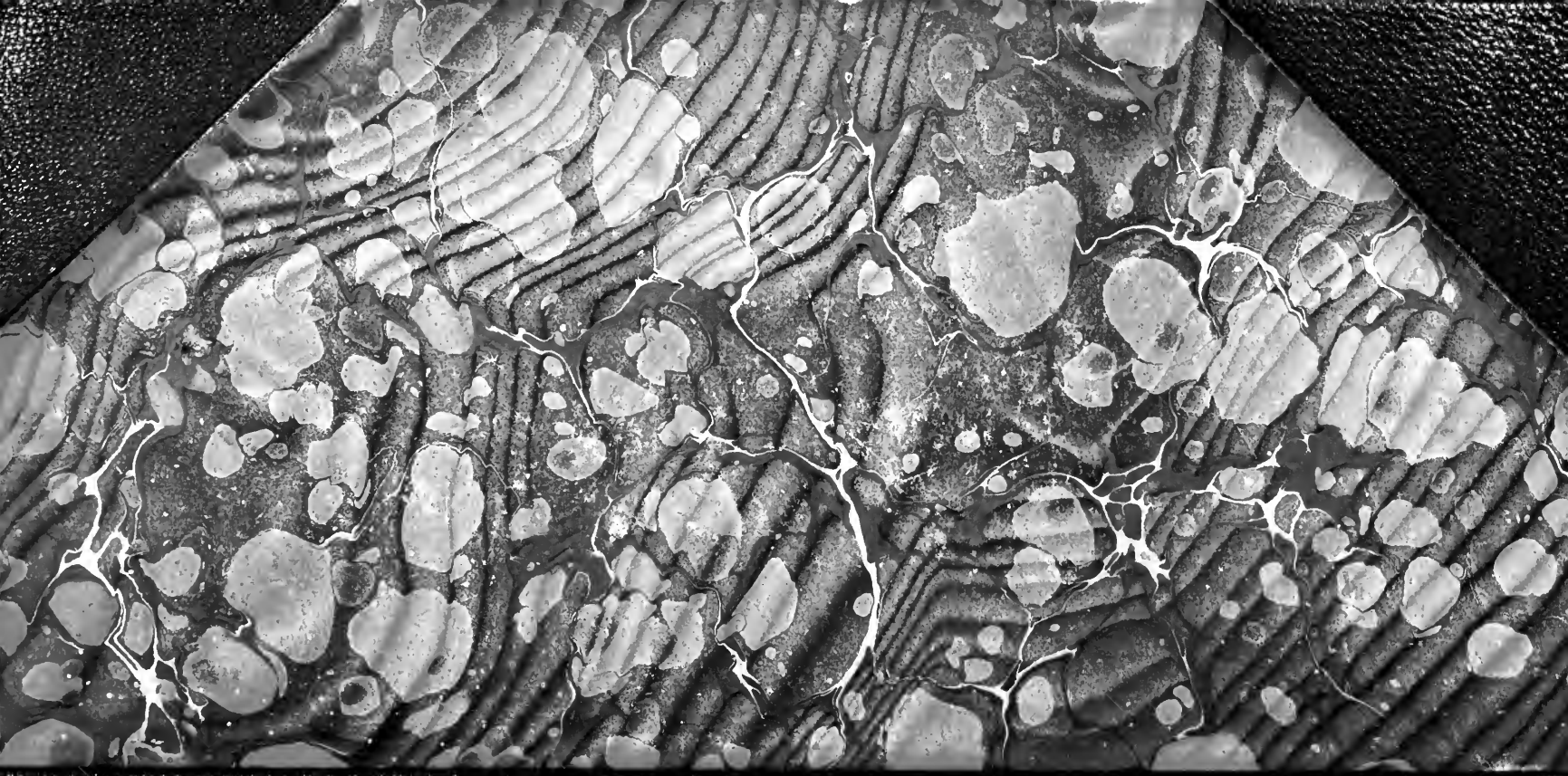

Hon. James Buchanan
with regards
from the Author

Pittsburgh July 20th 1849

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING

OF

THE SYNOD

OF THE

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

PHILADELPHIA, MAY 16, 1816.

BY THE REV. JOHN BLACK,

PASTOR OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

PITTSBURGH.

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.—Be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men.—PAUL.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The substance of the following Discourse was delivered before the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, better than two years ago.

The Author, by synodical appointment, had been enjoined to preach upon the subject of Church fellowship. By an act of Synod, all the discourses delivered at the opening of that body, are to be furnished, for the purpose of publishing them in a volume, at a convenient time. This volume is not yet published. But as the article of communion among professed Christians, is, at the present time, much agitated, the Synod recommended the Author to publish this discourse, with such notes or observations, as he might see proper.

The *form* of the discourse, is something different from that in which it was delivered, and appears on the Author's own responsibility.

That it may, through the Divine blessing, be useful in settling the minds of Christians respecting the scriptural basis of church fellowship, about which, they are, at present, far from being agreed, is the earnest prayer of the Author.

A SERMON, &c.

PSALM LV. 14.—*We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the House of God in company.*

MAN is a social being. In his creation God infused into his nature, the principles of rational and intellectual society. These principles are, in their nature, totally different from any thing conferred on the lower orders of animated being.

By the constitution which God has given to the irrational creatures, they are disposed to live in a *collective*, and not in a *solitary* capacity. Fishes, of the same species, croud together in shoals—Quadrupeds, herd together in droves. The feathered tribes are gregarious. But it is peculiar to man to be a *social* being. Irrational creatures assemble together, by a blind instinctive propensity of their nature. Society is predicated upon rationality, and is the property only of intelligence. It proceeds upon a moral principle, and not on

the ground, either of instinct, or mere necessity. Society, thus constitutional to man, has God himself for its author, and can no more be said to be a creature of human fabrication, than intelligence or rationality. It was God who declared *that it was not good that man should be alone;* because he had created him with a social nature.

Man is a subject of law—and being a moral agent, the law by which he is to be governed, must be a moral law. This law recognises every relation, in which man can be placed on earth. It, of course, extends its authority to society. To God, the Creator of society, we must look for its laws and regulations. And as all things were made by Jehovah for his own glory, and as his rational family are capable of actively declaring his glory, they are, therefore, under indispensible obligations to be employed in social acts of worship.

Social worship does not originate in any positive institution of a visible church, but in the constitution of man, as a rational and social being. There is no sense, in which, it is good for *the man to be alone.* All men are bound by the constitution of human nature, to worship God in their *social*, as well as in their *individual* capacity.

By the fall of man, he was rendered both incapable and unworthy, to worship God, with divine acceptance. While the obligation remains, with undiminished claims, the power,

disposition and ability are lost. Man is become a culprit, and cannot restore himself to favour. He is no longer innocent, and to make satisfaction for his guilt is absolutely out of his power. Divine Revelation opens up a way of escape. It presents a new and a living way, into the holiest of all, through the rent vail of the Mediator's flesh. The system of grace is revealed, and the Church of God is presented, as redeemed by Christ, and consecrated to the service of God, through his blood. The original and constituent principles of human nature are not eradicated, but devoted, through a new channel, to the honour of God. The social principle, purified from the corruption of the fall, is retained, and applied to its proper offices in the Church of Christ. The church is a society. She is formed upon the principle of an organic body, having a head and members. This constitution proceeds upon the ground of a covenant, embracing the head, and all the members, in a state of union and communion together. All the members united to Jesus Christ, and members one of another, walk together in love. They join their hands, for their hearts are united. *They take sweet counsel together, and walk unto the house of God in company.*

DOCTRINE.

Saints by profession, are bound to hold communion and fellowship, in the worship and service of God.

Method of Illustration.

I. Explain this Communion.

II. How far ought it to be extended.

III. Answer objections—and then conclude with some practical inferences.

I. I am to explain this Communion—

1. It is a communion of Saints. The house of God is holy, and holiness becometh it well for ever. Here the social principle is exercised in its perfection on earth. It is devoted to holy purposes, and consecrated to the Lord of the whole earth. None have a right, in the sight of God, to this holy fellowship, but *real* Saints, and none but such *really* enjoy it. Others, though they may be present, and appear to participate in the communion of the Saints, yet it is only in appearance. Externally, they draw near to God in his holy institutions, but their hearts have no concern in the solemnity. The character of such is given in Ezekiel, XXXIII. 31. "*And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.*" But those who *are* Saints, *were* once, a very different character. They were, by nature, children of wrath, even as others. How then do they obtain this character? No way but by union to Jesus Christ, through the regenerating influence of the Spirit of God. Means are generally used, but the efficiency is of God. In the day of effec-

tual working of his Holy Spirit, he lays on them an arrest of mercy. They are apprehended by Christ, and are made to apprehend him. Their understandings are enlightened, so that they are enabled to discover the certainty, the value, the excellency, the suitableness of Jesus the Saviour, to their needy case. Objective testimony is furnished. with such undoubted evidence, that they become convinced, and are verily persuaded, not only that they *may* fully and freely accept of the offered salvation, but that it is the best and the most desirable thing so to do. The will, renewed by the Holy Ghost, follows the dictate of the understanding, and actually receives the Lord Jesus Christ, appropriating him for life and salvation. This completes a mystical and indissoluble union between Christ and the believer's soul. Christ, by the bond of his spirit, unites himself to the elect sinner, in regeneration, and the sinner, effectually called, by the bond of faith unites himself to the person of the Redeemer. The believer, thus united to Christ, is in the court of heaven, sustained, as righteous. Christ and he being *one*, whatever is Christ's is reckoned to the believer. Christ's righteousness is his, and on account of that righteousness. he is justified. His name is changed from *sinner* to *saint*.*

We have said, that only such as are thus *really* Saints, are, in the sight of God, entitled to the communion and fellowship of his church.

* See note *(A)* at the end of the discourse.

But as the heart of man is known only to God—as it is his prerogative, and only his, to search the heart and try the reins, an absolute knowledge of this union to Christ, which constitutes men *really* Saints, cannot belong to this communion. Only Saints by profession, such as possess those distinctive characters which the head of the church has laid down in his word, by which we may, in the judgment of charity, know, and esteem men to be his followers. *By their works shall ye know them.* If they are sound in the faith, and have a life and conversation, such as becometh the gospel, they are to be reputed Saints, and with such, we are bound to have communion.

2. It is a communion of love and holy affections.

Not only are all Saints united to the Head Christ Jesus, but they are all united to one another in love. *They are members one of another.** They have one common interest, and they mutually seek each other's good. They are all actuated by the same spirit. They are all concerned for the honour of their glorious head. They are brethren, children of the same Father and of the same Mother. God is their Father. By him they were spirtually begotten, through the instrumentality of the word of truth.† The Church is their Mother. By her they were brought forth.‡ The spouse (the individual believer) calls the church

* Eph. IV, 25. † Jam. I, 18. ‡ Song III, 5. VIII, 2.

her *mother's house, the chambers of her that conceived her.* There are, it is true, some *mother's children,** that are not Father's children, nominal professors, who love not the real children of the family: but all who are *the children of adoption, the sons and the daughters of the Lord Almighty*—have a communion in one another's love. They seek the good of the family, and they live together in unity, as it becometh brethren. This love, and kind affection, is opposed to the *biting and devouring of one another.* It is opposed to quarrels and intestine broils, the disgrace and the ruin of every family. It is opposed to schism and divisions. Those who possess this principle of love, will cover with the mantle of charity the failings and the infirmities of their brethren. They will bear one another's burdens. They will be gentle and easy to be entreated. They will not willingly give, or take offence. But bound up in the bundle of life and of love, with the rest of the members of the household of faith, they will *take sweet counsel together, and walk to the house of God in company.*†

3. The communion of Saints embraces their gifts. In these they have a joint and mutual interest.

As all the members of the human body, belong to the body, and discharge their several functions in its behoof, so all the members of the mystical body, belong to that body, and are bound to discharge every office in their

*Song I, 6. †See note *(B.)*

power for its good. The human body, of right, demands the strength of the arm, the skill of the fingers, the motion and agility of the limbs, the hearing of the ear, the seeing of the eye, the wisdom of the tongue—all to be employed for the advantage of the body. The church—the mystical body of Christ, has similar claims upon all her members. She also of right, demands, that all the gifts which any, and all her members have received from the blessed Head, shall be employed in her service. Their ears—their eyes—their hands and feet—their tongues, and all their powers, must be devoted to the Church's interest, for to her they all belong. And as all the members are benefited by the act of one, so is it in the Church. If the eye sees the danger approaching—if the ear hears the deep laid plot for the destruction of the body or any of its members, the timely notice, is of equal advantage to every member. The tongue that successfully pleads the cause of its owner, confers an equal advantage upon the hands and the feet. In the same manner has the mystical body, and every one of its members, a joint interest—a fellowship and communion, in the gifts of any individual member. They all share in the knowledge, the judgment, the experience, and the wisdom of each other. The stock becomes common, and every one may draw upon it, without, in the smallest degree, diminishing the capital.

4. The Saints have communion in each other's graces.

Real Saints all possess the same graces. They may vary exceedingly in their exercise and degree, but not in their nature or number. They are all proper children, and have their spiritual members alike, in number and kind. These graces are bestowed for the purpose of being exercised. And not only does the exercise of grace in one of the members, by strengthening the body, thereby strengthen all the other members in consequence of their relation to the body, but the members present together, have a fellowship in the exercise of the grace of any individual member. There is a kind of spiritual sympathy, so to speak, in the exercise of faith, love, hope, patience, joy, &c. so that it is calculated to call forth corresponding affections and sensibilities of soul, in others, possessing the like principles of spiritual action.

The gracious prayer of a Saint, will be accorded in, by gracious souls, whose mouth he may be, at the throne of grace, and a fellowship and joint interest, may be enjoyed in all the social exercises of the true worshippers of God. 1. Cor. xii. 12, 13. *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.* Compare also verse 26. *And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it,*

or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Such is the unity of the body of Christ, and such the interchangeable participation amongst all its members. This leads them, with cheerfulness, to spend and be spent for each other—to engage, with pleasure, in the benevolent act of relieving each other's wants, according to their several abilities and necessities. It is relieving a member of that body to which they belong, and of which, each one forms a part.

5. This communion involves, a joint recognition of the same engagements binding to the performance of such duties, public and private, as conduce to the mutual good of the members of Christ's body mystical. Isaiah, II. 3. *And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the* LORD *from Jerusalem.* See also Heb. x. 25. *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another.* The Church embraces the social principle, in its fullest extent. All the obligations to duty, in every relation in which man is found, and all the moral engagements under which the rational family may lay themselves, are homologated by the church. And her members have a fellowship in fulfilling all these obligations and engagements. The rule of the

Church's conduct in every respect, is the moral law, in the hand of the Mediator. And all the new institutions revealed in the gospel, are ingrafted upon the moral law. The social principle is never lost sight of. As a band of brothers, as fellow labourers and good yoke fellows, the authority of the law addresses them, and calls them together to the rallying point of social worship, whether public or private, *to take the cup of salvation to call upon the name of the Lord, and to pay their vows unto the Lord, in the presence of all his people.* They are collected, as a number of grains are gathered together, and incorporated into one loaf of bread.* *For we being many, are one bread, and one body.* Feeling the force of the sacred obligations under which they are laid, they join hand in hand, in the discharge of every duty. Professing the same faith, believing the same testimony, holding the same doctrines, and offering the same prayers, they set to the same seal, and enter into the same vow in the solemn Eucharistic festivity, when, in the most intimate communion, which is exhibited or enjoyed on this side heaven, they all *eat one bread,* and are all made to *drink into one Spirit.*

II. How far ought the communion of Saints to be extended.

1. That communion of charity and sympathy, which consists in relieving the necessities of those in distress, and supplying the wants of the poor and needy, ought to be extended

* I Cor. X, 17.

to all who profess to be lovers of Jesus, and who, in their daily conversation evince, that they are his friends. It might be enquired, whether the charitable liberality and beneficence of Christians, ought not to be extended to all the needy sons and daughters of Adam, as far as in our power? And the answer, we cheerfully give, in the affirmative. It undoubtedly ought. But the claim is not of the same nature with that, which a child of God has upon you, O! believer in Jesus. Descended from the same common stock—possessing the same common nature—made of the same flesh and blood and subject to similar wants—All the offspring of Adam are brethren, whether believers in the Redeemer or not. By the common tie of kindred blood—by the indissoluble bond of *human* nature, they are more closely allied to *one another*, than they possibly can be to creatures of another kind. Their claims upon each other are peculiar also. But added to the common bond of identity of nature and kindred blood, the members of Christ's mystical body have claims upon each other, arising from the unity of that body, and the relation they bear to each other. There is an *especially* to the household of faith, because they are the household of faith. *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.**

* Gal. VI, 10.

2. To all, to whom, in the judgment of charity, we may apply the name of Christian, we ought to extend our Christian communion.

