons by J. L. Morrison of Northam  
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Sermons on a Covenant of Duty & the  
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of Haddington  
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Letters on Toleration of Blas-  
phemy and Idolatry. By J. Brown.

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William Blair

Dunblane

22 March 1859

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Church-Fellowship.

BEING AN

E S S A Y

ON THE

PRINCIPLES, OBLIGATIONS, and ENDS

OF THE

Communion of Saints,

IN THE

G O S P E L - C H U R C H.

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By ARCHIBALD HALL.

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Acts ii. 42. They continued stedfastly in---fellowship.

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# T H E P R E F A C E.

*THE following short treatise upon church-fellowship, sufficiently recommends itself to every intelligent and unbiassed reader; but after the press was set a-going, being importuned by a Reverend Brother, whom I highly esteem, to declare my sentiments about it to the public, I can with all freedom affirm, that I did read the manuscript with great pleasure. The conciseness, and at the same time the perspicuity in which it is wrote; together with the strength and solidity of the argument, will undoubtedly set it far above any recommendation of mine. Howbeit, at such a time as this, when it cannot be known, by the conduct of many professors, what denomination of Christians they belong to, I cannot help being of opinion, that a careful perusal of this small performance, will, by the divine blessing, be a means of their walking more closely with God, according to the unerring rule of his word; and likewise of promoting brotherly love towards one another, in all the duties of Christian fellowship.—That this short dissertation may answer these valuable ends, is, without the least privacy of the Reverend Author, the sincere desire of*

JA. FISHER.

Glasgow, 24th August,

1770.





## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE professed design of the following sheets, is to give the *scripture-line*, which equally avoids the criminal excesses of *bigotry* and *libertinism*. It is indeed become extremely difficult to observe a just medium, without leaning to one or other of these dangerous extremes, especially in an age like this, wherein divisions abound among the saints, and the nature, purposes, and limits of Christian fellowship are but little attended to, and, by the most part, but ill understood.

The *precise zealot*, whose good opinion and good wishes are confined to the party he belongs to, and whose cruel censures are indiscriminately thrown out upon all that do not think, and speak, and act, in exact conformity to his own views, errs upon principle, and thinks he is doing God service, in proportion as he finds his mind warmed in a cause which he supposes to have an exclusive title to be denominated the cause of God and truth. Such a person circumscribes his charity within the narrow circle of these who approve what he approves, and do what he himself does. He examines every scheme of religious truth and practice by his own apprehensions concerning both; and pronounces every person who does not come up fully to his standard, either blind to the knowledge of the doctrine of Christ, or disaffected to powerful godliness. Persuaded that his own sentiments are founded on the oracles of God, and that his views of the chain of scripture-truth are both accurate and extensive, he considers every one who denies the

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least jot of what he maintains, or even who may not allow all that he believes, as an enemy to religion. Under this view, he is firmly persuaded that he ought to censure all who walk not with him; and the transition is short, and sometimes quick, from censuring their cause, to condemn and dislike their persons.

The *lax catholic professor*, who breaks through every decent useful regard to the limited intimacies of church-fellowship, in stated regular attachments to particular societies, congregations, and churches, and who pretends to hold an equal communion with all denominations of Christians, as far as they will permit him,—he also errs upon principle, and believes it is an improvement in the divine life, to set aside every impediment whatever, to the most extensive visible communion among the saints. Upon his principles it is reasonable to expect, that his wishes to promote such an union and harmony, will prompt him to discourage every peculiarity in the system of received principles in every church. When he gives place to reflection upon the many and various systems he sees in the religious world, he perceives a mixture of good and bad in every denomination, and finds not only some holy men in each, but some characteristic opinion or service that seems to have the stamp of divine institution, in all. Imagining that *all the essentials* of pure and undefiled religion are common to every class of professing Christians, he boldly avers, that every peculiarity is but *a circumstance*, and however clear its foundation may be in the word of God, it is not necessary to salvation; consequently he judges it imprudent and criminal to insist upon it, at the expence or hazard of his notions about an universal coalition of the people  
of

of God in one visible communion. He treats all that differ from him, as persons that do not understand the genius, that do not possess the spirit of Christianity. While he censures bigotry with the utmost severity, he is not sensible that his principles are much the same with the most confined bigot's. The only material difference lies here; he is an enthusiast for an impracticable scheme of religious visible fellowship, which is merely speculative, as well as unscriptural; and the bigot he despises, is no less zealous for an unscriptural, but practicable system of communion. The one and the other are, however, equally attached to their own opinions respectively; but each of them blind to their own weaknesses.

This Essay is an honest attempt to guard Christians against both these extremes, by stating a candid appeal to the word of God, and to sound reason.

Erroneous conclusions have often been supposed to arise out of sound principles. This is a common case, when these principles are viewed in a wrong light. Because sinners are saved by grace, and justified only by faith, *Antinomians* deny the necessity of good works in them that believe. Because no man shall see the Lord without holiness, *legalists* affirm that good works procure the favour of God. Antinomians and legalists respectively build their dangerous errors upon good principles, which they have first represented to their minds in a false light.

The case is precisely the same with bigotted zealots and libertines, in their respective notions of church-communion. It is the indispensable duty of church-members to observe all the ordinances

nances of Christ, as well as to believe the whole system of his doctrines; therefore the contracted *bigot* fancies he must confine his charity and good wishes to his own party. It is the indispensable duty of the saints to love all that love the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore the religious *free-thinker* imagines he should despise every hedge set about the communion of saints in their particular and more private connections.—Both parties go upon good and useful principles, and both of them draw false and erroneous conclusions.

My intention in this Essay, is not to balance the iniquity and mischief of the one against the other, by way of comparison; but to manifest the absurdity and ill consequences of these erroneous conclusions they severally draw from principles which will not warrant their inferences.

The reader is neither to expect in it a vindication of any one class of Christians, nor an attack upon others. It is indeed my firm belief, that the model of the Christian church is an essential branch of revealed truth, and that the Presbyterian form of order and discipline is most agreeable to the mind of Christ: but these points are always supposed throughout the following performance, having, after many abler pens employed in that cause, also shewn mine opinion, in a book published last year, entitled, *An humble attempt to exhibit a scriptural view of the constitution, order, discipline, and fellowship of the Christian church*. The principles explained and established in that book, are the foundation of this little piece, which may therefore be considered as a sequel and improvement of it.

No particular notice is taken of the Secession from the judicatories of the church of Scotland, though I consider it only as a seasonable and dutiful attachment to that system of doctrine, worship, discipline, and church government, which is delivered in the oracles of God, and drawn out in the *Westminster assembly's Confession of Faith, Catechisms, Directory, and Form of Presbyterial Church-government*.——The only circumstance that has occasioned their attachment to be manifested, in a way of secession, is the too evident and intolerable corruption of this divinely excellent system by the established church, which obstinately perseveres in exercising cruelty and violence against faithful ministers and people, while she neglects the due administration of vigorous discipline upon the erroneous and immoral.——May these causes soon cease; and may the very name of Secession be forgot, in an united endeavour of all that fear God to return to himself, and to walk together with true zeal and charity in his truths!

The leading topics in this Essay are neither peculiar to one party nor another. They are common to society. The opponent, whoever he may be, is represented as a rebel against God and common sense, as an enemy to the welfare of the church, and a stranger to the world and himself.

My earnest prayer is, that God would mercifully enlighten the minds of his people, and unite their hearts, in receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire all the ordinances of Christ.

London, August 22,

1770.

ARCHIBALD HALL.

THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF BOSTON  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY  
OF THE BOSTON BAR  
VOL. I  
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1822

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## CHURCH-FELLOWSHIP.

**T**HE conditions and purposes of mankind suggest the utility and the terms of their social connections. The general principles, that constitute society, are the same in barbarous regions, and in the countries refined by the knowledge of the liberal arts. Men are at least as much *a law to themselves* in SOCIAL LIFE, as in any *branch of morality*. Circumstantial improvements, and these of the highest concern to human nature, are the happy consequence of that discernment and light, which elevate some nations and societies above others. But the fundamental terms of society, in its rudest state, are either suggested by instinct, or the result of the most superficial observation.

Without attending to the *general system* of society, our notions about *particular branches* of it must be vague, and precarious, if not in many respects false.

Even our conceptions about RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP, OR THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS, must be extremely imperfect, unless the nature and laws of society are carefully attended to.

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## 2 CHURCH-FELLOWSHIP.

Many things are common to all societies; and it would be folly to attempt to find every such essential idea in a positive, express scripture-institution respecting the church. "There are some circumstances concerning—the church, common to human—societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, *N. B. according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed* †."

To introduce what I have to offer concerning RELIGIOUS COMMUNION, it will be proper to give some account

### *Of society in general.*

The constitution of human nature, like the whole system of creation, is adapted to communicate and receive social energy. The influence of *attraction* or *repulsion* is visible through all nature. Mankind are endued with capacities and dispositions to enjoy much happiness in company; and the diversities of their genius, temper, taste, and situation, afford individuals many occasions of intellectual improvement, open a new source of self-knowledge, and excite to many useful, entertaining, benevolent, and pleasant pursuits, while the field is kept clear for every adventurer, to endeavour the general welfare of his neighbour, by a life employed in beneficent actions.

Necessity is the irresistible inducement that impels men to form and maintain regular connec-

† Westminster Confession, chap. i. sect. 6.



tions. Where-ever this necessity operates, it produces similar effects. It is founded in *the affections*, which are inseparable from humanity, and directed in their bias by the notions of the understanding. Hence every man is attached to society of some sort; and yet there is an endless variety of connections in the world. The barbarous Hottentot, and the wildest American savage, have each his passion for its charms and benefits, as well as the most refined philosopher: and it is hard to determine which of them is most inclined that way. The savage knows little, and therefore has few desires. The philosopher's mind is enriched with observations and reflections, and therefore his desires are extensive, and his connections in society more noble and important in their nature and design, than the barbarian can possibly reach, on account of his wretched ignorance. Desire follows knowledge \*. But there is great reason to believe, that mankind have much the same desires after society, according to the notions they have of its nature, and the purposes to be obtained by it.

The *most improved state of society*, and the *love of science*, are inseparable companions. They stand or fall together; and they wax or wane with an even pace.

But without launching into speculations on a subject, which is practical in its nature, and is only to be considered at present with a view to throw light on the duty of Christians in church-fellowship; I shall collect some of the most *general notions of society*, which are inseparable from

\* Ignoti nulla cupido.

it in the most unpolished state of mankind; and upon which every refinement of civilized manners is built, in places of the world, and in ages, enlightened with good sense, and improved with fine taste.

1. There is a certain instinctive tendency in mankind to entertain a common regard to one another. This is a work of the law, which is naturally written on every man's heart. Even Heathens knew that *malice, envy, malignity, want of natural affection*, and such like crimes, *deserved death*, Rom. i. The apostle appeals against such vile tempers to the dictates of conscience, and the general sense of mankind, Rom. ii. 14. 15. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another." The moral law is for substance the law of nature; and the sum of its obligations towards men is comprehended in *loving our neighbour as ourselves*, Matth. xxii. 39. Interests and prejudice indeed are too powerful for principle in many cases; and every country furnishes too many examples of men being carried to the most shocking extremes of wanton barbarity, in contempt of all humanity. But there is no nation under heaven, where these outrages are countenanced by the sense of the people, except upon a system of jurisprudence, imperfect and absurd as it is, which is established among them, and then they think the good of mankind obliges them to observe it. Their notions may be false, and their  
manners.

manners absurd, and even brutal ; but while they err upon principle, and are inhuman and unnatural by rule, this is no objection to the general position,—*That there is a certain instinctive tendency in their breasts to entertain a common regard to mankind.*

2. The sentiments and manners of mankind, which depend upon thousands of circumstances, that form the character and conduct of persons and societies, are widely different through the world. The early impressions of education, the force of custom, the authority of names, and many, many other causes, tinge the mind with prejudice, and become rooted principles of error and misconduct. Almost every man has something peculiar to himself. There is something alike, and yet with some difference, in the sentiments and manners of all men, not unlike the varied uniformity (if I may use the expression) in the shape of the body and form of the countenance, that shew mankind to be of one species, and yet distinguish individuals. A *family-likeness* and a *national character* are become proverbial.

3. Amidst this variety, the common regards of mankind are far from being sufficient to unite them in close enough connections for their comfort. This truth was not left to the slow investigation of either reasoning or experience. Adam discerned it previous to the exercise of his reasoning powers, and before he had the least experience of the nature of society with his own species. When “the Lord God had made the rib,  
“ which he took from the man, a woman, he  
“ brought her to the man : and Adam said,

## 6 CHURCH-FELLOWSHIP.

“ This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of  
 “ my flesh ; she shall be called Woman, because  
 “ she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a  
 “ man leave his father and his mother, and shall  
 “ cleave unto his wife : and they twain shall be  
 “ one flesh,” Gen. ii. 22. 23. 24. This was the  
 first society that ever existed among mankind,  
 and was a pattern for all their posterity. On  
 this account our Lord corrects the error of the  
 Jews, on the head of polygamy and divorce, by  
 appealing to *what was from the beginning*, Matth.  
 xix. 8. Mark x. 6. 7. 8. 9. There have been  
 such monsters as have *held the truth in unrighteousness*  
 in every age, and in every country ; but  
 there is no example of any man or woman, who  
 was content to live upon equal terms of undistin-  
 guishing friendship with all mankind. The ne-  
 cessity of close and particular connections is uni-  
 versally perceived, felt, confessed, and submit-  
 ted to, as the only means of making life tole-  
 rable.

4. The laws of society must be sacredly obser-  
 ved. In barbarous countries this system must be  
 very imperfect ; but the purposes to be obtained  
 by it are in proportion general and unimportant  
 to the honour and comfort of mankind. A-  
 mong people that are more civilized, we find a  
 system of legislation more refined, and better cal-  
 culated to obtain high and noble ends. What-  
 ever differences may take place between the ru-  
 dest state of nature, and the most polished re-  
 finements of social life, nature uniformly prompts  
 men in both of them to have a sacred regard to  
 the laws of their society. Necessity and inclina-  
 tion combine all their influence to induce them

to this course, the very existence of society depending upon it.

5. Nature perceives, without the help of instruction, that the private intimacies of social connection are so far from superseding, or even injuring a public spirit, and a generous regard to the welfare of mankind, in the most extensive concerns of human life, that they are the best security for both. If there are a few instances wherein they interfere, the mutual assistances they contribute to each other are so much greater, and more numerous, that they have always been thought perfectly harmonious, and necessary to one another. The barbarian never dissented from the opinion of the philosopher, concerning their mutual subserviency and helpfulness in general. Where society is least perfect, to be sure the advantages of it are fewest and smallest in proportion; but as society comes to be more improved, the benefits of it become equally greater and sweeter in every relation public and private. This has been the uniform experience of every nation, since men were divided into different nations to dwell upon the face of the earth.

The indulgent husband, the loving parent, the kind master, the good neighbour, and the industrious man who looks well to his own affairs, have always been reckoned the best friends to the public welfare. This has been found, in fact, *as just a way of thinking, as it has been general*; and demonstrates my position, that *a strict regard to private intimacies in social connection, is perfectly consistent with, and even advantageous to the good of the public.* A public spirit  
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is not that absurd thing which destroys the securities and reasonable obligations of inferior societies, under the pretence of cultivating a catholic love to mankind, upon the most general undistinguishing principles. A public spirit undoubtedly implies an open, candid, and charitable temper of mind towards our neighbour, and all that is his; but it always supposes the person possessed of it, to be strictly attached to every private social connection, without which it is impossible the general ends of society can ever be effectually obtained.

6. The regulations of society in private life, constitute an essential branch of the general system of jurisprudence in every public society. The memoirs of every country vouch for the fact; and the most superficial reflection discovers a good reason for it. The least and the largest societies are united upon certain conditions: and these conditions are *the principles of their constitution*. All large societies are formed out of such as are originally small; and all public societies comprehend many private ones. The character, sentiments, and behaviour of individuals, are reasonable objects of consideration, in the least and most private society: and, for the same reason, the regulations of every such society, are an important object of consideration, in the jurisprudence of every country.

These general observations do not make any addition to the knowledge of almost any man endowed with a very moderate share of understanding. They are only reflections upon life; and the most they pretend to, is, a compendious view of

of social life, as it really exists, and acts, upon the principles of common sense.

These premisses will be of some service in opening *the communion of saints*, as they shew what *nature teacheth* on the subject of society: and her dictates have their use in many points of religion, 1 Cor. xi. 1.—16. I shall therefore proceed to the consideration of what is more particularly designed for the satisfaction of the reader in this dissertation, which is to treat

### *Of church-communion.*

THAT there is a communion among the saints, is both an *ancient*, and a *general* article of the Christian faith. But, like many others, it is more commonly supposed, than well understood. By a strange infatuation, it frequently happens, that *general truths* are neglected, while prejudice and ignorance operate, with an unperceived energy, to hinder mankind from just views, or a fair application of what every body has some notion about. Hence the multitude become dupes, either to their own indolent pride, or to the arts of designing men.

That the point in hand may be explained with precision, so as either to establish the truth, or lie open to a candid detection, I shall attempt to do three things:

1. To state and illustrate the nature of church-communion, in several propositions.
2. To deduce a few inferences from that illustration of it. And,
3. To give some directions concerning it.

CHAP.

## C H A P. I.

*Of the nature of church-communion.*

FOR Christians to join themselves in particular societies and connections, in order to carry on the great interests of religion, appears to be both a duty and a privilege. As a duty, it stands upon the surest foundations; and as a privilege, it is attended with excellent advantages. The nature, principles, and purposes of it, so far as my present design is concerned about them, may be sufficiently illustrated in the following propositions.

Prop. 1. *The church has every thing essential to society, in common with societies of any kind.*

Weak minds may perhaps move a doubt upon this head, because the church is a kingdom not of this world, and because her members are of another spirit, and united for other purposes, than the men of the world. Here the doctrine is true, but the application of it wrong. The church is not of this world; but it does not follow, that there is an essential difference, in these things, which constitute the very nature of her social fellowship, between the church and other societies. Without allowing that every thing essential to society, belongs to the church in common with all societies, we can never account for her being so often represented in the scripture, under images borrowed from civil societies. She is called a city, an house, a kingdom, a family, &c. Heb. xii. 22. 1 Tim. iii. 15. Matth. xiii. 38. Eph.



Eph. iii. 15. The propriety of these allusions must be founded in the supposed truth of my position.

And if the church has every thing essential to society, in common with societies of any kind, it follows, that the arguments, taken from *the light of nature*, and *Christian prudence*, according to the general rules of the word, are conclusive and pertinent, when applied to the concerns of the church, in such points as are common and essential to every society.

