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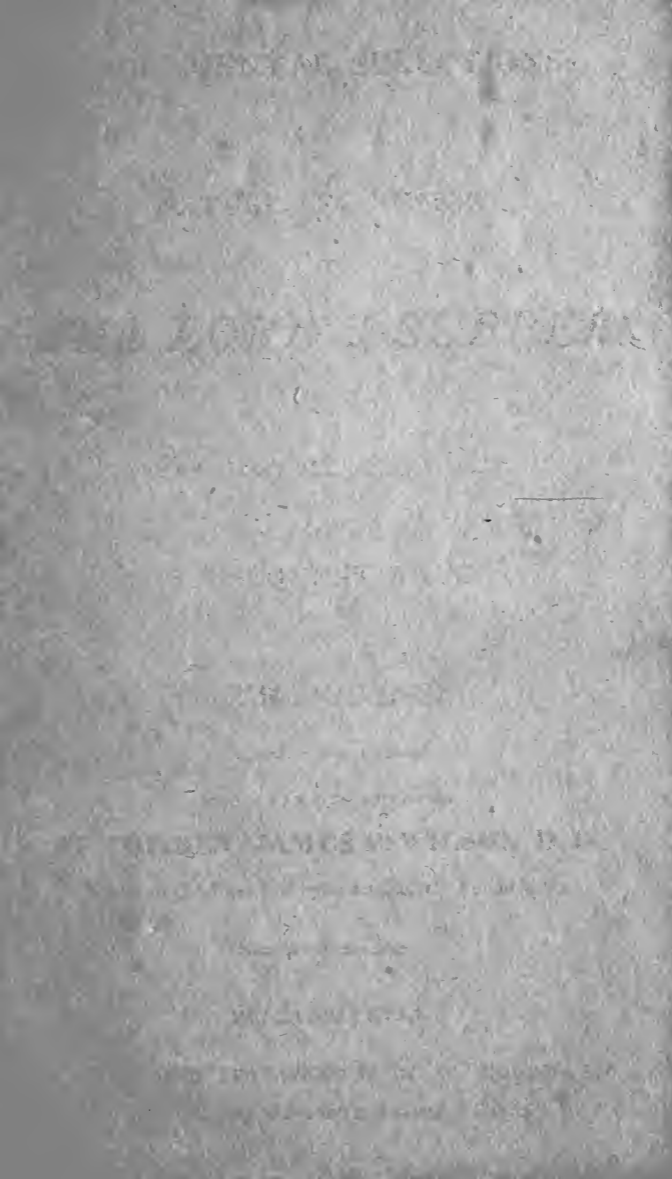
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SACRAMENTAL SELECTIONS;

OR THE

NATURE AND DESIGN

OF

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

WITH THE

PREPARATORY SELF-EXAMINATION

AND

SUBSEQUENT WALK

OF

COMMUNICANTS.

FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS.

BY THE REV. JAMES P. WILSON, D. D.

Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia.

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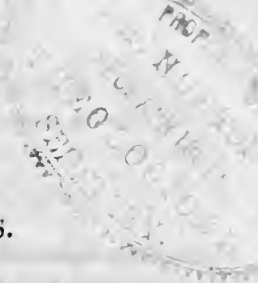
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D. CALDWELL,

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SACRAMENTAL SELECTIONS :

OR THE

NATURE AND DESIGN

OF

THE LORD'S SUPPER.



OF THE NATURE AND USES OF THE ORDINANCE OF
THE LORD'S SUPPER.

THE great design of Almighty God, to bring about the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ, has been gradually discovered: it has been carried on through the past ages of the world in divers manners: it was early mentioned to Adam: it was promised to Abraham: it was represented in types and figures under the Mosaic dispensation. The promise made to the father of the faithful, was repeated to David. In the fulness of time God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law. All these circumstances prove this great undertaking to have been the * eternal purpose of God:

* The happiness of man in his first estate flowed from the *goodness* of God, his miseries have flowed from his own guilt. *Justice* would approve if man in every instance were left to the consequences of his crimes. As man is formed for actively glorifying God, if every man had failed of this forever, it would have argued a disappointment of the purposes of his Creator: but the supposition is indis-

but it is not yet fully displayed. The last amazing and perfecting part of this great plan extends to another world: then only shall the mystery of God be finished.

As all the views in which this important design hath appeared, have relation one to another, they contribute mutually to cast light upon each other. Thus, Christ himself said to the Jews, "If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so shall the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life;" and, of the passover, he saith, That it should be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

When this type was about to be fulfilled, under the gospel dispensation, in the death of Christ

creet, for the whole scheme of God relative to man is one, and entire; and the salvation of the myriads of saints was as much in the divine view as the formation of man. In themselves guilty and helpless, their salvation must spring from the mercy of their Creator. But mercy cannot be extended to the disparagement of the justice, holiness, and truth of God. The Scriptures affirm man's inability to satisfy justice, he has nothing to render, he cannot be profitable to God, and the great Supreme cannot cease to be just, or wave the demands of justice. They show that God has provided a satisfaction, which has been rendered according to purposes existing before man's creation, so that justice has received all her dues, with respect to those who have an interest in Christ. Man is unholy, averse to submission, and unfit for the enjoyment of God; a way therefore has been opened, by which the Holy Spirit can, consistently with justice, be sent to change the heart, produce submission, and make the party meet for glory. And because all this was from eternity on the Divine mind, he has never said or done any thing in his transactions with man incompatible with such intentions, though such purposes have not been expressed as limitations of his denunciations. This whole scheme of salvation originates with, and is carried on, and perfected by God. It is all therefore of grace, and all redounds to his glory.

our passover, on the night before he was crucified, our blessed Lord instituted the Sacrament* of his Supper: It is recorded by three Evangelists: Matt. xxvi. 20, 26, 27, 28. " Now
 " when the even was come, he sat down with
 " the twelve. And as they were eating, Jesus
 " took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and
 " gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat ;
 " this is my body. And he took the cup, and
 " gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,
 " Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the
 " new testament, which is shed for many, for
 " the remission of sins. Mark xiv. 17, 18, 22,
 " 23, 24. And in the evening he cometh with
 " the twelve. And as they sat and did eat,—
 " Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it,
 " and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this
 " is my body. And he took the cup, and when
 " he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and
 " they all drank of it. And he said unto them,
 " This is my blood of the new testament, which
 " is shed for many. Luke xxii. 14, 19, 20.
 " And when the hour was come, he sat down,

* That the word *Sacramentum* was used to signify a military oath among the Romans, cannot be questioned. That Pliny used it in this sense, when he applied it to the Lord's supper, in his description of Christian worship in his letter to Trajan, ought also to be admitted. But whether it was so understood by the early Christians, who first applied it to the ordinances, is extremely doubtful. They used the word *Sacramentum*, for *mystery*, as is plain from its occurrence in the Vulgate in Ephes. i. 9. iii. 8. 9. v. 32. Col. i. 27. 1 Tim. iii. 16. Rev. i. 20. xvii. 7. and perhaps in other places. They probably therefore meant by the term thus used, that more was contained in, or intended by the ordinances of Baptism and the Supper, than the external rites discovered to un instructed spectators. Vide Dr. Campbell on the Gospels, and Dr. V. Knox, on the Lord's Supper.

“and the twelve apostles with him. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”

The fullest account given of it is by the holy Apostle Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 23. The writings of the Apostle and of the Evangelists are of equal authority: we may safely rely on them; for they were all written by the aid and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.* The Evangelist Matthew was

* Reason after her highest attainments is nonplussed in many things, about which men in all ages have been solicitous. Whether the soul survives the body, whether the body shall be raised, whether man can be rendered happy without satisfaction to offended justice, whether there be a way of salvation, and such like, are questions, the solution of which, if they have been solved, must have come from the God of nature. He is able to reveal to us his pleasure for we cannot frame a thought without him. This has been also the general belief, as is proved by the contrivance and reception of Pagan oracles, and by the efforts to sanction human laws by Divine authority. That he has done it, appears by the declarations of the writers of the Holy Scriptures; they have not wilfully prevaricated; their characters are good, and their testimony was against their interest and worldly comfort. Their subject matter contains too much evidence of wisdom to allow us to suppose the writers ignorant and enthusiastic. These writings speak themselves divine; they give the most perfect character of Deity, the most credible account of the origin of man, his first condition, the peopling of the world, his present character, and natural disposition; and the way of happiness. They surpass every system of morals yet offered to the world. They have stood the test of the most severe and most general scrutiny of all sorts of men, through many ages, and have not been justly charged with any defect. Their morality is the most pure; their history of the early times the most credible; and their representation of Deity the most reasonable. Their effects in civilizing the savage mind, in calming its furious passions, regulating its inordinate desires, in directing the will to its proper object, in disseminating the prejudices of the darkened understanding, and rendering man a reasonable being, discover

present, and narrates the summary of what he heard and saw; the holy Apostle Paul writes what he had received by immediate revelation, from our Lord himself, relative to the Lord's Supper.

He wrote on purpose to rectify what had been amiss in the conduct of the church of Corinth,

that they are not a human invention. Prophecies, miracles, the preservation of the Scriptures, and of the nation of the Jews to be witnesses of the Old Testament, which is the best proof of the New, and the accompanying witness of the Spirit of God to his own word, render certain the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Many portions of these sacred books were communicated to the speakers or writers immediately by strong impressions upon their minds, by visions, by dreams, by audible voices, or face to face, and whether the ideas or words were thus given, it may be denominated for the sake of distinction, an inspiration by *suggestion*. By far the greater portion of the sacred Scriptures is historical. The writers possessed in common with other men reason, memory, and the other ordinary mental faculties, and were sufficiently acquainted with their own language to narrate the occurrences of which they had been witnesses, or the facts, of which they had received certain information from others. There could be no need of an immediate suggestion of the things they knew or remembered, but only of things which they would not have remembered; and also, that it was God's will, that they should make such record. It cannot be believed that Deity intending to perpetuate the knowledge of such facts, would suffer himself to be disappointed in the means or instruments adopted. He allowed them to communicate as witnesses their own ideas, in their own words, but so superintended them, that it should be all true, and that that, which he intended, should be communicated. This is the inspiration of *superintendence*, which constitutes the whole *the word of God*, all the Scriptures being written by inspiration of him.

Deeds and wills express the minds of grantors and testators in the language in which they were originally written and executed. The Septuagint, Vulgate; and other versions, and the masoretic points, give us but the opinions of judicious men upon the various parts of the Original, and are not *the word of God*. Much of the Scriptures is in figurative language: to adopt a literal interpretation universally, would therefore be to mistake in many instances the sense. When this is apparent we are at liberty to adopt no other; unless a secondary sense has been expressly authorized by the Holy Spirit in some other passage of Scripture.

in administering that ordinance ; and, therefore, recites the original account of its institution. “ I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread : and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you : this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also, he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new Testament in my blood ; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

After our Lord had celebrated the passover with his disciples, the Apostle and Evangelists say, “ he took bread.” The Evangelists St. Matthew and Mark say, “ he blessed it.” The Evangelist St. Luke, and St. Paul, say, “ he gave thanks.” The two expressions import the same thing ; an act of religious worship ; and that our Lord implored the blessing of Almighty God on the bread and the wine, that thereby, as the memorials of his death, they might be

made to answer the pious and religious purpose to which he had appointed them. Thus our Saviour is said to have applied to heaven,* imploring the blessing of Almighty God on the loaves and the fishes: he laid his hands also on little children, and blessed † them: he lift up his hands, and blessed his disciples, at his ascension. ‡

He took bread, *and brake it*: A part of the institution very significant; for, had it not been broken, it could not have been a proper emblem of his body, which was broken, or crucified for us. Breaking of bread seems, therefore, to have been the name most commonly used in the New Testament, to express the Lord's Supper. § And, if the bread be not broken, it does not represent, as it ought, the communion of saints; who, || by that action, as they are partakers of that one bread, have communion one with another; and are all as really members of that one body, of which Christ is the head, as they are partakers of one bread.

He gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you." The disciples could not possibly have understood by this expression, that the bread was Christ's real body: for his body was visibly distinct from the bread. It could, at this time, only be understood *figuratively*; for his body was not crucified, or broken, till the day following. The body of our Lord that was cru-

* Matt. xiv. 19. † Mark x. 16. ‡ Luke xxiv. 50, 51.
 § Acts xx. 7. 11. ii. 42. 46. || 1 Cor. x. 16.

cified, separated by death from his soul, and again joined to it at his resurrection, is now in heaven; this sacrament is dispensed in remembrance of him as absent; and, therefore, the bread cannot possibly be his *real* body. This is done by us, the Apostle says, “to shew his death till he come;” but, if he be here *bodily* present, that presence destroys the ordinance entirely, which was designed to keep us in remembrance of him, while he is absent.