With all such, we ought, as we may have opportunity, to pray and converse about religious things. Joint craving of Heaven's blessing on the food of our table—praising God in company—united thanksgiving for the mercies of the bountiful Giver of all good, is the indispensible duty of all who name the name of Jesus, when in the course of Providence an opportunity is afforded, for such private and christian communion. All real Christians love one another. They all love Christ, and cannot but love all who bear his image. And this is the characteristic mark of all who love him—*they have his Father's name written in their foreheads.* All such will delight to mingle their voices, their hearts and affections, in religious exercises. They will speak of Christ—of the wonders of his love, and the wonders of his grace, with pleasure and delight. They will join in his praises. They will talk together in recommending him more and more. The theme is inexhaustible. They will unite in addressing him, for they love prayer, and they have one heart. One spirit actuates them.

3. But that communion which is strictly ecclesiastical,* is to be extended only to such as agree in the same terms of church

* See note *(C.)*

communion. *Can two walk together except they be agreed?** Undoubtedly they cannot. They would fall out by the way. If brethren *dwell together*, it must be *in unity*, or their character will be extremely unbecoming.

Without calling up the idea of church communion, all that are reputed Christians, may worship God together, because in their acts of worship, they are, in the main, agreed. The principal part of their worship will be prayer. In this, all Christians think and act nearly alike. They speak the same language, for they feel the same wants, they approach through the same medium, and form the same conceptions of that Great Being whom they address, and whom they love. But a visible church requires a public connection, and definite terms of communion, on which all its members agree, and on the footing of which, they appear as a consolidated body, publicly espousing the cause of their Redeemer, supporting his interest, and opposing all who are hostile to his rightful claims.

Every association of men, necessarily requires some specific articles of agreement, or principles of combination on which they associate. This forms a test of fidelity, or bond of agreement, which every individual member gives to the whole association. Having the same views, they voluntarily agree, to prosecute the same ends, by the same means.—

* Amos, III. 3.

Approving of these, and engaging faithfully to abide by them, every member is entitled to the full enjoyment of the privileges and the protection of that association. All others are, of course, excluded. These principles of association—these conditions of membership, are the *terms of communion* of that society. Now, it is not easy to see how any association, civil or religious, could exist without such regulations, or terms of membership. "They seem, indeed, to result from the very nature of society," amongst mankind. And shall we suppose, that the Church of Christ, the most precious—the most excellent—the most orderly, and the best regulated association upon earth, shall be without her specific articles of agreement—her conditions of membership, and terms of communion? Far from it. She is a visible society, and she has her bond of agreement, among her members—*Soundness in the faith and a becoming conversation.* The divine Head of the church has strictly enjoined it upon every member of this spiritual association; *earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the Saints.* JUDE, verse 3. See also 1 COR. I. 10. Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.* En-

* Eph. IV. 3, 4, 5.

deavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace—one body and one Spirit—one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And there was given me a reed like unto a rod, and the Angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.* Stand fast in one Spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel.† It is evident, from the above passages, that express and explicit terms of communion are required in the fellowship of the Christian Church. *Union* in sentiment, and *oneness* in judgment—*No divisions* but speaking the *same thing*, and *with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*, cannot by any rational and fair interpretation mean any thing less than a cordial agreement in *terms of ecclesiastical communion.* It is to ascertain this unity and oneness of judgment, that confessions of faith and testimonies in behalf of truth and in opposition to error, are necessary. These declare in what sense, those who hold communion together, understand and profess the doctrines of salvation—in what sense they *hold fast the form of sound words, and contend for the faith once delivered to the Saints*, so that they who take sweet counsel together, and walk to the house of God in company, may be of one mind and speak the same thing.

4. Ministerial communion may be extended

* Rev. XI. I. † Phil. I. 27.

to all those ministers of the gospel who agree in the same public standards, and to them only.

There is a *fellowship* in breaking the bread of life to the people of God. It is true, there is a communion in the church, common to the rulers and the ruled—to the officers and the private members. Every officer, whether civil or religious, is also a member of that Commonwealth, or Church, in which he is an officer. He stands, in some respects, in an individual or private capacity, as well as others, and in that relation, there is a communion, common to him and them. Such is the communion of church members, as such. The highest officer in the Church of God receives the ordinances of the church, administered to him, not as an officer, but as a member of the church. At the Lord's table he is a *fellow communicant*, in common with the rest, who, with him, break the bread of communion, and drink the cup of holy fellowship, "dividing them among themselves." But there is, distinct from this, a fellowship which is official—a communion, which is properly ministerial. This is peculiar to them in their official character. It is in a special manner, necessary, that they speak the same thing, and teach the same doctrine. That their prayers and instructions, shall be all regulated by one standard. They may be viewed as officers in an army, all under the authority, and subject to the orders of one commander in chief. Agree-

ment in understanding their instructions, unity of operation, and harmony in discharging their several duties, are evidently necessary. Nor will the supreme commander be satisfied with less. But the ministers of the sanctuary are all *watchmen* on Zion's walls, and it becomes them to *see*, *eye to eye*, and, indeed, this is promised, when the LORD *shall bring again Zion.* They blow the trumpet of the everlasting gospel, and must give *a distinct and certain sound.* No discordant notes, no jarring sounds must be suffered to interrupt the pleasing harmony. The ministerial office is *a unity*, and no reason can be given for dividing it. If those who bear this office, cannot hold communion together, in one part of it, they cannot, consistently, in another. Those who cannot subscribe the same terms of communion, cannot *interchange* in any part of their official or ministerial duty. The house of God is like its glorious owner, full of order, and not of confusion.

5. Judicial communion may be extended to all those officers in the church, who rule according to the laws of the house. They must be *agreed* in their views of the government of the church. The different views of church government, so far as they are reducible to any regular and systematic form, may all be classed with one or other of the three following, viz. Prelacy, Independency and Presbytery. All who maintain an official superiority and inferiority in the Christian minis-

try, dignitaries, superior orders, or grades invested with office above a preaching elder, are reducible, in their ecclesiastical regimen, to prelacy.

All who view official commissions in the church, as radically in the community at large, and refuse to any court, a power of governing or judging, in common, the several congregations belonging to the church, but that each congregation is competent, to its own self-government, independent of every other, are reducible to the system of independency.

All who maintain that the power of church discipline and government, is by the head of the church, entrusted to the office-bearers, or public, and regularly called ministry of the church, in the capacity of ruling elders, contend for Presbyterial Church government.—This is that government which Christ has appointed for his visible society on earth. The ministers of Zion, according to the express declarations of the Redeemer, stand together, upon a perfect equality. Every attempt at superiority is pointedly prohibited by the Redeemer. *Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them: But it shall not be so among you. One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.** With the teaching Presbyters, the Head of

* Mat. XX. 25, 26—and XXIII. 8.

the Church hath associated in the government of the church, other Presbyters who only rule. Their courts, inferior and superior, are appointed by the Lord of the house. How absurd to suppose, that those who hold different views and opinions about these very courts, and the kind of officers that are to compose them, could jointly sit down and hold communion together, in judicial transactions. Would not their decisions be a mass of confusion, and self-contradiction, in direct opposition to the character Christ gives of his Spouse; *I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses, in Pharaoh's chariots.**

To the doctrine thus stated, and illustrated, many objections are made. In head III. we shall notice some of the most plausible.

Obj. 1. There is no such limitation of communion "so much as noticed in the word of God." Why did not Christ, or his Apostles, caution "against the peril of a free communion, among all who are visible Christians?" The only term of communion authorized by Christ in the New Testament, is "visible Christianity."†

Ans. 1. What is taught in scripture, is of equal authority, whether it be stated expressly in so many words, or indirectly, and by necessary consequence. An argument for explicit terms, in admitting to the communion of the church, may be fairly drawn from the com-

* Song I. 9. † See Dr. Mason's Plea for Sac. Com. p. p. 37, 307.

mission given to the Apostles, by their risen Lord.* He authorized them to administer the seals of the new covenant. But he, at the same time, gave it in charge to them, to accompany the administration of these seals, with the instructing of the nations in the knowledge of the truth. Not merely that truth, or those few truths, that may be called fundamental, or essential, but all the different articles of his revealed will. *Teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you* Was not this really a term of communion, as extensive as that contended for in the doctrine objected to? And will any venture to affirm, that the Apostles administered the seals of the covenant without any engagement to this requisition?

2. The conduct of the Apostles confirms the doctrine of explicit terms of communion. Baptism and the Lord's Supper alike embrace, and seal the communion of the church. We shall examine their conduct in relation to both.

On the memorable day of Pentecost, when, after the hearing of Peter's sermon, the hearers cried out, *what shall we do?* The term of admission to the privilege of baptism, and of course, to the communion of the church, was *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*† It is unnecessary to explain all this.

* Mat. XXVIII. 20. † Acts, II. 38.

The sum of it is this, embrace the Christian Religion in all its doctrines—On this footing, you shall be admitted to the communion of the Church of Christ, and receive the seals of his covenant. They who complied with the terms laid down, were taken into communion—verse 41. *Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized.* How extensive this expression, *his word?* How much of divine truth does it comprehend? Does it exclude any articles of revealed truth? We never contended for more than this.

Let us consider the Ethiopian Eunuch.* After Philip, the Evangelist, had preached unto him an excellent gospel sermon, and explained to him the true nature of the Messiah, and that Jesus of Nazareth was he, the Eunuch expressed a desire to be baptized. Philip proposed to him a simple but comprehensive term of communion. *If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest.* This proposition reduplicated upon all that Philip had preached, and embraced an acknowledgment of all revealed truth, known to the Eunuch. His answer plainly supposes this. *I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.*

The same doctrine is exemplified and confirmed in the case of Cornelius, the centurion, and those that were with him. *Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*† This

* Acts, VIII. 27—39. † Acts, X. 33.

was a willing and cheerful acquiescence, in the truth, the whotle truth taught by the Apostle, so soon as it was made known to them. Thus instructed, and thus professing their faith in the Redeemer, and submission to his law, they were baptized. "This was visible Christianity," an excellent term of communion.*

Nor were the Apostles less pointed and explicit, in their terms of admission to the Lord's Supper. *Continuing stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine*, is inseparably connected with the church's *fellowship and breaking of bread.*† Such was the Apostle's zeal that the communion of the church should be kept pure and harmonious, according to the *truth of the gospel*—the test, or term of communion, and that the *truth might continue* with the brethren, that to such as did not submit unto it, he would not *give place by subjection, no not for an hour.*‡ From which, it is abundantly evident, that the communion of the church, as limited, as that for which we plead, was that which was enjoined by Christ and his Apostles, and practised in the earliest period of the Christian Church.

Obj. 2. "Every church refusing to hold communion with another, does, by that fact, declare herself to be too pure for such communion, i. e. that such communion would contaminate her in the eyes of her God, and bring down upon her the tokens of his dis-

* See note *(D.)* † Acts, II. 42. ‡ Gal. II. 4, 5.

pleasure." And "before she venture upon such high and dangerous ground, she must be *very sure* of her own pretensions, *very sure* that the mantle of her excluding zeal does not cover offences against the Lord her God, quite as provoking as those which she charges upon others—that there is no place for the Jewish proverb, *Physician heal thyself.*"*

Ans. The spirit of this objection is, that refusing to hold communion, with all churches, who may be churches of Christ, whatever may be their defections or errors, betrays a spirit of supercilious self-importance, and that a church must be perfectly pure—no place for the proverb, *Physician heal thyself*, before she dare withhold her communion from any other church of Christ, however erroneous.

This objection will, no doubt, be popular. It is addressed, not to the *understanding*, but to the *feelings* of Christians. And there are many more who are actuated by feeling, than those who are governed by understanding and judgment.

But let us examine it more closely. "Every Church," says the objector, "refusing to hold communion with another, does, by that fact, declare herself to be too pure for such communion." And, therefore, would be acting wrong. This must be the conclusion, or where is the force of the argument? Whatever, therefore, would declare us "too pure for

* Plea for Sac. Com. p. 301.

communion," with any, must be wrong.—And this is further illustrated, by stating, that "there must be no place for the Jewish proverb, *Physician heal thyself*, i. e. we must be altogether perfect; nothing, with which, in the court of conscience, we may charge ourselves, before we refuse communion with any. This would, at once, put an end to all church censure, unless we could find men to inflict the censure, to whom the proverb would in no way apply. Such men, it is presumed, will not soon be found. A real Christian may fall into scandal. We cannot, it is true, judge the heart. But not unfrequently is it the case, that men are left, in the providence of God, to fall into scandal, whom, the judgment of charity may, nevertheless, allow to be real Christians. And must we really hold communion with such, unless there be no place for the application of the proverb to us, *Physician heal thyself?* Surely, our own purity, or impurity, is not the rule of duty. *Whatsoever I have commanded you*, is the rule, and the only rule. The Head of the church had a right to give the law, and his authority, and not our own purity, is the formal ground of our obedience.

But after all, where would be the impropriety of doing as we are commanded, even though it should say, "we were too pure for such communion." There is some communion, for which, we really ought to be too pure. When Joseph said to his mistress,

How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God, it might have been retorted to him, in the language of the objection, "You declare by this, that you are too pure for this communion, you would need to be *very sure* of your own pretensions, before you venture upon such high and dangerous ground." Assuredly he ought to have been *very sure* of his own pretensions. But if he had not—if he had not been able to say, "there is no place for the proverb, *Physician heal thyself*," would that have justified him in complying?—For surely the objection carries this idea, if there is impurity about you both, you *ought to hold communion together*. Any thing like a divine command, as the rule of obedience, is kept entirely out of view. It may be objected to all this, that the case is not in point, because compliance in Joseph's case, would have been a sin. Granted, it would have been a sin. But the communion pled for in the objection, would be no sin. Whether is that fact, or begging the question?

Obj. 3. "To refuse communion with a church, or with her members, is, in effect, to unchurch her, and to declare that she is no church, and that her members are no followers of Jesus Christ—it can be viewed as nothing less than an *excommunication* in disguise."*

Ans. 1. It might be, perhaps, a sufficient answer to this objection, to say, *Non valet conse-*

* Plea, p. 302.

quentia. The conclusion is not contained in the premises. But let us hear the argument. For to assert that *it is not*, or that *it is*, may be alike a begging the question.

It is enquired, by the objector, "What is excommunication, (the heaviest penalty in the Kingdom of God) but a judicial exclusion from the communion of the church, on account of the unworthiness of the excommunicated."* Now, it does not appear, how these *other churches* and their members, can be subjects of *judicial* cognizance, in any church, to whom they are not accountable, and who have no jurisdiction over them. By the hypothesis, the one is *without* the communion of the other. But excommunication is "a judicial exclusion from the communion of the church." It is not perceived, how those could be *cast out* of communion, who had not been *in* communion. Nor does it appear that withholding communion, from those *not in* our communion, is an unchurching, or excommunicating them. But an explanation is given by the objector, "a judicial exclusion from the communion of the church, on account of the *unworthiness* of the excommunicated; i. e. the *unlawfulness* of holding communion with them." The precise idea of the objector does not readily occur.—What is the word *unlawfulness* intended to explain? From the word *unworthiness* being also put in italics, it would appear that *unlawfulness* is explanatory of it. But the unwor-

* Plea, page 302.

thiness of the excommunicated, is not the unlawfulness of holding communion with them, though it may be a reason for its being unlawful to hold communion with them. Nor can "the unlawfulness of holding communion with them," be exegetical of the whole sentence, though it may be a result from it.—For a "judicial exclusion from," &c. and "the unlawfulness of holding communion," do not identify. What then can be intended by this confusion of ideas—even of language itself? Is it argument? Certainly not. Is it with a design that it *may* "*draw deep*"—that it may alarm the religious feelings of weak, but pious minds? The mere refusing to admit to the communion table, Christians who do not believe our creed, and, whose creed we do not believe, is represented as the same thing, with the most awful deed of the church judicative. An exclusion from the visible church—a delivering over to Satan—a separating the wretched outcast from the holy walks of Mount Zion, to wander unblessed and cheerless in the unhallowed grounds of the world's common—the same thing, as to declare this, perhaps, Christian brother, a blasphemer and a profligate.*

And does the fact of *not admitting* to the Lord's table a Christian, who cannot agree with our terms of communion, say all this? Would your declining to receive to your family

* "What more can they do to the blasphemer and the profligate?" *Plea for Sac. Com. p.* 303.

table, a person who would willingly participate with you, or your refusal to partake with a respectable neighbour, when invited by him, say, that you counted such men the vilest of characters? It is not pretended, by this, that the tables are alike, but that the principle is the same, and if the consequence—the "therefore," follow in the one case, it will in the other. But it is refused that it would fairly and legitimately follow in either. And such, also, appears to be the judgment of the objector himself, when he says, that "a church, in her collective capacity, does not *withdraw herself* from communion with an offender; she *authoritatively puts him away* from her communion."*

So it seems, after all, that the mere withholding from communion, is a very different thing, from authoritatively *putting away*, or judicial excommunication. Indeed, no man who would seriously and coolly reason, could so "gamble with his own understanding—as to adopt such a monstrous "*therefore*,"† that because the church withholds her communion from those who do not agree with her terms of communion—*therefore* she excommunicates them—because she lets them alone, *therefore* she draws the sword against them!