Prop. 2. *The members of the visible church are such as profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, with their children.*

Many are hypocritical in such professions, and are not cordial in their pretensions. It has always been so, and there is much reason to believe it will be so, while the world stands. But, though their hypocrisy exposes them to the resentments of omniscient jealousy, which will not be mocked, it cannot exclude them from membership in the visible church. Judas Iscariot, though a son of perdition, was reckoned among the chosen twelve. Simon, who had been a magician or forcerer, was baptized upon a profession of his faith, though he was still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Nothing avails in the sight of God, but a *new creature*. But God, as was most fit, hath reserved to himself the prerogative of judging the secrets of the heart; and hath pointed out *certain appearances*, that may prove false and deceitful, to be the rule of human judgment, which therefore is not infallible.

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These appearances are few and simple, but they are every way sufficient to answer all the purposes of their fellowship in the gospel. (1.) They must have some *knowledge* of the perfections of God, of the spirituality of his law, of the sovereignty of his grace, and of their need of Christ, with his universal suitableness and sufficiency, Rom. x. 3. 4. Eph. ii. 8. (2.) They must *profess their belief* of these capital articles of Christianity, upon which the whole system of its privileges and duties is built, Acts viii. 37. Rom. x. 9. 10. (3.) They must *depart from all known iniquity*, 1 Cor. vi. 9. 10. 11. 2 Tim. ii. 19. Tit. i. 15. 16. (4.) They must *express their esteem and love of the truth*; and, as an evidence of this, their resolution to yield a cheerful obedience to all divine institutions according to the scriptures, 2 Cor. viii. 5.—We should expect such fruits as these in every real Christian, advanced to a ripeness of reason and understanding; and wherever they are found, charity forbids every unworthy suspicion concerning that person's Christianity.—The infants of such as are members of the visible church, though they cannot show these fruits in their infancy, are to be reckoned among the members of the visible church, until their impious courses demonstrate that they are “without Christ, being aliens from the common-wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world,” Eph. ii. 12. The illustration and proof of the membership of *such children* would be too tedious, besides that they are impertinent, for my present purpose. The reader is referred to the explications and defences of the doctrine of *infant-baptism*, for full satisfaction.

From

From what has been said on the character of church-members, it is plain, that their membership is not to be estimated by the place of their birth or residence:--that it does not depend on their external privileges:—and that their visible title to this dignity, if adult, is founded on their PERSONAL CHARACTER.

Prop. 3. *Christians are called by the gospel to an holy fellowship, and are under the strongest obligations to cultivate that fellowship with mutual ardour.*

That Christians are called by the gospel, to an holy fellowship together, is very evident from these considerations. (1.) The descriptions of the Christian church, which is called *a flock, an house, a city, a kingdom, &c.* clearly suggest an idea of social communion. (2.) The uniting influence of the gospel-scheme deserves particular consideration. The saints have a joint interest and concernment in such excellent things as direct and oblige them to be united in heart and affection, in fellowship and practice: Eph. iv. 3. 4. 5. 6. “ Endeavouring to keep the unity of  
“ the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one  
“ body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in  
“ one hope of your calling; one Lord, one  
“ faith, one baptism, one God and Father of  
“ all, who is above all, and through all, and in  
“ you all.” (3.) This fellowship is exemplified in such instances as have the force and obligation of a law to direct and bind the conscience. We are compassed about with a great cloud of honourable witnesses on this point. The saints have always been companions of all them that feared God. As soon as any believed in the apostolic

age, we find they immediately joined themselves to the saints, and continued stedfastly in fellowship with them: Acts ii. 41. 42. 47. "Then  
 " they that gladly received his word were bap-  
 " tized: and the same day there were added un-  
 " to them about three thousand souls. And  
 " they continued stedfastly in the apostles doc-  
 " trine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread,  
 " and in prayers.—And the Lord added to  
 " the church daily such as should be saved."

(4.) It is *expressly commanded* as a duty which constitutes a remarkable branch of practical religion: Phil. i. 27. "Only let your conversation be as  
 " it becometh the gospel of Christ." And that we may know what the apostle means by *this conversation which becometh the gospel of Christ*, he subjoins in the same verse, "that YE STAND  
 " FAST IN ONE SPIRIT, WITH ONE MIND,  
 " STRIVING TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH  
 " OF THE GOSPEL." The last expression is evidently intended to explain the first. And,

(5.) The *manifold advantages* of this holy fellowship are a great recommendation of it: for it gives courage to every Christian to profess and practise his religion, when many persons are engaged by mutual agreement in the same profession and practice;—it is more for the particular edification of Christians, that such societies should be formed, where the word of Christ is constantly preached, where the ordinances of Christ are administered, and the religion of Christ is held forth in a social and honourable manner to the world;—such an holy fellowship and agreement to walk together in the ways of Christ, is an happy guard against backsliding and apostacy; it is a defence against the temptations of the world, and the defilements of a sinful age; and—Christians,

stians, thus united together by mutual acquaintance and agreement, can give each other better assistance in every thing that relates to religion, whether public or private.

Such a variety of concurring obligations, which combine their weight and authority to engage Christians to join in an holy and intimate fellowship, are strong inducements to an ardent zeal in maintaining and cultivating that fellowship, when it is once formed. The purposes of Christian communion are practical, and can only be fully obtained by perseverance, and unwearied endeavours in the prosecution of them. To be remiss and neglectful in this point, is a practical denial of the principles of it, and implies an acknowledgment of their insufficiency for the ends of their revelation to men.

Prop. 4. *Christian fellowship is built upon the foundation of revealed truth.*

It may truly seem strange, that this proposition should ever be disputed. But strange as it may appear, the fact is certain. The methods of managing the contest are many and various, but all of them odious to such as are determined to make the word of God their *only rule* to direct them, how they may glory and enjoy God. "Other foundation can no man lay," for the faith, obedience, and fellowship of the Christian church, "than that is laid," 1 Cor. iii. 11. Whatever respect that assertion may have to individual persons, it is manifest, that the original design of the Holy Ghost in it, is to represent Christ as the foundation of the communion of saints in *their church-state*: for the apostle is reproving that

contentious humour which prevailed in the church of Corinth; and to expose the absurdity of it, he puts the members in mind of an image that represents the folly of their bad tempers in a very striking light—*Ye are God's building*, vers. 9. —In pursuing this argument, he observes, that *a building*, though composed of many detached parts, is *one whole*, and has but *one foundation*, and therefore they should be one among themselves. He urges this argument further, by describing the materials of which this sacred edifice is built. *Wood, hay, and stubble*, would disgrace the foundation, and endanger the fabric; therefore they must only *build gold, silver, and precious stones*, upon this precious foundation, vers. 12.—15. As Christians should unite upon clear scriptural principles, so their sentiments and practices should shine, in that holy state, in all the simplicity and beauty of unfeigned faith, and of true holiness.

The proposition I have laid down concerning *the foundation of Christian fellowship*, which is affirmed to be *revealed truth*, might be supported with a great compass of solid proof. (1.) The nature of the church, which is *the kingdom of Christ*, and is *not of this world*, is a manifest demonstration of it, John xviii. 36. Being *the kingdom of Christ*, she must acknowledge no judge, king, or lawgiver, but Christ only; because she would not be *HIS KINGDOM*, if she acknowledged any other: and being *not of this world*, she must be spiritual in her constitution, and independent on the pleasure and authority of men. (2.) The *characters of grown church-members*, furnish another evidence of this point. They must profess faith in Christ, and obedience to him.

Faith

Faith is a crediting the divine testimony concerning him; and obedience to Christ, is an obedience to his authority. This testimony and authority are only to be expected or found in the scriptures, which testify of him, and declare his pleasure to men. (3.) The position is expressly delivered almost in terms, Eph. ii. 19. 20. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." (4.) The *progress* of church-fellowship is an additional proof that it is built upon the foundation of revealed truth. Eph. iv. 1. "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." Vers. 7. "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Vers. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that

B. 3

"ye

“ ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk  
 “ in the vanity of their mind.” Vers. 20. 21.  
 “ But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be  
 “ that ye have heard him, and have been taught  
 “ by him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

Since the doctrines and duties of Christianity, which are *the conditions and object of church communion*, (or *its moral foundation*), are the truths of God, and revealed in his word; we should endeavour to obtain a competent knowledge and proper evidence of what is there delivered, and be content with that establishment, which is both most suitable to the nature, and advantageous to the honour and safety, of the gospel-church: Matth. xvi. 18. “ Upon this rock I will build  
 “ my church; and the gates of hell shall not  
 “ prevail against it.” The Holy Ghost teaches us “ to pray for kings, and for all that are in  
 “ authority; that we may lead a quiet and  
 “ peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,” under their mild and just administration, 1 Tim. ii. 1. 2. The best authority for our faith and practice is in the oracles of God; and there is small reason to value ourselves upon any sanctions of men, which are so frequently converted into engines of carnal policy, and sometimes of cruel tyranny.

Prop. 5. *Edification and comfort in the faith, love, and obedience of revealed truth, are the great objects of religious communion.*

Every society proposes some ends which they reckon important and useful. The purposes to be obtained in a state of church-fellowship are, in proportion, more important and beneficial  
 than



than the purposes of any other society, as they relate to the happiness of the soul, and the everlasting interests of mankind.——These are the mutual and united edification and comfort of the members in the faith, and love, and obedience of the scriptures. (1.) *Edification and comfort* are every where represented as *the governing ends* of this holy fellowship. As all the members contribute to the benefit and pleasure of the whole body; so the particular members of the Christian church to the increase and joy of the body of Christ. Their fellowship heightens their satisfactions, and diminishes their sorrows: for hereby they come to have common joys and sufferings, common happiness and alleviations of grievous pain. They may say, in reference to what concerns their condition, as the primitive disciples did of their worldly substance, “that none of the things they possess” or want “is their own, but they have all things common,” Acts iv. 32. Thus the church maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself. (2.) This edification and comfort which Christians should pursue, consist in the *growth, evidence, and fruits of their faith, love, and obedience of revealed truth.*——*Of their faith*, that it may become more judicious, more confirmed, and more efficacious, while the doctrines of it are better understood, the grounds of it are more clearly discerned, the encouragements to it are more powerfully felt, the operations of it are better directed, and the evidences of it become more manifest. The saints are *the faithful in Christ Jesus*, Eph. i. 1.; and their church-communion makes their faith to grow exceedingly, and to become conspicuous in the world, 2 Theff. i. 3. Rom. i. 8.——*Of their love*, that it may become more warm, more judicious,

dicious, and more fruitful, according to the prayer of the apostle for the Philippians, "And this  
 " I pray, that your love may abound yet more  
 " and more in knowledge, and in all judgment;  
 " that ye may approve things that are excellent;  
 " that ye may be sincere, and without offence  
 " till the day of Christ; being filled with the  
 " fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus  
 " Christ unto the glory and praise of God,"  
 Phil. i. 9. 10. 11.—*Of their obedience* likewise, that it may become the privileges of the gospel, and correspond with the commandments of the divine law; that it may be visible, extensive, and pleasant, while they walk together in the fear of the Lord; and that it may be convincing to the world, while they see the saints uniform and cheerful in doing the will of God, as well as in confessing his truths. Rom. xiv. 16. 17. 18. 19.  
 " Let not then your good be evil spoken of. For  
 " the kingdom of God is not meat and drink,  
 " but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the  
 " Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after  
 " the things which make for peace, and things  
 " wherewith one may edify another." *Revealed truth* is the only rule of all gospel-obedience: and whenever it is neglected, the best services become like garnished sepulchres, outwardly fair, but inwardly abominable. Practical Christianity is, on this account, called *walking in the truth*, as we have received a commandment from the Father, 2 John 4. The apostle beautifully describes the principles, nature, and rule of that obedience, which is the object of religious communion, Col. iii. 9.—17. " Lie not one to another,  
 " seeing that ye have put off the old man with his  
 " deeds;

“ deeds; and have put on the new man, which  
 “ is renewed in knowledge, after the image of  
 “ him that created him. Where there is neither  
 “ Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircum-  
 “ cision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free :  
 “ but Christ is all, and in all. Put on there-  
 “ fore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved)  
 “ bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of  
 “ mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing  
 “ one another, and forgiving one another, if  
 “ any man have a quarrel against any : even as  
 “ Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above  
 “ all these things, put on charity which is the  
 “ bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God  
 “ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are  
 “ called in one body ; and be ye thankful. Let  
 “ the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all  
 “ wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one an-  
 “ other in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual  
 “ songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the  
 “ Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or  
 “ deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
 “ giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

Now, where-ever this faith, love, and obedience  
 of revealed truth prevail, the church is edified  
 and comforted : her glorious Head is publicly  
 honoured, and his presence enjoyed. According  
 to their faith, so it shall be to the saints. He  
 that hath the commandments of Jesus, and keep-  
 eth them, he it is that loveth him : and he that  
 loveth him shall be loved of his Father, and they  
 will come unto him, and make their abode with  
 him. Thus it shall be done to the man that the  
 King of glory delighteth to honour. And this  
 shall be the honour and privilege of holy socie-  
 ties, which hold fast Christ's name, in a series of  
 such

such works, and charity, and service, and faith, and patience, as become their heavenly calling ; for the effectual fervent prayer of Christ for them runs in these words, John xvii. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. “ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that  
 “ they also might be sanctified through the truth.  
 “ Neither pray I for these alone, but for them  
 “ also which shall believe on me through their  
 “ word : that they all may be one, as thou, Fa-  
 “ ther, art in me, and I in thee ; that they also  
 “ may be one in us : that the world may believe  
 “ that thou hast sent me. And the glory which  
 “ thou gavest me, I have given them : that they  
 “ may be one, even as we are one. I in them,  
 “ and thou in me, that they may be made per-  
 “ fect in one, and that the world may know  
 “ that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them,  
 “ as thou hast loved me.”

Prop. 6. *The liberties and blessings of the gospel are to be enjoyed, in their greatest comfort and extent, only in a state of Christian society.*

Retirements from the world, and the duties of personal religion, are essentially necessary, and highly useful in the Christian life. The benefit of them is very manifest : but still the communion of saints, in *their united social state*, puts them in the best capacity to enjoy the liberties and blessings of the gospel : Heb. xii. 22. 23. 24.  
 “ But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto  
 “ the city of the living God, the heavenly Jeru-  
 “ salem, and to an innumerable company of an-  
 “ gels, to the general assembly and church of  
 “ the first-born, which are written in heaven,  
 “ and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits  
 “ of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the  
 “ mediator

“ mediator of the new covenant, and to the  
 “ blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things  
 “ than that of Abel.” What is contained in  
 these verses, is not to be considered as a descrip-  
 tion of the privileges of *the future state* of the  
 church in heaven, but of *its present state* on  
 earth, under the gospel-dispensation, which the  
 apostle opposes to that of the Old Testament: for  
 therein lies the force of his argument, to shew  
 the preference of the gospel-state, beyond that  
 under the law, and to guard the Hebrews against  
 apostatizing from Christianity to Judaism. In al-  
 lusion to the characters under which the church  
 of Israel was represented, he speaks of the gospel-  
 church, as *mount Sion, the city of the living God,*  
 and *the heavenly Jerusalem*, which are all terms  
 of much the same import, and are applied in  
 Scripture to the New-Testament church of true  
 believers, of which the church of Israel were  
 types. And believers being *come to it*, as descri-  
 bed under these titles, may most immediately re-  
 late to the communion which they are brought  
 into with the *church on earth*, though the last  
 parts of the description seem more immediately  
 to relate to the communion they have, EVEN  
 WHILE THEY ARE HERE, with *the church in*  
*heaven*, and with God and the Mediator, who  
 are most perfectly enjoyed there.

The pen of impudent panegyric is altogether  
 needless for setting forth the advantages of reli-  
 gious society, to convey and enjoy the privileges  
 of the gospel, in their greatest comfort and ex-  
 tent. Social intercourses, properly directed, in-  
 crease and diffuse knowledge, warm the heart,  
 raise the affections, excite emulation, and many  
 ways contribute to the good of mankind. Our  
 Lord

Lord and Saviour, in his wisdom and goodness, hath ordained the fellowship of his disciples, for the magnifying his kingly office, and for their common edification: for which great and glorious ends all his institutions are, without dispute, evidently designed, and excellently adapted.—The apostle's illustration of the comfortable and advantageous communion of saints, by comparing them to the body, which is but one, though it hath many members, 1 Cor. xii. Rom. xii. confirms all that I affirm: for these members are set in the body for their mutual honour, service, and benefit. The words of a sensible writer \* are rational and pertinent to this purpose: "Particular parts are increased by union and communion with the body; for if the communion be cut off, the part decays; so the growth and increase of the body is in the particular parts, *for the body is not one member, but many*, 1 Cor. xii. 14. and vers. 20. *Now are they many members, but one body*, neither can the body spare one without detriment, nor it the body: but if a member go off from the body, the body may live, though the member cannot."

*Prop. 7. The governing ends of church-fellowship may, in some cases, be inconsistent with the narrow views and wishes of individuals.*

If it be a misfortune to Christians, to be connected upon such terms in their religious concerns, it is, however, certain, that this misfortune is inseparable from every social connection in life. The governing ends and purposes of society daily interfere with the confined views and

\* Isaac Chauncey.

desires of mankind in every relation; hence there must be a daily exercise of forbearance, patience, and prudence, in order to make life tolerable. To be inflexible, each in following his own opinion, would ruin every society. Kingdoms must be destroyed, and even families must be ruined, by unyielding attachments to personal views and interests on all hands. When the depravity of human nature is considered, it is too favourable a construction upon it to suppose, that all the members of society are strictly honest and disinterested in their designs and measures; but, if it were granted, that this supposition is as just, as it would be charitable, still it cannot be denied, that mankind see but in part, and sometimes discern their interest and duty too imperfectly, and even falsely, to enable them to choose what is good, and to embrace the best measures to obtain the most valuable ends in these societies they belong to.

It would be downright madness to expect, in the present imperfect state of things, that church-members will see every point of truth and duty with one eye, or, that such measures as are requisite for the public good, will not be grievous, in particular instances, to individuals. Many of the duties, incumbent on them by divine authority, imply *self-denial* in reference to their inclination, interest, and honour. Such self-denying duties suppose, that the governing ends of their communion are, in these cases, inconsistent with their views, interests, and wishes, as individuals: for if this principle be admitted, the propriety of these injunctions is obvious; if it be denied, they are unaccountable. This principle

sets the apostle's advice and reasoning in a very agreeable light, Rom. xv. 1.—7. “We then  
 “that are strong, ought to bear the infirmities  
 “of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let  
 “every one of us please his neighbour for his  
 “good to edification. For even Christ pleased  
 “not himself; but as it is written, The re-  
 “proaches of them that reproached thee fell on  
 “me. For whatsoever things were written a-  
 “foretime, were written for our learning; that  
 “we through patience and comfort of the scrip-  
 “tures might have hope. Now the God of pa-  
 “tience and consolation, grant you to be like-  
 “minded one towards another, according to  
 “Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and  
 “one mouth glorify God, even the Father of  
 “our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye  
 “one another, as Christ also received us, to the  
 “glory of God.”