The cup is called the *new testament or covenant in his blood*: that is to say, the wine in the cup, represents the blood of Christ, by which the covenant of mercy was ratified: for our Lord became “the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the *blood* of the everlasting covenant.”

These figurative ways of speaking are very consistent with many other expressions in holy scripture. As, when Christ is called a *Rock*, or calls himself a *Shepherd*, a *Door*, the *Way*, or a *Vine*; no man ever imagined any of these could be understood literally, but figuratively. When Joseph said, in the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream, “The seven good kine are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years,*” he meant they represented, or signified, seven years.

In the same language, the bread and wine are the symbols, the memorials, or representations of the broken body and shed blood of Christ: they are neither of them a complete sacrament without the other. It is absurd to say, “That

* Gen. xli. 26, 27.

“ the bread or wafer, by itself, as representing
 “ the body, is a sacrament, because the body
 “ contains the blood ;” for this sacrament is in-
 stituted in commemoration of the blood shed
 out of, or from the body ; and, therefore, with-
 out the cup, his crucifixion is imperfectly re-
 presented. We may add, that both kinds were
 appointed by the same authority ; and, if there
 be any difference made in the New Testament,
 the greatest stress seems to be laid upon the
 blood,* which was the life, and given to be the
 sacrifice.

The Apostle adds, ver. 26. “ As often as ye
 “ eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew
 “ the Lord’s death till he come :” That is, shew
 forth the truth of it, and our own belief in it. So
 that, in the Lord’s Supper, we not only com-
 memorate Christ, that was crucified ; but we
 also profess our faith in his resurrection, and
 our hope of his coming to judgment. “ For he
 “ liveth, though he was dead, and is alive for
 “ evermore, and hath the keys of death, and of
 “ the grave.” And therefore, this ordinance is,
 in its own nature, the memorial of his love, and
 a pledge of his second coming.

He adds, ver. 27. “ Whosoever therefore, shall
 “ eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord
 “ unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and
 “ blood of the Lord.”

The *body and blood of the Lord* signify the
 death of Christ. For he saith himself, of the
 bread, “ This is my body,” and of the cup,

* Eph. i. 7. Col. i. 20. Heb. ix. 14. 1 Pet. i. 19. 1 John i. 7.

“ This is my blood ;” that is, they represent the death which he suffered for the remission of sin. To eat and drink unworthily, if restricted to the Corinthians, refers to that proud and uncharitable, that intemperate and irreverent manner, in which they partook of the Lord’s Supper, for which the Apostle finds fault with them.

To be *guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*, is a strong figurative expression, like Heb. vi. 6. “ they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame :” And, Heb. x. 29. “ they count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing :” That is, those who turned back to Judaism, from the profession of the gospel, behaved towards Christ as if he had been an impostor, and had been justly put to death. So that the restricted meaning will be, that their behaviour at the Lord’s Supper was a great indignity to the death of Christ, which that institution was meant to commemorate.

But as the Apostle speaks of the time that is to come, and says, “ Whosoever *shall eat* this bread, or drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, *shall be guilty* of the body and blood of the Lord ;” and what he wrote was by the authority of Christ, agreeable to what he had received from him : it seems reasonable to understand him as establishing a law with respect to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Good laws usually take their rise from misbehaviour and ill conduct in the subjects. Thus,

from Peter's rebuking his master, when he foretold that he was himself to suffer and be crucified *, our Lord warns them against the danger of being ashamed of him, or denying him before men. From the Pharisees maliciously insinuating †, "that by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, he did cast out devils," he pointed out to them the great guilt of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

In like manner, from the irreligious and offensive behaviour of the Corinthians, the Apostle took occasion to declare to men, the danger of eating and drinking unworthily; and, therefore, with great propriety may he be understood as warning us against every improper and unworthy manner of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

He says, "They eat and drink *judgment* to themselves;" by their irreligious behaviour they offended God. He mentions also the punishment which had been inflicted on some of them already, for their guilt. Many were visited with sickness and distress, and some with death: "For this cause many are weakly, and sick among you, and many sleep."

It is very observable, that, in this institution, the wisdom of God hath followed the same method, in which he hath thought fit to instruct mankind from the beginning of the world: For when, at any time, Almighty God hath condescended to speak of himself to the sons of men, as we are averse to think of spiritual things, and

* Mark viii. 30.—38.

† Math. xii. 24. 31, 32.

incapable of forming any proper conception of them, but by some helps, or analogy to sensible objects, therefore he hath never given us any sublime description of his nature and essence, which, very probably, we could not have comprehended; but chose rather to be known to us by some memorable work, or some affectionate relation in which he stood to the sons of men. Thus, to the patriarchs he was known as “the Creator of the heavens, and of the earth:” To the Israelites, as “the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and the house of bondage;” and, to Christians he is revealed, as “God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are as careless to remember, as we are at first slow to apprehend spiritual things; and, therefore, has the same wisdom employed some outward means, or external signs, to bring these important relations to our remembrance. Thus, to preserve the belief of our dependence on him as our Creator, and a sense of the duties which we owe him, immediately after the creation, God was pleased to set apart one day in seven for his worship. To perpetuate the memory of their great deliverance from oppression and slavery in Egypt, he ordained the passover to be carefully observed by the children of Israel, in all their generations: In the same view is the Lord’s Supper appointed to be celebrated in all the churches of Christ, as a memorial of his death and sufferings, till he comes again. As these symbols are plain and significant, they are wise-

ly adapted to promote this great end ; for, such is our frame, that sensible emblems, when not glaring and ostentatious, make deeper, and more lasting impressions on our minds, than a bare historical narrative of the facts to be remembered. So that,

1st. The primary intent of the Lord's Supper, is to perpetuate and keep up the remembrance of Christ till he come again : " This (says he) do " in remembrance of me."

Hereby we are called to remember how excellent this person is, who underwent all these sufferings for us. " The only begotten Son of " God, * the brightness of the Father's glory, " the express image of his person, in whom are

* The Scriptures of the New Testament contain the expression *the Son of God* above forty times. That Christ, the anointed, that is commissioned, of the Father, was also the Son of God, appears to have been a leading article of the Gospel faith, and therefore these terms were, we presume, well understood. If the Socinian interpretation of them, as implying inferiority and subjection be the true one, it ought not to be rejected, but the meaning of this expression, should not be taken from the force of such terms in modern use ; it is but fair that their sense should be sought for in the book in which we find them, the correct understanding of which is the object of all who receive it as the Word of God. The term *son* does not in every instance imply inferiority ; we associate such idea, when the son has been in minority and subjection, but the Son of God is from eternity, he made all things and is frequently named Jehovah in the Old Testament. The Jews accused Christ of blasphemy because he called God his Father, which they deemed to be the making himself equal with God. The word Son did not import necessarily subjection, otherwise it would not have been said, " Tho' he were a Son yet learned he obedience," but because he was a Son therefore he yielded obedience. In like manner the word *son* may be used without associating with it the idea of posteriority, whatever may be the case in order of nature, God always existed and never without purposing, his purposes are therefore eternal, and so the Son is eternal. The meaning of the word Son may be collected from the first chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews " Being by so much more powerful (*υπερτων*) than the angels,

“ hid all the treasures of wisdom and know-

as he *hath inherited* a more excellent name than they ; ” (a) and that name as appears from the next sentence was that of *Son*. Angels and men may be called sons by adoption, but he is by inheritance, by nature such. Every name and title found in the New Testament may be ascribed to Christ, and are so, and yet his Deity denied, because as he condescended to be a Mediator, and to assume our nature, he was thus inferior to God, and the Scriptures which describe this inferiority are applied to his character under all circumstances. But to be a Son, and begotten of the Father express that his nature is the same, and that he may be the *brightness* of the Father’s *glory*, (b) and consequently the same with the Father, as a part of the same glory, and yet personally distinct as these words shew. He was a Son before he was *sent*, or *manifested* and is thus denominated as his personal distinction in the ordinance of Baptism. It is a term like all others which we apply to Deity taken from sensible things, but ought no more to be confined to his human birth than the term *word* to his prophetic character in the first chapter of John, for though he reveals the Father yet he was the *Word* in the beginning. Because it is said after a description of the conception (c) “ therefore also that holy “ thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God,” it does not follow that thereby he *became* the Son of God, for it was thus he became possessed of the human nature, nor even that he should be then first *called* the Son of God; for he had been frequently called by this name in prophecy, the force of that passage is only that by such extraordinary conception that which should be born of the virgin Mary should be called by a name long before known, it should be accounted that Divine person who was from eternity the Son of God.

It was necessary that no less a person should be our Mediator, obey and die. The human *nature* not the Divine could suffer, but the *Divine person* suffered, as a man suffers when his body, not his soul is diseased. God only has a right to determine his own worship, and especially a vicarious sacrifice must be by Divine and antecedent appointment: but its whole importance did not rest in appointment, otherwise so costly an one need not have been offered, the blood of bulls and of goats, or a nominal sacrifice, might have answered; tho’ the law and justice required sufferings and death, yet God takes no pleasure in the miseries of others; this was not the principal end; but he governs the universe, his laws must be obeyed, his honour must not be compromised, his word must be fulfilled; it was therefore necessary that a sacrifice should be made, which would demand the attention of the universe, and which could not have been affected by the sufferings and death of a mere creature, if it had been innocent, and had a right to lay down its life, and power to take it up again. But for the Creator and Lawgiver to obey and suffer produces the utmost respect for his laws, and the greatest terror to the guilty.

a Heb. i. 4.

b Heb. i. 3.

c Luke i. 35.

ledge, and the fulness of the Godhead bodily : He being in the form of God, took on him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The dignity of his person gave a value to his obedience, and to all his sufferings.

This most excellent person left all that happiness of which he was possessed in heaven, and came to earth ; " the Word that was God, was made flesh, and dwelt among us : " For our sake, " he became a man of sorrows, " and acquainted with grief : " After having taught us the terms of salvation and acceptance with God, set before us an edifying and perfect example, and endured much contradiction of sinners against himself, he suffered a painful and ignominious death, as an expiation for the sins of men.

All this he did with cheerfulness and constancy : All the opposition, hatred and reproach with which he was assaulted, rather quickened his anxiety to have that great undertaking accomplished. He neither failed, nor was discouraged, till he could say, " It is finished. "

To perpetuate the belief of this important event in the world, and to preserve an affectionate and grateful remembrance of it on the hearts of all the disciples and followers of Christ, as a principle of obedience, was the original intent of the Lord's Supper ; that, when we were sinners, and enemies, without strength to rescue ourselves from the guilt and dominion of sin, Christ, in due time, thus died for the ungodly.

2dly. The Lord's Supper affords us an opportunity of renewing and ratifying our covenant with God. Mercy and forgiveness are offered, in the gospel, to him that believes and repents. The terms on which mercy was offered, were obtained by the mediation of Christ, and purchased by his death. We are early dedicated to God, on the terms of this covenant, by baptism; but, alas! in many things we fail, and come short of the sacred obligations that were then laid on us. As these terms of mercy are accommodated to imperfect men, who promise obedience, and are in danger of breaking, or of forgetting their vows; the Lord's Supper affords an occasion of recollection, and an opportunity of considering how we have paid these vows, or wherein we have failed in the performance of the duties which were incumbent on us, and what guilt we are chargeable with in the sight of his cross. When we are to partake of the Lord's Supper, it is a very proper occasion of searching and trying our hearts; of confessing and mourning over our past transgressions; of imploring the forgiveness of them, for the sake of that propitiation, which this ordinance doth commemorate; of bringing ourselves under new and stricter obligations to watch against temptations, and resolving, that wherein we have done iniquity, by his grace, we will do no more.

3dly. The Lord's Supper is a means of maintaining communion with God. Sin forfeited the favour of God, banished men from his presence, and deprived us of freedom of access to him.

To this great privilege we are again restored by Jesus Christ, and now have access to the Father by him. Almighty God hath thought fit of his great goodness, that this intercourse should be carried on in the use of means. By them he vouchsafes to bestow on us, the direction of his Good Spirit, the assistance of his grace, the comforts of his love, the pledges and foretastes of eternal life.

The ordinance of the Supper is a powerful means of maintaining this communion, and of conveying these blessings to the children of God. "The cup of blessings (saith the holy " Apostle) which we bless, is it not the *commu-*
" *nion* of the blood of Christ? The bread which
" we break, is it not the *communion* of the body
" of Christ *?" that is, the means of conveying
to us the blessings purchased by the sufferings
of Christ.