Obj. 4. All Christians are agreed, or nearly so, in their views of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; why then, may they not take this *family meal* together? All Christians,

* Plea for Sac. Com. p. 337. † Ibid. p. 340.

whatever may be their creed, have a common interest in the provision which Christ has appointed, for the nutriment, growth and consolation of his body, and all have a right to *shew forth his death till he come.*

Ans. This is, perhaps, the most specious and imposing of all the objections that are made to a limited communion. It requires to be particularly examined.

1. It may be proper to enquire into the nature of this ordinance, as it respects the church. It is not only a seal of the covenant of grace, but as every sacrament must be, it is, also, a seal of church membership and of church privileges. There is no more intimate pledge, of the fullest communion, in God's visible covenant society upon earth It is an oath of fidelity to the Christian's King, that all who thus eat and drink together, do sacramentally pledge themselves, that they will co-operate as a band of brothers, in faithfully promoting his interest. That they will defend his honour, and earnestly contend for all his rights. It surely then, behoves them to be agreed about that honour, and about those rights. Otherwise, they might oppose one another, and be obliged to testify against one another, in relation to this very subject. Would this be to drink into one spirit?

2. Union in the Lord's Supper, declares, a union in our views of doctrine and church order—of the great principles of our faith and duty; otherwise, it is an *unprincipled* commu-

nion.* *For we being many, are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread. Are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?*†

3. The communion pled for in the objection, is deficient in relation to the qualifications required in the word of God. *Open ye, the gates, that the righteous nation* WHICH KEEPETH THE TRUTH *may enter in.*‡ The gates of the church's communion must be opened to the righteous nation that keepeth the truth. The pure church of Christ, are not only Saints, a *righteous nation*, but they also bear testimony faithfully for truth—all truth, in opposition to error. They *keep the truth*. Men may be Christians, and not *keep* the truth, all the truth. The hundred and forty-four thousand that are with the Lamb on Mount Zion, are saved sinners, yet they are not the *two witnesses* that prophecy in sackcloth.§ They are not testimony bearers, as the two witnesses are.

4. There is an absurdity in admitting to the most intimate communion of the church, those, over whom, that church has no controul. Not being subject to the judicatories of the church, whose communion they have shared; discipline, should there be afterwards need to exercise it, must be entirely lost, as to them. For, according to the objection they belong to a family in the church, over whom

* See note *(E.)* † 1 Cor. X. 17—18. ‡ Isai. XXVI. 2. § Rev. XIV. 1—5. XI. 3—12.

the administrators of this communion, have no official power. The subject is without their jurisdiction, and they cannot judge him.

5. This communion is self-contradictory. The parties are of different communions. They have previously pledged themselves to *different public* creeds. Yet at the sacramental table they declare that they are *one—One bread, and drinking into one spirit.* At that moment their hearts belie their public profession. They arise from the communion table, and immediately take up, each his own creed, and declare their *union a farce.* Or else they mutually recognise each other's creed—the same from which they differ! Can any thing be more contradictory?

This self-contradiction will further appear in the article of testimony-bearing. Those that are faithful in the house of God, are witnesses for him. *Ye are my witnesses saith the Lord.** It is the business of a witness to give testimony. His witnesses bear testimony in behalf of truth and in opposition to error.—They testify against the enemies of God, as enemies, and against his unfaithful friends, because *they are to be blamed* for their unfaithfulness. There are, sometimes, such corruptions so interwoven with the constitutions of churches, and so conspicuous in their daily administrations, that we are obliged, if we would

* Isa. XLIII. 10.

be faithful, to lift up a testimony against them. But how self-contradictory must it be, to join in the most intimate union and fellowship with those against whom we are holding up a testimony, because of their unfaithfulness! Where is our testimony in the moment of communion? Are we then *ceasing to hear the instruction that causeth to err?**

6. Much stress is laid, in this objection, on the *right* which all believers have, to commemorate the death of their Redeemer.—Sometimes the *right* is represented as *a privilege*, sometimes as *a duty*, and either way it is thought a most formidable objection.

It is granted, that the idea, both of privilege and duty, is contained in a right. As a privilege, the argument is taken, *wholly* from the *fact* of their being Christians. Being children, they have a right to the children's bread. But this shifting the ground of church fellowship, from an agreement in the faith and practice of true religion, to the supposed Christianity of men, will be found a dangerous experiment. Indeed, it is sometimes granted by the objectors themselves, that the mere *fact* of Christianity is not enough. For it seems, that Noah, and Lot, and David, and Peter, though admitted to be children of God, yet at some periods of their lives, would not have been entitled to the children's bread, even while they retained the

* Prov. XIX. 27.

seed of God, or in other words, they would not have been entitled to the full communion of the church.* They admit that "Christianity of the heart, unattested by Christianity of the mouth, in a good confession, and of the life, in fruit unto holiness, is to the Church no Christianity at all."

The ground pled for then, is simply this, that those, whose profession of faith is according to the *pattern shewed in the Mount*, and whose conversation is such *as becometh the Gospel*, are entitled to communion. And to the admission of such characters, it is confidently believed, no advocate for the most limited terms of communion, would have the least objection.

Nor is it perceived that the objection is more formidable, when viewed as a *duty*. It is asked—"Is it, or is it not the *duty* of Christians in all true churches to shew forth the Lord's death in the Sacrament of the Supper?"† And to this we unhesitatingly answer, it is not only the duty of "Christians in all true churches, to shew forth the Lord's death in the Sacrament of the Supper," but it is also the duty of all who are *not Christians*, but living in a Christian land, and who are in possession of the exercise of their rational powers, even the most ungodly, profane, mockers of religion—the vilest of the vile, to shew forth the Lord's death in the Sacra-

* Plea for Sac. Com. p. 321. † Plea, &c. p. 20.

mental Supper. It does not appear that their wickedness can loose them from obligation. And the Redeemer enjoins it upon all to whom these presents come, as they may have opportunity, to do this in remembrance of him. They are not only bound by his authority to do this, but they must also do it *as he has commanded.* All men have a right to do right. But no man can have a right to do wrong. If an allowance to do wrong, in something or other, be not pled for by the objector, what doth the reasoning prove? All will surely grant, that all men have a right to do their duty.*

Obj. 5, is taken from our Confession of Faith, Chap. XXVI. Sect. 2. "Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those, who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus."

Ans. 1. It is certainly a fact, that the Scriptures referred to, as proofs, by the Compilers of the Westminster Confession, evidently apply to relieving the wants, and contributing to the necessities of the Saints. But,

2. Let it be applied to the communion of the church in sealing ordinances, which very probably was the meaning of the Compilers of the Confession, then this "calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus," will be either according to the manner he has appointed to be done, in his own institutions

* See note *(F.)*

and ordinances, or it will not. If the former, we have no objection. This is precisely what we contend for. If the latter, which would be a breach of the laws of God, it is firmly believed, that our Westminster Divines never did intend any such communion.

Obj. 6. "It is our duty to heal the divisions and breaches that are in the Christian church, but to forbid occasional communion among the churches, which hold the head and agree in fundamentals, instead of healing, tends to widen the breaches, and keep professed Christians apart."

Ans. 1. That the breaches and divisions in Zion, shall be healed, is promised of God, and it is criminal to keep the churches unnecessarily apart. It is our duty to pray earnestly for their healing, and use all *lawful* means in our power, to promote such a desirable effect.

But it is humbly presumed, that occasional communion among those who entertain different creeds, would be to heal them *slightly*, which is severely reproved by the Lord. *For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, peace, peace; when there is no peace.** It is impossible that there can be any salutary healing, until those churches, who have either denied, or refused to own, any article of divine truth, shall be brought to see, and acknowledge, that they have, thereby wounded the Redeemer's inter-

* Jer. VIII. 11.

est and glory. And until those who have already made unnecessary divisions, shall be disposed to return and retrace their foot-steps.

On this subject, the mother truly may complain; but the children whom she has brought up, and who have rebelled against her, have cause to be ashamed.

2. That the churches shall all be one, *i. e.* shall all agree, in the same terms of communion, we have reason to believe will assuredly be the case in the glorious Millennium, but not before it. Until that time the *two witnesses will be finishing their testimony*, against the anti-christian apostacy.* And until they shall have finished it, there will be something to testify against, in relation to that which constitutes their character. They are called *two*, not only because the law of God requires, at least, that number, to establish a testimony, but also because they testify in behalf of God's *two* cardinal ordinances—*a scriptural magistracy and a gospel ministry*,† which antichrist is endeavouring universally to corrupt. The plan of universal healing, therefore, sooner than according to prophecy we have a right to expect it, will be rather a jumbling together of discordant bodies, than a communion of those who profess one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

We are informed of a certainty, that in the immediate dominions of antichrist—the western Roman empire, during the whole time

* See note *(G.)* † See note *(H.)*

of his reign, the *two witnesses* shall be a distinct body, not only from the world that lieth in wickedness, but likewise from the hundred and forty-four thousand, who are also christians, for they are *with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and have his Father's name written on their foreheads.* But these do not, like the two witnesses, *torment* and irritate the men that dwell upon the earth, by testifying against them.—They consequently do not subject themselves to suffering, as the witnesses do. Now, as similar causes produce similar effects, there may be found in other countries, that are not the immediate territories of the anti-christian empire, christians who espouse the same testimony with the witnesses, and are in full communion with them. They will find the men of the world, as well as temporizing christians, actuated by the same spirit every where. And like the *woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, on whose head is the crown of twelve stars*, where antichrist claims his kingdom, they will be obliged to remain in the *wilderness*, denying themselves the privileges and the smiles of the city, until the *forty and two months are fulfilled.* But how is this consistent with the universal amalgamation into one communion (even though it should be only occasional) of all who are called, or professed christians? Where then are the witnesses?

3. "Holding the head," and "agreeing in fundamentals," or "essentials," is resorted to

on all occasions, by the advocates for what is called a free or catholic communion.

It is freely granted, that there are, in the system of grace, some things of greater relative importance than others—some things, the knowledge and belief of which, are essential to the very *being* of christians; while others are not. And it would, certainly, be highly improper to consider all these as equally *fundamental.* But it does not appear, how the distinction comes to have any weight in this argument.

It is not a dispute about the comparative importance of *fundamental truths*, or whether every truth revealed, should be known and acknowledged, or not. The question is about the maintaining, or refusing, some of these truths when they are known. Whether any of them be of so little importance—so circumstantial, that we may admit to the communion of the church, those who deny them? And for our own part, we hesitate not to confess ourselves on the unpopular side.

We cannot believe that we are at liberty to set aside, or nullify any law, or doctrine of Jehovah, because it is of comparatively less importance than some others. The pins of the tabernacle, were not to be compared to the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat, or the cherubims of beaten gold; yet was not Moses at any more liberty to deviate from the pattern, in the making of a pin, than in preparing the furniture of the holy of holies. In Ezra 1,

9—11, we are informed that Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah, brought up from Babylon, after the captivity, "nine and twenty knives," which belonged to the sacred vessels of the house of the Lord. This is a fact of comparatively little value, and thousands of sinners may have been saved by the blood of Jesus, who never knew, during the whole course of their lives, that such a fact had taken place.—But supposing a man who knew that this fact was recorded in the Bible, would deny the truth of it, and declare that the writer was an impostor, and that such a relation was utterly unfit for divine revelation; how then? Was he still fit for communion, supposing him to deny no fundamental truth? Again, we could suppose a christian man, who did not know that when David uttered the dreadful imprecatory prayer, *Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand—Let his days be few, and let another take his office, &c.** that the Holy Ghost, in that passage, spake of Judas Iscariot.† And yet his not knowing that truth, which is of minor importance, compared with the declaration, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—the only saviour of sinners, might comport with *his holding the head.* But suppose, after he knew this, he would still insist, David here indulges a malicious and vindictive spirit—The language and the sentiment, are contrary to the spirit of the New Testament, and consequently unworthy

* Psalm CIX. 6—19. † Acts I, 16.

of God, and unfit to be sung in his praises; is the man still fit for communion? Yet in neither of these cases, has any one of those truths called *fundamental*, been denied; while in both cases, the persons have gone over to the camp of deism.

There is a deception practised upon less knowing, though well meaning christians, by employing the reasoning of the objection, to justify the prevailing, but it seems, unwarrantable practice of occasional communion, amongst those who are far from being agreed in their articles of faith. Still the idea of our being imperfect creatures—knowing but in part—the things contended for, being of little moment, and the like, are made the ostensible ground, while the true spirit of the objection is, that there are *some truths* of God that are of so little moment, that we may believe them or not, according to circumstances*—*Some commands of Jehovah*, possessing so little obligation, that we may obey, or not obey them at pleasure! How unlike the injunction of our ascended Lord, *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*†—

Obj. 7. A limited communion is contrary to the practice of the church, as it existed in the Apostles' days—contrary to the practice of the primitive church, which immediately succeeded the days of the Apostles; and contrary to the practice of the churches of the reformation.‡

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* See note *(I.)* † Mat. XXVIII. 30. ‡ Plea, &c. p. 27.

Ans. The practice of the Apostles in receiving members to the fellowship and communion of the church, has already been considered, in answering the first objection;* and it has been found to give no countenance to the modern Catholicism in communion, so strenuously contended for in this objection. It may be further observed that there is no parallelism between the state of the church *then* and *now*, in relation to the article of dispute. The Redeemer had organized, before his ascension, the New Testament church. He had given commission to the extraordinary officers, who were then necessary in her peculiar condition, and authorised and instructed them to settle her ecclesiastical polity. The idea of distinct churches, with distinct or separate communions, had then no place. All was predicated upon the ground of the *one* church of Christ, with *one* and the *same* doctrines and terms of communion. Whatever differences might spring up among individual members, or societies in that communion, never affected their standing as a church. The peculiarities, if erroneous, were corrected; if indifferent, they were borne with; if heretical, scandalous, or immoral, after suitable discipline had been previously exercised, without producing the desired effect, they were excommunicated.—So it ought to be in all communions.

But the church, at present, is far different in her visible appearance, from what she was in

* See page 25—27.

the Apostles' days. There are now separate churches, with their separate creeds and terms of communion. It ought not to be so. There is a fault somewhere. Who made the divisions?—But so it is. As this was not the case in the Apostolical church, reasoning from the one to the other is inconsequential and sophistical.

2. The case of the primitive church is of the same nature. The same principle of unity in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, which pervaded the Apostolical church, operated to a certain degree, in the primitive church which succeeded it, after the death of the Apostles.

It is true, that departures in some things, soon began to take place. Occasional inroads were made on the simplicity and purity of scripture doctrines and institutions. Indeed, these had begun to shew themselves, even in the Apostles' days.

But let it be remembered, the church was still one great family. Her terms of communion appear to have been the same. The departures were made by members who had regularly belonged, or had been introduced, to that family. And it would not have been proper, rashly to have withheld from them the family benefits, even when, in some things, they were not acting altogether according to the family order. Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, dwells with earnestness upon the *unity* of the faith, and represents the church, however widely scattered, still as one family,

and as if inhabiting a single house. Such too, appear to have been the ideas of Cyprian, and indeed, of all the early fathers of the primitive church.

But now we have churches formed out of churches; independent communions, with their peculiar creeds and tenets, differing widely from one another—And shall all these, in spite of their discordant principles, and jarring terms of communion, claim to themselves the unity of the Apostolical, or even the primitive churches?

3. The churches of the reformation are supposed to be hostile in their practice, to a limited communion. The sentiments and the conduct of the early reformers, and the confessions of faith of all the reformed churches, are vigorously pressed into the services of modern Catholicism, in the article of communion.*—Let it, however, be considered, that there is also here a want of parallelism between their case, and that which it is brought to support. They were all emerging from Popery. They were making their escape from superstition, despotism and tyranny. It behoved them, as far as in their power, mutually to co-operate in the struggle against the common foe. Is there any fair reasoning from the case of a people emerging from darkness, and in the act of reforming from gross superstition, to that of a people who have long enjoyed the blessings of that reformation—the ancient system regene-

* See note *(K.)*

rated—their confession of faith adopted, and the whole form of their ecclesiastical polity, established according to the word of God?—Certainly not.

Still it is urged, that the reformed churches, notwithstanding their different confessions of faith, held occasional communion with each other; and consequently, if we withhold communion from christians differing from us, we contradict their practice.