Prop. 8. *When church-members pursue their private views, at the expence of the general ends of religious fellowship, they are guilty of schism.*

Unless the same extensive care one for another prevail among the members, there is a schism in the body, 1 Cor. xii, 25. How would the case stand in the natural body, if the eye should say to the foot, I have no need of thee? or the hand to the head, I have no need of thee? What would be the consequence of such language and behaviour among the members of a family? Would not the body be injured, and the house be brought to desolation?—But nature impels the members to hazard themselves severally for the good of the body; and the vital parts, in a dangerous



dangerous case, have every possible assistance from the strongest and most distant members. In like manner, reason immediately perceives the necessity of an harmonious concurrence in family-affairs to promote their general good. Few maxims are more generally allowed, than that *private views of ease, ambition, interest, and pleasure, should only be gratified upon terms that are consistent with public utility.* This seems to be one of the first laws, relative to social conduct, which is written upon the human heart. *Divisions and schisms* would be the unavoidable consequence, if this principle did not generally prevail in the world. The very course of nature must be set on fire, and the foundations of society entirely destroyed, if this law of nature be once set aside. But mankind universally do the things contained in this law, and, in this matter, are a law unto themselves.

Love is the powerful cement of Christian fellowship. The *nature and operations* of this divine temper are beautifully described, 1 Cor. xiii. 4.---8. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; "charity envieth not: charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."—Where-ever THIS LOVE prevails, it must, it certainly will, induce every Christian to seek the peace, the welfare, and

prosperity of his Christian connections, by every method in his power, and to deny himself the pleasure of following his own private views, in points that would interfere with the edification of his brethren.

But where people are guided in their religious conduct by narrow, selfish views, and hurt the edification of their fellow-Christians, *they do not walk orderly* ; for they can neither exercise brotherly love themselves, nor secure a reciprocal affection from their brethren ; and consequently there must be envying, and strife, and divisions, and every evil work among them. To constitute what the scripture calls *schism*, it is not necessary that there be a total separation from church-communion ; for there were schisms in the church of Corinth, though there was but one church, and all the members were in one communion.

The only objections I can foresee against this proposition are these :—That *it destroys the right of private judgment* ; and—that *it seems to set up the public opinion as a test of religious practice*.

As to the first objection,—that *the right of private judgment will be destroyed, if church-members be not indulged in pursuing their own views, in things of a religious nature, even though their Christian connections be offended* :—I would observe, (1.) That every man has certainly a right, and it is his duty, to be determined concerning his doctrinal sentiments, and his religious practice, in every point of both from the oracles of God. (2.) A right of judging upon these principles, is fully consistent with a person's being joined in social ties with other Christians, each  
of

of whom have the same right with himself. Therefore, (3.) This right of private judgment must be used *with prudence*, that it may not occasion offence: for if it produce strifes, contentions, and alienations of affection, it destroys the very bonds of all Christian society. We have an imitable example of the exercise of *this right*, upon the plan of gospel-communion, I am recommending, in Rom. xiv. and 1 Cor. viii.

The second objection, *viz.* That *my position sets up the public opinion as a test of religious practice*, — is only a counter-part to the first. Concerning it I would observe, (1.) That the word of God is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. (2.) The word of God, in every thing relating to church-fellowship, addresses us not only *as Christians*, but *as church-members*, or *as persons that are joined in the ties of Christian society*. Therefore, (3.) *Not the public opinion*, but *the word of God*, which warns us against pursuing the gratification of our private views, at the expence of the general ends of religious fellowship, is the *alone rule of religious practice in all the offices of church-communion* — Yes, *the word of God*, which enjoins saints, to “follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another;” — which charges them “for meat not to destroy the work of God:”—and which gives this excellent reason for both, “to the pure all things are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence,” Rom. xiv. 19. 20. — This word of unchangeable truth, and of eternal righteousness, is our only rule.

Prop. 9. *Order and discipline are essentially necessary*

*cessary to the honour and edification of the visible church.*

There have been many disputes about the kind of government that should be administered; but it has been almost universally allowed, that some kind of it is necessary. The manner of exercising discipline has not been well agreed upon; but many of the acts of discipline have had some appearances of uniformity, in regard to the facts. Even the maddest enthusiasts, who make the boldest pretensions to the infallible conduct of the holy Spirit, find their account in admitting several acts of discipline into their societies. Indeed some have taken great liberties in declaiming against every system of church-discipline, as a carnal scheme: but these declamations are only in theory, and nature rebels against their own speculations. The universal practice is founded on the most obvious, undeceiving principles: for, (1.) The present condition of human nature requires it. Man is endued with reason, and therefore a subject capable of such government. There are many mere pretenders to Christianity in the visible church, whose defiled hearts are always ready to send forth streams of impurity, to the discredit of their profession. And even the saints are not without a powerful law in their members, which is a root of bitterness that springs up to trouble the church.—On all these considerations, it is necessary that there be *an order and discipline* observed in the visible church, both to preserve her purity, and to support her credit. (2.) Order and discipline are the appointed ordinance of Heaven for the use of the church. The apostle tells us of the Colossians, that *their order was in Christ*, chap. ii. 5. And  
again,

again, 1 Cor. xii. 28. *God hath set some in the church,—governments.* Whatever these governments were, it is plain, that governments of some kind were set in the gospel-church. (3.) Order and discipline are many ways useful to the visible church:—so useful, that it is not good she should be without them. They are for the honour of the church, for her purity, and for her comfort.—*For her honour*, as they make her appear respectable:—*for her purity*, as they are a fence about the professed faith and practice of her members:—and *for her comfort*, as they shew the station, duty, and dignity of each member; and consequently the amiable and lovely constitution of the whole body.

*N. B.* I do not pretend, at present, to describe that order and discipline, which are necessary to the edification of the visible church. I have explained my sentiments on that subject in another performance, wherein I have given my reasons for thinking *the Presbyterian system* to be *of divine appointment*.—I only affirm now, that *an order and discipline are essentially necessary in the visible church*, both to preserve her honour, and to promote her edification.

*Prop. 10. A credible appearance of persons being really exercised to godliness, is not, of itself, a sufficient recommendation for admitting, or continuing them, members of a particular church.*

This sentiment will, no doubt, have a very odd sound in some peoples ears. But strange as it may seem to be, it is manifestly adopted, in fact, among all denominations of Christians, though some of them deny it in words. As it  
is

is a very weighty and necessary point, that occasions abundance of speculative debate in the present age, I shall endeavour *to open the meaning,—to exhibit the proof,—and to defend the sense, of the proposition.*

*Section 1.* For *opening the meaning of the proposition*, the following remarks may be considered. (1.) The members of the visible church are supposed to be *real Christians*, previous to their being received into communion in any particular form of Christian fellowship. (2.) A credible appearance of being exercised to godliness, is a clear foundation for a *charitable opinion* of any person, or persons, being real Christians; and for loving them as brethren. (3.) Such an appearance is absolutely necessary to entitle a person to visible communion: and no substitute can supply the want of it, in order to render church-fellowship either safe or rational. (4.) This appearance, however genuine, (and in the case of particular persons it should always be reckoned genuine), is not, of itself, a sufficient recommendation, either for admitting them to, or continuing them in, the communion of particular churches. Unless there be also a professed subjection to the system of church order and discipline, which is acknowledged in that communion they would join themselves to, they cannot be safely, nor honourably, nor edifyingly, received or continued. Where persons do not profess such subjection, we may sincerely allow that they are the disciples of Christ, the members of his mystical body, and heirs of his everlasting kingdom; and, at the same time, consistently enough deny that they have *all the requisites* of a member of the visible church, which the scripture  
has

was made necessary to her comfortable fellowship. There is no contradiction between what is allowed on the one hand, and what is denied on the other.

*SECT. 2.* The *proof of my position* arises out of the following plain facts. (1.) Church-communion is formed by the mutual agreement of the members to adhere to one system of faith, to observe one system of worship, and to walk in one order of church-administration. Mutual agreement must be the foundation of all fellowship in a church state; "For how shall two walk together, except they are agreed?" and how shall they know that they are agreed, unless their agreement be expressed in a manner that may remove just cause of suspicion from one another's minds, and create confidence about their uniform views of the doctrines and duties of Christianity? (2.) Harmony of church-administrations in worship, discipline, and conversation, is necessary for the edification of her members, and for her appearing respectable in the eyes of the world, 1 Cor. xiv. 33. "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" and order, "as in all churches of the saints." It is impious to imagine, that the infinitely wise and holy God either is, or can be, the author, abetter, or encourager, of any disorderly and irregular management, which has a natural tendency to fling his worship into confusion, or to breed disturbances in his church. He is the God of peace and order, and, as such, commands, approves, and promotes every thing that tends to the spiritual prosperity of his people, in a regular, well-governed, and peaceable way. (3.) Christians cannot walk together in love for their mutual edification and comfort, in a state of church-fellowship,

lowship, unless they have stricter connections than barely the credible appearances of vital Christianity. Even nature teaches us, that intimate social alliances in common life must be established upon principles of *prudence*, which makes a rational choice of capacities, tempers, and geniuses, out of the human species. Every private religious connection, if prudent, is formed upon taste, and a distinguishing choice, wherein all Christians agree to justify the principle of building the intimacies of their sacred friendship upon a *narrower foundation*, than that of a *credible appearance of real religion*. Now, it is certain, Christianity was never intended to destroy, but to improve the fundamental laws of nature: and it would be very amazing, if *that prudent choice*, which is so manifestly useful and commendable, if well directed, in the narrower circle of *private Christian friendships*, should become criminal in *more public connections of church-communion*. And, (4.) The examples of primitive Christians, in the apostolic age, justifies all that I affirm: for they either submitted to, and observed the ordinances of gospel-worship, and holy fellowship, delivered by the apostles; or else they refused, and refusing, were branded for not walking orderly, 1 Cor. xi. 2. "Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you." Rom. xvi. 17. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." 2 Thess. ii. 14. 15. "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have  
" been



“ been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”  
 2 Theff. iii. 6. 7. “ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you.”—On the whole, I apprehend it is evident, that we must either renounce these obvious principles of the oracles of God, or else allow, that *a credible appearance of persons being really exercised to godliness, is not, of itself, a sufficient recommendation for admitting, or continuing them members of a particular church.*

*Seet. 3.* I shall now proceed to *the defence of this assertion*, against some of the most plausible objections that are frequently urged on the other side,

*First*, “ This proposition is supposed to be inconsistent with the apostle’s description of the kingdom of God, Rom. xiv. 17. 18. *The kingdom (or church) of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost: for he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.* From this account of the gospel-church they infer, that holy tempers, and a religious conversation, are the only conditions of church-communion.”—*Ans.* These verses contain a well-supported remonstrance against the imposing spirit of the judaizing Christians he had to deal with, who insisted on the observation of the Mosaic prohibitions concerning meats and drinks,  
 and

and days, alledging that no man could either please God, or be saved, without such observances. The apostle informs these mistaken professors, that the kingdom of God, or the gospel-church, had no business with these prohibitions and observances, being entirely of a spiritual nature: and that the person, who worshipped God in spirit and in truth, was now to be reckoned an observer of the divine law, and to be reputed such in the opinion of all good men.

*Secondly*, "It is said, that this proposition is inconsistent with catholic love, and particularly with that exhortation, Rom. xiv. 19. *Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*"—

*Ans.* I grant that our charity ought not to be confined to a party which concurs exactly with us; nor ought all our benevolent wishes and delights to centre in these that approve our opinions. I likewise allow, that *peace* is a very desirable thing; but we are not to pursue it at all adventures. We certainly ought to put forth ourselves to the utmost to obtain and preserve unity and concord, yet never to purchase it at the expence of *holiness, truth, or order*: for we must "follow peace with all men, and *holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord," Heb. xii. 14. "We can do nothing against the *truth*," in following after the things which make for peace, 2 Cor. xiii. 8. And the peace we pursue must be consistent with *order* and *distinction*, every one observing the duties of his station, and not like the children of Israel when without a king, every man doing what is right in his own eyes.

*Thirdly,*

*Thirdly*, "It is averred, that SELF-INTEREST prompts a set of misled, designing men, to oppose that catholic principle of admitting every one into their communion, merely on the appearance of their being Christians, as there would be little reason for selfish bigots to expect an hearty concurrence in all their interested schemes, unless people were first initiated into their measures, by false representations of the terms of church-communion."—*Ans.* It must be a knowledged, that artful men have, on many occasions, made a property of weakness and credulity, by calculating schemes of religious fellowship for advancing their own selfish ends among their followers. No censure is too severe for these impious adventurers, who suppose that *gain is godliness*, and from whom we ought to turn away with abhorrence of their vile principles. But would it be either just or generous, to include all under this censure, who plead for *other conditions* of church-fellowship, besides the credible appearances of a Christian character? Would it be fair, to represent every one that fixed a civil alliance with a proper prudent distinction, as a selfish interested individual, because he did not form his connections at all adventures, without any other conditions, than barely *their being of the human species*?—These cases are much alike, and serve to illustrate one another. — Besides, our times afford examples of *some*, who add to the conditions of church-communion Christ hath appointed; of *others*, who profess to reduce all to the single point of *the visible Christianity* of the persons they would admit;—and *both parties* destitute of any emolument from civil establishments: and let reason judge, or experience tell, which of

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them

them are *the best and most successful schemers*, supposing them to be chiefly determined by the love, either of money, or of reputation.—One observation more shall shut up the answer to this objection, *viz.* That it is certainly very unnatural for gentlemen who make pretensions to *catholic love*, to give such unkind insinuations about the motives and designs of these that dissent, upon principle, from their opinion about *the qualifications of church-members*; especially when they know that these dissenters resent the imputation as an injurious calumny.

*Fourthly*, “It is objected, that my position  
 “destroys the alone foundation upon which  
 “there could ever be any reasonable expectation  
 “of uniting Christians in one communion; and  
 “that it must perpetuate factions and separate  
 “communities among the people of God, so far  
 “as it is reduced to practice.”—*Ans.* The *unity of the invisible church*, consisting of all true believers, who are joined to the Lord, and made one spirit, is a real, indubitable thing; but the notion of a catholic unity of the visible church in one fellowship, is one of these chimerical speculations, that please in theory, but are unprofitable, and even impossible in application. No such thing is pretended to, except in countries where the pope’s jurisdiction is established, or where a national establishment is rigorously supported. The unity of the Roman church is the derision of all that know any thing of her history, who are fully convinced of the shameless impudence of her pretensions, so void of truth and candour: and sound policy induces every nation, that pursues its own interest, to abate in the execution of their penal laws against  
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nonconformists. Where then are we to expect that *general union of Christians in one communion of church-fellowship*? — When the terms of social union are vague and general, the services belonging to it must, in reason, be supposed to be few and superficial; and then the bonds of union must of course be weak and ineffectual.

The offices of church-fellowship ought to be sacredly observed: and to secure the due observation of them, these who accede to her communion must be of one mind about them: for without this, the society would be hurt, and her interests essentially injured, by an increase of her members. Hence factions and prejudices would render her communion uncomfortable, and defeat its every desirable purpose: which shews, that the objection is so far from being true, that the good to be pursued, and the evils to be avoided, which it mentions, are only capable of being effectually obtained and defeated, as far as human prudence can judge, upon the principle I am defending, *viz.* that something more than merely a credible appearance of real Christianity is necessary to recommend a person to be admitted and continued a member of a particular religious society: for is it not easy to conceive a thousand cases, wherein a real Christian might have scruples to some *part*, or *form*, of the *social services* in the fellowship of every church whatsoever? Upon the principles of my opponents, he must be received upon his application for that effect, merely because he appears to be a saint; and, moreover, they must not insist on his falling in with the judgment of the church, for that would be adopting my principle. It is impossible the church can agree to every singularity of every person that appears to

be religious : and, therefore, it is impossible that a church, constituted upon such loose principles, can, with one heart and one mouth, glorify God, in an harmonious performance of religious duties. On the contrary, we might look for a fearful neglect of public religion, and unedifying debates among the members of such a society. — If it be replied, that there are clear evidences in experience of the comfort of some such societies : I shall always rejoice to hear such accounts, but must beg leave to ask, whether their comfort is owing to their *adherence* to the principle I impugn, or to their *deviation* from it ? I could give some reasons why I think it must, at least in part, be ascribed to *the last*.

*Fifthly*, “ Some pretend, that to follow out  
 “ my principle, would divert peoples minds from  
 “ the great truths and duties of Christianity,  
 “ and fix them upon the circumstances of it, or  
 “ upon things of an inferior nature.” — *Answ.*  
 The *essentials* of religion certainly deserve our first and greatest regard ; but we should not overlook such points as men call *circumstantial*. If we are guided by the scriptures, perhaps it will be hard to support that distinction, which seems to have been invented with no friendly intention to the honour of the word of God, or the good of mankind : — I am convinced, however, that the use which has been made of it is very bad. Every article of revealed truth and Christian duty is certainly essential to its purpose, and in its proper place. The making and placing of every pin, loop, and board, in the tabernacle made by Moses, were but circumstances ; yet they were no less essential for their purposes, and in their places, than the most solemn public services  
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of the Jewish worship, for their purposes, and in their places. In like manner, I esteem all that the Holy Ghost hath revealed, concerning the conditions and offices of church fellowship, *essential* to the purity and comfort of that holy state. Therefore, to direct peoples attention to these duties, is very improperly called *a diverting their minds to the circumstances of religion*. Indeed, if we call their thoughts to any thing not contained in the word of God, and unconnected with the providential situation of the church, (for these two ought always to be considered together), it is highly criminal, and is nothing else than *building wood, hay, and stubble*, on the precious foundation. But, until we be convinced that the scriptures contain no warrant for particular churches requiring a profession of their faith and obedience to the system of gospel-ordinances, from every candidate for their communion, we will disregard the weak or ill-natured constructions put upon (what we think) our duty.