It must be acknowledged, if there be no such thing as real communion with God, many expressions in holy scripture can have no determinate meaning at all. As when the Psalmist says,
"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so
" panteth my soul for God, the living God †.—
" We shall be satisfied with the fatness of thy
" house, even of thy holy place: thou wilt pro-
" vide for them drink of the rivers of thy plea-
" sure ‡.—Then shall I run the way of thy com-
" mandments, when thou shalt enlarge my
" heart §." Saith our Lord himself, "He that

* 1 Cor. x. 16. † Psalm xlii. 1. 2. ‡ Psalm xxxvi. 8. 9.
§ Psalm cxix. 32.

“loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him. If any man love me, he will keep my words; my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him *.” And, since he ascended into heaven, he saith to the church, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: If any man will hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me †.” This is, indeed, the hidden manna of God, which the world knoweth not; a stranger doth not intermeddle with this joy!

4thly, The Lord’s Supper is intended as a means of our improvement in holiness, and all the other graces of the Christian life. This is called *feeding on Christ*. He calls himself *the bread of life*: That is to say, the blessings which he hath brought and purchased, and bestows on us, are as necessary to the happiness of the soul, as bread is to the nourishment of our bodies.

The soul is spiritual, and stands in need of spiritual food; that is, of light to direct us in the road of our duty, and of assistance to perform it; of courage to persevere in the course of a holy obedience; and strength to resist temptations. We all agree, that the growth and progress of every thing depend on the concurrence of providence, and life conveyed to it, according to those laws which God hath established in the natural world. There seems from revelation, to

* John xiv. 21. 23.

† Rev. iii 20.

be the same reason for believing, that there are means established in the moral world, for cultivating and cherishing the seeds of virtue and goodness in the soul, which shall, at last, spring up to everlasting life.

God is best judge what these means should be; the use of them is our duty; our employing them expresses our sense of our dependence on God, and our obedience to his commandments. No means could be more adapted to promote our improvement in all the graces of the Christian life than the Lord's Supper. What could tend more to strengthen and establish our faith in the gospel, than to partake of the memorials of the death of Christ, and see him, as it were, set forth crucified before our eyes; and to call to remembrance, that, as certainly as we eat this bread, and drink of this cup, Jesus, the Son of God, suffered for our sins? What could more contribute to encrease our love to God, than our being thus brought to remember that God so loved us, as to give his only begotten Son to the death for us. The same holy institution clearly shows us the evil of sin, that was expiated at so dear a rate, as the precious blood of the Son of God. How dangerous then must the state of the impenitent sinner be? In a word, nothing could be a greater check to all hatred, or revenge, against our brethren, or a more powerful motive to forgive their trespasses, than our seeing, in the cross of Christ, how God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us. This native tendency in the ordinance, is the wise constitution

of the High Priest of our profession. And to these means, seriously and devoutly used, God addeth his blessing to make them effectual. For whoever planteth, or watereth, it is God that giveth the increase.

So that, from the supper of our Lord, the devout Christian may hope to derive strength to resist temptation; assistance to put his best resolutions in practice, and to enable him to hold on in the road that leads to everlasting life. And if our blessed Lord hath assured us, that our heavenly Father is ready, even in answer to our secret prayers, to grant good gifts, or his Holy Spirit, to them that ask him *, much more may we conclude, will he grant those blessings of which we stand in need, when, with devout and penitent hearts, we implore them over that sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour, which is the purchase of them all †. He who denied us not the greater gift, will not refuse to give the lesser. "He who spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up to the death for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

† A Sacrament is an holy Ordinance, in which some sensible thing, or things, are, by divine institution, to be used as a sign and seal of the privileges, mercies, and engagements of the covenant of grace between God and his people.—

* Mat. vii. 9. † Rom. viii. 32.

† The following is taken from the Rev. John Blair's Essays on the Subject.

A Sign is something, which, by its presence or use, suggests or represents something else to the mind. This must therefore be some sensible visible thing. The sign in a Sacrament is not a natural, but arbitrary sign: it has no natural necessary connexion with the thing signified; but its connexion is by institution for that purpose.—Written covenants among men, are confirmed by adding a bit of wax impressed with the character of a seal, which is, by a particular action and express declaration, acknowledged, and is therefore called a seal. When this is done, the covenant cannot be revoked but by the consent and deed of both parties; without which, their engagements to each other stand good, and in full force. Now if any other sign or thing, attended with significant actions, be appointed for the same purpose, it is called by the same name. Thus the elements of Water, in Baptism, and Bread and Wine in the Lord's Supper, are called Seals, because when used according to their institution, they have the same efficacy with respect to the covenant of grace, that there is in seals annexed to written covenants among men.—Thus then some sensible sign, its separation and appointment to its proper purpose, and, in consequence thereof, its significancy and efficacy as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, all concur to the constitution of a Sacrament. This is the view of the matter which the Scriptures give us: thus Gen. xvii. 10, 11. *This is my covenant:—every man-child among you shall be circumcised.—And it*

shall be A TOKEN OF *the covenant betwixt you and me.* It shall be a token, or sign: it shall suggest to your minds the necessity of your being cut off from the old stock, and engrafted into Christ Jesus, the living Vine; and that *the foreskin of your hearts*, their natural hardness and stubbornness, *must be taken away, and turned to the Lord.* (See Jer. iv. 4. Rom. ii. 28, 29.) It is also a sign or token of the existence of the covenant. The tenor of the covenant, was the promises made to Abraham in v. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. see also Gal. iii. 14—16. Yet circumcision is called the Covenant, v. 10. Which can only mean, that the promises of the covenant are confirmed by it. Hence the apostle uses the terms Promises, and Covenant, promiscuously; and observes, that the covenant was confirmed before of God in Christ: viz. to Abraham, by circumcision. Gal. iii. 17. And the apostle calls it A SEAL of the *righteousness of faith.* Rom. iv. 11.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper agree in the general nature of a Sacrament, as above described. Yet, they differ not only in the external elements, (without which they could not be two Sacraments) but in sundry other considerable respects. As 1st Baptism is an initial commonstrative * sign and seal, which visibly denotes the existence of God's covenant between him and the baptized party, and their entrance into the school of Christ as his disciples; and by

* A Commonstrative Sign, is that which denotes the presence of the thing signified.

which their visible membership in the church is publicly ratified. This ratification of membership in the church of Christ as his visible disciples, is in Scripture attributed to this, and never to the other Sacrament. Thus Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Go ye therefore, and teach † all nations; and then take care of and treat them as disciples, ‡ teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you; they are hereby bound and engaged to observe and attend upon all ordinances and duties.

The Lord's Supper is a commemorative sign, wherein persons recollect and recognize their engagements to be the Lord's, previously entered into in the initiating Sacrament of Baptism; and especially commemorate, and improve the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Persons Church-membership is pre-supposed in, and pre-requisite to their access to this Sacrament. Hence the Sacrament of Baptism is only once to be administered to, and received by the same subject. For, from what has been observed, it appears, that by one administration it obtains its whole effect. Membership in the Church of Christ admits not of degrees; a person is either a member or no member of the Church; there is no ground in Scripture or reason for the distinction of imperfect or perfect members, members in a passive and active state as different sorts of members, the same member may have very different degrees of capacity for the discharge of the duties and enjoyment of

† Μαθητῶν.

‡ διδασκῶντες.

the privileges of a member, but he is the same member still. An infant member cannot exercise knowledge, nor perform duty, nor in childhood can he perform duties, which require degrees of knowledge above his capacity; but yet still he is truly a member, training up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I would ask what is done to persons in their passive state, viz. Infancy, when they are baptized. Are they not separated from the world, and dedicated to God as his peculiar property? Are they not brought under the bond of God's covenant, and under the ordinances of the Gospel or means of grace, as they become capable of instruction? Are they not really bound, and that so as, upon its being duly laid before them, their consciences must feel the obligation, to cleave to God in Christ, to perform all christian duties, and, among the rest, to renew their covenant engagements at the Lord's Table. But do they, by approaching the Lord's Table, acquire a new state of membership? In what Scripture is that declared? I would further ask, whether an adult person, when baptized, is a perfect member, or only imperfect, a member in embryo? If the latter, then, the matter does not turn upon the difference between the passive and active state, and so that distinction must be given up; but the imperfection of his membership must arise from an insufficiency in the sacrament of Baptism to ratify it, that is, it is not sufficient to ratify what it is expressly appointed to ratify, Matt. xxviii. 19. which is ab-

surd ; but if the former, then there is perfect membership by baptism, previous to coming to the Lord's table. Therefore also, baptism so confirms Church-membership to an infant, as to maintain and make good his title, as he arrives to capacity of enjoyment ; for its efficacy takes place after, as well as at the time of administration, even through the whole course of life. Thus, though a baptized person should not be regenerated and united to Christ by a saving faith until old age ; yet, thereupon his baptism, which he received in infancy, seals his ingrafting into Christ, and personal interest in the special blessings of the covenant, otherwise, where is the great advantage of infant baptism ? Hence also, it appears how groundless and unreasonable the distinction, which obtains in many places, between the church and the congregation. By this means, the greater part of worshipping societies are excluded from the care and discipline of the church, and yet are, in some respects, treated as members, in being admitted to dedicate their children to God in Baptism : there is great inconsistency in these things. But to return : from the very nature of a commemorative sign, it is evident it is designed to affect the heart by frequently bringing to remembrance the things signified ; therefore must be frequently used for that purpose. Hence, as the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is such, therefore it must be often celebrated by the same persons. They are to *eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord often.* 1 Cor. xi. 26.

These two Sacraments differ with respect to some of their subjects. Actual exercise, and a competent knowledge of the nature of the ordinance and transactions required, for which a proper degree of natural capacity is requisite, are indispensably necessary to an attendance on the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Without this, it could not be to persons what it is, viz. a commemorative sign; its subserviency to its end, is from the impression it is calculated to make on the heart, in attending upon it; but as circumcision of old, so baptism, which succeeds it now, is to be administered to infants, born of professing parents.

The Sacraments are public signs and seals of the covenant of grace, as transacted between the blessed God and his church as such. The covenant of grace, is the great and glorious charter, by which Jehovah has erected and constituted his church.* She stands related to him, and interested in him by covenant, Ezek. xvi. 8. *Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold thy time was a time of love, and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and thou becomest mine.* Hence it is, that the church is so repeatedly considered in Scripture, as married to the Lord. It is a marriage covenant. This I think, is the primary view of the covenant of grace, as thus represented and confirmed by

* The covenant of grace is that which was made with Christ, and in him with all the elect as his seed; yet it may well be termed also the charter of privileges upon which the church is founded.

sign and seal ; and it comprehends all the personal interests of individuals, as members of the body of Christ, and belonging to that Society, in all God's covenant-transactions with men ; of which we have an account in Scripture : the persons, with whom he immediately transacted, are not to be considered in a strict or abstract personal capacity, but as members of society, or as including the church. Thus when the gracious God opened and established his covenant with our first parents after the fall, (Gen. iii. 15.) they were then the church of God, and the stock from whence it was to be propagated. In the covenant-transaction with Abraham, he is considered as the father of many nations, Gen. xvii. 5. The church is set up in his house, his family, yea, the whole, both Jewish and Christian church are included, Rom. iv. 10—13. Gal. iii. 14—16. None of the promises of the covenant are directed to any who are out of the church. All who are aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, are strangers to the covenants of promise, Eph. ii. 12. The promises do indeed describe particular characters, and point out particular conditions and circumstances of God's people, to which they are accommodated. Hence each of the persons of those characters, and in such condition or circumstances, may claim a personal interest in such promises. Yet this is not by virtue of any personal direction of the promise ; but he pleads it as comprehended in the church, and belonging to the character described. Yea, there are promises which

cannot be claimed by the particular persons whose character and case they point out; but can be pleaded only by the Church. Thus, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit also will I put within you, and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh, and I will put my Spirit within you; and cause you to walk in my statutes.* Here the character pointed out is that of the unregenerate: but surely the promise cannot be considered as directed to that character. For then the blessed God would stand engaged by promise, to all of that character, to give them regenerating grace, and each one might claim it as that which God could not refuse consistently with his faithfulness, or without denying himself: but the faith of the church may rest upon it, and she may plead it as a promise of God's presence in her with his own ordinances, for the purpose of regenerating sinners: and in every instance of their conversion, God is fulfilling that promise to his church: Sinners are, indeed, hence encouraged to call upon, to cry to God for grace, and to attend upon the means of grace, but they can found no claim upon it. Hence we may see, that to have matter of encouragement, and to have a ground of confidence and claim, are not the same thing, as some seem strangely to imagine.

The church of Christ is usually, and very properly, distinguished into visible and invisible. By the invisible church is meant, the whole number of true believers wherever they are. All

these are, by a vital union with Christ by faith, savingly interested in the covenant of Grace; in God as their God, and in all spiritual blessings. But their consent to the covenant, and their relation to God thereby, is altogether invisible, and known only to God and their own consciences. These are called a church, because they are members of Christ by a common union with him, and stand united with, and related to each other in one body in a church state, as they are included in the catholic visible church.