But still the cases are not parallel—nor were the reformers correct in every thing. The reformed churches were generally, what were called *National churches*, and acted upon the ground of civil establishments of religion.—The principle of the church's unity in all the nations of the earth, was not duly appreciated, by the majority of the early reformers. The struggle in which they were engaged—the difficulties they had to encounter—the dangers to which they were exposed—the want of opportunities for mutual consultation; together with the worldly policy of the civil rulers who joined them, and by whom they were in some measure protected, had a tendency to divert their minds from sufficiently attending to this principle, in the formation of their ecclesiastical systems. Happy would it have been for the church, had all the reformers possessed such accurate views of her unity as did the great John Calvin. His comprehensive mind embraced this subject in all its bearings. But

his excellent plan for consolidating all the friends of the reformation, in every country, into *one church*, was unhappily frustrated.—The great body of the reformers, confined their views of uniformity to their own country. In concert with the civil authorities, the officers of the church laboured to obtain a uniformity in religion, in the kingdoms or nations to which they respectively belonged, as if the church in their district had been the whole church of Christ on earth.

The ministry were too inattentive to the church's independency of the civil governments; while the civil rulers, taking advantage of this, endeavoured to make the church, in her external form, a creature of state policy, and but too far succeeded. Hence their ecclesiastical constitutions, and confessions, instead of preserving that unity which ought to subsist, among the different branches of one great family—were, in a great measure, moulded into the frame of the respective civil governments where they were made. Their ecclesiastical standards respectively, became the bond of their own internal communion—while, as separate and independent governments, they held a friendly correspondence. They did not condemn each other's establishments, nor did they view their respective confessions of faith as erroneous. They admitted also an occasional communion with each other, according to circumstances. This communion, however, was rather *external* than *internal.*

But had their views of unity been never so correct, and should this communion be admitted, in the utmost latitude in which they practised it, it affords not the least countenance to the kind of communion, which it is called to support. The communion pled for in the objection, is not that external communion which subsisted among the different churches of the reformation; but an internal communion, between a church who has adopted certain standards, and those around her who do *not agree* with these standards; and even such as have organized themselves on an entirely different plan, provided, she can in the judgment of charity, believe them to be pious. In order to make the practice of the reformers, and the churches of the reformation bear upon the question, it should be shewn, that in their respective organized churches, they admitted to communion those *among themselves*, who, in the judgment of charity, were to be esteemed pious, notwithstanding, they disagreed with their established order, opposed their confession of faith, and had an organized system of their own, in some things entirely opposite to the confession and order of those who admitted them. Precedents of this description, it is apprehended, will not easily be found.

We conclude with some practical inferences.

1. The social principle in man is most honourably and usefully exercised in the communion of the church. Here, indeed, it is enno-

bled, for it is engaged in acts of fellowship with the Divine Head himself, and with his precious members, whom he hath purchased with his blood, and who are the jewels of his crown. Let us ever bear in mind, that it is a holy fellowship—a communion of saints.

It concerns every one to know the character, and the distinguishing marks, of the true church of Christ. And knowing these, let the resolution forthwith be formed, *I shall be there.* Deplorable is the condition of those, who despise the membership, and make light of the fellowship of the church of God—who never could say, in the spiritual exercise of the social principle, *we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company.*—Such are strangers to God's covenant mercy. Their moral and social principles are low and groveling, unuseful and unhonoured, vile and polluted. The High Priest hath looked upon them, and pronounced them unclean. *Without are dogs.* Let us earnestly desire to be *within* the sanctuary of the house of the Lord.

But a mere name will profit little. Saul was found once and again among the prophets, but he was Saul still. Judas was once numbered with the Apostles, and had a name among the disciples, but he was entirely destitute of the grace of that gospel which he preached, and a total stranger to the spirit of a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

Let us ascertain the character of a real and genuine member of the house of the Lord. He

is one who is united to Christ. He holds the head, because the Head hath taken hold of him. He is conformed to the Head, for the spirit of Jesus dwells in him. He loves the brethren, because he beholds in them the image, into which he himself is moulded.—He loves the house of God, and desires to be conformed to its laws, and to seek its good. He admires the beautiful order, symmetry and proportion of this house. He sees it to be a *building fitly framed.* He desires to maintain a character becoming those who dwell in the house of the Lord. And all is holy about it. *Holiness becometh thine house,* O LORD *for ever.* The communion is a holy communion. The members are *called to be saints,* and they answer the end of their holy calling. A principle of holiness is infused into their hearts. Their exercises are of a pure and holy nature. Here is the perfection of the social principle on earth. They unite in a holy song, and with one heart, and with one voice they praise the Lord, the King. Behold the goodly assembly! It is an holy convocation. It is the communion of saints, in the house of wine. They sit at the King's table, and the King sits with them, and they eat and drink in his presence. They see his face, and they hear the gracious words that proceed out of his mouth. What a blessed family! God is their Father—Jesus is their elder Brother, and he is *the brightness of the Father's glory,* and in him they behold the beauty of the Lord—*the light*

of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! One thing have I desired of the LORD, *that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the* LORD *all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the* LORD, *and to enquire in his temple.*

2. The revealed will of God is the rule of extension in the fellowship of the church.—*How can two walk together except they be agreed?* The members of the church must *all drink into one spirit.* Our own views, feelings or affections, must not guide us in the communion of the church of Christ. We walk by a rule. We must be careful not to make laws for the Lawgiver, but humbly learn his law, and do as we are commanded. We must never forget the principle of unity that pervades the church of Christ, and this we must hold, even though we should be obliged to *withdraw from a brother walking disorderly.* We must *all speak the same thing. We must be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaoh's chariots.* We must beware of indulging in plans and inventions of our own, or in those of others, having a specious pretension to more catholicism, liberality and charity, than others; lest be we found like David placing the ark of God *on a new cart,* instead of *the shoulders of the Levites. Behold, to obey is better than*

sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams.

The time is fast hastening on, when divisions shall be at an end—when all shall be one, according to divine appointment—the time when there shall be *one* LORD *and his name one—one* LORD, *one faith, one baptism.* But let us not go before God, and anticipate the promise. *He that believeth, shall not make haste. And Sarai said unto Abram, behold now the* LORD *hath restrained me from bearing, I pray thee go in unto my maid.** Let us not try to force the millennium before the time, lest the seed should not be the child of promise—*Ishmael* and not *Isaac.* Let us, with a firm reliance upon God's promise, wait his own time, and not "go out of the way of duty, to catch at expected mercy."

3. It is highly criminal to do any thing, that would unjustly, or unnecessarily mar the communion, or interrupt the fellowship of the church of God. The silken cords that bind the members of the sacred family together, should not rashly be broken. *Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.—Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*† They must answer it to God, who tear the bowels of the church of Christ without a cause. We are commanded to *plead with our mother*, and to plead again.‡ Nor may any leave the com-

* Gen. XVI. 2. † Rom. XVI. 17. ‡ Hos. II. 2.

munion of the church of Christ, any where, so long as they may remain in it without sin.

It becomes us also to beware of doing any thing that may grieve the generation of the righteous, or *cause a weak brother to offend.* The strong are bound to bear with the weak, yea even with *their infirmities.* To the weak many things are scruples of conscience, that to the strong are mere matters of indifference. How unchristian, then—how cruel must it be, in those who wound the conscience of a weak brother, in a matter which they themselves admit to be a thing indifferent. "But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."* To the strong, it is a matter of indifference—to the weak it is a scruple of conscience, and that too, on account of his weakness. Who then should bear? Doubtless, the strong.

Love is the great cement of union. Let brotherly love continue. Let it be without dissimulation. Let us be kindly affectioned one to another. We are brethren. We are travelling together to the heavenly Canaan.—Let us remember the charge of Joseph to his brethren, "See that ye fall not out by the way." "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Let us not grieve the hearts of the people

* I. Cor. VIII. 12—13.

of God, by a conversation unbecoming the gospel.

When a professed member of the family of Christ unfits himself for the communion of that family, it makes the hearts of the children sad. The enemies exclaim in triumph, *Art thou become as one of us?* Religion receives a wound by the hand of a professed friend—the enemies of the LORD are furnished with *great occasion to blaspheme*, and *the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.* A scandal is brought upon the church, and the sweet counsel of the family is interrupted, by a member having rendered himself unclean. "For, thus saith the LORD GOD of Israel, there is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you."

4. It becomes us in the communion and fellowship of the church, to be witnesses for Christ our LORD. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD." "I will give power to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth." We are called to be witnesses, both for the sweetness of the counsel enjoyed in the house of God—in the communion of saints, and for the correctness and scriptural order of that communion."

The world are witnesses against him. They say, in effect, "there is no sweetness in the

counsel which they take together, who go to the house of God in company." Believer in Jesus, you know better. You know they are false witnesses. You can, by sweet experience, say, and you will not withhold your testimony, "He brought me into the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." "This is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven." You love the house, and the order of the house. You are pleased with the goings out, and the comings in thereof, and all the laws thereof. You have never found the Master of the house an austere man, or a hard master. On the contrary, his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. You willingly bore your ear to the door posts of his house, and engage to be his servant forever.

We must also be witnesses for the correctness and scriptural order of the communion of the house of God. For this we must contend, and evidence it in our practice. Let us then seek that communion, where there is a true and faithful testimony for Christ, as *King of Saints, and King of Nations.* Let us be witnesses for a scriptural magistracy and a gospel ministry, these two cardinal ordinances of God, and both in the hand of the Redeemer—As governing his own house by his own ecclesiastical laws and ordinances, and as having civil government in his hand to execute all its laws, and make it subservient to the interests of

Zion. For the sake of his body, the church, he is made head over all things, and all power in heaven and on earth is delivered unto him. He rules the nations—he sits on the throne of his holiness. He sways a sceptre of righteousness over the concerns of the universe, for the sake of Zion *the perfection of beauty.* And that he may perfect the things that concern his church, in the administration of Providence, "he puts down one, and sets another up." "He shall remove the diadem, and take off the crown; exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. He shall overturn, overturn, overturn, and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is, and he will give it him."*

5. This subject calls upon us to bewail the divisions, that prevent the children of God from taking sweet counsel together, and going to the house of God in company. Alas! for our sins, "the great Shepherd hath cut asunder his staff, even bands, that he might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel." Let us grieve for the *afflictions of Joseph*, and for the *divisions of Reuben*, let there be *great searchings of heart.* Let us earnestly pray that the Lord would heal all our breaches.—Let us also use all lawful endeavours, that they may be speedily and effectually healed. While we lament that the attempts that are generally made, are only to heal the wound of

* Ezek. XXI. 26—27.

the daughter of Zion slightly, and to say peace, peace, when there is no peace.

Yet, let us be encouraged. The time is not far distant, when Zion shall arise, and put on her beautiful garments, and glorious things shall once more be spoken of the city of the LORD. The time is fixt. Jesus hath declared the decree. In due time it shall bring forth. The LORD hath spoken, and himself will bring it to pass. "He will yet turn to his people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, and serve him with one consent."

"The watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion." It is but a little while, until every impediment shall be removed, and every obstruction taken out of the way. And the LORD shall give his people *one heart* and *one way*. As there is but one LORD, so there shall be but one faith and one baptism.—"Then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more." "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk." "The LORD will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof, and will raise up his ruins, and will build it as in the days of old." "Thou, O LORD. shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favour her, yea the set time, is come." "Sing,

O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it:—Shout, ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel."

THE END.

NOTES

TO THE PRECEDING DISCOURSE.

NOTES.

NOTE *(A.)* page 9.

The true nature of imputation ought to be well understood.

The doctrine that sinners are justified, by the imputed righteousness of Christ, is as old as the visible church. The fathers of the reformation, and all orthodox divines, maintain that "we are justified by the *righteousness of Christ, imputed to us and received by faith alone.*"

Not that ever God imputed the righteousness of Christ to an unbeliever. *He that believeth not is condemned.* The mere fact of imputation, is not that which makes the righteousness of Christ become the believer's own. *Union* to Christ by the bond of the Holy Spirit and by the bond of faith, puts the believer in possession of his righteousness. God then accounts it to be the believer's, or *imputes* it to him. And *the judgement of God is according to truth.* He reckons that to the believer which is really his.

Faith *alone*, appropriates Christ's righteousness. We are justified by faith, not by hope, patience, or any other grace of the Holy Spirit. All the other graces accompany faith. It is never alone. But faith is the hand of the soul, by which it lays

hold on Christ, and *appropriates* his righteousness, or makes his righteousness its own in possession. It is no contradiction to say that *faith alone* justifies, yet never being alone, but accompanied by all the other graces of the Spirit. A man whose external senses are perfect, may be said to see with his *eye alone*, yet in relation to the other senses, the eye is not alone, but is accompanied by all the other senses—the organ of smell, taste, touch &c.

As soon as faith lays hold on Christ's righteousness, God, as a judge, imputes that righteousness to the person acting this faith, and justifies him, on account of that righteousness thus received by faith. *Abraham believed God*, and it was accounted to him, *for righteousness* i. e. the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him. Rom. IV. 3. The same thing also, holds true in all Abraham's believing seed. Ver. 23—24. *Now, it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe.*

A late writer maintains, that the righteousness of Christ is *imputable* to sinners, because it is the righteousness of the law, or covenant of works, and they are under this law, or covenant of works, therefore, it is imputable to them.*

This opinion is rather novel. It is a play upon the word *imputed*, which is generally used, when speaking of this subject.—Or rather, it is a misunderstanding of the term. It ascribes to the word *impute* or its derivatives, a meaning altogether new and unusual. *Impute* is used both by sacred and profane writers, in relation to both praise and blame. And literally, and *constantly* signifys, to ascribe to, charge upon, reckon, or account to a person, something either good or bad, as *that person's own*. It invariably carries in it the idea *of possession*. There is no instance of its being otherwise used *in the Bible*, or, as far as it is recollected, *out of the Bible*, except by Dr. Gray.

The sin of Adam is imputed to his posterity, because it is *their own*, Rom. V. 12. *For that all have sinned.* The sin of Adam

* See Dr. Gray's "Fiend of the Reformation detected" Sect. VI.

is *their own sin*, from the identity of representation. And being their own, it may be fairly and justly imputed to, or charged upon them. Indeed, as the judgement of God *is according to truth*, it does not appear, how it could have been imputed to them, if it had not been their own.

Again, the sins of all the elect are imputed to Christ. Why? Because he *assumed* them, and thereby made them his own.—Otherwise they would not have been justly *imputable* to him.—*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right*? Let us now try the doctrine, "that Christ's righteousness is imputable to all men, because they are under the law, and because it is the righteousness of the law."

If it be imputable, then it was *theirs*, in order to make it thus imputable, for nothing is justly imputable, but what not only *may* be imputed, but *ought* to be imputed. How then can God send to everlasting punishment, any of those, who really possess the righteouness of Christ? It is impossible. God is just. Upon the ground of the doctrine of Dr. Gray, all must be saved who are under the covenant of works—that very covenant too, by which all under it are condemned. The scriptures give us a very different ground for the righteousness of Christ being imputable, namely, being *one* with him by faith. *Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe—all that believe that righteousness might be imputed to them also.**

It was not designed to take any further notice of the "Fiend of the reformation detected," which, we believe, is entitled to only part of its name; but on looking over Dr. Ely's Review of M'Chord's Essays and Dr. Gray's *Fiend*, it appeared necessary to make a few remarks on that performance also, in connexion with the *Fiend* &c.

It is freely granted, that in the Review, many sound criticisms are made, and the ground which Dr. Gray assumed about the "righteousness of the law—its imputability &c." Dr. Ely has shown to be utterly untenable. There are, however, some things

*Rom III. 22—IV. 11.

in the *Review itself*, which do not appear altogether perspicuous, and with some opinions in it we cannot entirely coincide.

There is a strange disagreement among all these writers, and it would seem that there is something incorrect in every one of them. Mr. M'Chord refuses that Christ is the representative of any until they are regenerated and united to him by the bond of the Holy Ghost. Dr. Gray admits that Christ stood in a covenant relation to his elect from all eternity. He however, *avoids* using the word representative, which he calls a "spectre" page 43. and threatens to "put it down." Yet a few lines afterward, he has no objection to it. And in page 46, he makes representation essential to the very being of the eternal covenant, and again and again asserts, that without it there could be no eternal covenant.

In Dr. Ely's Review No. II. page. 178, he seems to approve of what Dr. Gray has written "Fiend" Sect. III. without exception. And in page 190, he approves of Dr. Gray's remarks on Mr. M'Chord's theory of representation, also without exception. We shall extract some observations from these, which we think rather incorrect. In Sect. III. page 43, Dr. Gray asserts, "that it is an absolute truth *as Mr. M'Chord states*, that the Holy Spirit is the bond of union between Jesus Christ and believers." (He speaks of the mystical union.) Now Mr. M'Chord states, "Body of Christ" page 44. "The Holy Ghost is the actual bond of union, and in the strict sense of the words, *exclusively* the bond of Union &c. In pages 72, 73 of the "Fiend," Dr. Gray, in attempting to explain our oneness with Christ, lays down the following order, *Election* producing a oneness with him in covenant relation. *Imputation of his righteousness*, and *then* he says, they are one with him, being equally justified by the law of works. *Faith and love*, by which they are one with him in moral righteousness. Does Dr. Ely approve of all this? Is the Holy Ghost *exclusively*, the bond of the mystical union? Is the imputation of Christ's righteousness before faith? And do that imputation make believers one with Christ?