*Sixthly*, "It is also alledged, that the principle I defend is contrary to the apostolic direction, Rom. xiv. 1. *Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations*. Now, it is evident in experience, that there is no condition of church-communion, but what is matter of doubtful disputation, except what constitutes vital powerful godliness, which is pretty uniformly agreed upon by every Christian."—*Ans.* If this objection were pursued in its just consequences, and if the supposed sense of the apostle's direction be fairly stated, it is hard to say what point, either of truth or duty, would be retained: for if persons weak in the

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faith

faith are not to be received to *doubtful disputations*, and if every thing, for *matter*, or *form*, not agreed to by every Christian, or society of Christians, is to be deemed a *doubtful disputation*, it will be easy to shew, that the Christian scheme is very narrow — The apostle's meaning is largely explained in the chapter referred to. He is writing to a church consisting chiefly of Gentile converts, who understood the nature and extent of their liberty from every obligation to observe ceremonial rites about *meats* and *days*. There were also some Jewish converts in Rome, who believed in Christ, but could not give up their education-notions, relative to these ceremonial observances of *meats* and *days*. These different sentiments caused much disputation between the parties, who held them. The Jews knew that God spake in favours of their opinion by Moses; and the Gentile-Christians knew that God had, in these last days, spoken by his Son and Spirit, through the ministry of his apostles, in behalf of their sentiments. The apostle decides between them, and largely states and argues on the case, shewing that, in the (*then*) situation of things, their disputes would tend rather to puzzle and disquiet their minds, than to godly edifying, so long as the temple service continued at Jerusalem; because the destruction of that temple and city, and the abolishing of their ceremonial services in them, were the grand evidence divine providence had appointed for the conviction of the Jewish converts: and until it should be accomplished, Gentile-Christians ought to receive them, though weak in the faith of the liberties of the gospel, into an intimate fellowship with themselves, in all the privileges and services of their church-state, without insisting on their giving



ving up any of their opinions about the distinction of meats or days: for, if they were to dispute on these points ever so much, still the Jews would reckon the Gentile-opinion *doubtful*, while the temple-service existed.

*Seventhly*, "The position I have stated is sometimes represented, as inconsistent with that exhortation, Rom. xv. 7. *Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*" From whence they reason to this purpose:— "That Christian churches ought to admit into their brotherly affections, friendly converses, and holy communion, all these, who, in the judgment of charity, are received by Jesus Christ into his favour and family, and into the nearest union and communion with himself, without enquiring into their character, sentiments, and conduct, in any other light." — *Ans.* This is one of the most specious arguments that are employed on that side: for it is generally thought excessively shocking, that men should deny the intimacies of their religious fellowship, to these who are favoured to have their fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. The following things deserve some consideration on this head. (1.) None should be received into church-communion, who openly manifest that they have no part in Christ. (2.) God hath not given any infallible rule to enable us to judge certainly *who are real Christians*, and *who are not*. Human judgment, in many cases, is the very reverse of the judgment of God, who seeth not as man seeth. Therefore, (3.) It would be absurd to suppose, that *real inward Christianity* is the test of admission to church-communion, because *that* is infallibly known to God

God only : nor should *the mere appearances of it* be sustained for a sufficient criterion, because *they* are often deceitful and false ; and where they are false, they cannot change the temper, nor secure the society from many disgraceful inconveniences, that would be inseparable from a fellowship with them, entered into without conditions, and maintained without a vigorous administration of discipline. (4.) The apostle's words are wrested from their obvious meaning, in the use made of them by our objectors. He does not say, *Receive ye those whom Christ also hath received to the glory of God* ; but, *Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us*. It is evident the apostle is proposing and urging *the example of Christ* in receiving THEMSELVES, as a pattern and motive for the believing Jews at Rome, to receive their Gentile brethren, and for the believing Gentiles in that church to receive their Jewish brethren, severally, notwithstanding *their different opinions about eating certain meats, and observing certain days*, WHILE THEY WERE OTHERWISE OF ONE MIND, ABOUT THE DUTIES OF THEIR HOLY FELLOWSHIP. So that this objection, when weighed in the balances, is found wanting.

*Eighthly*, “ Some are pleased to say, that to  
 “ act on the principle in dispute, would be  
 “ more unnatural and impious, than any thing  
 “ Balaam the soothsayer, notwithstanding his  
 “ love of the wages of unrighteousness, would  
 “ ever yield to do against Israel, of whom he  
 “ said,—*How shall I curse whom God hath not*  
 “ *curled ? or, how shall I defy whom the Lord hath*  
 “ *not defied ?* Numb. xxiii. 8. But upon this  
 “ principle, not a few must be, in a sense, ex-  
 “ communicated,

“communicated, who are allowed, at the same  
 “time, to have all the credible appearances of  
 “Christianity:—and excommunicated too by  
 “such as pretend to be their brethren, children  
 “of the same Father, partakers of the same  
 “Spirit, and heirs of the same glory. This is  
 “represented as an hard, unnatural, and cruel  
 “case.”——*Ans* This topic furnishes matter  
 for warm declamation: a method of managing a  
 cause, that is much more *pleasing* than *instruc-*  
*tive*. In the hand of an artful casuist, strong  
 allusions, bold figures, and positive inferences,  
 are extremely useful to serve a purpose. They  
 engage the affections, and impose on the under-  
 standing of the unwary. I apprehend the ar-  
 guing in this objection is of that sort: for, (1)  
 It is not fair to represent these persons as pos-  
 sessing *all the credible evidences of Christianity*,  
 who do not submit to the authority of Christ in  
 all his appointments relative to church-commu-  
 nion; because such submission is one of the fruits  
 of the Spirit, and consequently an evidence of a  
 Christian temper: Heb. x. 24. 25. “And let us  
 “consider one another, to provoke unto love,  
 “and to good works: not forsaking the assem-  
 “bling of ourselves together, as the manner of  
 “some is; but exhorting one another: and so  
 “much the more, as ye see the day approach-  
 “ing.” (2.) It is an injurious intimation,  
 when professors shew a reluctance to scriptural and  
 rational terms of communion with a particular  
 church, to represent that church as, *in a sense,*  
*excommunicating them*. They excommunicate  
 themselves in fact; and they alone must bear the  
 blame of their being in a single state. (3.) Bro-  
 therly regards, upon the New-Testament plan,  
 may be kept up among Christians of different de-  
 nominations,

nominations, who have different connections. These who hold the opinion opposite to my proposition, will readily acknowledge this, or else, like Ishmael, their hand must be against every denomination of Christians, and their pretensions to catholic love must terminate on their own image.—The very error they profess to detect in others!

These are the principal objections against making other conditions of church-communion, besides the general appearances of a person being religious. The reader must judge for himself, what regard he thinks due to them, and the answers I have given.—I hate all *mysterious reserves*, which are generally, and sometimes not unjustly, suspected of concealing some design one is ashamed, or afraid, to discover; and therefore shall gratify the curious reader with an honest account of **THE TEST** I would establish for the admission, or continuance of church-members. Two things, as before hinted, concur to determine what should be required of them. (1.) That they professedly forsake the world, the flesh, and the devil, and give themselves up to the Lord Jesus Christ, to walk in the faith and order of the gospel, with that church they join themselves to. (2.) That they observe the situation divine providence has placed the church in, and demean themselves accordingly, in regard to her prosperity or adversity, or particular condition; because these circumstances must determine the extent of their services in every temporal concern, and must guide them in several religious duties.

To express what I mean in still fewer words,—Every admissible member must profess his resolution

tion to " receive and observe, to keep pure  
 " and entire, all such religious worship and or-  
 " dinances, as God hath appointed in his word ;"  
 and to do all this, in communion with the  
 church, under every dispensation of providence,  
 as it may affect either himself, or the church he  
 unites with.

This criterion seems to be fully authenticated  
 in these pregnant, decisive passages. Phil. i. 27.  
 " Only let your conversation be as it becometh  
 " the gospel of Christ : that whether I come and  
 " see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your  
 " affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with  
 " one mind, striving together for the faith of  
 " the gospel." 1 Tim. vi. 3. 4. " If any man  
 " teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome  
 " words, even the words of our Lord Jesus  
 " Christ, and to the doctrine which is accord-  
 " ing to godliness ; he is proud, knowing no-  
 " thing, but doting about questions and strifes  
 " of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, rail-  
 " ings, evil surmisings." Rom. xii. 4. 5. " For  
 " as we have many members in one body, and  
 " all members have not the same office : so we  
 " being many are one body in Christ, and every  
 " one members one of another." Matth. xvi.  
 24. " Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any  
 " man will come after me, let him deny him-  
 " self, and take up his cross, and follow me."  
 Rev. iii. 8.-----11. " I know thy works : behold,  
 " I have set before thee an open door, and no  
 " man can shut it : for thou hast a little strength,  
 " and hast kept my word, and hast not denied  
 " my name. Behold, I will make them of the  
 " synagogue of Satan, (which say they are Jews,  
 " and are not, but do lie), behold, I will make  
 " them

“ them to come and worship before thy feet,  
 “ and to know that I have loved thee. Because  
 “ thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also  
 “ will keep thee from the hour of temptation,  
 “ which shall come upon all the world, to try  
 “ them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I  
 “ come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast,  
 “ that no man take thy crown.”

Prop. 11. *The members of a Christian church  
 should continue in its communion, unless some just  
 cause induce them to separate from it.*

When I speak of their *continuing in its commu-  
 nion*, I mean, that they should join with the  
 church in every gospel-ordinance, as they have  
 opportunity. Church-communion does not con-  
 sist in an harmony of notional speculations; but  
 in Christians observing jointly all the institutions  
 of Christ, for his honour, and for their mutual  
 comfort.

The use I would make of this proposition, may  
 be pursued in two things; while, (1.) I give an  
 account of some of *the just causes* of leaving the  
 communion of a church or congregation; and,  
 (2.) Shew, that where these causes do not ope-  
 rate, a separation is very criminal.

Sect. 1. I shall begin with an account of *some  
 of the causes*, that will justify a person in leaving  
 the communion of a particular church or con-  
 gregation. The point is delicate. Extremes are  
 dangerous, and the true medium is difficult to  
 be ascertained with sufficient evidence.—In gene-  
 ral, *separation must be criminal, where communion  
 can be preserved with a good conscience; for it is*  
 the

the very last expedient in a desperate case. To withdraw for slight causes, which do not affect the conscience, is evidently wrong, and highly injurious to the credit and comfort of society. It betrays an unstable mind, and is but a sorry specimen of either a sound judgment, or a good disposition.

But if a church admit or retain such members as are ignorant, erroneous, or profane, without making proper enquiries concerning their character, principles, and behaviour; and continue to cherish them, even when they have been convicted of ignorance, dangerous errors, and vicious practices; she is no longer faithful to Christ, nor an holy people. Or,

—If a church forsake the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and substitute in its stead, or even join with it, tradition, schemes of policy or interest, the pleasure of magistrates, or her paramount authority, she only heareth Christ's sayings, but doth them not, and may be likened to an house built upon the sand. She holdeth not the Head, even Christ. Or,

—If a church neglect all order and discipline in her administrations and fellowship, she evidently puts it out of her power to purge out the old leaven, and to keep the gospel-feast as an holy society, 1 Cor. v. Or,

—If a church, under high pretences of zeal for the vigour of discipline, become tyrannical in her government, casting saints out of her communion, because they cannot approve her administration, though they heartily agree to her  
E constitution;

constitution; she thereby demonstrates, that she is not following the doctrine, example, and Spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus. Or,

—If a church adopt a system of worship, founded upon the commandments of men, and not on the word of Jesus Christ; she is verily corrupted from the simplicity, which is toward Christ, her Lord, her Lawgiver, and her King. Or, finally,

—If a church impose sinful terms of communion on her members, obliging them to forbear plain duty, or to commit sin; she is rather to be reckoned a synagogue of Satan, than the church of the living God.

*In any of these cases, the causes of leaving the communion of a particular church are justifiable; and separation is not only allowed as a privilege in these circumstances, but required as a duty.*

—I mean, separation from such a church is just, necessary, and honourable; because to continue in her communion would neither be safe, nor prudent, nor conformable to the main purposes of Christian fellowship in a church-state: 2 Cor. vi. 14.—18. “Be ye not unequally yoked  
“together with unbelievers: for what fellow-  
“ship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?  
“and what communion hath light with dark-  
“ness? and what concord hath Christ with Be-  
“lial? or what part hath he that believeth, with  
“an infidel? and what agreement hath the  
“temple of God with idols? for ye are the  
“temple of the living God; as God hath said, I  
“will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I  
“will be their God, and they shall be my people.

“Wherefore



“ Wherefore come out from among them, and  
 “ be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not  
 “ the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and  
 “ will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my  
 “ sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

*Seft. 2.* I shall now collect several considerations to shew, that where these or such other causes do not operate, it is *very criminal* for a member to withdraw himself, in whole or in part, from the communion of a particular church with which he was connected, while he has an opportunity to join with her as formerly. To withdraw *wholly*, is so obviously wrong, that it needs no demonstration; and besides, if it can be made appear that it is criminal to withdraw *in part* from communion with the church and congregation he belongs to, in *any of the acts and duties of her fellowship*, it must be still worse to leave her communion altogether. The arguments against separating, *even in part*, from a church, by leaving her communion in any of the acts and duties of her church-state, which a member has an opportunity to join in, are many, and, to an unprejudiced mind, they must have great weight, if they do not fully convince the conscience of the error of such a course. For,

1. Such a practice is directly opposite to *the example of the primitive Christians*, who “ continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,” Acts ii. 42. These enlightened holy persons were not weak enthusiasts, attached to one another by the novelty of their situation, while it was new and singular: for they were

*filled with the Spirit*, whose energy produced these useful and amiable intimacies in their society. This example is certainly recorded for our learning and imitation. Some indeed pretend to find a mighty *difference* between that church at Jerusalem, and any church in latter times; both because there was then no other Christian church in the world, and because that church was infallibly directed in her worship, obedience, and fellowship, by the ministry of the apostles in it. I shall grant that these first converts to the faith of a risen and exalted Saviour, had both these encouragements; and that these inducements were greatly in their favour, to make them obedient, both in word and in deed, to the will of Christ, concerning their fellowship upon the humbling plan of the gospel. But I cannot allow, that our assistances and encouragements for such intimate communion as they had in their church-state, are, in any respect, less than theirs, when their circumstances and ours are compared: for if these believers had great advantages, they had *great discouragements* too; and the last were in full proportion to the first. They were just converted from *Judaism*, which they all believed to have been originally a divine institution: they were called into the faith and fellowship of the gospel in *Jerusalem*, which was the city of the Jewish solemnities: many of them were *zealous of the ordinances of the ceremonial law*: they frequently observed *some of the Mosaic rites*: and they did not perfectly *understand the liberties* of the gospel-church.—Under all *these singular disadvantages*, it was expedient they should have *extraordinary assistances* to their faith, obedience, and worship, in order to make their fellowship subserve their edification. But the apostles doctrine

trine did not die with them. We have their sentiments and practice in the word of God: and if we do not hearken to them speaking there, neither would we hearken to them, though they were to rise from the dead, and minister among us in their extraordinary character. — Upon the whole, I affirm, that a causeless separation of church-members, from any of the acts and duties of her communion in a church-state, is directly opposite to the examples of the primitive Christians, whose fellowship was intimate, regular, universal, and persevering.

2. Christians withdrawing themselves causelessly from communion with the church they belong to, in any of the offices of her fellowship, *tends to defeat the avowed design of church-communion.* The purposes of this divine institution have been represented under *the fifth proposition*, where it was observed, “that edification and “comfort in the faith, love, and obedience of “revealed truth, are the great objects of religious communion.” But how can these ends be obtained, if members, without a just cause, leave the communion of the church in her social services? How can there be an *effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love*, which should be constantly aimed at? Separating members withhold their proportion of energy and operation from the body; and put themselves out of a capacity of receiving such comfort and edification from the body, as their persevering communion might have derived upon them. — Perhaps it will be replied, that their withdrawal is only *occasional*, and in some *few instances*. But this apology has little weight, if it be

done with design; for church-communion consists in a continued series of social services. An interruption of these services must, therefore, be a prejudice to the edification of the body. And the same principles that induce a member to one neglect, may induce him to many more: and if he can satisfy himself for one, he may, upon the same grounds, be able to justify himself for many instances of the kind.—And, if such a practice become general, the body, instead of being edified in love, will become cold, partial, and judges of evil thoughts. Neither will their faith, love, and obedience be so comfortable to themselves, nor so convincingly manifest to the world.

3. Causeless separation from any of the acts of religious communion, in a church-state, is offensive to fellow-members: and on this account, though the action were but of an indifferent nature, in itself, yet, being done with offence, it becomes a sin. The apostle, speaking of meats and the creatures, which are all good, being used with thanksgiving, and without offence, says, “All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence,” Rom. xiv. 20. And the charge concerning this matter is very express;—“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God,” 1 Cor. x. 32. Supposing that, *in respect of their morals*, persons may be without just and blameable offence to Jews and Gentiles; it is easy to conceive other ways of offending the church of God, *viz. in matters of gospel-order in a church-relation*. Now, that this is a cause of offence is too manifest to bear any dispute. Hereby the spirits of members are provoked, while they apprehend their communion

nion is condemned, if not despised, by such as divide and separate from their social services. It is certain, they generally consider the withdrawalment of members in this light: and hence arise *debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, swellings, tumults*, 2 Cor. xii. 20.

It is usually pled on this head;—"That offence is causelessly taken, where little offence is given, and where none at all is intended; and so the blame of the scandal cannot lie at their door."—But I must beg leave to observe, that so far as there is an offence, so far the end of church-union, and the security for it, are prejudiced. Where offences begin, Christian affection and confidence end. Brotherly love is the great and powerful cement of all religious society. It is edified in love, but injured, in its most essential interests, by animosities and disaffections among its members. Whatever has a tendency to irritate bad tempers in others, should, on this account, be carefully avoided, lest we destroy their peace of mind, and become occasions of sin to them, whom we look upon as weak in the knowledge of their liberties in Christ. If we are but *the occasions of offence* to the people of God; without MANIFEST NECESSITY obliging us to give such occasions of scandal, we certainly sin against our weak brethren, and become, in some degree, partakers of their crime.—But I apprehend it is saying too much to aver, that *offence is causelessly taken at such members as do not conscientiously join with the church, in all the services and duties of her communion, which they allow to be scriptural*: for this practice is bad in itself, and a root of bitterness that infects many. It hurts religious society, and is no very promising  
sign

sign of a temper formed on the plan of gospel-truth. There are cases in human societies, which are immediately founded on principles of interest, and supported by a vigorous exercise of powerful laws, that cannot admit of such liberties as are said to be innocent in the church of Christ. The nature and conditions of church-communion are no less plain and express than the laws of society require them to be in every point respecting civil affairs.

Besides these three arguments, the subject furnishes much variety from other topics: such as, — *That causeless separation dishonours Christ,—exposes these who practise it to many temptations,—and hardens the inconsiderate in their neglect of church-fellowship.* I cannot pretend to enlarge on these points, however weighty, and therefore shall conclude the illustration and proof of this proposition, with an answer to some of the most popular objections against the sentiment I have endeavoured to confirm.