The visible church consists of all those, who by an external profession of the doctrines of the gospel, and subjection to the laws and ordinances of Christ, appear as a society separated from the world, and dedicated to God and his service. In this view, in this imperfect state, the church comprehends branches that are withered, as well as those that bear fruit. Now the covenant of grace subsists between the blessed God and the church, as such a visible society,* and is rendered visible by a visible transaction, and external administration in various ordinances; and comprehends sundry external privileges for the advantage and spiritual edification of the church.

* In no other way can we conceive the covenant to subsist between God and believers as a church. In the exercise of faith, believers have union to, and communion with Jesus Christ; but by this alone, they could have no fellowship with one another; for each one could only be conscious of his own exercise of faith, and could have no society with any other therein. Whatever real relation to each other is founded in their common union to Christ, yet they could not at all perceive it. They would be members of Christ, but utterly detached from each other, and so not formally a body. It is only as incorporated in the visible church, that they are fitly placed in the body, and can have any knowledge one of another, and to have any fellowship.

Here are not two covenants, one for the invisible church, and another for the visible; for these are not two churches, but a two-fold consideration of the same church, though undoubtedly considered as visible, she includes more members than the real subjects of saving grace.—The visible church includes the invisible. Wherever there is a true visible church, there are, no doubt, a number of true saints; from these as the better part, the visible church is denominated: by their faith, the church lays hold on the covenant, and her covenant relation to God is maintained, and all visible believers share in her external privileges, whatever their real internal state be. Accordingly then one and the same covenant, comprehends the whole interests of the church considered both as visible and invisible, with respect to internal, special, spiritual blessings, and external privileges. The great God stands related to the invisible church, by virtue of this covenant, as her God by way of special interest in him, and by the same covenant to the visible church, as visibly her God and Lord.

It is the covenant of grace in this view, viz. as visibly subsisting between God and his church, considered as a visible society, a public body separated and distinguished from the world, and dedicated to God, that the Sacraments are annexed as visible signs and seals thereof. To this purpose I would observe, that when it pleased God first to set up his church in Adam's family, the whole was included. As there were none

from whom to separate and distinguish his church, the Lord saw fit then to propose his covenant more obscurely, and designing that as a more imperfect dispensation, he only taught them by sacrifices, thereby shadowing forth the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ. When mankind greatly, though gradually degenerated, as he was not gathering his church out of the world, but men went out of the church, he did not still see fit to appoint any public badge of distinction; but upon a general apostacy, he destroyed the old world, and the church continued to exist in Noah's family. Thus he was pleased as it were, to give a new edition of his church, and the whole world was again included in it. But when mankind had again generally revolted and turned aside to idolatry, having promised and confirmed it by his bow in the cloud, that he would no more destroy the world; he saw proper to call Abraham out from amongst his kindred, and erect his church in his family. Here the blessed God more fully opens his great plan, more explicitly proposes his covenant, and solemnly transacts it with Abraham, not as a private person, but as the father of many nations; comprising therein, not only his family then in being, but both the Jewish and Christian church. It was proper, that a matter of so great and extensive importance, should be transacted with peculiar solemnity, and that there should be some public badge of distinction between the church thus separated to him, and the world. God was pleased, therefore, to ratify his

covenant, and publickly distinguish his visible church, from the world, by the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith. To distinguish between the church and the world, seems to be one important design of the initiating seal of the covenant; because in that, a person's membership in the church is publickly declared and ratified. Commemorative signs, such as the passover and the Lord's Supper, are designed to establish, edify and quicken those who are in the church, rather than to distinguish them from those who are without. But the initiating seal, as circumcision or baptism, though it has other ends in common with the other Sacrament; yet is particularly designed as God's mark set upon persons to distinguish them from the world, as his. Thus though he had indulged their frailties in the omission of circumcision, while travelling in the wilderness,* partly because of their continual journeying, and partly because they were then entirely at a distance from all other nations; (otherwise he could have ordered them to delay their journey for a time, in order to perform it;) yet when they came over Jordan among the Canaanites, they must not enter upon the war until they were circumcised; as also in order to the celebration of the passover. This day, says the Lord, have I roll-

* I say indulged their omission, not because he had excommunicated them, for he had abundantly shewed his care of, and regard to the congregation of Israel as still his people; and these who were uncircumcised, were not the subject of the resentful sentence God had pronounced, but those who fell in the wilderness, upon whom it was fully executed.

ed away the reproach of Egypt from off you, *i. e.* your being uncircumcised like the Egyptians from amongst whom ye came. Josh. v. 9.

Hence appears the great impropriety of private Baptisms, unless where real necessity requires it. Seeing it is God's public seal, it should be publicly applied; as it is a sign and seal of membership in the visible Church of Christ, it should be transacted in the face of the Church.

Sundry important uses of the Sacraments have been already suggested in the foregoing observations. Yet it may be proper here to recollect, and more explicitly attend to them, together with some others not expressly mentioned, that we may have them more fully before us in one view.

As signs of the Covenant of Grace; they serve in the first place, to give divine truths a more easy access to the mind, with more fixed impression. Such is the strange connexion between soul and body in the present state, that they mutually affect each other. The attention and thoughts of the mind are excited to, and fixed upon objects by the exercise of the external senses, and by this means it is more deeply affected. Thus, in Baptism, by the washing with water, the efficacy of which is to cleanse, we are led to contemplate our guilt and moral pollution by sin, the efficacy of the atoning blood of Christ to remove guilt, and of the Holy Spirit's influences to purify the heart; the excellency, freeness and abundance of the spiritual bles-

sings, &c. The elements of Bread broken and Wine, which was pressed from the grape in the Lord's Supper; suggest to our remembrance the painful anguish and violent death of Christ, when his body was broken on the cross, and his precious blood was shed. 1 Cor. xi. 26. Bread, which is the staff of Life, and Wine which cheers the heart, points out Christ as the source of life, strength and consolation; and while many partake of the same Bread, and the same Cup, it denotes their communion with one another, as members of the same body of Christ.

They serve as visible signs of the existence of the covenant of grace between God and his people, and so render their covenant relation to God visible. Yea. in the participation of the sacraments, the covenant is visibly transacted; consenting to the covenant, whereby persons truly enter into it, is an internal act of the heart, invisible, and purely personal, in which there can be no social concurrence of the church. It was, therefore, necessary there should be some external solemnity, some visible transaction, whereby it should be declared, rendered visible, and wherein the church can unite and have fellowship. Thus God says of circumcision, *it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.* Gen. xvii. 11. Therefore, these signs are public badges of distinction between the church and the world. They are, as it were God's mark, whereby he publicly challenges the Church as his, and persons are visibly separated to his

service ; and especially, in the initiating sacrament one particular design of which, is to signify and confirm our visible membership in the Church.

As seals confirming the covenant of Grace, they primarily seal the truth and certainty of Gospel promises according to their true tenor. They confirm the certain connexion by divine constitution, between faith in Christ and the pardon of sin, and the vouchsafement of all spiritual blessings ; and that in this way, God will be his people's God, and not otherwise. They confirm the obligations of the covenant upon all those who partake of them. They are bound to cleave to the righteousness of Christ, to give up their hearts to God, and to serve him in all holy obedience ; to observe his statutes, and attend upon all his ordinances.* Hence the offences and disobedience of visible church members are peculiarly resented as a breach of covenant. † When persons do truly consent to the covenant by embracing Jesus Christ, then, and not otherwise, the sacrament seal, is a personal saving interest in the promises of the covenant. The seals of the covenant confirm its promises only as they are proposed, and not as they are not. Therefore, whoever only visibly consents to the covenant, but not with the whole heart, though the sacraments seal the truth and certainty of the promises in themselves, for *He that believes shall be saved, &c.* (so that the

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

† Hos vi. 7. *ad. Fin.*

connexion between faith and salvation is ratified, and sinners have sure ground to go upon in venturing upon Christ) yet they do not confirm an interest in the promise of salvation to this person while he does not truly believe; but when he truly believes, the seals of the covenant, in sealing or ratifying the certain connexion between faith and salvation, consequently seal his personal interest in the promise of salvation; as being one of the characters to which the promise is made and ratified. They seal to the church, as a visible society, the external privileges of the covenant: such as the care and discipline of the church over her several members; the ordinances of worship by which the covenant is administered, a Gospel ministry, and the care of divine Providence in correcting and in preserving protecting her. The sacraments are designed to promote and maintain the external purity, and visible holiness of the church, and this they do two ways. First, they lay bonds upon the conscience. Sacramental transactions include in them the most solemn engagements to be the Lord's, to renounce the service of sin, and to walk in the way of God's commandments. These engagements affect the conscience, and, at least, lay restraints upon men, whereby they are kept in from the external practice of sin, and excited to practise the external duties of religion: hereby the visible reputation of religion is much preserved. Those who look upon themselves free from these obligations, though they own

the doctrines of the Gospel to be true, and would rather claim the christian name than any other, yet more generally live as they list, and still their consciences sleep pretty secure; hereby the name of God is greatly dishonoured. I really think, the so general neglect of the Lord's Table much promotes this security in the indulgence of sinful practices and neglect of religion. People entertain an unaccountable notion, that Baptism, which they received in infancy, does not so deeply bind them to such great strictness in the ways of holiness; and therefore, while they keep back from the other Sacrament, they may take a greater latitude. They give existence and efficacy to discipline. In order to the very being of Discipline, there must be something from which Persons may be debarred, or cut off, consistent with the great design of the Gospel; and it must be something of very great importance. But this cannot consist in debarring any from hearing the word preached, and the other means of instruction; for that would be to give up with them altogether, and use no more means for their conversion. It must therefore lye in debarring them from the seals of the covenant, till they appear penitent, where the lighter censures, such as admonitions and rebukes, are found ineffectual or inadequate, and indeed these would not be regarded as censures, if the contumacious had no higher to expect. The government of Christ's house could not be kept up, if there were no penalties to be inflicted in his name. The efficacy of discipline lies in affecting

and awing the conscience ; but what can so effectually do this, as suspending offenders from the privilege of communicating with God's people in the seals of the covenant, either in dedicating their children to God in baptism, or approaching the Lord's Table, until they appear, in dealing with him, to be brought to repentance ? Or finally cutting them off, when their conduct shall be found such as amounts to a full, obstinate, and avowed violation of their covenant obligations ? If they have any regard to Christianity at all, they will dread the thoughts of being reduced to the state of heathen men and publicans. *

These holy ordinances seem to be instituted to shew, that the blessed God is not to be put off with acknowledging in general terms, the truth of Gospel doctrines, and that religion is good, and ought to be chosen. He demands our avowed choice of it, and that we avouch the Lord for our God. The Lord, by these institutions, as it were, says, I will bring the matter to a point with you sinners. You acknowledge me to be the only true God, and that you ought to serve me ; come then to a resolution on the matter. Here are the terms of salvation, and on which I will be your God, proposed to you in a way of gracious covenant, either accept or refuse ; enter into solemn, openly avowed obligations to me, or disown me, and declare you will not take me for your God. Choose you this day whom

* Cor. x. 21, 22. Ch. v. 3, 4, 5. 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 8.

you will serve, the Lord, or your own heart's lusts. Either join yourselves openly to my people, or acknowledge you will not be of them. Surely, if men viewed things in this point of light, it would have a strong tendency to awaken them to solemn exercises of heart about this matter.

The sacraments are, in a special manner, calculated and designed to cherish, quicken and strengthen the graces of the Holy Spirit in true believers. They exhibit Jesus Christ and him crucified, (the great object of a justifying faith) and the glorious blessings he has purchased to the mind in a very striking and lively manner. Such pledges of the divine faithfulness; such solemn confirmations of the promises of life and salvation through the redemption of Christ, lay the firmest foundation for the confidence, and most intense acting of faith. Here are the most affecting representations of the love and grace of God towards his children. Surely then, the influence of the Holy Spirit concurring with all these exhibitions, must needs enervate faith, quicken and raise the affections, and enliven every grace. These ordinances, therefore, are often means of the most sweet and near communion with God.

OBLIGATIONS TO PARTAKE, AND
 EXCUSES FOR NEGLECTING
 THE LORD'S SUPPER,
 CONSIDERED.

* **W**E are bound to this duty from gratitude. Our salvation by Christ Jesus, is the unspeakable gift of God. What adds greatly to the value of any favour, is, that it was conferred on us in our great need. Our condition, when the Son of God came to save us, was indeed, distressful. We might be helped to form some proper notion of it, from the authentic accounts which we have of those nations, who never yet heard of the gospel: they are, to this day, without God, and without hope in the world, worshipping the most absurd objects, and living in barbarities, which it is even a shame to mention. This shews us, that all men are included under sin; and, thereby, become obnoxious to many miseries in this world, and to the dreadful consequences of sinful and vicious lives in the world to come.