What appears to be the scriptural view, and undoubtedly the

view which our standards give of the unity established, between Adam and those whom he represented; and between Christ and those whom he represented, is this; Adam was constituted a covenant head, and representative of all human persons. He stood bound for all his posterity descending from him by ordinary generation. The legal principle of connexion, or bond of union, by which he and they are identified in the covenant of works, is *representation*. The *actual bond* by which they are identified with Adam, is *natural generation*. By it, Adam's sin is conveyed to them. The moment they come to exist, or *actually to be*, they are personally embraced by the principle of representation, and become actually chargeable with the guilt of Adam's first sin. Accordingly *it* is imputed to them as *their own*. In relation to the second Adam, the new covenant head, and all whom he represented, the case appears to be this. All the elect were chosen in Christ. He stood as their representative in the covenant of redemption. His federal representation, or covenant headship, identified him and them in legal acceptation. He and they are viewed as *one* in law reckoning, in the court of heaven. The *Head* then actually existing, and all the members ascertained in the divine counsel, and contemplated as hereafter actually to be, and now viewed as *virtually* existing in their head and representative.

The stipulations of this covenant embrace certain arrangements respecting these contemplated members thus ascertained. Natural generation *is not*, as in the case of Adam and his posterity, to unite them, *actually* and *personally* with their new covenant head. They are to come into being, related to the old covenant—under its curse *and children of wrath*, even *as others*—that, however in due time, that connexion should be broken, and they should be *personally instated* in the covenant of grace, in which they had *virtually* and *representatively* been from all eternity.

And as in *natural generation*, the seed of Adam, become actually, or in their own persons, united to hm; so in *regeneration*, the seed of Christ become actually, or in their own persons, united to him. This is a spiritual, real, and mystical union.

These writers appear to agree in representing this union, as if it were the act of only one party. The bond of it, they say, is the Holy Spirit *exclusively*. But what can be more absurd than to suppose a union between intelligent beings without the consent and engagement of *both parties?* The union is a mutual act. A marriage would be unintelligible if represented as the act of the bridegroom only. The union of a soul to Christ is a *union of persons*. It is not a *personal* union, like the hypostatical union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. It is a spiritual marriage. Jesus is himself the bridegroom, and the regenerated sinner the bride.—He gives himself to her, and by the bond of his Spirit unites himself to her, engaging to be her husband for ever. She cordially accepts his offer and engagement, gives herself to him, and binds herself as his spouse for ever. This bond by which she closes and completes the Union, is faith. The engagement is mutual and reciprocal, and forms a union never to be dissolved.

I, with pleasure, quote here the words of two distinguished divines on this subject.

Speaking of those who are with the Lamb on mount Zion; "Their highest privilege" says Dr. M'Leod, "and their distinguishing blessing, is to be *with* him as their living Head, who, as the Lamb without spot, made atonement for them. *Faith forms this union* with the Saviour. Two intelligent beings cannot unite without a mutual giving and receiving of the one to the other.

The Son of God is *given* that we may *receive* him. Faith receives and rests upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel. It appropriates the Saviour to the person, and for the salvation of the convinced sinner."—Lect. upon the Revel. p. 455—456, New York.

To the same purpose speaks President Edwards:—

"In order to an union's being established *between two* intelligent active beings or persons, so as they should be *looked upon as one*, there should be the *mutual act* of both, that each should receive the other, as actively joining themselves one to another."—Sermon on justification by faith alone. Works, vol. VII, p. 23, Worcest. 1809.

On *this mystical union*, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and believers' consequent justification are formally predicated, and not on their virtual and representative union in eternity. Nevertheless, that union in eternity, and Christ's representing them in the covenant, lie at the very foundation of the whole system; and had it not been for the representative character of the Lord Jesus Christ in the covenant, his righteousness could never have been imputed to them. So far is it from being true, therefore, what Dr. Gray asserts "that the imputability of Christ's righteousness does not depend in any manner nor in any degree on his representative character," that nothing can be more remote from the matter of fact.

Dr. Ely highly applauds Dr. Gray's discussion of the covenant of works, and particularly notices the clearness of his probation concerning Eve, in that covenant, p. 199—201. But this part of the discussion appears, indeed, greatly defective. Dr. Gray represents Eve, in precisely the same relation to Adam, as their posterity were, in the covenant of works. But surely there is something *peculiar* in her situation.

She was in some sense *one party* with Adam in that covenant. He was properly the covenant head and representative, to all their natural posterity. But he was not so, *without* the woman, but *with* her. Adam in conjunction with his wife, was the root of the whole human family. When the covenant was entered into with Adam, the woman was not yet formed, but God spake to her in Adam. She is viewed as one with him, as being a part of himself. *And God called their name Adam.*

There is no doubt but *Eve* is thus represented in, and by Adam. And had Adam *only* fallen, she, as well as his natural offspring, must have been a sharer in the transgression, upon the principle of representative identification. But it appears, that God spake to her, personally, after she was made, and informed her of the covenant. And it is contended, that she had a conjunct concern with Adam in that covenant, distinct from what any of his posterity had, or could have. She was to be the mother of the human race, and without her, Adam could have had no off-

spring. Adam, then, can never be considered as the head and root of mankind, but in conjunction with his wife. *They twain were one flesh.*

In relation to his posterity, the keeping or breaking the covenant, depended solely on Adam, and not on Eve. Did it so depend in relation to Eve herself? It is astonishing that Dr. G. adverts not to the circumstance, that Eve was *first in the transgression.* Was it for the fact of Adam's eating the forbidden fruit, or her own personal eating, that she is judged and condemned? It may be fairly admitted, that if Adam *only* had eaten, she would have fallen in him, as the great representative; but nothing can more clearly prove the peculiarity of her situation, in that covenant, and that she is to be viewed as one party with Adam, than the fact, that she, by her own personal act, did break the covenant, and is distinctly judged and condemned for her own act of eating the forbidden fruit; while Adam's after act is not mentioned in the process of her judgment.

In relation to the posterity of Adam the test of obedience was restricted to *him alone*, but not so in the case of Eve. The Confession and the generality of Divines have said little on the subject of Eve's relation in the covenant of works, but surely silence is much preferable to the account furnished by Dr. Gray and applauded by Dr. Ely.

In the Review, p. 189, it is refused by Dr. E. that sin is "an absolutely infinite evil." This might be soundly explained. But in p. 268—269, he denies that sin is an infinite evil at all, and asserts that "every sin is a *finite*, though an exceedingly great and horrible evil."

That a finite being could perform an act *subjectively* infinite, is indeed impossible. But it does not follow, that a finite being cannot do an act *objectively* infinite.

That every human person is under the obligation of God's moral law will not be disputed. This law possesses an infinite obligation. And consequently all the subjects of that law are under infinite obligation to perform what it requires. Though they can-

not be required by it, to perform infinite acts of obedience, yet they are laid under *infinite obligation* to perform finite acts. Sin is the violation of this *infinite obligation*. But the violation of an *infinite obligation* is *infinitely* criminal. Sin is, therefore, an infinite evil.

"If God be infinitely worthy," says President Edwards, "of love, honour, and obedience, then our obligation to love, honour, and obey him, and so to avoid all sin, is infinitely great Sin is the violation of this *infinite obligation*, it is, therefore, an infinite evil."*

"In order to form just conceptions of the greatness of Christ's sufferings," says a late accurate writer, "it is necessary to enquire into the cause from which they proceeded. This is the *infinite* evil of sin. When we speak of sin as infinitely evil, we do not mean to affirm that the act of the soul, in sinning, is infinitely intense; as this is impossible in a creature, all whose powers are limited. The malignity of sin, from which its demerit arises, must be considered as it relates to God, the divine lawgiver. He and the rational creature, though closely related, are infinitely distant in point of greatness and excellence. Men are under an obligation to love God. This obligation must be great in proportion to the infinite excellence of the object. Worth and excellence are the proper reasons and grounds of loving any object; and as these, in God, are infinite, men must be infinitely obliged to love him. This is undeniable; as they cannot be under the same obligation to love one another, or the highest Seraph, as to love God. Sin is a violation of this obligation, or an acting contrary to it: the evil, then, relatively considered, must be proportioned to the obligation.

Though the infinite evil of sin is inferred from the infinite dignity of the object against whom it is committed, it will not warrant the conclusion, that a good action must be infinitely good, because performed to the same object. The contrary is true. Sin is heinous, in proportion to what it denies to the object, or attempts to take from it. Sin treats God as a contemptible being, neither

* Sermon on the Eternity of Hell Torments.

to be regarded nor feared; and therefore treats him with contempt. It depreciates his excellence, love, and goodness, impeaches his justice, denies his holiness, and sets his power and anger at defiance. It is an attempt to pluck God from his throne, &c. On the other hand, the goodness of an action must be in proportion to what it gives to the object. Besides God's respect to any man's obedience must be according to the degree of respect to which he is entitled; but the respect due to man is infinitely less than what is due to God, because of the meanness of man, and his infinite distance from God."*

But after all, is it not substantially granted by Dr. E. Rev. p. 269, that sin is an infinite evil, since he admits that "every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come?" Is not the wrath of God infinite wrath? And is not the life to come infinite in duration? And must it not be an infinite evil that will subject to such punishment? His own objections, if indeed they had any weight, would strike against his own concession, with equal force as against the doctrine he combats. Let us however, attend to them. They are briefly these, "that sin being committed by a finite being, must be a finite evil, and requires a finite satisfaction—Sin is an effect, every effect requires an adequate cause;—If therefore, sin be an infinite effect, man the cause of it, must be an infinite being—Infinities will not admit of degrees of comparison—if sin is an infinite evil, all sins must be alike—no man is a greater sinner than another—and if every sin is infinitely evil, every sin deserves infinite punishment—a man cannot endure more than one infinite punishment; consequently, no man can be punished for more than *one sin*." This is the sum of the objections to sin being an infinite evil.

These objections, however, are mere sophistry. The objections, that *sin is committed by a finite being—that it is not an infinite effect, because its cause is finite*, are predicated upon the mistake that it is to be viewed *subjectively*, and not *objectively*, and have been already considered.

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* Thomson's Theol. Disc. vol. I. p. 56—57.

The remaining objections suppose, that there can be no degrees in any thing, which is in its *nature infinite*. We would enquire if divine wrath be *in its nature infinite?* It is presumed that it is, and that it will scarcely be denied even by Dr. Ely. And cannot God inflict *more or less* of this infinite wrath, according to the demerit of the guilty offender? If any should dispute it, we refer him to the seventy-eighth psalm. In verse 38th, God is represented, as *not stirring up all his wrath.* What? Is not the wrath of God infinite? And "there are no degrees in things that are infinite." If, therefore, he stirred up his wrath, according to the objection, he must have stirred up *all his wrath.* This, however, is contrary to the text. We, therefore, leave the Dr's. logic and the text to settle it.

Again, is not the power of God infinite power? According to the objection, he cannot withhold, or extend this power, more or less, at pleasure, because there are *no degrees in things that are infinite.* Yet in allusion to the awful display of his infinite power on mount Sinai, Hab. III. 4. God is represented as *having horns coming out of his hand, and there,* says the inspired penman, *was the hiding of his power.* What then must have been the *discovery* of his power, if all this was only the *hiding* of it? Or, because it is infinite, must God have discovered it all?

But would not a similitude of the Dr's. own, completely set aside his own objection, about the "equality of all sins," and "all infinities being equal," and (upon the supposition of sin being an infinite evil) "the impossibility of any man's being *punished for more than one sin?*" Let us hear the Dr. In Rev. p. 189, he says, "As we may conceive of a cable, and of a twine, which shall be alike interminable, or *infinite in continuation*, and yet finite and different in diameter, &c."

According to the supposed example, the cable and the twine are alike *in continuation*—they are infinitely extended. This may point out the evil of sin, as being, in its nature, infinitely criminal, for the nature of the cable, and the twine is the same. But they differ in thickness. They are both infinitely long, and in this they agree. But the one has more folds than the other. In this they

disagree. So of sins. They are all infinitely criminal in their nature. This bears upon the length. Some are more heinous, or more horribly aggravated than others. This bears upon the thickness. The punishment will be proportioned to this. For though the punishment of all sin will be eternal, and in point of duration equal, like the length of *the cable* and *the twine*, yet the intensity of it, or weight of divine wrath, will be varied in proportion to the degrees of guilt in the offender.

We shall here quote the words of two eminent divines, whose praise is in the churches, in corroboration of our views on this subject.

The first is the eminent President Edwards, who well understood the subject.

"Another objection (that perhaps may be thought hardly worth mentioning) is, that to suppose sin to be infinitely heinous, is to make all sins equally heinous; for how can any sin be more than infinitely heinous? But all that can be argued hence is, that no sin can be greater with respect to that aggravation, the worthiness of the object against whom it is committed. One sin cannot be more aggravated than another in that respect, because in this respect the aggravation of every sin is infinite; but that does not hinder but that some sins may be more heinous than others in other respects: As if we should suppose a cylinder infinitely long, it cannot be greater in that respect, viz. with respect to the length of it; but yet it may be doubled and trebled, and made a thousand fold more, by the increase of other dimensions. Of sins that are all infinitely heinous, some may be more heinous than others; as well as of divers punishments that are all infinitely dreadful calamities, or all of them infinitely exceeding all finite calamities, so that there is no finite calamity, however great, but what is infinitely less dreadful, or more eligible than any of them, yet some of them may be a thousand times more dreadful than others. A punishment may be infinitely dreadful by reason of the long duration of it; and therefore cannot be greater with respect to that aggravation of it, viz. its length of continuance, but yet may be vastly more terrible on other accounts." Serm. on Justif. by Faith alone.

The second is the celebrated Turretine, professor of theology, in Geneva.

"Though a death of infinite value," says this great and good man, "was due for every individual sinner, yet such a death as Christ's is quite sufficient for the redemption of the whole elect world. A penal satisfaction is not of the same nature with a pecuniary payment, which is only valued by the amount paid, without regard to the person who pays: and hence can be of avail to none but the individual for whom the payment is made. But penal satisfaction is appreciated by the dignity of the person who makes it, and is increased in worth in proportion to his dignity, and hence avails for many as well as for one. Money paid by a king is indeed of no more avail in the discharge of a debt, than money paid by a slave: but the life of a king is of more value than the life of a vile slave, as the life of king David was of more worth than that of half the Israelitish army.—2 Sam. XVIII. 3. In this way Christ alone is more excellent than all men together. The dignity of an infinite person swallows up all *the infinities of punishment* due to us—they sink into it and are lost. Besides it is no new thing that what is necessary for one should be amply sufficient for many. One sun is necessary to the illumination of an individual, and yet the same sun illuminates the whole human family. One victim was sufficient for the priest and all the people, and yet it would have been requisite for one. The great annual expiatory sacrifice, made atonement for all the people, while yet there were as many atonements necessary, as there were Israelites, because by divine appointment it was offered for the whole congregation, as well as for individuals."*

Upon the whole, if sin be not an infinite evil, it was not necessary, that the Saviour of sinners should have been an infinite person. Finite evils however numerous, and aggravated, require, only a *finite* satisfaction. And if a finite satisfaction only was required, Adam might have been set to rights again, without the interven-

* Turret. de Satisfact. Chris. Verit. Translated by Willson, p. 251—252. Philadelphia.

tion of the Son of God. A finite person could have suffered a finite penalty.

Nor will the allegation have any opposing force "that a finite creature is under obligations to render all the obedience in its power, for itself." Be it so. Let it only be *innocent*, and the law of God does not require it to *suffer* for itself. It is indeed under obligations to *obey*, but under none to *suffer*. Suffering alone, is the penalty. Let the finite creature *obey* for itself, and suffer the finite penalty for Adam, and all will be well. Upon this ground also, "had another man been formed like Adam, and had he perfectly obeyed the law," for himself, and suffered the *finite* penalty, which he well might have done, in due time, then "a divine Saviour" would have been "a needless gift of the counsels of Jehovah." If Dr. Ely "is right in his doctrine on this subject, the Saviour of the Socinians, provided he be a perfectly obedient man," and suffer this finite penalty, "will answer all the wants of sinners."

But if sin is not an infinite evil, why is the punishment of it in hell, of infinite duration?

Dr. E. answers, "God may extend the amount of penalty incurred to any assignable duration; and for ever may *continue* to punish one, who *for ever continues* to multiply transgressions."—P. 269—270.

This will require a little examination. It assumes, in the first place, that God may extend the amount of penalty incurred to any assignable duration. Does punishment flow from God's sovereignty? *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* God may not extend the amount of penalty one moment longer, than justice demands. If only finite punishment be due, there is no attribute of Divinity, that will concur with this infinite extension.