*Object. 1.* “ There are many denominations  
“ of Christians of different communions; and  
“ few sober men will take upon them to say,  
“ that all these several denominations are guilty  
“ of separation, though they have no visible  
“ fellowship: why then should the crime of se-  
“ paration be imputed to the members of a par-  
“ ticular congregation, merely for occasional ne-  
“ glects of social services with their own con-  
“ nections, while they are occasionally joining  
“ with other churches or congregations?” —

*Ans. (1.)* The gathering of the saints into a church-state, for the enjoyment of Christ in the purest administration, according to what light they

they have, is no unchuraching of others, whom Christ will allow to be true churches, though they walk not up to the same explicit observation of (what their brethren esteem) divine appointments. (2.) Divine providence has answered many grand purposes, by Christians of different denominations walking, according to their light, severally, in separate communions; and perhaps will have ends to answer by such a dispensation, till the end of the world. (3.) Church-members, belonging to these several denominations, are obliged, both by reason and divine authority, to be regular, steadfast, and persevering, in all the acts and services of their respective communions; yet without giving place to uncharitable sentiments towards others, who appear to be zealous for the faith of the gospel, though with different views of his will. And, (4.) It is absurd to reason from the opinion of different denominations of Christians about one another, in favour of an occasional discontinuance of social services among the members of any individual church or congregation. The cases are not alike. It is universally confessed, that churches of different denominations, neither *can* have, nor *should* have, the *same* communion with each other, that members of the same church and congregation both *may* and *ought* to have among themselves. Therefore, (5.) The crime of separation may be imputed to these members of a congregation, who do not embrace every opportunity of performing every duty of church-communion among their connections, with a great deal more reason, than it can be laid against churches for forming themselves into distinct societies, for the purpose of practising gospel-rules more explicitly, conformable to their views of

of the mind and authority of Christ. To all which may be added, (6.) That *the schisms and divisions* condemned in scripture, refer to such as are in *one communion of church-fellowship*, and not primarily to the *variety of Christian denominations*, each walking according to the light of truth which Christ hath given them.

*Object.* 2. “ A church is no prison : and why  
 “ then should people confine themselves to a  
 “ constant attendance with any Christian com-  
 “ munity ?” — *Ans.* This is “ strange language  
 “ from those who have, in the sight of God,  
 “ angels, and men, given themselves up, in a  
 “ special relation, to the churches they respec-  
 “ tively belong to. In answer to this, I say like-  
 “ wise, that *a church of Christ is no prison* : no, it  
 “ is rather to be regarded as a palace, a spiritual  
 “ palace, not only on account of the divine  
 “ pleasures and privileges to be enjoyed in it,  
 “ but as it is the habitation of the King of saints  
 “ and glory, where he often manifests his gra-  
 “ cious presence to those that love him. A pri-  
 “ son is a place of confinement and disgrace, in  
 “ which persons are detained *against their will* :  
 “ but it is an honour to have a name and a place  
 “ in the house of God ; an honour of which  
 “ his faithful people are so sensible, that it lays  
 “ them under all the constraints of duty and  
 “ love : and none are compelled against their  
 “ will. So far from it, that, I apprehend, *will-*  
 “ *ingness of mind* is a necessary qualification for  
 “ church-membership : for he who discerns the  
 “ heart, accepts of nothing short of a free-will-  
 “ offering from those who pretend to worship  
 “ him. And, indeed, *that declaration of a will-*  
 “ *ing mind*, made by all who enter into this re-  
 “ lation,



“ lation, is an aggravation of their wilful disorder.  
 “ der.

“ But if by *the church not being a prison*, be  
 “ meant, that those who stand related to it are  
 “ under no obligation to duty in it, nothing can  
 “ be more manifestly perverse and absurd. The  
 “ duties for the observance of which I am plead-  
 “ ing, are enjoined of Christ. It is expressly  
 “ commanded, that believers in fellowship should  
 “ *not forsake the assembling of themselves together*;  
 “ and it is evident, that a neglect of this duty is  
 “ destructive of the end, and strikes at the es-  
 “ sence, of a church. To complain, therefore,  
 “ and argue against any obligation to this duty,  
 “ what is it but to groan under the yoke of  
 “ Christ as grievous, and reject his appointments?  
 “ And what testimony is this of Christian wis-  
 “ dom and obedience? Shall persons, who stand  
 “ in the relation of church members, complain  
 “ that they are not connived at, and indulged  
 “ in neglecting the duties of that relation, and  
 “ cherished in a practice that directly tends to  
 “ the ruin of the churches they belong to?  
 “ What ground can they alledge for this? or,  
 “ what of the love of Christ can they shew in it?  
 “ It must be strange delusion, that shall make a  
 “ man fancy, *he enjoys no Christian liberty, if he*  
 “ *be not allowed to neglect, as he pleases, and*  
 “ *set his own rate on the duties and privileges*  
 “ *of the house of God.*” Wallin’s humble address  
 “ to the churches of Christ, p. 23. 24. 25.

Object. 3. “ The end of Christian institutions  
 “ is answered, if people attend on gospel-ordi-  
 “ nances some where, though they do not con-  
 “ fine themselves to attend constantly in one com-  
 “ munity.”

"munity."— *Ans.* If this assertion be true, not only *any single member*, but *every member of every congregation*, may reduce it to practice in the most general manner; and then anarchy and confusion must ensue. Reason, experience, and the scripture, concur to expose the folly and mischief of so loose a principle: a principle which establishes a chimerical notion of church-communion, on the ruins of revelation and common sense.— But this objection, with some others, will be more particularly considered, when I come to explain the duties of the saints in a church-state, in the third chapter.

## CH A P. II.

*Some inferences from the foregoing account of Christian society.*

THE view of religious society, exhibited in the foregoing propositions, which have been explained, confirmed, and defended, (where a defence seemed to be necessary), will, I presume, account for the whole system of *church-administrations* upon the scripture-plan, so far as they relate to the *admission, continuance, fellowship, discipline, services, or exclusion, of her members.*— Among several others, I beg leave to request the reader's attention to the following *deductions* from the principles laid down in the former chapter. .

Inference 1. *It is highly reasonable, that every one to be admitted into church-communion, be required to satisfy the church, previous to his admission, concerning his soundness in the faith.*

Revealed

Revealed truth is the foundation of the Christian church. Edification in the faith of that system, is the great object of her communion. And the faithful in Christ Jesus are her members. These who rule in the church, should, therefore, endeavour to have all reasonable satisfaction concerning their faith.—Enquiries concerning their experiences are strong temptations to hypocrisy, and, on that account, should be managed with very great caution. But enquiries concerning the measure and soundness of their knowledge in the doctrines of faith, are authorised by reason, and exemplified in the scriptures. Acts viii. 30. 31. “And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? and he desired Philip that he would come up, and sit with him.” Vers. 35.—38. “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayst. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”

*Inf. 2. Public articles, creeds, or confessions of faith, are not only useful, but necessary, in the Christian church.*

The church is certainly built upon the revealed will of God, contained in the volumes of inspiration,

piration, which are the alone standard of truth and holiness. I will cheerfully subscribe whatever can be thought of, or expressed, in honour of the scriptures, and in giving them the preference above all human compositions whatever. They are the only original source of saving knowledge, the only complete rule of conduct, the only infallible guide to glory, and the only testimony bound up and the law sealed among Christ's disciples. Whatever speaks not according to this word, has no light in it. But it is fully consistent with all these superior honours of the divine testimony,—*to collect the sense of the scripture into articles and creeds*, by connecting passages that lie remote from each other, by deducing inferences that are not particularly expressed, and by explaining allusions, metaphors, and purposes, that are not easily known, and scarce intelligible, without the assistance of antiquity.

Particular occurrences in providence have been the occasion of enlarging *the sacred canon* with *new discoveries* of truth, or with *new applications* of what was before revealed. The scripture-revelation is now complete; and nothing must be added to it, or diminished from it. But the situations of mankind, and of the Christian church, still make it necessary to exhibit the will of God, in a proper contrast to *erroneous notions and ungodly practices*. What is this *exhibition of truth and duty*, but a *confession of faith*? If it is a wrong view of the will of Heaven, it is highly dishonourable to the scriptures, which it pretends to be built upon: but if it is just, it deserves regard on account of the evidence it sets forth of the mind of the Holy Ghost.—*Creeds and confessions* must never be set on a foot with the scriptures, and far less must they be substituted

tuted in their room: they only reflect that light on doctrines and manners, which shines in the scriptures already.

To pretend that *it is enough for men to express their belief of the scriptures*, is manifestly wrong, and inadequate to the purposes of intimate communion among the saints, of any denomination. The Pharisees and Sadducees pretended the same zeal for the law of Moses: and, in our times, all the numerous sects of Christians, (some of whom err concerning the most important articles of faith, while others hold the truth in unrighteousness), yet they *all* pretend a veneration for the Bible. How can a general profession of believing it, then, answer the end of church communion; or enable any religious society to edify themselves in the love of revealed truth, by speaking the truth in love, and by walking in the truth, rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith, as they have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving?

*Confessions*, it is said, *have frequently been made engines of error, vice, and faction.*—I know they have; and very probably they will be employed to such wretched purposes, in some hands or other, to the end of the world. But it is the misfortune of many good things to be abused; so that this charge, however true, is not sufficient for setting the use of them aside. Besides, it seems evident from experience, that *a neglect and contempt of confessions* have been too much accompanied by a dislike of the doctrines of salvation, and a cold indifference as to the concerns of truth; and that having frozen the spirits of mankind, and shaken loose their faith, they have laid them open to the impressions of

error, and heresy makes an easy conquest of them.

*Liberty, charity, moderation, &c.* are fine words and great names. But as to the application of them in the present case, the experience of ages past may reasonably induce a prudent suspicion, that they are urged against *articles of faith* and *confessions*, either through ignorance, or a bad design.

I shall only add in the words of Mr Dunlop ;  
 —“ All the beauties and excellencies of truth,  
 “ the sweets and advantages of peace and union  
 “ in societies, and of a fervent love, mutual e-  
 “ steem and harmony among Christians, concur  
 “ to impress us with very favourable notions  
 “ of *confessions*, which we think so well adapted  
 “ to secure these blessings to a church: as on  
 “ the other hand, the deformity and danger of  
 “ heresy, the fatal effects of a flood of errors  
 “ breaking into a church, the grievous plague  
 “ of animosities, divisions, and disputes among  
 “ the members and ministers of it, every one of  
 “ them, with uncharitableness, heat, and ob-  
 “ stinacy, propagating contradictory opinions,  
 “ and the melancholy influence such questions  
 “ and speculations have on practical godliness,  
 “ and the most amiable graces of the Christian  
 “ life,—make us look with sorrow and regret  
 “ upon those schemes, whereby all restraints of  
 “ order and government are destroyed, and a  
 “ wide breach made for all those evils and cala-  
 “ mities to enter, and both pollute the church,  
 “ and lay it waste.” *Large preface to the Assem-  
 bly’s Confession of faith, p. (mibi) 176.*

Inf. 3. Church-members indispensably owe a la-  
 bour

*bour of love to each other, according to the nature of their religious connection.*

Their souls are purified in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; and therefore, they should love one another with a pure heart fervently, 1 Pet. i. 22. All the system of church-communion is built upon principles, that have the most direct and powerful influence upon the labours of social love; and every neglect of the services due to fellow-members, must be imputed, either to *ignorance* of these blessed principles, or to *disaffection* to them. The *labour of love* is no less necessary to complete the character of the saints, than *the work of faith*, or *the patience of hope*, 1 Thess. i. 3. Persons, that have no appearances of love to the saints, ought not to be church-members: for love is the great band of union and communion, in that relation. It becomes the saints, after all their attainments and labours, to keep up an humbling sense of their defects in this, as well as in every other grace; and to be earnest with God to invigorate and carry it on to still greater purity, liveliness, and eminence, that it may grow exceedingly in all its parts and fruits.

The labour of love, required by the Holy Ghost, implies a careful, diligent, and cheerful performance of every office to a brother, which real affection can suggest, or his condition can need at our hand. Viewed in this extensive light, it takes in the following among many more things. (1.) A seasonable relief to the necessities of the poor, out of the abundance of their wealthier brethren, 1 John iii. 17. 18. "But whoso hath  
" this world's good, and seeth his brother have  
" need, and shutteth up his bowels of compas-

" sion from him, how dwelleth the love of God  
 " in him? My little children, let us not love in  
 " word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in  
 " truth." (2.) A fellow-feeling with each other,  
 both in a way of compassion and congratulation:  
 Rom. xii. 15. " Rejoice with them that do re-  
 " joice, and weep with them that weep." (3.)  
 Carefully forbearing to speak evil one of another:  
 James iv. 11. " Speak not evil one of another,  
 " brethren. He that speaketh evil of his bro-  
 " ther, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil  
 " of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou  
 " judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law,  
 " but a judge." (4.) The restoring a man over-  
 taken in a fault, in the spirit of meekness, Gal.  
 vi. 1. (5.) Using every method to prevent of-  
 fence, or to remove it where it has taken place,  
 by a strict attention to the scripture-rule, Matth.  
 xviii. 15.—18. (6.) A constant persevering at-  
 tention to the apostles doctrine and fellowship,  
 and to breaking of bread, and to prayers, unless  
 providentially hindered from joining with their  
 connections in these services, Acts ii. 42. And,  
 to name no more, (7.) An ardent concern to  
 provoke one another to love, and to good works,  
 Heb. x. 24.—Where these things are and a-  
 bound, they constitute an amiable, useful, and  
 pleasant labour of love without dissimulation.

The following passages may be considered for  
 setting the nature, obligations, and manner, of  
 these services, in a striking light: Eph. iv. 1. 2.  
 3. " I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, be-  
 " seech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation  
 " wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and  
 " meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one  
 " another in love; endeavouring to keep the  
 " unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."  
 Phil.



Phil. ii 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. " If there be therefore  
 " any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of  
 " love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any  
 " bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye  
 " be like-minded, having the same love, being  
 " of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be  
 " done through strife, or vain glory, but in  
 " lowliness of mind let each esteem other better  
 " than themselves. Look not every man on his  
 " own things, but every man also on the things  
 " of others. Let this mind be in you, which  
 " was also in Christ Jesus." Eph. iv. 30. 31.  
 32. " And grieve not the holy Spirit of God,  
 " whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemp-  
 " tion. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger,  
 " and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away  
 " from you, with all malice. And be ye kind  
 " one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one  
 " another, even as God for Christ's sake hath  
 " forgiven you." Chap. v. 1. 2. " Be ye there-  
 " fore followers of God, as dear children; and  
 " walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us,  
 " and hath given himself for us, an offering and  
 " a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour."

*Inf. 4. Zeal and charity in religion are en-  
 tirely consistent.*

Zeal for the authority, honour, and ordinances of Christ, in every social connection, is both reasonable and necessary; that they may stand fast in one spirit, and may, with one mind, strive together for the faith of the gospel. Every defect, in this matter, is criminal in itself, dishonouring to Christ, and injurious to the church. Laodicea's character is the very reverse of this zeal. She was *neither cold nor hot: not cold; for she professed to have a regard for divine ap-  
 pointments,*

pointments, and to be concerned about them: *not hot*; for she was not fervent in spirit, serving the Lord in a regular, firm, and affectionate attachment to the system of her fellowship. As an effectual cure to this cold, careless, and indifferent temper about things of a spiritual, heavenly, and holy nature, he prescribes to her case in the following words, “Be zealous, and repent,” Rev. iii. 19. These words are not obscure in themselves, but when the connection they stand in is considered, they appear to be remarkably striking; and imply, that it is our duty to shake off all dull formality, indolence, and hypocrisy, in serving God, and in the duties of our Christian fellowship, and to have our affections inspired with sacred love and fervour, in a constant, cordial regard to every service, ordained in the churches by divine authority, and subservient to Christian improvement in vital religion. *Be zealous*, employ the whole vigour and ardency of your renewed souls in an holy, devoted regard to the divine will: *and repent*, reflecting with ingenuous shame and grief upon your former lukewarmness, and turning from it with full purpose of heart, firmly resolved that ye will not forsake the house of your God, but that you will study to cultivate the same mind that was in Christ, whose undaunted courage, and fervent zeal for the glory of God, and the purity of divine institutions, called to the disciples mind that prophetic passage, *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*, John ii. 17.

Charity and moderation in religion are no less reasonable and necessary, than the zeal I have described. The apostolic direction is plain and positive,—“Let your moderation be known to all men,” Phil. iv. 5. Every Christian has so  
much

much experience of his own depravity, ignorance, and evil propensities, that he cannot approve of his own character altogether. It is very absurd to suppose, that any Christian society can be perfect, being composed of members who are imperfect. The whole cannot be more perfect than the several parts will admit. Amidst these imperfections, *prudence* requires us to choose the purest connections; but *piety* forbids us to be malevolent, censorious, and uncharitable, towards those who do not manifestly appear to be enemies to the truths of the gospel, Phil. i. 15. 16. 17. 18. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Our zeal should be directed to *the honour of God*, in an holy devoted regard to the divine will. When it operates upon this principle, it must warmly approve whatever appears to be agreeable to the mind of God in every party, which is *true rational charity*; and must detest whatever appears to be inconsistent with it, which constitutes that *holy singularity* wherein the people of God should distinguish themselves, that they may the better observe the ordinances of Christ. Thus Christian zeal is *charitable*, and Christian charity is *zealous*. They mutually describe and characterize each other.

Ignorance of the nature, extent, and influence of zeal and charity, has given rise to a vulgar error, which few are at pains enough to correct,—

*That*

*That these Christian virtues are not consistent in their operations. To divide them is criminal; but to oppose one of them to the other is shocking. We see it done, however, every day, and among every denomination of Christians. But from the beginning it was not so. God hath joined them together, and no man may safely attempt to put them asunder. Bigotry, which pretends so highly to zeal, and latitudinarianism, which pretends so much to catholic love: the first excluding every benevolent idea, except towards their own party, and the last rioting in a wanton contempt of regular order, and the particular intimacies of social connections,—are both of them extremes. There must be a medium; though he is an happy man, that is taught of God, both in theory and practice, to keep the middle course; extremes being as common, as they are dangerous.*

*Inf. 5. The irregularity of members on the head of social services in a church-state, is a just cause of suspending them from actual communion in that church, while their practice continues to give offence.*

Allowing them to be *good men, and men of great understanding*, yet if they do not walk in love, condescension, and harmony with their connections, they do not walk edifyingly, and their practice must injure the comfort and happiness of society. Every slight difference in sentiment and practice ought not to induce an hard and severe opinion of them. Some points of difference are very immaterial, and have no sensible effect upon the order of the church. Such matters should be borne with on all hands. But if a member wilfully deviate from the rules and laws of the church, whose observation he had engaged unto

unto upon his entering into it, he forfeits thereby his actual communion in it. Agreeable to this, Dr Owen says,—“ Thus far is every lawful confederate society enabled and warranted by the light of nature, to remove from its communion, and from a participation in its rights and privileges, any of its number, who will not walk according to the rules and principles of its coalescency and constitution. Whereas, therefore, the rule of the constitution of the church, is, that men walk together in holy obedience unto the commands of Christ, and the observance of all his institutions, without giving offence unto one another, or those that are without, by any sinful miscarriage, and do abide in the profession of the truth; if any one shall wilfully and obstinately transgress in any of these things, it is the right and duty, and in the power of the church, to remove him from its society.” *True nature of a gospel-church*, p. 199.