From this distressful condition we were unable to recover ourselves, but the Son of God was manifested to save us; to instruct us in our duty to God, to atone for our guilt, and to quicken us in the ways of holiness, who were dead in trespasses and sin. To accomplish this

* From Dr. Duncan's devout Communicant's Assistant.

redemption, he relinquished all that happiness of which he was possessed in heaven, and laid down his life, in many circumstances of ignominy and distress, as the propitiation for our sins. To perpetuate the memory of this amazing love, was our Lord's Supper appointed.

How would gratitude be expected to manifest itself for temporal favours, respecting things of this world? If any person had ventured his life to save us, when we were on the brink of perishing by fire or water, we would have reckoned ourselves obliged, all our lives afterward, to remember him with esteem and affection. If, therefore, we have any vestige of gratitude in us, for the inestimable benefit of salvation by Christ Jesus from far greater miseries than temporal death, we will contribute what we can to preserve the memory of it in the world; that children yet unborn may declare his mighty acts, and one generation to another may praise the Lord.

Any man who lives in the habitual neglect of this duty, ought seriously to consider, that if all men acted and argued as he does; the Lord's Supper, which has been a continued and incontestible visible proof of the truth of the Gospel, would go into desuetude; and thereby the love of Christ, which he remarkably expressed in his death, be entirely forgot in the world.

2. The advantages which we may reap from this ordinance, are another reason why we ought to embrace every opportunity that comes in our way of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

In all the offices of piety and religion, there is a pleasure which a good man feels in the consciousness of his honest endeavours to approve himself to God. As Job long since beautifully expressed it, The Lord knoweth the way that I take, and when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.* There is also a joy in the sensations of a heart grateful toward God, which a stranger doth not intermeddle with. The real worth and comfort of these two no man knoweth, but he that hath received them.

Besides these, this ordinance hath particular advantages from the native design and tendency of it, to stir up many devout and pious considerations, to shew the evil of sin, and arm us with resolutions against it.

The frequent participation of it keeps awake on our minds, a sense of our relation to Christ as the head, as we are members of his body; of our obligations to be made conformable to his death, and to live in the hopes of his coming to judgment.

It cherishes in our souls love to God, who loved us, and sent his Son to save us;—love also to the blessed Jesus, who loved us, and gave himself to the death for us. Besides this,

The Lord's supper sets before us a powerful motive to love our brethren, as children of the same family, redeemed with the same precious blood; and teaches us to check all ill-will or revenge against those for whom Christ died.

The self-examination in which we ought to

* Job xxiii. 10

be employed, as preparatory to the Lord's Supper, will lead us to a greater acquaintance with our own hearts and lives; and thereby shew us what things are wanting that need to be supplied, or what things are wrong that need to be rectified, or what guilt that needs to be pardoned and repented of.

In a word, commemorating the death of Christ, who is our peace, affords comfort to the penitent, in hopes of pardon, "in that we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin;" for now, he that confesseth, and forsaketh it, is certain of finding mercy.

And, therefore, as the Lord's Supper will afford peace in the road of our duty, and be a means of animating us to live up to our profession with greater diligence; if men judged with the same sagacity in spiritual things, as they do in things of this world, they would think themselves strictly bound to perform a duty that tended so much to promote their best interest.

3. The express commandment of Christ obligeth us to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. "This do in remembrance of me.—" "Shew forth the Lord's death till he come." This commandment is recorded by three of the Evangelists, and by the holy Apostle Paul, who had it in immediate charge from Christ himself. When he was made an apostle, not by man, neither by the will of man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ, then he received of the Lord, what he also delivered unto us relative to this ordinance.

This commandment, delivered by the authority of our great Lawgiver, is as binding upon us as any other duty of our religion, or any of the ten commandments of God's law. Every one therefore, who lives in the habitual neglect of it, lives in wilful sin. Every such person ought seriously to consider, that to partake of the Lord's Supper is the only distinguishing act of Christian worship, and an explicit declaration of our faith in the death of Christ. A person, therefore, come to age, who did never partake of it, as he was baptized without his own consent, has done nothing to declare his acceptance of the choice then made for him, for him, or to ratify the obligations that were then laid on him; and consequently, has given no evidence to the world that he is any more a Christian, than he is a Heathen, Jew, or Mahometan.

There are many circumstances attending the delivery of this commandment, that ought powerfully to enforce our obedience to it: he who enjoined this duty is Jesus the Son of God; our hope; the author and finisher of our faith, who laid down his life for us; is now gone into heaven to take possession in our name, and prepare a place for us; and will return to "receive us" "unto himself, that where he is, there we may be also."

The time in like manner, when this ordinance was instituted, ought to affect every ingenuous mind, as a motive to obey the commandment, "That night in which he was betrayed," when he had a full prospect of his sufferings. He well

knew that all the disciples should, that night, be offended because of him; for it should be fulfilled that is written, "they shall smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered." In the prospect of certain sufferings, mankind are usually so affected with their own distress, as to be unmindful of others; but even then, when he was about to pour out his soul unto death, he remembered us, and instituted this memorial of his death, and commanded us to do this in remembrance of him. All men are careful, if possible, to fulfil the request of a dying friend, much more of a friend dying for us.

So that if we retain, in our hearts, the least vestige of gratitude for that love which Christ expressed for us in our low estate, which he bore in his mind in the greatest agonies of his sufferings; if we would wish to have the grateful remembrance of what he hath done for mankind kept up in the world, and a more powerful sense of it impressed upon our own hearts; if we are even earnest to reap the benefit and comfort which the pious performance of this duty might afford us, or think ourselves under any obligations to obey the commandment of our dying Redeemer, we are certainly bound to do this in remembrance of him.

4. I may add, that if there were any difficulty in explaining the extent of this commandment, or any doubt whether the memorial of Christ's death was intended to be kept up in his church as a duty of perpetual obligation, we have the

practice of the primitive Christians, those who lived in the days of the apostles, as an explication of it; they certainly had best access to know the meaning of it. “They continued with one accord in the temple, and in breaking of bread from house to house.—They continued in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.—On the first day of the week, the disciples came together to break bread.*” And when the apostle Paul, writes to the church of Corinth,† with relation to this ordinance, he does it not to institute a rite that was new, but to rectify several abuses, of which they had been guilty in the celebration of it:—that they came together as to a common meal, while one was hungry, and another drunken, and ate to excess, as if they had not had houses to eat at home. As therefore, they had profaned the Lord’s Supper, if it had not been a duty of perpetual obligation, the apostle would have forbid the institution altogether, rather than have given them further directions about the religious celebration of it: but his appointment is, “As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye shew, (or shew ye) the Lord’s death till he come.”

AS the duty of partaking of the Lord’s Supper is so reasonable and delightful and our obligations to perform it so indispensable, one would think there must be something very ex-

* Acts ii. 46. 42. xx. 7.

† 1 Cor. xi. 23.

traordinary, that could hinder a person from embracing every proper opportunity of approaching it. No text of scripture can be explained as a pretence of staying from the Lord's table, where the blame will not fall on ourselves. Yet, so it is, that sometimes good Christians are distressed with difficulties and discouragements, in the prospect of coming to it; and wicked careless men often muster up excuses for continuing, perhaps their whole lives, in the neglect of this necessary duty. This makes it very needful, as the third part of this subject, to consider the excuses and pretences for not coming to the Lord's table.

I hope it is not improper to beseech every one who has neglected this duty, under pretence of any one of the following excuses, seriously to ask himself, Whether he be sincere in offering them, and would willingly come to the Lord's table if these difficulties were removed? For, if he hath only mustered up any of them, to patch up a sort of false peace with his own conscience, that he may quietly continue in sin, and not undergo the pain and sorrow which the purging out the old leaven would cost him, that he might be suitably prepared to keep this feast; he is proof against conviction, and we speak as to them that do not hear.

I would earnestly wish, that endeavouring to answer these excuses might have the good effect to induce those to partake of the Lord's Supper who have formerly been negligent of it, and to assist serious well meaning Chris-

tians to approach it with more comfort and advantage.

1. Some say, We are so great sinners, that we dare not come to the Lord's table.

In answer to this, it is necessary to consider, whether those sins which make them afraid to come to the Lord's table are repented of, or not? If we have repented of our past transgressions, and are justly humbled on account of them, and steadily resolved to watch against them; so far as we are conformed to the calls of the gospel. This, instead of rendering us unfit for the Lord's table, is a very proper disposition to qualify us for it; * that, by this ordinance we

• The terms of salvation have been the same in every age of the world. Submission and an acquiescence of the heart in the Divine will and government are both fit and indispensable in those subjects of the great King, who have rebelled against him. An external formal submission is proper in the subjects of a visible government, but in spiritual subjects nothing less than a real change of the will and affections can be deemed a return from rebellion; and strict subordination, though not a meritorious cause, must nevertheless be necessary, that the offended Divine majesty should take complacency in them.

This in the view of man has been true religion in every age, however designated by various names under the dispensations of different times. It has been called the fear of God, trusting in him, committing the soul to him, walking with him, working righteousness, because such an humbled mind would be exercised thus variously according as the Lord should be seen in terrible majesty, or in his gracious promises, as delighting in holiness, or requiring obedience. Under a milder dispensation the self-same disposition would receive with gratitude the glad tidings of salvation, believe the testimony of God by his Son, be led to repentance by a sight of his goodness, charmed by the displays of the Divine loveliness, hope in his promised rest, and rejoice upon the possession of the satisfactory evidences of an interest in the Redeemer.

Fear and reverence, repentance and faith, love and obedience are but the different exercises of the same acquiescing heart, which has been created a-new by the Holy Spirit. If any such exercise be false,

may be strengthened against sin, and all our good resolutions be confirmed. The penitent and contrite heart God will not despise. To him, “even to this man, will I look,” that is, with comfort and approbation, “who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word *.”

But if we are living impenitent, in the commission of sin, we are, indeed, unfit for the Lord’s table; but the blame must lie on ourselves. While we continue in this impenitent state, our prayers and praises, every act of religious worship, as well as communicating, are an abomination in the sight of God. When we spread forth our hands he will not regard; and, without amendment of life, this will render us incapable of admission into the kingdom of heaven.

A person labours under a great mistake, who

then the man is yet an enemy and all his religion is vain; if any one be true, all are sufficiently so as to comfort with the christian character; and thus happiness is often promised to a lonely grace; he who repents is forgiven, he that believes will be saved, and a true love of God, though defective in degree, is said to fulfil his law.

Faith is the name most frequently put for the whole of religion; for it is the exercise of the mind which receives and acquiesces in the revelation of Christ; but such faith is not merely a matter of speculation or a mere assent to evidence, for the saint believes with the heart; nor does it terminate in a temporary and transitory excitement of the affections, for it works by love and produces the fruits of holiness; nor does it rest in holy dispositions, words, or actions, as sufficient to procure happiness; but the believer deems himself an unprofitable servant, and trusts alone to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. But all of these things spring from that holy subjection of soul unto God, which is his gift, and which tends towards his glory.

* Isaiah lxi. 2.

imagines himself in a safer way to salvation, by absenting from the Lord's table, while he continues in sin, than if he approached to it. For, whether he communicate or not, unless he repent he must perish.

If, by this excuse, any one means, that he is sensible he lives in so disorderly, or unchristian a manner, that he is really unfit for the Lord's table; and that his being seen there might, perhaps, give offence to his neighbours; he ought seriously to consider, that, while he continues such, he is unfit to enter the heavenly Jerusalem. For if he is not possessed of so much of the external decency of religion, as could entitle him, in the judgment of charity, to the outward privileges of a professing Christian; he cannot pretend to have so much real holiness, as does, in the sight of God, render him fit to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven, where nothing can enter that defileth, or worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.

So that unless the sinner resolve to continue in sin, and renounce all hopes of salvation, the wisest course he can possibly follow, is to embrace the first opportunity, "while it is called to day," of turning from all his iniquities, and of ratifying those good resolutions, by devoutly partaking of the Lord's Supper.

It is necessary, before I leave this question, to observe, that, sometimes, pious persons, in prospect of the Lord's Supper, have been distressed with the same objection, "a sense of their own unworthiness." There are pious

and devout persons who deal more severely with themselves than any body else; and, from a dejection of spirit, or mistaken notions of their duty, are sometimes ready to render this sacrament a mean of melancholy and discouragement, instead of consolation and thanksgiving. And because the Psalmist speaks of the reproach which he had brought on religion, in the matter of Uriah; and the holy Apostle Paul calls himself the chief of sinners, and injurious, because he had persecuted the cause and followers of Christ, and obliged them to blaspheme his holy name; they are ready, in the same spirit of dejection, to give themselves such names as these, and consider themselves as the chief of sinners; though they cannot fix upon any great crime of which they have been guilty; but possess not all that cheerfulness of mind; or that fervour of devotion, which they could wish.