In the second place Dr. E. ascribes the eternity of the punishment of the damned, to their continued sinning. He says, "God for ever may continue to punish one, who for ever continues to multiply transgressions."

This opinion takes for granted, that the sins which the damned shall commit through eternity, are taken into the account, at the

day of judgment, as well as "the deeds done in the body." It is certain that the judgment at the last day is final. The sentence is then past for eternity—*Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire.*—Why this sentence? Why are the wretched criminals doomed to everlasting fire? According to Dr. Ely's plan, it is upon a two-fold ground—Because they *have sinned*, and have not believed in Christ—and because they will *continue to sin*, and will not believe in Christ to all eternity! So much, and so long they are to suffer, for what they *have done;* and then to eternity for what they shall *hereafter do* to eternity!

Notice is taken by our Saviour, in the account which he himself gives of the last judgment, both of what the wicked have done, in opposition to the divine law, and what they have neglected contrary to its requisitions; but he is entirely silent repecting their *future* sins, as forming any part of the formal reason, or cause of the sentence of everlasting punishment. They, indeed, still remain subjects of the law, and every sin deserves punishment, and shall be punished, though committed in hell, yet the infinite duration of the torments of the damned, is not, in the sentence of condemnation, predicated upon what they shall *hereafter do*, but upon what they have *already done*. Punishment is not in its nature *prospective*, but *retrospective*.

Should it be foreseen by a judge, that a murderer on whom he pronounces sentence of death, would, on his way to the place of execution, take away the life of one or more of the guard that conducted him to the gallows, still it was not for this, as yet uncommitted crime, that he pronounced the sentence of death, but for the murder already perpetrated. According to Dr. Ely's scheme, the Judge of the quick and the dead could not pronounce sentence of *everlasting punishment*, on the reprobate, at the last day, for all the guilt with which they are justly chargeable, previous to that time.

But as the *sinning period* of the elect is *bounded*, their sins must, according to Dr. E. require only a *finite* satisfaction; and the Redeemer must bear so many *finite pains*, according to the number of the elect, and the *every way* finite magnitude of their

transgressions. So that if more in number had been redeemed; or if their sins had been greater, or more numerous, he must have suffered more, in proportion—so much for the sins of Peter—so much for the sins of Paul, &c. &c. For says the Dr. "all the sins of the elect are of a *definite* amount—the punishment merited by all the sins of the elect is of a *definite* amount—Christ bare *a definite amount* of punishment, even such a *degree* of punishment, considering the divinity and dignity of his person," (did that consideration diminish the number of the finite stripes, or any of the items of the finite debt?) "as was an equitable commutation in God's esteem, for the punishment due unto all the sins of the elect." P. 188.

This, the Dr. thinks, is not cutting up the righteousness of Christ *into shreds and patches;* but he must surely admit, that it is dividing and subdividing it into millions of fractions, and assigning to each individual elect sinner, as much as the demerit of his sin may require. The scale, however, is not yet graduated.

This is the age of discovery, of invention, and of system making. Mr. M'Chord's system contemplates a body of indefinite extension, or interminable enlargement. "This scheme," says Dr. Ely, "he seems to have invented, that he might, according to his own notions, preach the gospel. Dr. Gray invented his scheme of imputation without representation, for the same reason."—And no doubt, for the same reason, Dr. E. invents a scheme of sin being a finite evil, and of course that there neither is the fact, of any infinite value in the atonement of Christ, nor any need of it!—What scheme shall be invented next? Would it not be better, after all, to be contented with the scheme invented by God himself, and preach the gospel according to the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ? There seems to be little good in this system making. When shall the blessed period arrive when the gospel will be preached in its own native simplicity, without the inventions of men!

NOTE *(B.)* page 11.

There is no doctrine more plainly taught in scripture, than the unity of the Church of Christ. Separate communions in the church, or separate churches of Christ, holding different creeds, necessarily infers something wrong. It certainly was not so by Christ's institution when he organized his church. The pattern he has given is for *one church.* All that differ, however little, from that pattern, are so far departing from the law of the house laid down by its glorious Head. But it is quite common with the advocates of what is called *catholic communion*, to recommend a kind of confederation among these *different denominations*, while yet they may remain distinct sects, with their respective different creeds.

It is indeed granted by them, that an agreement in all the articles of faith, would be very desirable, "but the churches are not ripe for it." But what shall be done in the mean time? Why, let them compliment one another with *church hospitality*—let them exercise the *most ungrudging fellowship in holy ordinances, as opportunity serves*—let the one say of the other, they have invited us to eat of their bread, *let us do so, and welcome them, in turn, to eat of ours.* Is this, or is it not a confederation of churches? Where is the warrant in divine revelation for such a system? Do they not hereby recognise one another's creeds and modes of worship? Most assuredly. For they join in eating the sacrifice?—*Are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?* Few, it is presumed, would venture to answer, no. Whatever, therefore, belongs to *the altar*—the principles, doctrine and worship of any church, is recognised by *eating the sacrifice*—partaking of the Lord's supper in that church. If you differ with that church in any thing, it is because you think *that thing* wrong—How then can you *eat of the sacrifice*, thereby recognizing what you think wrong?

NOTE *(C.)* page 17.

Much labour has been spent, and great pains have been taken, to destroy the distinction between ecclesiastical, and mere chris-

tian communion. It is attempted too, to put the distinction to ridicule.

Those who maintain it, are represented, as if they held, that christian communion and church communion are in *opposition* to each other—that christian communion *includes* christianity, while church fellowship *excludes* it entirely.

It is asked, "if the communion which, in public worship, saints hold with saints, as such, is not communion of saints—which christians there hold with christians, is not christian communion—what is it?" Do the *christians* disappear when the *church* assembles? Do the saints become *unsainted* the moment they sit down at the Lord's table?"*

Is this generous? Is it fair? Did ever any person who avowed the distinction, think of *contrasting* the two kinds of communion? Or is it necessary that there must be an opposition†—a contradiction, in order that there may be a distinction? The powers or faculties of the human soul are distinguished from one another—must they therefore be opposite? A celebrated writer on the powers of the human mind, informs us "that the will always *follows* the last dictate of the understanding—that volition has always for its object that which appears *most agreeable*."‡ It is apprehended this is far enough from *opposition*. A husband and wife are distinct persons; must they, therefore, necessarily be in a state of opposition? Church fellowship is distinguished from mere christian communion, therefore christians disappear, when the church assembles, i. e. when church fellowship commences! Church communion is distinct from what is termed, only christian communion, therefore the saints must become *unsainted* the moment they sit down at the Lord's table! We envy no man such extraordinary powers of reasoning.

It may be said, we have introduced qualifying words, such as *mere* christian communion—*only* christian communion, while the objection contemplates the distinction in an unqualified manner. To this we answer, if those who use the distinction, ever explained

* Plea, p. 227. † Ibid, p. 233. ‡ Edwards on Free Will, Part I. Sec. 2.

themselves, as intending to *exclude* christianity, or christian communion, from church communion, there might be ground to object. The manner in which the distinction has been uniformly used, is this, that christianity itself, if, in the judgment of charity, we had ground to believe any man possessed it, was a sufficient warrant for us to hold private christian fellowship with him, whether we agreed in our respective creeds, and ecclesiastical terms of communion, or not. So far as mere christian exercises were concerned, we were agreed, and so far we might walk together. This has been called *christian communion*, meaning that it was christian communion *only*, and not *ecclesiastical*. It did not call up the public terms of church fellowship, in agreement with which, the members of a church hold public communion together, as an organized body.

That for this organical, ecclesiastical communion, something more than the mere fact of christianity, is necessary. It also requires a specification of the *faith once delivered to the saints*, and an agreement therein, that they may *all speak the same thing, and have no divisions among them.* This necessarily requires a public test, or bond of ecclesiastical fellowship, and by this it is distinguished from mere christian communion, which however it still includes, but adds thereto. And this is what is so triumphantly, perhaps I should say sneeringly, represented, as banishing christianity.

After all, the distinction between ecclesiastical and mere christian communion, appears necessary, while imperfection so far characterises the visible church, that her members cannot *see eye to eye*, in doctrine, order, and worship. Before all *real* christians will be ready, in a scriptural and orderly manner, to join together in ecclesiastical communion, the time must have arrived, when the Lord shall have turned to his people a *pure language*, and given them *one heart and one way*, and then shall they join *sweet counsel together, and go to the house of God in company, serving the Lord with one consent.*

Nor was the distinction unknown to the Apostle Paul, 2 Thess. III. 14, 15. *And if any man*, says the Apostle, *obey not our*

word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. "Even those that are under the censures of the church," and so deprived of church fellowship, for the time, are still to be counted as *brethren*, and so entitled to christian communion. The interpretation, that such an one, as the Apostle commands the Thessalonian christians to *withdraw from, to have no company with*, was a man unfit for "personal intimacy—private and familiar intercourse," on account of his disorderly conduct, "living in idleness"—"disturbing his neighbours"—being a "lazy professor," a person "of idle and impertinent habits," but yet fit for the communion of the church, and still enjoying it, must be referred to the great liberality of *catholic communion.*

NOTE *(D.)* page 27.

Much is said by the advocates of what is termed *a liberal communion*, about "visible christianity being the only term of communion, authorized by the Lord Jesus Christ." This visible christianity must be explained. Is it "a profession and practice becoming the gospel?" This is well. The man, then, who is to be esteemed a visible christian, is one who professes to make the law of God his rule in *all things*—who *continues stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine*, and endeavours to *walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the* LORD *blameless.* To such an one we have no objection. He is welcome to our most intimate communion. We receive him with heart and hand. But if "visible christianity," is also to be predicated of the man, who, professing to be a christian, selects certain parts of the word of God, which, he says, contain the "*substantial doctrines* of the cross"—"*substantial truth*," the *substantial doctrines* of the gospel" and the like, as a rule and a test of fitness for communion; while he rejects others, as, of course, *not substantial—not essential*, or not necessary to be taken into the account, and we be called to admit such a man to communion, on the ground of having all that the Redeemer requires for church fellowship, it is confessed, that we would demur, because Christ has said, *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*

NOTE *(E.)* page 35.

Union in the church of God is most desirable. The disruption of it never took place without a crime somewhere. But desirable as it is, we must not sacrifice truth to obtain it. I here quote with pleasure, the words of an accurate writer, who appears to understand the subject.

"I am, indeed, aware that there is much talk of union; that schemes are devised, no doubt with the best designs, for its extension; and you likewise know, that there is very little of it in the church. That there should be more is readily confessed. That means more efficient for its attainment must be employed, all but the most superficial thinkers do admit. Too much, we have reason to fear, is attempted on this subject, by one effort, and that one not well directed. Under the influence of a thoughtless impulse, early opinions, ancient prejudices, and confirmed habits, may, for a moment be forgotten; but that impulse once gone, that moment past, they will return in all their wonted force. So far as contending parties unite on principle, and for an *unprincipled* union, no man of enlightened piety will plead, it must be effected by deliberation, and a precise inspection of the ground on which they meet."—M'Master's Apology for the Book of Psalms, p. 12, 13.

NOTE *(F.)* page 39.

There are no rights held so sacred among men, as the rights of conscience. They are deservedly so held. Conscience has its rights, and they are, indeed, *sacred rights*. They ought, however, to be understood, lest we attach something to conscience *as a right*, which deserves a very different name. The best things are most liable to be abused. The excess of liberty is licentiousness.

The rights of conscience, as well as all other human rights, are derived from God, and are bounded by the law accompanying their delegation. The law of God embraces the whole man, and all his rights, and all his relations. This is not always attended to, in considering this subject.

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it *free* from the doctrines and commandments of men, as originating in their judgment, or in their authority. To believe such doctrines, or obey such commands, as the rule to regulate the conscience, is to betray the true freedom of the conscience; and to require this to be done, is to require implicit faith and blind obedience, and is the destruction of liberty of conscience.

It, however, ought never to be forgotten, that God himself is the rightful Lord of the conscience, and constantly holds it subject to his law. Conscience never was by its author intended to be itself a law; but as the vicegerent of heaven, it is appointed as a judge to decide according to the law furnished by the legislator of the universe, for that purpose. This law, and not conscience, is the rule both of belief and action. There can, therefore, be no right of conscience inconsistent with the divine law—no right but what is derived from it. Modern claims for the rights of conscience, are not kept within the bounds of sober reason. In their eagerness to discard the unjust claim of one man to lord over the conscience of another, some have assumed a ground which gives conscience a negative over the divine law itself. I, with great satisfaction quote here, the words of an eminent scholar and divine, the Rev. Dr. Wylie, of Philadelphia. They fully express my sentiments on this subject.

"All power to be found among the creatures, is, necessarily, derived from God. He is the original source and fountain from which it flows, *For in him we live, and move, and have our being.** All this delegated or derived power, should be exercised to his glory, and regulated by his law, *Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*† To effect this end, all our powers should be directed; and of this, his law is the unerring rule. By this, therefore, all rational beings are indispensibly bound. God has given them no right to do what it prohibits. To suppose men to possess any such right, is wicked and blasphemous. This would be the same as to suppose God to

* Acts XVII. 28. † 1 Cor X. 31.

say to them, I, as the Supreme Legislator, give you my law. To the least breach of it, I annex the penalty of eternal damnation; yet I give you a *right* to violate this *my law*, and to wage war with your God, and direct your artillery, against the Sovereign of the Universe!" From this the Dr. justly argues, "that no man has *a right* to worship God any other way, than he himself hath prescribed in his law—that it is criminal for a man's conscience to approve any way repugnant to this sacred rule—and that this *crime* cannot legitimate *another*, or make an action *right*, which God expressly condemns, under pain of eternal wrath."

"If conscience can legitimate," continues this accurate reasoner, "what God's law condemns, it must be paramount to the divine law, and, consequently to the Legislator also, in having a negative over the requisitions of both the one and the other.

Were this the case, it would not only free from criminality, but would render virtuous, laudable, and praise-worthy, the most damnable errors—the most horrid blasphemies, and detestable abominations; if but dictated by the consciences of Pagans, Mahometans, &c. Then the Egyptians worshipping God under the form of a snake or crocodile, would be as lawful, yea, as commendable, as doing it precisely according to the manner which he has prescribed in his word, provided that, in both cases, conscience said amen!

But, supposing for a moment, that men had such a right, let us enquire how they came by it? Either they must have it by derivation from God, or they must hold it independently of him. It cannot be by derivation from God: it would be absurd in the nature of it, and incompatible with the essential holiness of his character.

To suppose God giving to his moral subjects *a law*, to the breach of which he annexes eternal punishment, and at the same time, giving them a *right* to break it, is inconsistent and impossible. *Right* would be opposed to *right*—a right *to obey*, and a right *not to obey!*—A man may be persuaded in his conscience, that a false way of worshipping God is the most proper way"—According to the modern claims for unlimited rights of conscience, "he has a right to worship this false way! But worship-

ping *in a false way* offends God. No matter, he has a right (of conscience) to offend God; for if worshipping falsely, and offending God, are equivalent; seeing he has a right to do the one, he has a right to do the other!!!"*

NOTE *(G.)* page 41.

For an interesting and judicious view of the character, history, death and resurrection of the witnesses, I refer the reader to M'Leod on the Revelation, Lect. X. I quote the following remarks from that Lecture, as perfectly corresponding with the view I have taken of the witnesses.

"These," says the Dr. "are a small company of true christians defending the interests of religion against all opposition, and frequently sealing with their blood the testimony which they hold—They are *distinguished as a part from the whole*, from the great body of those who are to be considered as true christians, and even from the visible church of God in general, at this period. (The duration of the antichristian system.) They are christians; and they belong to the true visible church: but they are a distinct class of christians in the communion of the visible church. These witnesses differ as much from their contemporaries, the 144,000 sealed ones, as Elijah differed from the 7000 in Israel in his time, who did not bow the knee to Baal.—These witnesses are *two* in number, because *one* is not sufficient according to the law† to prove the guilt of the antichrist; and because there were as few employed as would be sufficient to attest the truth, and protest against the perversions of the christian system.

There is besides in this number, *two*, an allusion to well known characters who appeared, *two and two*, and who exemplified in their own day, and taught with fidelity, that doctrine which antichrist remarkably opposes, and which these witnesses are authorized to maintain—the doctrine which requires that man should regulate all his social concerns by the principles and precepts of revealed religion. This doctrine has always been opposed by the

* The Two Sons of Oil, p. 7, 41, 42. † Deut. XVII. 6. 2 Cor. XIII, 1.

supporters of the man of sin; and in direct hostility to it, the antichristian system has been established. The *two* great branches of that system, the heathenish church and beast of the abyss, have of course corrupted the moral order of the two great kinds of society in Christendom, civil and ecclesiastical. They who bear testimony against this *twofold* corruption of religion and morals, are not improperly called *two*," &c. M'Leod on the Rev. p. 316–321.