The scripture is full, plain, and expresses on this head. The following passages are a sufficient proof of it. Rom. xvi. 17. 18. “ Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” Phil: iii. 15. 16. 17. “ Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together  
“ of

“ of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye  
 “ have us for an ensample.” 2 Tim. ii. 16. 17.  
 “ Shun profane and vain babblings; for they  
 “ will increase unto more ungodliness; and their  
 “ word will eat as doth a canker,” or a gangrene.  
 Tit. iii. 9. 10. 11. “ But avoid foolish questions,  
 “ and genealogies, and contentions, and striv-  
 “ ings about the law; for they are unprofitable  
 “ and vain. A man that is an heretic, after the  
 “ first and second admonition, reject: knowing  
 “ that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth,  
 “ being condemned of himself.” Many other  
 testimonies might be adduced; but at the mouth  
 of so many witnesses as have been led in proof  
 already, the point is abundantly confirmed:  
 though a multitude of other evidences are ready  
 to give their testimony: for *God speaks once, yea  
 twice*, on this subject, to prevent all cavilling, and  
 to silence every objector, in a case which is ex-  
 ceeding plain, though much controverted.

## C H A P. III.

*Directions concerning the communion of saints, in a  
 church-relation.*

I Shall conclude this essay on church-commu-  
 nion with some directions concerning it,  
 shewing how her members may best obtain the  
 ends of their connection in a social relation. My  
 thoughts on this branch of the subject, may be  
 reduced to four heads of advice. Let Christians  
 be *cautious in forming—steadfast in maintaining—  
 diligent in improving, and—fearful of breaking,  
 their religious connections.*

Direct. 1. *Let Christians be cautious in forming  
 their religious connections.*

This

This advice has a near relation to my plan and purpose, though it does not regard persons as already fixed in their religious fellowships. But as the future conduct of church-members has a great dependence upon the principles and manner of establishing their connections at first, it must be reckoned an important object of consideration, to proceed properly in this matter. With this view I recommend *the utmost caution*, and *mature deliberation* unto all that wish or expect to be comfortable in a church-relation; advising them to ponder well the path of their feet, in every step they take in such an important business. The direction may be resolved into three branches.

1. Do not, my dear Christian friends, live single and unconnected in religious society. Press into the kingdom of heaven. Become companions of them that fear God. Go forth by the footsteps of the flock. The disposition of a Christian is to enjoy and communicate social energy. Be not deceived, misled, or imposed on, by any means, to neglect religious fellowship, upon any pretence whatever. Do not live in a continued neglect of commanded duty, by a continued contempt of the high mandate of Heaven,—“If any man will be my disciple, let him —follow me,” putting on every holy temper, and walking in every divine institution. Do not shame the faces of the prophets and apostles of the Lord, who have represented such intimacies as the happy privilege, and eminent honour of the saints. Do not separate yourselves from the great cloud of witnesses, who, in the apostolic age, associated themselves in church-connections, as soon as they gladly received the word. Do not reject the benefit of godly society, while you

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are

are on the way to your everlasting home. Do not reckon such an institution *useless*. Do not, O do not, reckon yourselves unworthy of eternal life, by despising these intimacies on earth, which give a foretaste of the pleasures that are in heaven, where fellowship will be divinely pleasant, full, and endless. "Finally, my brethren, if  
 " there be any consolation in Christ, if any com-  
 " fort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if  
 " any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye the joy" of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of angels and saints, "that ye be like-minded, having the same  
 " love, being of one accord, of one mind," Phil. ii. 1. 2.

2. Consider well the *principles, constitution, and practices* of that church you intend to join with. There are, undoubtedly, some distinguishing characters of a *true church*, which ought to be seriously pondered, when you intend to enter into actual communion with any part of the visible church. Let *Papists* triumph as they will in Bel-  
 larmine's marks of a true church, which Protestants have repeatedly confuted and exposed; but do you "prove all things, and hold fast that  
 " which is good." Examine and try the truth and falsehood of every doctrine and practice, by the standard of the word, in a humble dependence on the light and influence of the holy Spirit, to enable you to form a right judgment concerning them: and when, upon impartial trial, ye find what is really good and honourable, in point of truth or duty, maintain and abide by it. "I  
 " speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say," on this point; especially in the following weighty cases.

Is it safe or honourable to join in communion with a church, that does not stand on *the pillar and*



*and ground of truth* \* ? If the truth of the gospel, in some of its essential articles, be corrupted; if the ruin and recovery of mankind be denied, or misrepresented; if Christ be not held as the Head and Fountain of knowledge, righteousness, and duty; if good works are made, in whole or in part, our justifying righteousness before God; if personal holiness is set aside, and rendered useless; if the co-equal, consubstantial Deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be denied; if the sovereignty of divine favour to sinful men be impugned, or even not asserted; if human decisions are made a rule of faith; if creature-performances are made the condition of enjoying the favour of Heaven; if Christian morality is represented in a light that does not exalt it above the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, who observed the letter of the law:—in any, or all of these cases, I beseech you to consider, whether you

\* *The pillar and ground of truth* is referred by some to the church and by others to Timothy and gospel-ministers. But the truth of the gospel is more properly the pillar and ground of the church, than the church is of the truth, and the church cannot possibly be the pillar of truth any otherwise, than as it holds forth and maintains the truth, which itself is built upon; and though the apostles are called pillars, Gal. ii. 9. yet they cannot be said to be so in their own persons, but only as in their ministrations they supported the gospel-doctrine concerning Christ, as the foundation of the church, 1 Cor. iii. 10. 11. which, on that account, is called the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, Eph. ii. 19. and the doctrine of Peter's confession, or Christ, whom he confessed, is called the Rock, on which he would build his church, Matth. xvi. 18. It therefore seems to me, that, in opposition to the pillars and foundation of a material temple, which is here alluded to, the truth of the gospel or Christ as exhibited in the gospel, is meant by the pillar and ground of truth, on which the church stands, as its foundation and support: accordingly this truth is spoken of under the appellation of "the mystery of godliness;" and several articles of it are specified in the following verse.

*Gusse's marginal note on 1 Tim. iii. 15.*

can reasonably expect, that your communion would be either *useful* or *safe*.

Again, can you think it safe to join with a church, *whose worship is taught by the commandments and authority of men*? “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth,” John iv. 24. “This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me” in any act of gospel-worship, Lev. x. 3. If any ordinance of Christian worship is rejected; if human services and rites are joined with the appointments of Heaven; if the manner of performing religious duties is changed, limited, or modelled by the pleasure of men:—if you find that the system of worship in a church is digested in such a form, it is surely an object of serious consideration, whether you can, in these circumstances, unite yourselves in connections, that would oblige you to worship a jealous God, by these means, or in that manner, which you believe to be unauthorised in his word.

Moreover, it surely merits your attention, whether there is a reasonable prospect of edification to your souls in the communion of a church, where pastors are established in congregations by the power of *a man*, whose family has been, perhaps in the dark ages of Popish superstition, a temporal benefactor to them, and is usually called *a patron*? Without entering, at present, on the merits of the cause, relative to *the right of patronage* in the Christian churches; I only beg leave to urge upon your thoughts a just regard to *the tendency of this scheme*, where-ever it is carried into execution. It manifestly robs the people of God of their religious rights, and invests them in hands that are not likely to make a good use  
of

of them; it opens a prospect for the *patron's* friend to a comfortable provision; it lays a strong temptation before the minister so called to execute his office rather to the pleasure of his benefactor, than to the edification of his congregation; and it gives a wicked preference of worldly riches to religious characters in the kingdom of Christ. This point is considered, with great judgment and candour, in a late performance, entitled, "*An attempt to prove, that every species of patronage is foreign to the nature of the church: in six dissertations.*" Printed by Gray & Alston, 1768.

Besides, it is both prudent and necessary, that you ponder *the security* you are like to have, in a church-state, for the effectual exercise of discipline, in making a separation between the precious and the vile, and in purging out the old leaven of corrupted members, that the church may keep her feast as a new lump, Jer. xv. 19. 1 Cor. v. 7. — 13. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle, not to company with fornicators. Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are with-

G 3

"out?"

“ out ? do not ye judge them that are within ?  
 “ But them that are without, God judgeth. There-  
 “ fore put away from among yourselves that  
 “ wicked person.” Rev. ii. 2. “ I know thy works,  
 “ and thy labour, and thy patience, and how  
 “ thou canst not bear them which are evil : and  
 “ thou hast tried them which say they are apo-  
 “ stles, and are not ; and hast found them liars.”  
 Vers. 6. “ But this thou hast, that thou hatest  
 “ the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”  
 Vers. 14. 15. “ But I have a few things against  
 “ thee, because thou hast there them that hold  
 “ the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to  
 “ cast a stumbling-block before the children of  
 “ Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and  
 “ to commit fornication. So hast thou also them  
 “ that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,  
 “ which thing I hate.”— The order and con-  
 stitution of that church, which do not enable her  
 to exercise discipline faithfully, vigorously, and  
 impartially, are certainly defective. If church-  
 decisions are over-awed by civil laws and penal-  
 ties ; or if her members have not united upon  
 this condition, that they will walk in mutual  
 love, and will severally submit to her order and  
 discipline ; pray, consider with yourselves, what  
*reasonable security* you could expect to find, in  
 such a communion, for *a pure and holy fellow-  
 ship*.

Finally, consider whether the church you in-  
 tend to join is *tyrannical in her government*. It  
 is the duty of a church to *revenge all disobedience*,  
 as the apostle speaks, 2 Cor. x. 6. But *severity*  
 against offending members, is no where autho-  
 rised by the meek and lowly Jesus. His *doctrines*  
 and his *example*, are so far from countenancing  
 any thing of this kind, that they are a flat con-  
 tradiction

tradiction to it in every shape. Can you really think, that the spirit of the gospel prevails, where the *only means* used for removing the scruples, for answering the doubts, or for satisfying the consciences of the members, who need satisfaction, especially, if they also respectfully desire it, is *a violent, forward exertion of church-power*? Be not blinded by any insinuations of crafty men, that would tell you, such a rigorous procedure is necessary in *making a fair stand for truth*. Can you think, that divine truth is so destitute of evidence, as to need such a shield? You have reason to suspect, either that the cause, which is supported by these furious measures, is bad; or that its advocates and partisans are weak, if not unprincipled men. An upright and judicious friend to truth, will always aim at commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, by an open, faithful manifestation of the reasons and evidences of what he takes to be truth. He is ready to give unto every man that asks him, another sort of reason for the hope that is in him, than either the opinion or decision of a council, or the powerful weight of church-authority.— A tyrannical administration of church-discipline may reasonably forbid a prudent man to join her communion.

Upon the whole, it is necessary that Christians seek out a communion, where the doctrine is sound, the worship pure, her privileges free, and her discipline regular and vigorous, yet moderate and gentle.

3. Consider seriously your own *ends* and *purposes* in joining yourselves to a congregation. What do you wish or hope to gain by a church-connection?

connection? After the multitude had been attending on the ministry of John the Baptist, our Lord interrogated them in these terms,—*What went ye out into the wilderness to see?* Matth. xi. 7.—In such terms you ought to ask your consciences, concerning your *motives* and *aims*, in proposing a connection with a congregation. The heart is deceitful, proud, and selfish, and frequently deceives and misleads mankind in their religious conduct. Events have often discovered some fatal error that must have produced unprincipled church-connections: for light as the matter may appear in the eyes of many, it is certain, that an unnecessary forsaking of communion with a Christian church, is a manifest proof of some wrong motives and designs in forming their original connection, 1 John ii. 19. “They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us.”

Do you wish to exhibit and maintain, to profess and contend for *a system of sound principles*? Is it your governing aim to *hold fast*, in this holy and intimate relation to the people of God, *the form of sound words* delivered in the sacred oracles? Do you join a church, because you are satisfied, upon clear evidence, and due enquiry, that her society is useful to open the mind to the discoveries of truth, to quicken and govern a regular zeal, and to fortify the mind against the deceitful appearances under which error makes fatal impressions upon it, in a single unconnected state?

Do you intend, in a church-state, to honour  
God,

God, by *observing the simplicity of gospel-worship*, and keeping pure and entire all the ordinances of it? The scripture is certainly very full and express on the duties and obligations of divine worship, in public, private, and secret. Several ordinances of religious worship can only be observed in a church-state. Without such connections, it is plain, these ordinances must go into disuse, as far as the practice of individuals can operate; and where is the proof to the world, in this case, that the neglecters of such institutions love, obey, and honour the authority of Christ?—But when you resolve on forming holy connections in a church-relation, are you impelled by an earnest desire to do the will of Christ, and to enjoy his presence, while you take sweet counsel with his people in every social religious service?

Again, do you propose to yourselves, in that holy relation, to maintain, and to submit to *the impartial exercise of church-discipline*? That this end may be effectually obtained, do you resolve, in a firm dependence on divine grace, to obey in the Lord them that have the rule over you, and to follow their faith? Do you purpose to consider well your station and place in the church, and to be conscientious in performing the duties of it, submitting yourselves, in the spirit of love and meekness, unto the admonitions, reproofs, and exhortations, both of your spiritual guides, and of your brethren, on every proper occasion? Unless this be your fixed resolution, it is very improbable, that your religious connection will either prove useful to yourselves, or comfortable to the church.

And, finally, do you wish and hope to promote  
and

and preserve an *holy bias, temper, and disposition of mind*, in your whole conversation, improving your religious communion, both as an *inducement* to this holiness, and as a *means* of maintaining it? Are you resolved to look well to yourselves, as well as to your brethren, lest any root of impurity and bitterness grow up to trouble you or them? Are you desirous of walking together in the fear of the Lord, adding to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity or love.

Upon the whole, examine your own hearts concerning your designs in proposing to form a connection with the saints in a church relation. Endeavour to obtain satisfaction to your minds upon every branch of this question,—Whether your consciences bear you witness in the sight of God, that your governing motives and ends are, to maintain and exhibit *soundness in the faith of the gospel—the simplicity of instituted worship—the impartial exercise of discipline—and, that purity of personal and social conversation, which becometh the gospel of Christ?* The question is weighty and necessary. Consider what answer you will give unto God, who cannot be deceived, and who will not be mocked. Superficial thoughts on this subject, are, perhaps, the chief reason of that *instability* so often to be seen among church-members, who, having entered into communion without consideration, are fickle in all the duties of it, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, or with every gust of passion. —But this calls my attention to another point, *viz.*

Direct.



Direct. 2. *Let church-members be stedfast in maintaining their religious connections.*

When the hearers of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, which next followed after the resurrection of Christ, became believers, they submitted to baptism, and united in a church-state. This association was not temporary and occasional: for "they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers," Acts ii. 42. Their practice is recorded for an *example* to us, and sufficiently proves, that these who are added to, or made members of, a particular congregation or church, ought firmly and stedfastly to persevere in all the ordinances and institutions appointed by Christ for their edification and comfort in that church.

It is truly a lamentable case, that in this age which affects to be thought eminently enlightened, there are so many unstable souls, sometimes here, and sometimes there, who must think, if they think on the case at all, that the church is only a temporary society, and her fellowship merely an occasional thing. If they reckon her communion and services *stated*, they must be condemned of their own selves for their wavering unsteady practices. Permit me, my brethren, to use such freedom with you as I think the case requires; and do not count me your enemy, because I tell you what I apprehend is the truth. You are called unto liberty, only use not your liberty for an occasion of the flesh.

Let none entertain a prejudice against me, under an apprehension, that I take upon me to censure every church-member who is not *a ways* present,

present, when the church to which he belongs is gathered together. I am sensible of the variety of events and occurrences that from time to time break in upon professors, and necessarily interrupt and hinder their attendance. It would be very weak and uncharitable not to remember the bodily infirmities, the turns and events of life, and many other things that fall out in every station, and from time to time interrupt Christians in this privilege and duty. But the practice I condemn, is an allowed neglect of stated attendance in church-assemblies with their connections, through sloth, caprice, itching ears, love of the world, or any other carnal, curious, or delusive motive, whereby the institutions of Christian fellowship are rendered less beautiful and less fruitful. — A neglect which I will venture to say, is no other than a breach of the communion of saints in their church-relation. — As a means of conviction, I intreat those, who are either fallen into this course, or inclined to defend it, seriously to consider what they are doing, and to give place to deliberate reflections on the following things.

1. By this neglect one main design of a standing ministry of the word is subverted, or rendered in a great measure fruitless. One principal business of a gospel-minister, with respect to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer, is, *to dispense the word*, not in a formal manner, or merely as a system of doctrine, but as it may suit the condition and circumstances of his people. On this account, the duty enjoined on him is, care over them, converse with them, and attention to them, to the end that, seeing their tempers and situations, their frames and dispositions, and considering the various temptations  
one

one or other of his members, or the whole body, may fall into, he may bring a word in season to their case. A wise and faithful minister will be careful to observe all the dispensations of providence and grace which may affect the people under his charge: and when he discerns and understands their particular cases, he is earnest in prayer, studies the scriptures, and endeavours, by all the means in his power, to form his discourses for their warning and comfort. But in vain are all a minister's watchfulness, prayer, meditation, and labour in such a view, if his people be inconstant and careless in attending at the appointed seasons of ministration. 'Think soberly upon the case, and judge in yourselves, whether such unstedfastness has not a manifest tendency to grieve and discourage your pastors, to provoke the Lord, by opposing the end of that ministry he hath appointed, and to injure your own souls, by losing the benefit, and defeating the purpose of that ministry you have chosen. Heb. xiii. 17. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." 1 Thess. v. 12. 13. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake \*."

## 2. By

\* The reverend Dr Conder on this text, observes, It is a people's duty to know those that are over them in the Lord as to their special character and relation. Ministers are Christ's commission-officers, and they are spirited and gifted by him for the service of your souls. They are ambassadors or heralds from the Prince of peace to publish glad tidings.

2. By this neglect of constant attendance with their fellow-members, in a zealous, stedfast regard to all the duties of religious fellowship, Christians become guilty of breaking their solemn

and to diffuse the royal proclamation of peace on earth, and good will to men. The Lord has given them a commission to dispense his word, reserving to himself the power of commanding the blessing. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" 1 Cor. iii. 5.