To such persons we may say, If men had been perfect, the death of Christ would have been unnecessary. The means of grace are appointed for our improvement in holiness: The best of men have their infirmities; but there is a great difference between them and the wilful sinner, who goeth on in his trespasses. As these infirmities and weaknesses, to which pious persons are exposed, are their grief, and great ground of sorrow, as they strive and wrestle against them; this ordinance is appointed as a mean of establishing them more in the faith, and enabling them to overcome their spiritual enemies. Such persons Christ himself affectio-

nately invites to come to him for relief; “Come
 “unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy la-
 “den, and I will give you rest*.—Thus also,
 “saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth
 “eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the
 “high and holy place; with him also that is of
 “a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the
 “spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart
 “of the contrite ones †.” And every one re-
 members the acceptance of the humble publi-
 can’s penitent prayer, “God be merciful to me
 “a sinner ‡,” in preference to that of the proud
 self-righteous pharisee.

2. Some say, We are so much taken up
 with the cares of life, that we cannot afford
 time sufficient to prepare ourselves for the Lord’s
 table.

If a man pursue the lawful cares of this world
 within due bounds, this is his duty, and by no
 means disqualifies him for serving God. What-
 ever mistaken notions of godliness men may
 have drunk in, Christianity does not allow us,
 even under pretence of minding religion, to ne-
 glect our lawful employments; but expressly
 commands us to study to be quiet, and do our
 own business, working with our hands, that we
 may eat our own bread §.

If we pursue unlawful objects, or set our
 hearts too much on the things of this world, and
 in quest of them, forfeit a good conscience; this

* Matth. xi. 28.

† Isaiah lvii. 15.

‡ Luke xviii. 14.

§ 2 Thess. iii. 12.

pursuit, if we continue in it, will render us unfit for eternal life. To pretend this as an excuse for absenting from the Lord's table, rather aggravates than lessens our guilt: It is excusing one sin by another. But if a person were really sorry that the cares of the world employed too much of his thoughts, there could not be a more effectual means of curing our hearts of this disease, of lessening our esteem of the things of this world, or of weaning our affections from them, than frequent and devout meditation on heavenly things; and, particularly, in this ordinance, viewing the things of this world in the cross of Christ, would greatly assist us to overcome them.

Perhaps a person who offers this reason for neglecting to partake of the Lord's Supper, means, that his situation is such as allows him but very little time to prepare for it. To this may be properly answered, That God, whom we serve, best knows our situation in life; he hath determined the bounds of our habitation; he makes allowance, in mercy, for our circumstances, and exacts improvement from us, only in proportion to the talents with which we are intrusted; and, therefore, expects that we should employ more or less time in the duties of piety and devotion, in proportion as our circumstances can afford. So that a servant, or any other person, who is necessarily taken up in labouring from morning to night for his bread, cannot be supposed to bestow so much time in preparing himself for this ordinance, as one who has all

his time in his own disposal; though all of us might employ more time in the offices of religion than we usually do: For even when our bodies are employed about the things of this world, our affections may be toward God; our thoughts turned to the inward frame and state of our souls; meditating on things above; sending up our prayers and devout ejaculations to heaven; imploring the forgiveness of sin, and mercy and grace to help us in the time of need.

So that our minding the cares of this life, can be no excuse for absenting from the Lord's Supper. If we pursue them with reasonable concern, that is no crime, nor any reason for neglecting the service of God; as we are then only doing our duty: But, if we pursue the cares of the world in excess, this is a fault that requires speedy amendment.

3. Some stay away from the Lord's Supper for fear they should afterward break their vows, and thereby, instead of making improvement in religion, be in danger of contracting new guilt. They think it, therefore, safer not to vow, than to vow and not pay.

Such persons seem to proceed upon a mistake, that, by staying away from the Lord's Supper, they are free from the obligations to holiness which we are laid under by coming to it. Every one that nameth the name of Christ, must depart from iniquity. The gospel obliges us to abandon "all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in

“ this present world ;” and assures us that impenitent sinners cannot be happy in the next ; for “ without holiness no man shall see the “ Lord.” When we come to the Lord’s table we make open profession of these obligations, and renew our serious purposes to live in this manner ; but our staying away does not free us from the obligations to perform these duties.

To partake of the Lord’s Supper is not only a duty, but a very necessary mean of improvement in grace. We may safely affirm, that no disciple of Christ ever partook of it who had not infirmities to struggle with, and many things that needed to be amended. The holy Apostle Peter sat at the first Supper with our blessed Lord, and professed very warm and affectionate love to him ; and yet, ere the cock crow of next morning, he denied him. This is not recorded to terrify good Christians from the Lord’s Supper ; for, it is evident, soon after this, when that Apostle professed great love for his Lord and master, Christ did believe him sincere, and continued him in his apostleship ; and forewarned him, that he must suffer for his name, though lately he had denied him *.

The just inference from this is, That people who are afraid lest they should break their vows ought to be the more watchful. If they are in danger of being tempted to return to the commission of their sins, it is a very wrong course,

* John xxi. 18.

for that reason, to neglect so necessary and important a duty : they ought much rather to resolve, that they will be the more on their guard against temptation ; they will exercise the more serious dependence on the grace of God ; and be more constant and fervent in prayer for the assistance of his Holy Spirit.

We too often argue in matters of religion, as we would not in things of this world. If a thing is necessary to be done, and tends greatly to our interest, we will not be terrified from it, though attended with some hazard. A merchant will not give over business though he has the risk of bad debtors, and the dangers of the seas to encounter, since trade is necessary for his own and his family's subsistence. Thus we ought to reason on the case before us : we are strictly bound in duty, gratitude, and interest, to partake of the Lord's Supper : the danger of which we are afraid, is doubtful ; for, by the grace of God, we may be enabled to approach worthily, and to fulfil our vows ; but, if we neglect it, the sin is plain and obvious. In the conscientious attendance on our duty we have the veracity of God to comfort us ; " He is faithful who hath promised, who will not suffer *us* to be tempted above that *we* are able ; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that *we* may be able to bear it.*"

4. Some are afraid to come to the Lord's table, because they have not made all that improvement which they think they ought to have

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

made by the occasions which they have formerly had of partaking of it.

Such persons ought to consider, that nothing can exempt us from obedience to a plain positive commandment, but inability to perform it. We make *real* improvement in religion by the use of the means of grace, when we are more confirmed in the faith, and enabled more constantly to resist temptation, and attend to our duty; though, perhaps, we have not all that *sensible joy* and delight in the offices of piety that we could wish. It is far safer to perform two duties, though attended with imperfections, when we are sincere in what we set about, than wilfully or carelessly to neglect one.

But if a person is really sorry, that he has not formerly made all the improvement which he ought to have made in religion, by the use of this ordinance, instead of being a reason for neglecting it now, this is the justest reason for him carefully to examine his own heart, to learn what hath been the cause of his not profiting heretofore by the Lord's Supper. And it is very probable he will find, either that he hath not thoroughly examined himself, but hath left some hidden iniquity, which he hath not searched out, or hath not entirely forsaken, and this root of bitterness afterward springing up, hath defiled him; or else, that there hath so long time intervened between the seasons at which he partook of the Lord's Supper, that the impressions and effects of the one have ceased long before he embraced another opportunity.

But let every honest Christian be diligent and sincere in preparing his heart for this ordinance : let him, as the apostle expresseth it, study “ to purge out the old leaven,—and keep the feast with sincerity and truth :” let him purpose and endeavour to live like his profession ; and earnestly implore the blessing of God to make all effectual to the comfort and salvation of his soul, and that assistance will not be wanting. But he must not imagine that one ordinance, or one Supper will crown him, or make him perfect at once : he must continue in the diligent use of these means, to carry him on “ from strength to strength ;” and at last he shall “ receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul.” We must not be weary in well-doing ; “ in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

5. The dread of incurring the danger of unworthy communicating, “ He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body,*” hath distressed many in the thoughts of coming to the Lord’s table.

In reply to this, it is necessary, first, to observe, That the word here translated *damnation*, and on the margin *judgment*,† is not meant of

* 1 Cor. xi. 29.

† The learned and pious Dr. Doddridge, of Northampton, who was incapable of speaking slightly of what respected so important an institution as the Lord’s Supper, observes, on the word *damnation*, 1 Cor. xi. 29. in his Commentaries on the New Testament, “ I think it the most unhappy mistake in all our version of the Bible, that the word *κατα* is here rendered *damnation*: it has raised a dread in tender minds, which has greatly obstructed the comfort and edification which they might have received from this ordinance.”

eternal condemnation, as the word in our language, usually signifies; but temporal judgment. *Judgment*, that is, distress, calamity, or persecution, “must begin at the house of God.*” And thus the 30th verse here explains it, when the apostle says, “For this cause,” that is, for unworthy communicating, “many are weakly “and sick among you, and many sleep,” or are dead. He adds in the 32d verse, that these corrections, and marks of the divine displeasure, were designed for their amendment, and to prevent their final condemnation with the ungodly. “When we are judged, we are chastened of the “Lord, that we should not be condemned with “the world.†”

We may also observe, That the manner in which we now celebrate the Lord’s Supper in the church, prevents our being guilty of communicating unworthily, in the very sense in which the Corinthians did. While they ate it, as a common meal, out of strife, with pride and uncharitableness, one was hungry, and another drunken, and would not impart of their supper to their poor brethren, who had not houses of their own: yet it would be very unreasonable on this account to say, that we cannot now partake unworthily of the Lord’s Supper, as we cannot in the sense in which the Corinthians did.

To commemorate a great obligation suitably or worthily, implies a grateful sense of it, and a conduct agreeable thereto. If an impenitent sinner, who is going on wilfully in his trespasses

* 1 Pet. iv. 17.

† 1 Cor. xi. 32.

come to the Lord's table, without any serious sense of the goodness of God in sending his Son into this world; or of the love of Christ, in dying for our sins; and without any purpose of amendment of life; this man, by coming to the sacrament, really condemns himself: for by this outward profession he owns his subjection to Christ, and obligations to live answerably to his death, while, at heart, he has no such intention. The conduct of such a person is like that of a man who is an enemy to his prince, and secretly carrying on treason or conspiracy against him; yet, to qualify himself for an office, publicly swears oaths of obedience and allegiance to him. All the world would esteem such an one perjured and self-condemned.

But we may affirm, with the greatest certainty, that no serious person, who sincerely wished and endeavoured to communicate worthily, could communicate unworthily. For God accepteth a man according to what he hath. For even when one who has formerly been a stranger to religion, comes to the Lord's table with sorrow and contrition for sin, sincere purposes of after amendment, and of living answerably to the death of Christ; though his religion go no farther at present, than honest purpose and intention, he communicates worthily.

Every one who sincerely repents of his past transgressions, and carefully endeavours to bring his heart and life in conformity to the gospel covenant, is within the terms of mercy; and when he comes to the holy sacrament, in obe-

dience to the commandment of Christ, as a mean of his improvement in holiness ; though he be not purified to that degree that he could wish, yet may be perfectly secure, that he cannot, in any sense, be said to eat or drink unworthily, so as to “ be guilty of the body and blood of the “ Lord,” or “ eat and drink condemnation to “ himself.”

Unworthy communicating must have been a deliberate and wilful sin, not a sin of infirmity ; otherwise it had never been so severely punished, as it was among the Corinthians, with diseases, bodily afflictions, and death.

And it ought never to be forgot, that, whatever was meant by recording the guilt and danger of unworthy communicating, the apostle could not have intended by it to terrify any person from coming to the Lord’s Supper, but only to make men more circumspect in their approaches to it : for, in the very next words, after he has spoke of being “ guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,” he adds, “ but let a “ man examine himself, and so let him eat of “ that bread, and drink of that cup.*”

The sum of what hath been said amounts to this : The obligations that lie on us to perform this duty are indispensable ; the objections offered for habitually neglecting the sacrament are insufficient and ill founded : it follows, therefore, that every one who professes to believe the gospel of Christ, ought to have such a measure

* 1 Cor. xi. 28.

of knowledge of the doctrines of religion, particularly of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, and live so becoming his profession, as Christ's disciple, that he may be in condition, when called on, to come to the Lord's table; otherwise he is living in the habitual neglect of the commandment of Christ, and is a wilful sinner.