NOTE *(H.)* page 41.

That power, against which, the witnesses direct their testimony, during the 1260 years in which they are to prophecy clothed in sackcloth, is, in scripture, denominated *antichrist*, I. John, ii. 18. *Ye have heard that antichrist shall come.* If we compare with this text, 2 Thess. ii. 8, *And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the* LORD *shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming;* we shall find clearly ascertained, the fact, both of his *existence* and his *destruction.*

Two questions engage the attention of enquiring christians, with no small degree of interest—*What constitutes the antichrist?*—*When shall he come to his end?* We shall offer a few observations on both these.

ANTICHRIST

signifies an opposite Christ, or one in opposition to Christ. One may be opposite to another, as an avowed enemy, or he may be opposite, as a rival, or a competitor, for the honour, which really, and of right belongs to the other. It is in this last sense that antichrist obtains this name, as being an opposer to Christ, by pretending that the honours, and rights, which exclusively belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, belong also to him. We may, generally learn, what really belongs to Christ, by the presumptuous claims, and arrogant pretensions of antichrist.

Antichrist is a complex term. Sometimes, indeed, it is represented in scripture, as one person, *that wicked—the man of sin—the son of perdition.* The mystery of iniquity is then personified

But *the apostacy—the antichrist*, is really a complex system.—"It includes the beasts of the pit, of the sea, and of the earth; the head, the horns, the image of the beast; the mother of harlots, and all who are drunken with the cup of her intoxication."*

Its grand constituent parts are given in detail, in the XIII. chapter of the Revelation, under the symbolical representation of *a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads, and ten horns*; verse 1.—*a beast coming up out of the earth with two horns like a lamb*; verse 11—And *an image, which the second beast causes to be made to the first.*—verse 14. These three, the beast of the sea—the beast of the earth, and the image of the beast, include all the component parts of the antichristian system, and to one or other of these, or to them all together, every other description of antichrist, under whatever symbol, may be referred.

The beast of the sea, is the civil powers of the Western Roman empire, in its *divided state*; for it is represented as having 7 heads, and 10 horns with crowns.

The 7 heads refer, not only to the seat of this power, "the capitol of which was located on seven well known hills,†" *the seven heads are seven mountains, upon which the woman sitteth;* but also to the seven different forms of government, under which the Roman empire passed, *and there are seven kings.*

The 10 crowned horns are the 10 different kingdoms or dynasties, into which the Latin or Roman empire was divided. They correspond exactly with the 10 horns of the fourth beast in the vision of Daniel, chap. VII, 7 and with the 10 toes of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, chap. II. 41, 42. These 10 horns, or 10 toes, are the different powers within the limits of the Western Roman empire, after it ceased to be one great sovereignty under one despot. The beast appeared to John *with these ten horns.*—This sets aside all application of the beast of the sea to Rome pagan; because the empire was not divided into ten kingdoms, until after the death of Constantine, when the empire was become, at least nominally, christian.

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* M'Leod on the Rev. p. 260. † The city of Rome, "Urbs septicollis."

The *beast of the earth* is the ecclesiastical *hierarchy*, embracing all ecclesiastical power, order, and worship, devoted to the support of the antichristian apostacy. It symbolizes with the "little horn" "which makes war with the saints," and "speaks great words against the Most High,"* and with the "mother of harlots," that is seated upon the "scarlet coloured beast," and "drunken with the blood of the saints,"† also with the "false prophet," who works miracles before the beast, with which he deceives them that have the mark of the beast, and worship his image."‡ This beast is seen *coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.* This system is *earthly* in its *origin* and *nature*, as opposed to the true church of Christ, which is of *heavenly origin* and of a *heavenly nature.*

He has *two horns like a lamb.* He professes the mildness, the meekness, and the innocence of a lamb, but he is really a beast of prey, and speaks like a dragon. Instead of preaching the gospel in its purity, as the glad tidings of salvation, he utters blasphemies, and his speeches breathe of cruelty and death.

His two horns are the two orders of the Romish hierarchy—the *regular* and the *secular* clergy. The first comprehending all the monastic orders, as being in some measure secluded from the world. The second embracing all the parochial clergy, who profess to live in the world and take the charge of souls.

This beast causeth the people who dwell on the earth to *worship the first beast*, i. e. to yield submission to the civil power, however wicked and tyrannical, as if it were the ordinance of God. And finally it causes an image to be made to the first beast. This image is the papacy. The pope of Rome is the creature of the church. The cardinals as the representatives of the Romish church, or second beast, create him.§ He is made the image of the civil power or first beast; for "he is the common centre," "the principle of unity to the ten kingdoms of the beast," i. e. the empire, and procures for the civil rulers, "a blind obedience from their

* Dan. VII. 8, 21, 25. † Rev. XVII. 3, 6. ‡ Rev. XIX. 20. § "Quem creant adorant," whom they create, they worship.

subjects." He delivers over to the secular arm, at his pleasure. He claims to be set over the political empires of the earth, and to dispose of crowns and kingdoms. He is equally tyrannical with the first beast, for he has received power from his *makers* to cause that as many as will *not worship him shall be put to death.* This whole complex system is *the antichrist.* There is observable in it throughout, a regular derivation of power, and dependence. The pope derives his power from the church—the *woman clothed* in scarlet. She is supported by the *beast having seven heads and ten horns*—the civil governments of the Western Empire. And the beast receives from the dragon, his *power*, his *seat*, and all his *authority:* and this dragon is declared, Rev. XII. 9, to be—*the devil.* He is as the soul of the whole system. From beginning to end, through every part of this complex system of apostacy, which is to waste the true church of Christ 1260 years, and finally slay the witnesses of the Redeemer, it is *diabolical*, and cannot be acknowledged as *the ordinance of God*, by any conscientious christian.

The question, so anxiously asked by every lover of the church of Christ, *when shall the end of these things be? When shall antichrist be brought down?* demands our attention.

The time is fixed in Jehovah's decree, when the *mystery of God shall be finished*, by bringing *the mystery of iniquity* to an end. But as it is a mysterious providence indeed, the sober christian will not be confident in deciding with certainty, when that end shall be.

The number of years, during which antichrist shall be permitted to exercise his complex system of misrule, tyranny, and superstition, is limited to 1260 days,* a prophetical day being put for a year.† The difficulty is to know when this period commences.

In Daniel's prophecy, chap. VII. 25, we are informed that the saints of the Most High *shall be given into the hand of the little horn.* The little horn symbolizes the *hierarchy* of the church of Rome. The *hand* of the little horn will represent the *power*, by

* Rev. XII. 6. † Ezek. IV. 6. Numb. XIV. 34.

which the church executes her designs. This power is the pope, whom she *creates* for this purpose. But some other power distinct from *the little horn*, must give the saints into his hand.—There appears to be a *league* between the church and the beast of the bottomless pit. This beast *carrys* her, and she in return causes the nations to *worship the beast* and receive *his mark in their foreheads*, or at least in their *right hands; open* and *avowed*, or *hidden* and *implicit* subjection to the *thrones of iniquity*, with activity in supporting their unhallowed claims.

We may expect then, that in this mutual co-operation, the civil power will be that, which will give the saints into the hand of the executive power of the church. We find a remarkable instance of this in the emperor *Phocas*, who, for brutality, tyranny, and blood-thirsty cruelty, may rank with Caligula, Nero, or Domitian, when in the year 606, he constituted pope Boniface III. universal Bishop, and head of the church, and required all the churches to acknowledge the papal supremacy. This was indeed, a giving the *saints of the Most High into the hand of the little horn.* The year 606, therefore, seems to be the time from whence to date the rise of the antichristian apostacy. By adding 1260 years to 606, we are brought to the year 1866. And if we are to reckon according to our own calendar, it will be so long until antichrist come to his end.

There is, however, something in the numbers used by John, that seems to favour the mode of calculation in use among the Jews. Their months were 30 days each. Of course their year consisted of 360 days only. The period of antichrist's reign is represented by John under different forms. Twice it is said to be 1260 days.* Once it is denominated, *a time, and times, and half a time.*† And twice it is represented as 42 *months.*‡ All these point out the same period.

Time is put for *one year*;§ *times* will then be *two years*, and *half a time* will be *half a year.* Three years and a half, of twelve months each, make forty and two months: and forty two months

* Rev. XI. 3, and XII. 6. † Rev. XII. 14. ‡ Rev. XI. 2, and XIII. 5.—§ Dan. IV. 16.

of thirty days each, amount to 1260 days, i. e. years, according to prophetic style. Now, as all these point out the same period, it would seem that the same principle should regulate the whole—that no interpretation should be given to the *days* that would make them differ from the *months*. If the forty two months are taken to be thirty day months, according to the Jewish calculation, they will produce 1260 days. But if they contain either more or less, they will not. But twelve months of 30 days each, will not make one year of our calendar. They will produce 360 days only.—The difference of five days and almost six hours each year, during the whole 1260, will amount to eighteen years, round numbers.—These, according to this calculation, must be subtracted from 1866, which would bring us to the year 1848. If this calculation be correct, less than 30 years will put an end to the antichristian system.

This mode of calculation will be further justified, by the co-incidence of the probable destruction of one of the principal horns of the beast, which will appear by another process of calculation, taken from the specific threatening of the second commandment.

Of all the civil powers that belong to the *ten horns*, none have so remarkably distinguished themselves in the support of the *hierarchy* and the *image* of its creation, as the present British government. Though professedly *protestant*, yet have they done all in their power to aid and support the tottering fabric of the *man of sin*. Rome has been saved from destruction by British cannon. How warmly has this power testified her attachment to popery, by establishing it in Canada, and in Corsica during the short time it was attached to the crown of Great Britain! And has she not been the principal support of the antichristian system, against the terrible attack made on it by Revolutionary France? It is true, that in the late re-establishment of the pope, after the downfall of Buonaparte, the *power* of the Greek church united with the *power* of the English church, i. e. Russia and Britain joined heart and hand. How strikingly are they exemplified, by the *two women with the wind in their wings*, Zech. V. 9. who bear away the ephah, with the *woman of wickedness, to build it an house in the*

land of Shinar and to establish it, and *set it there on its own base.* Thus did these two powers restore to, and re-establish the Roman pontiff, in his ancient antichristian dignity, in his own Babylon.—This was to establish the woman of wickedness—the scarlet woman on her own base. Yet still in the whole history of the transactions of the British government, in relation to the pope and his interest, they are the most active and zealous supporters, and to them he acknowledges he is the most indebted. It is reasonable then to suppose that they should stand and fall together.

According to the threatening of the second commandment, the iniquities of the fathers shall be visited upon the children of them that hate the Lord, to the third and fourth generation; that is, in relation to public, or national wickedness, persisted in, from generation to generation, God will not delay the execution of national judgments longer than the *third*, or at farthest, the *fourth* generation.

The present British government was constituted upon the ruins of the ancient Reformation. The blood of the Martyrs shed in the times of persecution, was never purged from the throne of Britain.

The period of a generation according to scripture reckoning is *forty years.** The present government of Britain commenced with the Revolution of 1688. Let us then add *four generations* (the longest extension of divine forbearance, in relation to national punishments,) to the commencement of the British government. Four times forty make 160. This number added to 1688, brings us to the year 1848, precisely the same year, in which, according to the former calculation, the whole system of antichrist is to give up the ghost. It is astonishing how the one synchronises with the other.

Let us, however, beware of deciding peremptorily, in this mysterious calculation. The prophetic numbers are certain, and the prediction infallible, but human calculations are liable to mistake.

These 42 months of 30 days each, and their product 1260 days, may refer, not to the *kind* of years, but to their *number only.*—

* Numb. XXXII. 13. Psal. XCV. 10.

Neither more nor less than 1260 years, is the point expressly determined. They may be solar years. These are *true years*, for they are according to nature. If they are to be thus reckoned, the *man of sin* will retain his power, at least to a certain degree, for 47 years yet to come.

There are other numbers mentioned by the prophet Daniel, which ought not to be overlooked, because they must have reference to a period either immediately *preceding* or *succeeding* the commencement of the Millennium. These are found in chap. XII. 11, 12—"And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be *a thousand two hundred and ninety days*. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to *the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days*."

There are here two specific periods, one of 30, and another of 45 years, making 75 years, distinct from the period of 1260 years. If these *succeed* the commencement of the Millennium, as is generally supposed, then it would appear, that 30 years from that period, will bring about a general improvement of the world. All nations shall have begun, and considerably progressed in the work of reformation—the Jews brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, as the promised Messiah, and the heathens, generally made acquainted with the true God, will have embraced christianity.—But it will require 45 years more, or 1335 years from the commencement of the antichristian system, until the Millennium be at its height; *when the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven fold*—when the glory of the church shall shine in all its meridian splendor.

A late writer* who combines judicious observation with true evangelical piety, supposes, that both these periods of Daniel's, *precede* the commencement of the happy Millennium. He considers Daniel and John, as presenting "two different schemes of prophecy, in which, though they most harmoniously agree, different numbers and symbols are employed"—"a double scheme of numbers relating to the rise and fall of antichrist, and to the

* Mason on the Church's Happy Prospect. Glasgow, North Britain, 1818.

subjugation and emancipation of the church of God, embracing two conspicuous dates, one of which exactly agrees to the numbers of Daniel, and the other to the number of John, and both harmoniously terminate in the same year."

He attaches considerable weight to the analogy between the Old Testament Babylonish captivity, and the New. As there were different times of the Jews being carried to Babylon, and as many corresponding periods of their return; but one principal captivity, and one most general and public return; so in relation to antichrist, of which Babylon was a type, it is not unreasonable to suppose, that something of the same kind may be found. And this is found in the predictions of Daniel and John, embracing two different periods for the rise and fall of antichrist, but one more public and conspicuous, in the accomplishment of which, the prophecies of both co-incide, which perfectly reconciles their different schemes of prophecy.

The author observes, "The 1335 days are Daniel's gross number,* which has a respect to the church's low condition, and to the reign and tyranny of the antichristian horn.—In this number there are three other numbers included, and they are brought before us in this chapter. The first of them is mentioned in verse 7;—*time, times, and an half.* The second of these numbers is stated in verse 11—*a thousand two hundred and ninety days.* In this number there is an addition of 30 days made to 1260 days, (the time, times, and a half.) Those 30 days constitute Daniel's second number. The third number is discovered by what is said in the 12th verse, *Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.* From this it is evident, that 45 days are added to the 1290 days, which raise that number to 1335 days. The period of 45 days forms Daniel's third number—Distinct and important events, which will be most conspicuous accomplishments of scripture predictions, will commence at the expiration of each of Daniel's three numbers, which are contained in his 1335 years."

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* Dan. XII. 12.

The author's view of these important events, is briefly, the following; That Daniel's first number 1260, commenced with the decree of the emperor Justinian in 533, when that emperor constituted the bishop of Rome the head over all the churches. That this is the first rise of antichrist, according to the scheme of prophecy, by Daniel—That it terminated in 1792, at the commencement of the terrible wars in Europe with Revolutionary France. Then commenced the *thirty years*—Daniel's second number; when the judgment began to sit upon antichrist, and he as a great state prisoner is put upon his trial, which, however, is not to be brought to a final issue at the end of the 30 years, but is still in progress.

Nevertheless at that time, an important accomplishment of scripture predictions, may be expected. The author gathers from the last chapter of Daniel, that this will probably be the commencement of the public conversion and restoration of the Jews. This will take place in 1822, at which time the 30 years or 1290 days will expire.

The third number, or remaining 45 years, will terminate in 1866, as the last of them, viz. 1867, is the first of the Millennium, when Satan's kingdom in its heathenish, mahometan, and popish forms, shall have fallen as lightning from heaven, and antichrist shall be completely destroyed.

This period exactly synchronizes with the latter part of the 1260 days of John. These, Mr. Mason supposes, commenced in 606, when the emporor Phocas declared the bishop of Rome to be the head of the church. This is the second date, from which, John in his scheme of prophecy commences the rise of antichrist, which, though it terminates at the same time with Daniel's, yet does not embrace the first 75 years of his 1335 days—

This is a short abstract of the view of the rise and fall of antichrist, taken by this excellent author. In some things it is entirely new. It is impossible to do it justice in this short compend of it. The book itself is recommended to the serious perusal of every one, who is longing for the time, when the *little stone shall smite the image upon his feet, and shall break them to pieces*, and itself *shall become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth.*

Whatever be the mode of calculation, one thing is certain, the period of antichrist's reign draws near to a close. A few years only remain, until *the mystery of iniquity be finished.* But much has to be done in these few years. "The kings of the earth must hate the whore, and burn her flesh with fire." Forgetful of their vain determinations, and their futile leagues for an everlasting peace, they shall soon hear the alarm of war, and speedily be engaged in it. The remainder of the harvest must be reaped—the vintage must succeed the harvest, and its judgments are terrible. The witnesses mast be slain, and lie dead three years and a half, and rise again. Remarkable changes must take place, before these things can be accomplished. Popery may be established in Britain, before the slaying of the witnesses takes place. They must be slain where they exist; and it would seem reasonable too where they exist in the greatest numbers. All who are acquainted with their true character, will admit that this is in the British dominions.* If popery be established there, where the reformation was the most perfect, we may expect it generally over all Europe. And it scarcely appears possible, that the witnesses could be slain without such an establishment. To persecute to the death—to shed the blood of the Martyrs of Jesus, requires all the sanguinary principles of the scarlet woman. aided by the power to carry them into execution. Let us never forget, however, that when God has work to be done, a short time will suffice.—*One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

NOTE *(I.)* page 45.