To know your ministers in their character then, is to look upon them as Christ's commissioners. Christ's servants, Christ's wife and gracious provision for your consolation and salvation: and the word they dispense, so far as it is supported by the sacred oracles, is not to be regarded as the instruction of the speaker, but as his instruction in whose name they speak. Keep your eyes steadily on this point in all your public attendances, and it may be expected our gospel will not come unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.—And as to their relation to you, such whom God hath united your choice in for stated work, they are in a peculiar manner *his ordinance for your good*, you are to know them *as your own, as God's special provision for you*. And would ye grow in grace, adorn your profession, and make sensible advancements in the divine life, then know them that labour among you, *i. e.* make conscience of cleaving to their ministry, adhering to their instructions, conversing freely with them, and admitting them freely and faithfully to converse with you concerning the affairs of your precious souls. Give me leave to exemplify these hints a little. You open your Sabbaths with contemplation and prayer, your souls thirst after God, you breathe for a fresh message of grace from him under his word: and is the question with you, Where shall I go to-day? whose ministry shall I attend? shall I turn in here to the right, or there to the left, and hear what God, by such or such a ministry, shall say to my soul? No, no! this indeed is too much the temper and conduct of many, but it is a temptation, a weakness. The path of prescribed duty is directly before you, "Know them that labour among you;" rather think of filling up your places than of indulging your fancies; remember he that plants is not any thing, nor he that waters, but God that gives the increase. The blessing is wholly at his disposal, and you have much greater reason to expect it under the ministrations of them he has set over you, than of any others. Know them therefore  
in

lemn obligation before God to walk with their brethren in all the services of their social relation. They are much mistaken who suppose, that their church-relation only obliges them to a moral conversation,

in your closets, by earnest and frequent prayer for them, that they may be furnished with a word in season to you; know them in their Christian visits, by a kind reception of all their friendly counsels, and cautions, and reproofs, which faithfulness and affection may occasionally suggest; and know them in the house of God, by a close attention to their public instructions, as containing the particular message, which it was the all-disposing will of God, you should at such a time receive from them. In such a temper of mind the word will come clothed with authority, your ministers will be heard with acceptance, and your hearts cheered and refreshed with the blessing. *Conder's sermon at Mr Stifford's ordination, p. 45.*

The pious and judicious Mr Durham of Glasgow, treating of the particular relation between a minister and a particular flock, shews, that it doth arise from these grounds. (1.) From the Lord's special assigning of one particular church, to one man rather than to another: in which he is to labour for the good of the whole. In which respect, as he is a minister of Christ to the catholic church, and hath that common with all other ministers; so hath he this peculiar to him, that he is specially designed in reference to that portion, as it were his particular post. (2.) Upon this delegation by the Master, such a people become peculiarly his; and by the Master's appointment, are to submit to the ordinances administered by him: because that same Lord and Master of the minister, who warrants him peculiarly to treat with such a people, being also Master of that flock, calleth them peculiarly to submit to him: from which, according to his appointment, there doth arise a mutual obligation between such a minister and such a people: he is obliged to minister unto them in the gospel; and they are obliged to submit to him, strengthen him, acknowledge him, communicate to him in all good things, and to provide for him, &c. And this mutual relation is not founded merely on voluntary consent, nor is of a personal nature, (to speak so); that is, as if he or they were disposing of themselves as principal parties: but it is an obligation flowing from the former delegation, and cannot but follow from the nature thereof, and by virtue of the general commands given, Heb. xiii. 17. 1 Thess. v. 12. Gal. vi. 6. &c. although there were no explicit covenanting in reference to these ends amongst

conversation, and to acts of gospel-obedience in their private and family capacities, in a general way of living in the fear of the Lord: for, in virtue of this relation, they are engaged by their own consent, to walk as brethren in church-communion. Now, it must be remembered, that this walk consists in *a stedfast continuance in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.* Perhaps it will be said, “that an engagement of this kind is but seldom  
 “proposed to church-members upon their admission, and therefore it is wrong to interpret  
 “their liberties *a breach of any such engagement,*  
 “which is not entered into by them, when they  
 “form their relation to a particular church.”

these parties: and where any is, it is but a formal expressing of that which otherwise is implied; and is necessary, not for binding up that relation simply, but for the better furthering the ends thereof. Therefore in that tie, ministers and people both, are to look upon that obligation as a mean subservient to an end, and so to be regulated by it: and both would remember that they do principally belong to Christ; and that therefore it is not free to them to article or not, or as they will, in that obligation, or otherwise than may stand with the Master's end, and delegation foresaid. (3.) From this mutual obligation there doth arise a more near mutual sympathy between that minister and church, than between him and any other church, or them and any other minister. They have common interests, common hazards, common joy and grief, &c. in which respect a cross to one of them is a cross to both: and in this respect there is a greater likeness between them than others not in this peculiar relation. (4.) As there are peculiar duties called for on both sides from each to other, which are not so required between them and others; so there is a particular charge or reckoning and account which will follow thereupon: in this respect a minister is to count more peculiarly for that particular church than others; and the people again, for the reverencing and encouraging of him in a special manner, as may be gathered from Heb. xiii. 17. And upon this account Paul did particularly aggrudge the Gentiles slighting and grieving of him, in his epistle to the Corinthians and Galatians, because of his particular delegation in reference to them. *Exposition of the Revelation*, p. (mihi) 66.

—I answer such an engagement is reasonable, just, and moderate ;—it would be proper always to mention it explicitly at the admission of members, for it is always understood ;—and this engagement is ratified under that great seal of the *Lord's supper*, which is appointed, among other purposes, to testify the union of these saints in one body, and in one social connection, who are partakers thereof under the same ministry and administration : for “ we being many, are one bread, and one body,” 1 Cor. x. 17.

3. This neglect, whatever be the cause of it, is an offence to the church of God. If an action be but of an indifferent nature, it becomes a sin when done with offence, Rom. xiv. 20. *All things*, speaking of meats and the creatures of God, which are all good, being used with thanksgiving, and without offence ;—*all things indeed are pure ; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.* Ye are brethren, do not then fall out by the way ; do not wrong one another ; and do not cruelly destroy the peace, the comfort, and edification of those for whom Christ died ; neither give occasion to them that seek an occasion to ruin the prosperity and mutual love of your connections, nor make the hearts of such sad, to whom you should administer consolation.

Be not deceived with the notion, that *offence is taken at your freedoms, while none is given* : for though this were really the case, you might still be criminal for taking such freedoms as you know will be the occasions of offence. You would not admit that to be a sufficient excuse in civil life ; because you are sensible, that no relation could be tolerable, if every one, suppose an husband, wife, parent, child, master, servant,

or neighbour, was boldly to follow his own choice, and to be a law to himself, without paying any regard to the pleasure of those he is related to. Our Lord has made *self-denial* an essential branch of Christian duty, Matth. xvi. 24. But if any man do not deny himself to please his brethren, whom he hath seen; how can he pretend, with any reason, that he denies himself to please Christ, whom he hath not seen?—So that though your opinion should be right in speculation, your practice might be wrong. But I cannot admit that your liberties, if they are accompanied with offence, are harmless and innocent. It is too manifest to bear any dispute, that *an action, which is wrong in its circumstances, is so far sinful*. The circumstances of social actions consist in the relation such actions have to society. The neglect of stated attendance with their connections, in all the duties of religious worship and communion, is to be judged, therefore, not by the rectitude of the practice in itself, but by the relation it has to the church whereof they are members; and if it be previously known, that offence will be taken at this neglect, the neglect becomes, in these circumstances, a sin against Christ. The only answer to this reasoning that I can think of, must be founded on the following principle;—*That such occasional neglects and interruptions of stated attendance for hearing the word, for fellowship, for breaking of bread, and for prayer, are a positive branch of Christian duty*.—It will be soon enough to confute this position, when it comes to be openly affirmed: for though loose practices in Christian society must be resolved into it, I do not find the principle itself avowed. Whether this proceeds from *inattention* or *design*, I shall leave to others to determine.



4. This neglect is a real prejudice and hurt to the church and congregation you belong to. It tends to weaken their hands, and to discourage their hearts. If all the members should adopt the same sentiments, and these neglects, in course, become general; they must soon prove a fatal bar to the observation of any order, and to the exercise of any discipline. Many of the duties of church-members must be omitted altogether; or else performed in a very superficial manner. The intimacies of her members must be laid aside, and their love to one another will become very cold. This practice, in a word, hazards the peace of the church, defeats the ends of her connection, mars her beauty, and ruins the vigour of her social services.— And, finally,

5. The neglect I caution church-members against, has many pernicious effects upon themselves. I do not aver this upon *speculation* only, but make the appeal to *experience*, which bears witness to all that I affirm. Blessed be God there are some exceptions, but it may be laid down, in general, as a fact confirmed by common observation,—*That the appearances of the power of godliness usually decay, in proportion as people become lax and negligent in the stated duties of religious communion.*— Prudence, surely, forbids us to risk any hazard, in such a dangerous course.

What I have urged may be thought less complete, unless a particular argument, on the other side, be considered, which I shall propound and answer in the words of a sensible writer \*, referred to formerly.

\* Mr Wallin's Humble Address, &c. p. 25. 26, 27.

“ They

“ They alledge, that, notwithstanding they  
 “ wander from the churches they immediately  
 “ belong to, they still, where they go, sit down  
 “ with the children of God, and under a sound  
 “ gospel-ministry; and that this conduct testifies  
 “ their love to all saints. This, they say, is  
 “ walking in a catholic spirit, and with the mark  
 “ of universal charity. And this, they apprehend,  
 “ sufficiently covers them from blame.”

*Ans.* “ It may not be amiss to observe here,  
 “ that it is one continual labour of the enemy of  
 “ mankind, against Christ and his gospel, to  
 “ dissolve the union, by which, in particular  
 “ churches, Christians are joined in a special  
 “ and immediate relation to each other. And  
 “ this he does, among other ways, by insinua-  
 “ ting, that a zealous and firm attachment to  
 “ the duties of that special relation, favours of  
 “ bigotry and a party-spirit. The serpent knows,  
 “ that an indifferency in this matter, as it brings  
 “ on a neglect of all order, is the ready way to  
 “ bring a church to ruin.

“ But to answer this allegation more directly:  
 “ —Either a particular church-state, and that  
 “ special relation in it, which believers stand in  
 “ to each other, is of divine appointment, or it is  
 “ not.—If it be not, why do these persons, by a  
 “ solemn act of union and fellowship with it,  
 “ support and countenance, in the church of  
 “ God, an human invention?—But if this con-  
 “ stitution be of the Lord, how will they answer  
 “ for neglecting the duties they owe to it?

“ On the other hand, is the close attachment  
 “ of a Christian to all his duty, in the church  
 “ he immediately belongs to, inconsistent with

“ a catholic spirit? They who think so, must  
 “ know very little of what concerns the kingdom  
 “ of Christ. Every particular church and con-  
 “ gregation is a constituent part of the catholic  
 “ church. The strength, fruitfulness, and glo-  
 “ ry of the latter, will always advance or de-  
 “ cline, in proportion to the number and con-  
 “ dition of the former. And hence it may ea-  
 “ sily be seen, that they who, by disorder and  
 “ negligence, bring injury and decay on the  
 “ Christian community they immediately belong  
 “ to, do, by this means, endamage and endan-  
 “ ger the whole body. And thus the persons,  
 “ I am now particularly answering, do, under  
 “ the specious colour of a catholic spirit, injure,  
 “ and indeed betray the catholic church. For,  
 “ if their example should be universally follow-  
 “ ed, universal confusion would follow likewise,  
 “ and Christ would have no appearance of a  
 “ church on earth.

“ But, after all the talk of *universal charity*  
 “ among such people, experience shews,—That  
 “ they who are the most resolved and assiduous  
 “ to fill up their places in the churches to which  
 “ they are particularly related, best witness their  
 “ concern for, and best promote the honour  
 “ and interest of the catholic body.—And can  
 “ it be supposed, that he, in whom are all the  
 “ treasures of wisdom, hath so constituted his  
 “ church, and settled all that concerns it, as  
 “ that the neglect of duty in a particular part of  
 “ it, shall become a necessary testimony of a  
 “ Christian’s love and zeal for the whole? No-  
 “ thing is more contrary to reason, and the  
 “ word and honour of the Redeemer.”

To conclude this direction, I beseech the  
 members

members of any particular denomination, of any particular church, or congregation, stedfastly to maintain their religious connections, and conscientiously to keep up their attendance with the congregations they severally belong to, in all the ordinances of their stated fellowship, as a gospel church.

Direct. 3. *Let Christians be diligent in improving their religious connections.*

The will of God is, that whatever our hands findeth to do, should be done with our might. Eccl. ix. 10. This implies, in general, two things: (1.) That the duties of religious communion should be made our great business. We should be always ready and watchful to embrace every opportunity to attend on the communion of the church, and should lay aside every incumbrance that might hinder us in that attendance. (2.) That whatever we do in this business, should be done heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men, Col. iii. 23. ; that is, it should be done in the fear of God, in obedience to his command, and with an eye to his glory.

In this manner of old time did the saints abound in this work of the Lord, and have left us an example of the like diligence and zeal, cheerfulness and unwearied constancy, in every social labour of love. All that is necessary on this subject, may be reduced to two heads.

I. Carefully embrace every opportunity of *receiving improvement* from your Christian and church connections. God hath placed every member in the body according to his wisdom and pleasure. Some members are more useful than

than others, but every one is useful in its place; and none of them can truly say to the rest, I have no need of you. Thus *God hath tempered the body together, that the members should have the same care one for another*, 1 Cor. xii. Every Christian should study to know his place in the church, and should use every means of enjoying proper supplies from fellow-members, in order to furnish him thoroughly for the services of his station. Every one should be swift to hear, and forward to seek improvements in the power of godliness to his own soul, in every means of instituted worship. Ministers cannot say, they have no need of their flocks, nor the most experienced Christian, that he hath no need of his weakest brother.

Watch and pray, and strive, that you enter not into temptation, by giving place to a *proud conceit* of your superior attainments, as if you had no further need of deriving improvements in the duties of religion, in a church-relation, from your connections; or by a kind of *fatal inattention* to the obligations and benefits of such services. Believe that the ordinances of church fellowship are the appointments of Heaven, and the ministration of the Spirit of Jesus. Use them as such, and seek to be filled with the Spirit, through these channels wherein the supplies of the Spirit flow so plenteously and so freely. Consider what advantages the most improved saints may receive by a conscientious attachment to the stated offices of their communion in a church-relation. Hereby they are emboldened to profess and practise religion with greater firmness and courage: hereby their souls are animated with a warmer fire of holy devotion: hereby they are more effectually secured against apostacy, and even against  
 luke-

lukewarmness in the cause of truth and holiness, and hereby they are more confirmed and established in their most holy faith.

2. Cheerfully embrace every opportunity, and comply with every call to *communicate social improvement*, in a church-relation. Do not bury your Lord's talents in the earth, far less should you employ them to his dishonour, and to the prejudice of his people. Your gifts are not bestowed on you for any such purpose, but for a much nobler end. Often review that elegant representation of the case, drawn by the pencil of inspiration, 1 Cor. xii. 4.—13. “ Now there  
“ are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And  
“ there are differences of administrations, but  
“ the same Lord. And there are diversities of  
“ operations, but it is the same God, which work-  
“ eth all in all. But the manifestation of the Spi-  
“ rit, is given to every man to profit withal. For  
“ to one is given by the Spirit, the word of wis-  
“ dom; to another the word of knowledge by  
“ the same Spirit; to another faith by the same  
“ Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the  
“ same Spirit; to another the working of mi-  
“ racles; to another prophecy; to another dis-  
“ cerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of  
“ tongues; to another the interpretation of  
“ tongues. But all these worketh that one and  
“ the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man se-  
“ verally as he will. For as the body is one, and  
“ hath many members, and all the members of  
“ that one body, being many, are one body: so  
“ also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all  
“ baptized into one body, whether we be Jews  
“ or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and  
“ have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

Dedicate

Dedicate your *gifts, graces, time, and substance*, to the honour of the church, and employ them for the good of your brethren, as far as may be consistent with your general and special duties in life.

*Your gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and prudence*, should be employed for the honour of the church, and to edify one another. Be ashamed to think that you would neglect to exercise, in a cause so good, and for a purpose so noble, these endowments, which are designed to profit the body of Christ. But if you take your Lord's talents, and use them as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, by employing them for your own advantage, honour, and applause, to swell your own pride, to pervert justice, to occasion strife, to extenuate error and vice, or to serve a friend at the expence of truth—my soul shudders at the alarming consequences!—you must, indeed you must be muzzled and speechless, when you stand impeached by God himself, of the heinous crimes of rebellion, ingratitude, injustice, and treachery.—A horrid catalogue, whose united force is concentrated in a point!

*Your graces of faith, repentance, meekness, long-suffering, hope, patience, love, and joy*, ought to be used for the edification of the body of Christ. They are the fruits of his blessed Spirit, and many of them shine brightest in social life. Every divine temper should be subservient to the welfare, and assisting to the comfort of religious fellowship, that we may in all things grow up into Christ, as our head.

*Your time* should be employed, in a reasonable proportion, for promoting the interests of religion

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gion in the church or congregation you belong to. I do not speak of the Lord's day, which ought to be kept strictly holy; but of so much time and trouble, as may be found necessary to discharge every duty you owe both to the body, and to the several members of it. Do not grudge reasonable time and attendance in such services; but eagerly catch the present opportunity and season of doing good.—Finally,

*Your substance* should, in a suitable proportion, be devoted to the service of your brethren in church-fellowship; both by contributing for the decent support of a gospel-ministry, and by relieving, according to your ability and opportunity, such poor as seem to be of the household of faith. Both these are incumbent on the saints by every obligation of duty and love.

To sum up what has been mentioned on this direction, I beseech you, in the bowels of the Lord Jesus Christ, to embrace willingly and cheerfully every opportunity that you can have, both to receive and to communicate social improvement, in a church-relation.

Direct. 4. *Let church-members be fearful of breaking their religious connections.*

I have a message from God unto you, and, in his name, I demand a favourable hearing. My message is, to inform these who have ears to hear, what the Spirit saith unto the churches, in such passages as these, Heb. iii. 12. 13. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing  
“from the living God. But exhort one another  
daily



“ daily while it is called, To-day ; lest any of  
 “ you be hardened through the deceitfulness of  
 “ sin.” Chap. x. 24. 25. “ And let us consider  
 “ one another, to provoke unto love, and to  
 “ good works : not forsaking the assembling of  
 “ ourselves together, as the manner of some is ;  
 “ but exhorting one another : and so much the  
 “ more, as ye see the day approaching.” Chap.  
 xii. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. “ Wherefore, lift up the  
 “ hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.  
 “ And make straight paths for your feet, lest  
 “ that which is lame be turned out of the way,  
 “ but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with  
 “ all men, and holiness, without which no man  
 “ shall see the Lord : looking diligently, lest a-  
 “ ny man fail of the grace of God ; lest any  
 “ root of bitterness springing up, trouble you,  
 “ and thereby many be defiled : lest there be any  
 “ fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who  
 “ for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right.”