The doubts and fears which often distress pious persons, in the prospect of the Lord's Supper, are generally either owing to their own timorous dispositions, or to too rigid and severe notions of this institution, which they have learned from their teachers. For, were the excuses on their part rightly understood, as such persons are sincere in their wishes to improve in faith and holiness, and comfort of the Spirit; though it may be true that there are things wrong in their tempers, which they earnestly desire to be amended; this is by no means a reason for leaving off, but rather for continuing in their pious attendance on this duty; and a very necessary mean of promoting that very end, which they have so much at heart. I may, with great truth add, for the comfort of such people, that these very doubts and fears about the state of their souls, with which they are often distressed, instead of being a proof that they are bad men, are rather marks of a tender conscience, of a care to approve themselves to God, and of sincere concern for their own salvation. For bad men are seldom pressed with such difficulties: if at any time, any alarm of the danger of their

sinful courses attack them, like Felix of old, though it may make them tremble, they are ready to stifle the conviction, and shift it off to a more convenient season.

It is not now necessary, neither was it any part of the design of this discourse, to enter particularly into an examination of the reasons, why Christians separate communion one from another.

The rulers of the church of Rome have, indeed, made it impossible for us to join in communion with them; for, by an amazing stretch of authority, they have taken away from the people one half, and that very essential, of the Lord's Supper, *the Cup*, the representation of the blood of Christ. That Church has also affixed strange and unauthorized notions to the bread (or wafer) the memorial of the broken body of Christ.

The case is very different among Protestants: as they have not assigned any meaning to any part of our Lord's Supper, upon which they all (especially of this island) are not agreed, I can see little reason why a good man, when he has not access to communicate with those with whom he usually assembles, may not partake of the Lord's Supper with those Protestants with whom he can, at that time, most conveniently meet, rather than neglect an opportunity of "shewing forth the Lord's death till he come." Even though such a person should declare, that he retains affection to the church and forms in which he has been educated, I can see no reason why any other society of Protestants

should refuse to receive him to partake with them of our Lord's Supper.

I am fully persuaded, if the disputes which have happened about smaller matters in religion had been conducted with more of the spirit of the meek and lowly Jesus, there might have been at this day, more generous terms of communion in the Christian church. For, as holding relation to the head, all that love Christ in sincerity have communion one with another, whether they sit at the same table or not.

How distressful is it to think, that this solemn ordinance, instituted by the Prince of Peace, in commemoration of the most amazing instance of goodness and benevolence ever heard of among the sons of men, should have been perverted to the purposes of strife and animosity, to widen the smaller differences in opinion among his followers, rather than to unite their hearts in love ! would it not have been far more consistent with the spirit of the gospel, to have improved this feast of love as a means of enlarging our hearts with friendly and benevolent affections one to another, as we are all " fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God ?" as it is promised, in the days of the Messiah, that those who had long lived in animosities like the children of Israel and Judah, should forget their quarrels, and unite together in saying, " Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten.*"

I am far from intending, from what I have said on this head, to cast any unfriendly reflection on the rules and good order of the Christian churches: Great respect is due to these things, when they are not inconsistent with the word of God, the rights of conscience, or the peace of human society. In experience, these rules and forms have been the means of promoting religion. A person who receives a ministry in the church comes under the most solemn obligations to observe and maintain them. It can be no surprise, if those who, from education and habit, have been accustomed to listen to one side, should be attached to the forms of one part of the Christian church more than to another. Men of eminent understanding have thought themselves obliged zealously to defend these things, as connected with civil and religious liberty; and, while they mixed no bitterness or uncharitableness with their defence, their conduct merited commendation.

But it is fit always to remember, that these things are matter of order, necessary and useful; but not essential, or terms of salvation: and considering the spirit of the present age, that infidelity and indifference to all religion are the great threatening diseases, the disciples of Christ should, in heart and affection, unite among themselves, and be careful that their divisions and animosities give no advantage to the common enemy to cast reproach on them, or weaken the interest of the kingdom of God. This would be

a conduct suitable to the children of the same family, and servants of the same Lord; proving that though there are diversities of gifts, it is the same Spirit; differences of administrations, but the same Lord; diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

Such was the primitive and apostolical communion among the members of the body of Christ; and what blessed effects did this produce? what a spirit of universal benevolence did then prevail in the Churches? They sent, upon every occasion, bounteous supply to their necessitous brethren at a distance, and affectionate, ardent, good wishes for each others prosperity, in the epistles to all the Churches. Although they might, in smaller matters, differ in opinion from one another; yet they maintained “the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” For the multitude of them who truly believed, and obeyed the gospel, “were of one heart, and one soul, neither said any of them, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common, and with great power gave the Apostles witness, of the resurrection of Jesus; and great grace was upon them all*.” By these means, in early days, the churches of Christ “were edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied †.”

What has been said on the terms of commu-

* Acts iv. 31, 32, 33.

† Acts ix. 31.

nion, may be thought by some good men liable to one objection, That such generous or open sentiments professed toward those who differ from us, will be in danger of being abused by the most uncharitable of them, to harden them in their censorious and uncharitable dispositions; like a concession, that others judge them in the right, though they themselves condemn every body that differs from them, as being in the wrong, and in no safe condition.

This is the improvement which some men make of the charity maintained towards them by others. They employ it as an argument to pervert unwary people to their party, from this consideration, that others allow, that men may be saved in the communion of the church to which they belong; but they deny, that we can be saved; and therefore allege, that men are safer on the side where there is some charity for them, than on that side for which there is none. The candid reply is, That charity itself, and the best things, may be perverted to a wrong purpose; even the doctrine of the grace of God has been turned to lasciviousness. But, if charity be a mark given by Christ himself, whereby all men shall know his disciples *, any sect void of it has little claim to the name of Christian. The fate of the vain ostentatious Pharisee, compared to the humble Publican, shows us of what account men are in the sight of God, who esteem themselves righ-

* John xiii. 35.

teous, and despise others : they, and their services, are an abomination before him.

Besides this, the Supper of our Lord is his own table ; he alone can establish the terms of admission to it. No man, or church, or society of men, by whatever name they may call themselves, have any power to make any thing a term of admission to the Lord's table, or a ground of exclusion from it, which Christ himself hath not authorized. Ministers of the gospel are only servants of Christ, and dare not shut the kingdom of God against any man whom their great Lord and Master admits to it. What is here said on the terms of communion, seems to have foundation in the ordinance itself, as the communion of the body of Christ ; for in it we all partake of one bread ; and is agreeable to that union, and those relations, in which all the true disciples of Christ stand to one another, as members of the same body ; and to Christ Jesus the head, " from whom the whole body " maketh increase to the edifying of itself in " love."

* Who are the proper subjects of the Sacraments ? This question has a respect to two sorts of persons, *viz.* those who are born out of the Church, and so must enter at such years of understanding as to be capable of transacting for themselves, if ever they do ; and such as are born in the Church, *i. e.* of parents who are

themselves visible Church members. The latter have a right to membership by virtue of the covenant, as subsisting between God and his visible church. It is true, the child's right to membership follows the right of the parents, either both, or any one of them. Hence, if parents be suspended from privileges by the censures of the Church, or charged with such offences as expose thereto, the child's right is in suspense until that stumbling-block be removed; for hereby the parents right is called in question. The reason is, that though the parents are not cut off from membership, but only under a temporary suspension from privilege; by which discipline, the church is dealing with them, in order to bring them to repentance, and to behave as becomes members, and so recover their right; yet, if to such offence, they should add obstinate impenitence, and all due pains to bring them to repentance, prove ineffectual; they would be cut off. In that case, they would be excluded all right, and so could not be a medium, by which their child could derive any. Therefore, their conduct, in the mean while, renders their right doubtful until they appear to repent; consequently, the child's right is doubtful also. But still, it is not the faith of the parents, even considered as visible, which immediately confers the right upon the child. For an act of faith, considered simply as such, is merely personal, and can communicate nothing to another; but it is from the parent's visible interest in the covenant, and its external privileges,

in consequence of their visible faith, (of which privileges, its comprehending their infant seed together with themselves, is an important one) that the child derives its right of membership, *i. e.* from the parent's visible Church-membership.

As to the former, *viz.* such as are born out of the church, they have no right of membership, until, by their own personal transaction, they acquire it. This is done by acknowledging the doctrines of the Gospel to be true, yielding subjection to the laws and ordinances of Jesus Christ; publicly embracing the true religion and expressing a consent to the covenant of grace in the Sacrament of Baptism, which is the door of entrance, and seal of membership. Thus the son of the stranger joins himself to the Lord, by taking hold of his covenant.*

But in order to throw greater light upon my subject in my further consideration of it, I think it necessary to stop while I consider another question of great importance here, *viz.* What is that profession of true religion which constitutes membership in the visible church? I say, constitutes membership. For, to be visibly one of the true religion, and to be a member of the visible Church, is the same thing. Now, this includes in it an acknowledgment of the doctrines of the Gospel as true, and obligation of the laws of Christ, both verbal; for with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. †

* Isaiah lvi. 6.

† Rom. x. 9, 10.

And practical by obedience, and partaking of baptism as a sign and seal of embracing the true religion, and dedication to God and his service. In which covenant relation to God thus solemnly ratified, visible Church-membership formally lies. Membership in the Church is pre-requisite to, and supposed in approaching to the other Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but not constituted by it. In this Sacrament, former engagements are recognized and renewed; and the edification and spiritual advantage of those already members of the Church, is promoted. Now, the aforesaid profession and dedication is either actual, when persons are arrived to years of understanding, and transact for themselves, or virtual; in the profession and transactions, in their behalf, of those who have a right to dedicate them to God, as in the case of infants. These are comprehended in the covenant with the Church as the seed of professing parents, and are visibly children of the promise, their parents are engaged to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and teach them, from their early childhood, the ways of true religion. As they become capable of instruction, it is expected of them that they will be acquainted with, and acknowledge the truths, and practise the duties of religion; and are reputed the professors of it until they disavow it. If any thing contrary to this should appear, either in neglecting the known duties of religion or immoralities in practise; they ought to be dealt with by the discipline of the Church, until they are either

reclaimed, or regularly cut off. To the neglect of this, no doubt, it is in a great degree owing, that there is so much negligence in matters of religion amongst youth. Now all these together, and none of them alone, amount to a visible profession of true religion. The most orthodox sentiments only shew, that a person owns sound principles to be true, at least understands them, but does not amount to a profession of embracing them. The practice of religious duties affords yet a higher probability, that the doctrines of religion make some impression upon the heart, yet does not signify upon what principles a person professes to act; whether from a supreme regard to God, or merely from custom, &c. but when to both these is added, a solemn covenant-transaction, in partaking of a seal thereof instituted on purpose, not only to confirm the truth of the Gospel on God's part, but to express the man's consent to the covenant of grace, and dedication of himself to the Lord, to serve him upon the principles thereof; then the matter becomes determinate and fixed; if he does all this with his whole heart, he is a true Christian. By this external profession he visibly appears such, and never does appear such, until he partake of, at least, the initiating seal and token of the covenant. As the word and sacraments are the marks of the true Church, so they are of the true Christian.

There are, indeed, who place a profession of true religion in something beside the above-mentioned, and altogether prior to coming to

Sacraments, namely some declaration that they do so far as they know themselves, accept of Christ as their Saviour, and take God for their God, and give themselves up to his service with all their hearts. Upon this principle, many ministers draw up a covenant in form, containing such expressions as the above. This they require persons to take publickly, previous to their approaching the Lord's Table, or presenting their children to Baptism. No doubt a minister should be very careful in examining such as he admits to Sacraments. Hereby he will detect the grossly ignorant, who ought, on that account, to be debarred. In this way he will be under better advantages for apprehending what views and sense of things they have, and to judge what advices it may be proper to give them. But I have some exceptions to the requisition of a declaration of such a tenor, or taking a covenant drawn up in such a set form. I doubt it will rather prove a snare, than to be of any real advantage. Such a covenant is designed either, as an immediate transaction with God, or as a solemn declaration to the Church, for their greater satisfaction as to the persons admitted. In the former view, it is useless and superfluous; for it is only doing the same thing that is done in partaking of the seals of the covenant, which God has instituted as public signs, and solemn ratifications of such a transaction; with this difference, that instead of the public actions of divine appointment as signs, to which the word of God has affixed such a sense, such

a particular form of expression is proposed as the public sign; and with respect to persons already baptized, it seems to insinuate, that they are not already in the church, and in covenant with God by virtue of their baptism, which is contrary to fact. But are not the signs which our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed, and the manner of covenanting which he has prescribed sufficient, without the addition of our own inventions to supply the defect?