There is a most unwarrantable distinction made by some, between the obligation to believe a doctrine, or truth, and the obligation to obey a command.

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* We do not decide positively. It is highly probable Britain will be the place; but it is a matter of little moment where. Wheresoever it may be, the effects will soon spread themselves elsewhere, and the consequent change shall shortly be universal.

It is quite common to say, "that is only an article of faith"—"it is not a divine command." "If men do not differ in matters of *duty*, a mere *point of faith* is of little moment."

Multitudes of professed christians, it is to be feared, sadly impose upon themselves, in this matter. There is as much of the divine authority connected with the revelation of a point of faith—an article of doctrine, as there is with the revelation of a statute law,—a commandment regulating our life and practice. Are we not under the same obligation to yield obedience to God, in that which he commands us *to believe*, as in that which he commands us to do? A man who lives and dies despising the law of God, will no doubt die in his sins. And eternal ruin is connected with making light of Jehovah's commandments. But is not the man in an equally dangerous situation, who makes a mock of what God has revealed as an article of faith, and commanded him to believe? *If ye believe not that I am he*, says the Redeemer, *ye shall die in your sins.**

All that God has commanded us to believe is truth, emphatically the truth of God. All the doctrines of the Bible are *his truths*. Can there be among these, *a little truth*—a truth of little value, so that it is a matter of small importance whether we believe it or not? As the same authority is equally connected with commands, we might with equal propriety, ask, if there can be a little divine command? If either is admitted, the consequence doubtless will be admitted also, namely, that for the breach of it, there can be but a little eternal punishment—a little everlasting hell!

"As things are proposed unto us," says Dr. Owen, "to be believed as true, faith in its assent respects only the truth or veracity of God; but whereas this faith is required of us in a way *of obedience*, and is considered not only physically in its nature, but morally also as *our duty*, it respects also *the authority* of God, which I therefore join with the truth of God. "Thus saith the Lord," is that which is proposed unto us as the reason why we should believe."†

* Joh. VIII. 24. † Reason of Faith in the Scrip. p. 25, 26. Glasgow, 1801.

NOTE *(K.)* page 48.

Confessions of faith, have generally been considered as subordinate standards in the church. They have been viewed as a constitutional security to the church, regulating the ecclesiastical citizenship of her members. It is not, therefore, a very uncommon thing, that they should be *supposed*, and in some instances, *declared, to contain the terms of church communion;* i. e. *the terms upon which, and upon which alone, an individual can be admitted into church fellowship.*

It is, however, doubted by the author of the Plea for Sacramental Communion on Catholic Principles, whether such *an opinion be correct, and such a declaration discreet.** And he refuses that *when they are expanded into a comprehensive system of theology, as in the Westminster confession, they ought to be proposed for approbation, in all their latitude, to every one who desires baptism for his children, or a seat at the table of the Lord.*† Taking care at the same time to warn the reader, *not to be stumbled* at what might *thwart his prepossessions.*

There was need for this warning, especially as he had immediately before maintained that they ought to be a *test* to the ministers of the church, and *terms of official union.*‡ He views a confession of faith as the "*fixed testimony* of a church," and seems to think it difficult to conceive, "how it can be dispensed with," when the doctrine, government, and worship of the christian church "are matters of controversy."

His arguments in support of the view he takes of this subject are, that it was not the *original design* of the Protestant confessions, that they should be terms of communion for private christians—that they were not *in fact* terms of communion for private christians; nor even for the *reciprocation of ministerial* fellowship—and because they *cannot* be, in effect, terms of christian (we presume he means what we call church) communion.

The Dr's. arguments, however, do not seem altogether satisfactory. He grants that the confession of faith is the church's fixed

* Page 351. † Page 353. ‡ Ibid, p. 352, 353.

testimony. It does not appear quite correct to denominate a confession of faith a testimony, as these have been, from time immemorial, in the usage of reformed churches, considered as distinct.—A testimony, as a public document in a church, has uniformly been understood, to be distinguished from her confession of faith, by not only stating the doctrinal articles of the holy scriptures, as the confession also did, but likewise stating the contrary errors, and testifying against all that held them, which the confession did not.

We know of but one instance, where a church in her judicial capacity, attempted to amalgamate these two distinct, public documents, by representing her confession of faith as her *fixed* testimony. And even the approbation of Dr. Mason, will not be sufficient, to sanction the unwarrantable departure from principle and usage.

But taking it in his own application, as the fixed testimony of the church, it appears not a little strange, that the members of the church should not be bound by the church's testimony. A testimony is the evidence which a witness gives in court, or when regularly called before some tribunal. It is generally given on oath, but whether or not, it is constantly understood to be the act and deed of the witness himself—that he is the author of his own testimony, and that he declares what he believes to be the truth. The contrary of any of these would render a witness something worse than suspicious, and his testimony wholly unworthy of credit.

According to the Dr. we have here the testimony—the fixed testimony of the church, but her members are not bound to believe it. The officers to be sure must all believe the evidence which they have given, but the private members need not! This is rather serious trifling. In all conscience, would it not be better not to admit them to give testimony at all?

But I shall be told, this is the very thing contended for. This same fixed testimony *is not to regulate private communion*—it is not required of every one—it ought not to be even *proposed to every one for approbation in all its latitude.* Then it is not, it seems, after all, the fixed testimony *of the church.* It is only the fixed testimony of the officers of the church. Why then is it denomina-

ted the fixed testimony *of the church?* Do officers alone constitute the church? I know they do constitute the church judicative. But is that what is meant by *the church*, when the principles of the church—the doctrines of the church—the tenets of the church—the confessions or testimonies of the church are spoken of?

Let this matter be fairly understood. Let the people who are immediately concerned, be apprized of this fact. "You, the private members of the church, are not to consider yourselves, as having any thing to do with the confession of faith. That belongs to *us* the ministers and officers, and it is *our* confession of faith, not *yours*. For this strong reason, that it is the fixed testimony of the *church*, and we are the church. If you were the church, then indeed, it would be your testimony, and you would have to believe it, for it would be ridiculous to suppose, that you were giving a testimony that you yourselves did not believe. It would even forfeit your claims to moral honesty, should it be true, and, in fact, make you neither more nor less than false witnesses. Now the point to be supported is this, you may be admitted to communion though you should not approve of the fixed testimony of the church. It must not then be *your* testimony, the confession of *your faith*—*your* principles or *your* terms of communion."

If this be refused, and the side taken that will embrace the private members, in the testimony of the church, then it is respectfully enquired how the *testimony* that these private members give is to be no *test* to them, while the same *testimony* is to be a *test* to the officers? There probably would not have been all this torturing contradiction, if the confession had been kept in its own place, and not forced to invade the territories of the testimony. But even then the *denying* the *confession* of one's faith would have been tormenting.

There is a difficulty even respecting the ministers themselves, and their connection with this testimony, which does not appear quite so easy to be removed, as could be wished. Why should they be bound by *this test*, and the private members be all free?—I say all free; for if one may be admitted not approving, that is disapproving, in other words denying the confession of faith, an-

other may; all may. And why not? Confessions of faith were never, it seems, intended to regulate private communion, neither by their *original design*, nor in *fact*, nor in *effect*. The question then is, why is it necessary that the ministers should be so bound, when the system to which they are bound is of so little importance, that all the private members of the church may be admitted to communion, disapproving it? Is this order or confusion?

There is yet another difficult case, among these *tests* and *no tests*, that it would be desirable if light could be cast upon it. We shall endeavour to prepare it for the reception of light, by shewing that it needs it.

It is strenuously contended by the Dr. that the ministers of the church must all be bound by her fixed testimony. It must be a test to them. The church "must exact from them *a positive unequivocating engagement, to maintain* her confession of faith, constructed so as "to contain all those cardinal points which are essential to christian faith and fellowship," and likewise "others, which though not thus essential, are nevertheless, important; and worthy to be maintained with zeal and constancy."* While at the same time, he maintains, that as "thus constructed, they were not *in fact* terms of communion—even for the reciprocation of ministerial fellowship."

It is no easy matter to reconcile all this. The maintaining the confession with "an explicit avowal," and "a positive, unequivocating engagement," is strictly enjoined, as a necessary test to be exacted from all the church's ministers; while at the same time it is to be no term of communion "for the reciprocation of ministerial fellowship." We learn from the Dr's. practice, and explanations given at the beginning of his book, what he means by "ministerial reciprocation." The question now to be asked, is, whether the minister who reciprocates with Dr. Mason, be, while he is officiating in his church, for the time one of the church's ministers? If he is not, what relation is there between him and the church? And how came he there? Or what is the church doing with ministers that she claims not as hers? If he be one of *her*

* Ib. p. 352—354.

ministers, as common sense would say he is, what about the *test*—the *explicit avowal* of her confession, and the *positive, unequivocating engagemeut* to maintain it? While at the same time this very *test, avowal*, and *engagement*, is not a term of communion *for the reciprocation of ministerial fellowship*. We are not able to admit both sides.

But it seems that this liberal mode of dispensing with the confession of faith, has had advocates 100 years ago. Professor Dunlop, we are informed,* "in a work expressly defending confessions of faith," refuses that ever the church of Scotland established the confession of faith, a term of communion.

Professor Dunlop appears to have been about as firm a defender of confessions of faith as Dr. Mason; but according to his own account, was not so hardly beset by the judicial acts of his church, as the Dr. is by his. "In so far as is known to us," says Dunlop, as quoted by Dr. Mason, "there is no act of Assembly, nor even of any inferiour church-judicature, establishing the confession faith a term of christian communion, and requiring an assent thereto from christian parents, in order to their being admitted to all the privileges of church communion, and particularly the baptism of their children."

But the Dr. informs us,† that "the Westminster confession of faith, catechisms, form of church-government, and directories for worship, are *declaratively* and *legally* terms of permanent communion or membership in the Associate Reformed church."‡ But having quoted Dunlop, whose work he takes care to inform us, "was first published at Edinburgh, in 1719; thirteen years before Ebenezer Erskine's famous sermon which occasioned the Secession," he adds, "such were the views and practice of the church of Scotland before the Secession." That is to say, such is the account of the views and practice of the church of Scotland before the Secession, given by Professor Dunlop, therefore they were the views and practice of the church of Scotland.

One hundred years after this, a person reading Dr. Mason's

* Plea, p. 354, 355. † Plea, p. 356. ‡ The Westminster confession!—He surely would be understood cum grano salis. Is there no alteration?

views of confessions of faith, might draw the conclusion, that such were the views and the practice of the Associate Reformed church, unless happily he should notice the place where the Dr. states that the (he says Westminster) confession of faith, catechisms, &c. are *declaratively* and *legally* terms of permanent communion or membership in that church. He would then discover that the Dr. was writing against his own church; notwithstanding his agreement with these very terms of communion; for we cannot suppose, that there was an exception made in his favour, from the *terms of permanent communion*, or membership in his own church.

"Such were the views and practice of the church of Scotland before the Secession." It would seem by this remark, that the Dr. means to charge the Seceders with being the *first*, who ever viewed the confession of faith as a term of communion. The Dr. undesignedly does them honour. For if it were true that the church never made her own confession of faith, a *confession* and *profession* of the faith of her members until the Secession did it, then they were the first who ever had correct views of the church's confession of faith, or ever applied it according to its very *name*, and the use for which it was designed. Indeed, there is no doubt but their views of the confession were very different from those exhibited by Professor Dunlop. But that there was such an opinion as he represents, entertained by himself, and many more in the Revolution church, it is supposed no one will call in question.—The famous sermon by Ebenezer Erskine, and the rise of the Secession occasioned by that sermon, furnish the most indubitable proof that there were many erroneous opinions, entertained by the church of Scotland at that time. The confession, however, was a term of communion long before the rise of the Secession.

To obtain correct views of the confession of faith, and how it was used in relation to communion, we must go a little farther back, than thirteen years before Mr. Erskine's sermon;—to a period of greater purity in the church of Scotland, than that in which Professor Dunlop lived. The *Revolution* church of Scotland, never was to be compared to the *Reformation* church of Scotland.

The approving act of the General Assembly of a church far superior in purity and faithfulness, to the present establisnments in Britain, will give other views of the nature and use of the confession of faith, than those afforded by their time serving successors.

This act commences, with declaring a confession of faith to be the chiefest part of uniformity in religion, &c. It further states that the confession of faith agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster, had been duly examined, and found most agreeable to the word of God—and that the General Assembly did, after mature deliberation, agree unto, and approve the said confession, as to the truth of the matter, as most orthodox, and grounded upon the word of God—as to the *point of uniformity*, agreeing that it be a *common confession of faith* for the three kingdoms.

The new notion of its being a confession only for the ministers and officers of the church, was not then known.

The Solemn League and Covenant, and acts respecting it, will further elucidate and establish the point, that the confession was intended to be a term of communion, generally, and not to be confined to the ministers and officers of the church only. The first article of the Solemn League engages to this confession, and is not confined to the officers of the church, but embraces the common people *of all sorts*. The act of commission of the General Assembly, Oct. 11, 1643, did, by virtue of power given them by the Assembly, ordain, that the Solemn League and Covenant, be, with all due solemnity, sworn, not only by all the ministers, but by all the *professors* within the kirk, and that this be *universally* performed. The same decree obliges every minister upon the first Lord's day after the Solemn League and Covenant shall come to his hands, to read and explain it, and by exhortations to prepare *the people*, to the swearing and subscribing thereof, solemnly, on the next Lord's day—and that suitable censure, through the interference of the several Presbyteries, should be inflicted on such as refused to swear, and their names notified to the commission of

the General Asembly. Was not this making the confession, which the Covenant embraces, a term of communion?*

It seems, then, that the Secession are not entitled to either *the credit* or *the disgrace*, of being the first who made the confession of faith a term of communion, the authority of Dr. Mason, aided by all the authority of Professor Dunlop to the contrary notwithstanding. Indeed, it was drawing too deep upon the credulity of his readers, to make such a representation.

The Dr's. last reason why the confession of faith ought not to be made a term of communion to private christians, is taken from the *nature of the thing*, "it *cannot be*, *in effect* a term of communion.

But it does not appear, that there is any more weight in this reason, than in that taken from *authority*, which we have already considered. It never was intended, that all, to whom the confession is to be made a term of communion, should be able, either clearly to explain, or even to understand *all* the system of divine truth contained in it;—"a work which occupied for years the care and study of a body of divines, second to none in the world—covering the whole ground of didactic and polemic theology."—It is enough that so far as they understand it they are agreed with it; and hold no opinion subversive of its known doctrines. They are *disciples*. The church is a school, whether they come to learn, and to be more thoroughly instructed in the knowledge of the doctrines of salvation. A *competent* knowledge, and a *perfect* knowledge, may be very different things, though having the same thing for their object. Might it not be difficult, sometimes, upon the ground of the objection, to apply the case admitted by the Dr. himself? namely, that the confession should be *a test* to the officers of the church.

With pleasure we admit, that Dr. Mason is a scholar and a divine. And with confidence we put the question to himself, If a perfect, or even a correct, and accurate knowledge of the "whole

* See also Act of the Commiss. of the Gen. Ass. for renewing the Solemn League and Covenant. Edinb. Oct. 6, 1648. Likewise Act of the Gen. Assembly, against Dissaffecters of the Covenant. Edinb. June 3, 1644. Sess. 6.

doctrine of those standards," were required from every *officer* in the church, how many of them could abide the ordeal? The Dr. is acquainted with many ministers in different churches, who, more or less, claim the confession of faith. Does he believe, that all these are proficients in the system, which "covers the whole ground of didactic and polemic theology?"—that they are all able "to grasp a work like this?—to distinguish its numerous propositions; and to fathom their sense?" We shall venture the answer in the negative.

There must be a discretionary power used.—Something qualifying as to the degree of knowledge. While it will be sternly required, that they hold no opposite principle, no contradictory doctrine. And will not the same principle extend to the private members of the church? The *allowance* may be greater, but the principle is the same. Whatever, therefore, be the force of the objection, upon the allowed principle of the Dr's. own application of it, if it operates against us, it equally, in the nature of the thing, operates against himself, and is calculated to set aside the use of confessions of faith altogether.