Your connections are not occasional or temporary, and therefore you ought to be well satisfied, that the grounds upon which you would dissolve them are solid and clear. I shall exemplify this direction in some instances.

1. Do not resign your own judgment, in order to imitate those who are reckoned *great*, or *good*, *learned*, or *wise* men. This has frequently proved a snare to religious people. Follow them only as far as you see them followers of Christ. Make not men, but the Bible, your rule. Human authority and example are apt to mislead, and therefore both of them must be responsible at the bar of divine revelation.

2. Do not break your religious connections  
 I 2 rashly,

rashly, on account of personal offences. Offences will come in every society; and it is easy to account for more offences coming in the church of Christ, than in almost any society whatever. But will *every personal offence*, nay, I will venture to say more, will *any personal offence*, warrant church-members to forsake, or break off their fellowship, in a church-relation?—If this cause were sufficient, the church of Christ must be the most precarious, unfortunate constitution on the face of the earth. Let me only add, that this supposition makes void the wisdom and authority of Christ's appointment, relative to offences, Matth. xviii. 15.—18.—How very criminal must these be in the sight of God, who separate themselves from church-communion, on account of personal animosities, and generally without attempting any friendly measure to remove the scandal! But what words can describe the impious folly of such as dissolve their religious connections, merely on the credit of malicious tale-bearers! Their absurdity, however, is exceeded by the unfeeling hardness of some dark ungodly minds, which are capable, first of contriving, and then of improving groundless imputations against innocent persons, in order to serve as a pretence for justifying a wished-for separation.

3. Endeavour to give an early stop to those things that are likely to make a breach upon unity and order. This is agreeable to the advice of the wise man, who assures us, that “the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water; therefore,” says he, “leave off contention before it be meddled with,” Prov. xvii. 14. No sooner is the bank of a river broken, but the water will spread, and carry all before it with an irresistible,

irresistible violence. When passions begin to rise, it is the best way immediately to suppress them, because no one can tell how far they shall be carried, nor into what indecencies men may be transported by giving way to wrath. It is certainly the most prudent course to avoid the occasions of strife, and very early to resist every thing that has any visible tendency towards it. How great mischiefs, and what lamentable divisions have been occasioned by very small beginnings of contention! The little heterogeneous vapours, which the sun exhales from the earth, often descend in tempest and thunder; so, small differences, heightened by pride, fall in a mighty storm, and spread confusion and disorder, where once nothing but love and peace reigned. *How great a matter does a little fire kindle!* A few sparks, struck into a magazine, will instantly blow up and tear all in pieces. Therefore, suffer the word of exhortation, 1 Pet. iv. 8. "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

Many considerations might be urged to excite, in church-members, a jealous caution, and godly fear, of every thing, that tends to break their religious connections. Beware of separation, (1.) For your own sakes, and for the good of your immortal souls, which is much promoted by keeping up your communion with the saints in the duties of religion. (2.) For the sake of the church, whose beauty is marred by division, so that she becomes black when her mother's children are angry with her, Song i. 6. (3.) For the sake of your ministers, who may expostulate with you in the words of the apostle, Gal. iv. 13.—17. "Ye know how through infirmity of

“ the flesh, I preached the gospel unto you at the  
 “ first. And my temptation which was in my  
 “ flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected; but re-  
 “ ceived me as an angel of God, even as Christ  
 “ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness you spake  
 “ of? for I bear you record, that if it had been  
 “ possible, ye would have plucked out your own  
 “ eyes, and have given them to me. Am I  
 “ therefore become your enemy, because I tell  
 “ you the truth? They zealously affect you,  
 “ but not well; yea, they would exclude you,  
 “ that you might affect them.” (4.) For the  
 sake of your brethren, who have a reasonable  
 claim to your affection and labour of love, that  
 their hearts may be encouraged, and their hands  
 strengthened in God, Jude 17.—23. “ But, be-  
 “ loved, remember ye the words which were  
 “ spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Je-  
 “ sus Christ: how that they told you there  
 “ should be mockers in the last time, who  
 “ should walk after their own ungodly lusts.  
 “ These be they who separate themselves, sen-  
 “ sual, having not the Spirit. But ye, beloved,  
 “ building up yourselves on your most holy  
 “ faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep your-  
 “ selves in the love of God, looking for the  
 “ mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal  
 “ life. And of some have compassion, making  
 “ a difference: and others save with fear, pull-  
 “ ing them out of the fire; hating even the gar-  
 “ ment spotted by the flesh.” But above all,  
 (5.) For the sake of Christ, the Prince of peace,  
 who, in his solemn intercession, earnestly pray-  
 ed, John xvii. 11. 21. 22. 23. “ And now I am  
 “ no more in the world, but these are in the  
 “ world, and I come to thee. Holy Father,  
 “ keep through thine own name, those whom  
 “ thou hast given me, that they may be one, as  
 “ we

“ we are. That they all may be one, as thou,  
 “ Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they  
 “ also may be one in us: that the world may  
 “ believe that thou hast sent me. And the glo-  
 “ ry which thou gavest me, I have given them:  
 “ that they may be one, even as we are one. I  
 “ in them, and thou in me, that they may be  
 “ made perfect in one, and that the world may  
 “ know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved  
 “ them, as thou hast loved me.”—For his sake,  
 whose religion is uniform and consistent, whose  
 truths and institutions constitute one *undivided*  
*whole*, the scope of them being *Jesus Christ, the*  
*same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*, Heb.  
 xiii. 8.—For his sake, whose interests are far  
 from being different and opposite: for his house  
 and kingdom are not divided against themselves,  
 or else they would be brought to desolation.—  
 For his sake, whose body, the church, is undi-  
 vided, and called in one hope of their calling.  
 And—for his sake, who is the only Lord, and  
 Lawgiver, and Head of the church, and who,  
 in all things, has the pre-eminence.

Now, where there are so many inducements  
 to unity, should we not be fearful of divisions  
 and separation?—And should we not be cautious,  
 how far we carry a separation, even where the  
 causes are clear and necessary? Dr Manton well  
 observes, that “ as long as a lower degree of se-  
 “ paration will serve the turn, we should not go  
 “ to a higher; it is a great weakening to the in-  
 “ terest of Christ, when we presently draw  
 “ things to an extremity \*.”

Therefore, I again repeat the counsel to every  
 church-member,—*Be fearful of breaking your re-*  
*ligious connections.* Consider the tendency of

\* Manton on Jude 19.

such a course, were you to pursue it. (1.) It takes off that edge and fervour of Christian love, which is an essential branch of vital Christianity: for one who separates himself without fear, becomes indifferent to the comfort and edification of his brethren. (2.) It makes an unhappy impression upon the minds of these who see professors, eminent for knowledge and experience, walking in vague and loose connections: for hereby they are induced to think, that the intimacies of church-fellowship, which derive so much benefit upon mankind, are of small importance, and perhaps even to set them to the account of bigotry and superstition. (3.) It makes men careless of the edification of their neighbours, and particularly of fellow-Christians, whom they begin to look upon with indifference, and to censure for too much preciseness, whenever a misunderstanding falls in. (4.) It makes men indifferent to the weightiest concerns of vital godliness: for if a man become peevish in what refers to his brother's comfort, he must, of course, lose a present sense of the authority and love of God; and where these fade, the glory of Christianity in its powerful operations is departed.

I shall now conclude the whole with AN ADDRESS to these *who separate themselves* without a just cause from their connections, and wantonly burst the bands of religious fellowship. Consider *what you have done*,—upon *what principles you have acted*,—and *the native tendency of your course*. Give place to serious reflections on these important topics; and bear with me while I endeavour to state them to your thoughts in the best light I am able.

*First,*

*First, Consider what you have done.* Seemeth it to you, my dear friends, a light thing to separate yourselves from your brethren, with whom you took sweet counsel in going to the house of God? Have you done it with pleasure, and do you review it without regret? Is the review painful or pleasant to your minds? Perhaps you exult in being free, and happy, and unshackled of all the restraints of your social intimacies. Such glorying is not good. Doth not even nature teach you, that you cannot possibly disengage yourselves from religious society, without doing an essential injury to the power and exercise of godliness in your own souls? Lie not against the truth, by making bold pretensions to greater improvements in the divine life, as the effect of your separating courses. Such pretensions are common enough, but they are rarely justified by their fruits. The connection which the Spirit of God has made in their character is too often verified in their conduct, Jude 19. "These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit."

You have detached yourselves from the most instructive and delightful intimacies of communion with the saints, with whom you were wont to assemble statedly in acts of church-fellowship. You have broken these uniting bands, which formerly knit your souls together in faith, and love, and obedience. You are verily guilty concerning your brethren, whose edification you are under every obligation to promote: and you have sinned against your own souls, by withdrawing from the most useful communion of your best Christian friends. You have laid a stumbling-block before the world, which tends to confirm them in their alienation from, and enmity to,  
the

the ways of Christ, while they see them treated with so very little respect by these who had professed the greatest regard to them. In one word, your separating courses tend to undermine and destroy the kingdom of Christ in the world; and if they do not actually dissolve all the sacred ties of religious fellowship, it is only because your example is not universally followed.—Consider, I beseech you, what you have done, with the most serious attention; and examine your conduct without partiality or prejudice, remembering in whose sight you are, and in whose presence you act. It is both foolish and wicked to please yourselves with an apology that will serve to justify you before men, while God, with whom you have to do, knoweth your heart. Wherefore, laying aside all pride, prejudice, and selfish regards, review, in the light of the scriptures, and in the full persuasion of the impartial and decisive sentence of the righteous Judge of heaven and earth,—review the part you have acted, and come to the openest manifestation of the truths and will of God, that your deeds may appear to your own consciences to be what they really are.

*Secondly, Consider upon what principles you have acted in separating, with unprovoked wantonness, from your religious connections. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Unless you can satisfy your own consciences, and entertain the pleasant hopes of being approved of God, in regard to the motives and ends which govern your mind in the course you take, it must be both criminal and dangerous to be easy and thoughtless in a matter of such moment in the Christian life. In estimating your leading principles, beware, of mocking God, or of putting conscience,*



conscience, which is the candle of the Lord, under a bushel. You know, it is not these that commend themselves, but these whom God commendeth, that are approved. Bear with me then while I suggest the following questions; and may the Lord, the Spirit, carry home heartfelt convictions of your real motives and intentions.

Has *pride* no share in the direction of your conduct? You are called to *put on humbleness of mind*, and to be *clothed with humility*, imitating the dignified example of the meek and lowly Jesus, who condescends to men of low degree. A proud heart and a proud look are an abomination in the sight of God. Pride is generally a conspicuous part of the character of dividing spirits. Ask your own hearts, whether or not this diabolical temper has any influence on the part you act. Can you indeed say, with a good conscience, that your contentions and separation have not been an effect of pride? Look to it, and consider well what answer ye will give to that jealous God, who hath respect to the lowly, but will abase the proud and haughty sinner, whose soul is lifted up against the honour and prosperity of his fellow-professors. He that is puffed up with proud contempt of his brother, whom he hath seen, mocks God, and abuses the world, if he pretends to walk humbly with God, whom he hath not seen. Gal. v. 26. "Let us not be desirous of vain-glory, provoking one another."

Has not *self-love* made you partial in contending with your brethren? You should love your neighbours as yourselves; for this is the law and the prophets. Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, you should even do so to them.

This

This is right in itself, and a good work which is profitable unto men. Bring your separating courses to the light of divine truth; and let God's word be judge, whether you have not been the first to kindle the sparks of division, or to blow the growing flame; and whether a superior love to your own credit, humour, and reputation, hath not prompted you to such measures. Say not within yourselves, *Are we dogs that we should do such things?* The less suspicious you are, the greater reason you have for anxious jealousy in this matter. Self-love is dangerous, because it is subtle and secret in its operations. *If any man will come after Christ*, as a companion of them that love him, *let him deny himself*, Matth. xvi. 24.

Has *unbelief* no influence upon your dividing courses? An evil heart of unbelief departs from the living God, Heb. iii. 12. Does the word of Christ dwell richly in you, and do you abide by faith and love in the doctrine of Christ, while you separate from the endearing intimacies of his people? The belief of revealed truth is the centre of union and fellowship among the saints: for they are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. They who separate themselves from the members and ordinances of Christ, evidently show, that they do not hold the head, even Christ, in the exercise of faith. An unbelieving heart turns you aside from the company and from the footsteps of the flock. A dreadful censure! but a softer construction would be criminal and dangerous. I dare not retract it, nor even attempt to make an apology for it, 1 John i. 5.—8. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that

“ that God is light, and in him is no darkness  
 “ at all. If we say that we have fellowship with  
 “ him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do  
 “ not the truth : but if we walk in the light, as  
 “ he is in the light, we have fellowship one with  
 “ another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his  
 “ Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that  
 “ we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the  
 “ truth is not in us.”

Has a *spirit of licentiousness* no interest in the part you choose to act? Do you heartily approve the laws of Christ, because they are spiritual, and holy, and just, and good? Perhaps, if the question were put to you severally, you would answer in the affirmative, and even justify yourselves, by severe recriminations upon your former connections, for their disaffection and negligence. I am not, in the least, surprised to find men of divisive spirits attempt to vindicate themselves, and resist conviction, on this principle. But I ask you, in behalf of God, what your real sentiments are concerning the order which is in Christ, while you pay so little regard to the duties of your church-connection? Do not you reckon it a yoke of bondage? Does not your neglect proceed from a dislike of the strictness of Heaven's appointments? Do not you wish for some more indulgence than the authority of Christ allows you? In a word, does not the love of ease, sloth, and conformity to a present evil world, manifestly appear in your disaffection to the spiritual services of church-fellowship?

Have you no ambition to be thought religious and devout upon easy terms; and to maintain the character of disciples without much expence? It is very usual for such as divide themselves practically from the communion of the saints, to be

foolish and forward talkers, pretending to great eminence in religious experience, and censuring with malicious severity, all that do not pay them the compliment of being pious and regular Christians. To have the name of holy and judicious persons, seems to be the great object of their ambition; but to be in reality what they affect to be esteemed and called, is a more difficult matter, and requires more activity than they choose to bestow. Is this your way of judging, or not? Do you only want to secure a name that you live? Do you take liberties in neglecting your duty to God, and to your brethren, because the services of religious fellowship are a grievous burden? You may, by such courses, maintain a name that you live; but remember that while you act on such principles, you are really dead.

Consider, I beseech you, upon *what principles* you have acted in forsaking the communion of saints, and try them at the bar of God's word. I have no right to judge your heart, and I pretend to none; but I charge you, in the sight of God, and in the prospect of a future judgment, to *judge yourselves, that ye be not judged*. I do not call you to make an apology to men, where ingenuity and art might be of some service to furnish materials for a defence; but I call you to give the all-seeing, just, and jealous God, an account of your stewardship; and to weigh your motives and governing intentions in the balance of his sanctuary.

*Thirdly, Consider the native tendency of your separating course.* A corrupt tree bringeth forth bad fruit. Your way is evil, and the tendency of it is pernicious. You may take a specimen of it in the following instances. It tends to grieve the Spirit.

Spirit, to dishonour Christ, to offend the saints, to harden your own hearts, and to make the wicked triumph and blaspheme. (1.) It *grieves the Spirit* of truth, who is, in the saints, *a Spirit of love*. Divisions are works of the flesh, which are diametrically opposite to the fruits of the Spirit. Oh! do not the abominable thing which the Spirit of God hateth. Wo unto you, if you provoke the Holy Ghost to cease to strive with you, to reprove, or comfort you. Beware of walking in a course so dishonouring to this adorable Person, and so contrary to his office and honour. (2.) Separation from the sacred intimacies of the Christian church tends to *dishonour Christ*. *Is Christ divided?* 1 Cor. i. 13. The church is one body, whereof Christ is the head. Divisions carry in them a reflection, as though Christ were divided, and seem to go upon this principle, that the church has more heads than one. Unto them that believe, Christ is precious; but his person, doctrine, and kingdom, are dishonoured, when people separate themselves from the regular, stated fellowship of his people. (3.) Such a course tends to *offend the saints*, whose righteous souls are vexed at the reproaches hereby practically cast upon Christ. It is injurious to their honour, it disturbs their peace, it weakens their love, and it is the very opposite of that glorious state in heaven, where the church of the first-born shall serve God and the Lamb for ever, with cordial and united zeal. (4.) Your separating courses must have a fatal tendency to *harden your own hearts*. The farther that lines drawn from the centre to the circumference in a circle, are distanced from one another, the greater is their distance from the centre; and the more that Christians are separated from one another, the more they are removed from the light, comfort,

and influence of Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness. In this condition, what but deadness, formality, and decays in the divine life, can ensue to the children of God; while mere formalists are more and more hardened through the deceitfulness of this sinful course? And, (5.) This practice tends to make the *wicked triumph and blaspheme*, while they see so little regard to the order and appointed rules of Christian society, prevailing among such as are called by the Christian name. Wo to the man by whom offences come to an ungodly generation. Occasions of stumbling are certainly taken sometimes without a cause, and then the blame rests only upon the person offended; but a factious, untender professor is justly chargeable with the consequences of his separating courses, so far as they give occasion to the wicked to speak evil of the ways of righteousness.

Ponder these things, and weigh them with impartial attention. Reject every argument for or against your separating courses, which is not authorized in the oracles of God. If your way is really criminal, if the principles you act on are really odious, and if the tendency of your conduct is really pernicious; it certainly becomes your indispensable duty to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. The epistle to the church in Ephesus delineates your character, and prescribes to your case: Rev. ii. 4. 5. "Nevertheless, I  
 " have somewhat against thee, because thou hast  
 " left thy first love. Remember therefore from  
 " whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do  
 " the first works; or else I will come unto thee  
 " quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out  
 " of his place, except thou repent." I shall only add the animated remonstrance of God against

a people laden with iniquity of *the same kind* with yours, which is recorded for your learning, Jer. viii. 4.—12. “Moreover, thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slid- den back, by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I heark- ened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her ap- pointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow observe the time of their com- ing; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord. How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, cer- tainly in vain made he it, the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken; lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them? Therefore will I give their wives un- to others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all asha- med, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall, in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the Lord.”

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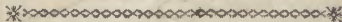
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