But if only a declaration, as matter of satisfaction to the Church, is designed; pray, will it afford better evidence of a man's sincerity of heart, to hear him pronounce such words, than to see him use actions, which, by divine appointment, signify substantially the same thing? and therefore, of the same import with the aforesaid declaration? To require such a declaration is to require a person to pronounce or affirm something concerning the exercises of his own heart as a term of admission. This cannot be considered as a declaration of a matter of fact, but only his opinion, or, at most, judgment of himself. Now his judgment may be formed upon evidence, that is really such to himself. But, pray, what evidence is that to others? Here I doubt, the formal professor will be more ready to pronounce, than many a true Christian. I would appeal to the ministers who are in this practice, whether on the one hand, they don't find reason to fear that these declarations, or even covenants, are sunk to matter of mere form; and on the other, whether they don't find a

number of poor perplexed souls, upon whom they must look in a judgment of scriptural charity, as the children of God; who yet are full of apprehension they have not the saving grace of God. Yea, their prevailing opinion may be on that side, and dare not make such a peremptory declaration, either to their fellow-men, or in a covenant-transaction with God; and though many a salvo be proposed, yet their conscience is not satisfied. May not a christian really give up his heart to God, and yet not be able to declare he has done so, even in his own judgment? Others may flatter themselves that they have really consented to the covenant, when, indeed, it is otherwise. Can it be the divine will that matters should be set upon so precarious a footing, and such a snare should be laid for men, to embarrass their way? Shall our duty be directed by so uncertain a rule?

If it be objected here, that I maintain sacramental transactions to be substantially of the same import, and sacraments to be signs of our consent to the covenant of grace, and will not that involve the same difficulty?

I answer, No. The sacraments are indeed signs of *our consent* to the covenant; but they are not signs of *our opinion of the kind* of that consent too; they are not signs of our declaring that consent to be true and saving. It is one thing really to consent; and another to be able to pronounce that consent to be right; the command of God is a plain rule of duty. A person, therefore, under great perplexity about the state

of his soul, may yet find himself bound in conscience to attempt obedience to God. Very true, he ought to have in view the nature of the duty, and what is required of him in it. He is required to give the full consent of his heart to the new covenant, and yield himself up to God. This is the business that lies before him, and which he is to attempt in receiving the seals of the covenant, but here is no set form of words he is to use; he will transact with God in such mental language as best expresses the frame of his heart. Perhaps, he cannot feel that freedom of Heart he desires, and dare not say, I do consent; I do give up my heart to thee O God, but can only say, I desire to cleave to Christ; O to be found in him! O that I could get my heart opened, and full of cheerfulness in giving myself away to the Lord. If he has just apprehensions of these things, and these desires under these apprehensions are really from his heart, he does consent and yield himself to God; and yet, at the same time, may be far from being satisfied that he has done so, but go away full of bitter complaints. It is easy to see the wide difference in the two cases.

But it is time to return to the question I left. When the sons of the stranger are instructed in the doctrines of the Gospel, are convinced in their judgment and conscience, they are true, and exhibit the true religion; that they are bound by the authority of God to embrace it, and yield obedience to the divine laws; it is their immediate duty to embrace it, and that

publicly and avowedly by joining themselves to the Lord, and his church, in the sacrament of baptism; and thus make a publick profession of the true religion, come under solemn obligations to walk in the ways of God's commandments, and under the care and discipline of the Church. The blessed God will not have matters lying loose; but has appointed the Sacraments to bring them to a point, and to reduce persons to some determination, either to appear for God and religion, or reject him; nor may they plead, by way of excuse, that though they are convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, and that all this is their duty, yet their hearts hang back, and do not yield. God will not sustain this as a plea. Shall their disobedience stand as a good argument why they should not obey? Surely they are more likely to obtain divine grace in the Church, than out of it among the heathen; they ought to stretch out the withered hand, to attempt giving themselves to the Lord in covenant. They are to set the terms of the covenant in view, and attempt to give the consent of their heart, and that in the solemn transaction which God has commanded. How know they, but while they are attempting, the heart may be made to yield? or, if it still hang back, and does not go forth in acts of faith; are they not likely to be more exercised about the matter, now they are under solemn obligation thereto, than when they had not come under it?

Now all baptized persons, I have already shew-

ed, are visible members of the church of Christ. By this dedication they are bound to attend upon all the duties and ordinances belonging to the christian character, as they shall arrive to sufficient strength of natural powers; different duties require different degrees of natural ability. The want of this will excuse from the discharge of duties, which would otherwise be incumbent: but want of moral ability, through our default, does not excuse at all. Therefore, I say, they stand bound by their baptismal dedication, to serve God in all the duties of the Christian religion, for which they have a sufficient natural capacity; and it is given in commission to the ministers of the gospel, to teach those they have *discipled, to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.** Now the Lord's Supper is one of those things he has commanded his disciples. Therefore all baptized persons are bound, as they come to years of understanding, to attend upon it.

It is indeed here to be observed, that such as are grossly ignorant, having sufficient natural capacity, or guilty of gross immoralities, or habitually neglect the known duties of practical religion, are to be excluded from the Sacraments by the regular exercise of church discipline, till by repentance and reformation they remove the offence. The reason is, that these things are such visible violations of, and contradictions to the covenant, that to admit such, would destroy one great design of the Sacra-

* Matt. xxviii. 20.

ments, viz. to preserve the external holiness and purity of the church, and be visible signs of our consent to God's gracious covenant, and avouching the Lord for our God; for they, who, by their works deny God, cannot be supposed to choose him. It would be, in short, to prostitute the ordinance, and leave no visible difference between the deportment of church-members and the world, and destroy all distinction of the church from those who are without. But all this is so far from infering, that the law commanding attendance upon Sacraments does not bind them, that it supposes the contrary. For how else can this prohibition be considered as a penalty and privation of privilege? It is upon this principle, viz. the obligation of the duty, that such censure serves to affect the conscience, and awaken the offender to repentance, that he may be restored. The ground of such a censure must be some fact or facts, which can be certainly known and judged of; and of such a nature as, if obstinately persisted in, after all due pains taken with the party, would cut him off from all right of membership. The obligation to attend those holy ordinances, binds such offenders to shun the scandals which exclude them; and by thus excluding themselves, they very criminally turn their backs upon them.

But the church has the authority of Christ for thus excluding the scandalous.* *But now I have written unto you, says the apostle not to keep company, if any man that is called a bro-*

* 1 Cor. v. 11.

ther, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no, not to eat. I am not so clear as some commentators seem to be, that the eating here mentioned does not mean eating at the Lord's table, because connected with the caution not to keep company, I rather think it does; for they are plainly matters of discipline of which the apostle speaks, and a conduct consequent upon the church's passing judgment, as appears by the next verse; and it was natural enough to observe, that such a judgment passed upon a person, inferred an obligation on church-members, to avoid even that civil society or company with such a person, which they might allow themselves in with their heathen neighbours. However, if it intend eating in ordinary meals, the argument from this passage in support of discipline, will still hold good. For if we must avoid civil society or fellowship with a person at his, or our own table, much more such a solemn act of communion as eating with him at the Lord's table. But all regular members of the visible church, of understanding sufficient to be able to attend to the Lord's Supper as a commemorative sign, are bound, by the authority of Jesus Christ, to shew forth his death till he come and are highly criminal in neglecting it; and such as are parents, are bound to dedicate their children to God in baptism. By this means, the visible church is propagated and preserved. It is doubtless one end of the ordinance of baptism, to collect materials into the church, and

under the ordinances of the gospel, as subjects of divine influences.

It will be objected here, that many baptized persons, yea, it is to be feared the greater part, are unregenerate, and unbaptized persons may be convinced in their consciences, that the Christian religion is true, and it is their duty to embrace it, yet be still in a natural state; therefore it will follow, that the unregenerate ought to come to Sacraments, this their unhappy state notwithstanding. I admit the consequence; they are under the same obligation to this as to other duties of religion.

If it be said, that if the unregenerate are bound to come to Sacraments, then it will follow, that the Sacraments are not visible signs of true Christians, or of a visible profession of true religion.

I deny the consequence. It no more follows on this than the contrary supposition; for on all hands it is granted that many unregenerate persons do come to Sacraments. Indeed, if I alleged no more was required of them in that transaction, than an unregenerate sinner, continuing such, can do, then the aforesaid consequence would follow. For the Sacraments can be visible signs of no more than they signify or is required in them. But I only say, the persons who are unregenerate, are, notwithstanding, really bound by the authority of God, to this, as well as any other duty of religion; they disobey him in neglecting it; nor will their unregeneracy be any plea for their neglect. But yet

they are bound to do all in attending that the true Christian does: to accept Christ as their Saviour, make choice of God as their God, and to give themselves wholly to him. He requires the unregenerate to make them new hearts, and turn unto the Lord.* And surely he may justly require them to do this with external solemnity by way of covenant, and visibly avow and ratify their joining themselves to the Lord. By the institution of these ordinances, the Lord as it were, says to sinners, it is not sufficient to entertain a good opinion of religion as true and necessary, but I insist upon it, that you will either embrace or reject it; avouch me as your God, or disavow me. Choose you this day whom you will serve. Here is my covenant; here are the terms of salvation; these overtures I solemnly ratify, on my part, by these public signs and seals, as most sure foundations, on which you may safely depend, and I demand that you strike a covenant with me, and openly confirm it by receiving these seals thereof. If, indeed, in this transaction your hearts hang back, and don't consent, I cannot approve and accept you; yet if you neglect this institution, and will not so much as make the attempt to yield yourselves, I will consider this as an open and avowed rejection of me and my service. Is there any thing unreasonable in this requisition? and who can tell but that in setting these matters solemnly before them, and attempting, in obedience to God's commands to give themselves up to him in these

* Ezek. xviii. 32, 33.

solemn covenant-transactions, the Holy Spirit may concur, and make the heart to yield? If He do, the business is done; they are true Christians; and who that beholds these solemn transactions, can say the heart does not consent? Therefore the Sacraments are visible signs of a profession of true religion, and the persons who partake of them are to be treated as Christians, till the contrary appears.

It is sometimes said, that the unregenerate are, indeed, obliged to come to Sacraments, but not immediately: it is their duty, but not their immediate duty. They are first to come to Christ, and then come to Sacraments.

To which I answer, then it is not now their duty in present circumstances; therefore their staying back is so far from being criminal, that they do right. To talk of the mediate obligation of a law prescribing duty, is a contradiction. The law either obliges a person now, or it does not oblige him. In a covenant or promise, there may be a conditional obligation, which depends upon some event, or something to be done by another as the condition. Yet even then, until the condition takes place, there is no actual obligation. But a law obliges without any other condition than the rightful authority of the legislator; and it obliges all to whom it is given, to immediate obedience from the time of its promulgation, or commencement; and the neglect of it exposes to punishment as a disobedience, cases of natural inability only excepted.

As to the newly invented plea, that God com-

mands no unregenerate duties, (a very odd phrase) or does not command unregenerate men, as such, to do duties. It really does not deserve a serious answer; for the meaning must be, either that the law of God does not command any duties to be done upon the principles from which unregenerate men act, or in the manner in which only they can perform them, while they continue such, and then it is nothing to the purpose. None of my reasonings are built upon, or require any such supposition. No, it is a spiritual holy obedience that is required of them; the same that is required of the most holy saint; and their unregeneracy or moral inability, affords them no excuse.—Or else it must intend, that persons who are unregenerate, are not comprehended in the obligation of the law; it does not command them to do any thing in religion, till they shall be regenerated. The very mention of which so glares with absurdity, that I believe there will none be found daring enough to assert it. For, upon that supposition, the unregenerate would be set free from all obligation to the practice of duty at once; their neglect of all religion would be no disobedience.

But it is objected, there is a difference between natural and positive, or instituted duties. The former, as prayer for instance, bind all mankind by virtue of the original law given to man in innocence; but the latter are, by the qualifications required in them, limited to the persons in whom the qualifications are found.

Answ. Natural duties are qualified, as well

as positive. Gracious principles, and a holy manner of action are equally required in both. Nor will the original obligation of the moral law natural, make any difference in the case. For it is a principle of that law, that whatsoever positive institutions God shall make known as his will, are to be obeyed. Positive laws as universally bind all of the general character to which they are directed, as do natural. Nor do the qualifications required in duties, at all limit the subjects of the law. The divine Legislator does not give his laws in this manner, viz. Whosoever have the qualifications required in them, are to perform the enjoined duties; but he requires duties so and so qualified absolutely, without IF or AND, of all who claim a share in the general character to which they belong. All who call themselves Christians, stand obliged to all the duties of Christians as such.

If it be objected, that partaking of Sacraments imports a consent to the covenant of grace, which unregenerate sinners cannot give: and surely God does not require persons to declare a lie, and that in so solemn a manner.

I answer, the blessed God is so far from requiring any to declare a lie, that he commands them to transact in this covenant with all their hearts. As he has instituted Sacraments, so he requires all to attend upon them with all the qualifications requisite in such attendance. Their want of the qualifications does not excuse the neglect of the external duty one moment; for their rightful Sovereign does not admit their

continuing unholy one moment ; and therefore, there is no plea for disobedience in any one instance. The obligation of God's law does not turn upon the internal qualifications of the subjects, but the rightful authority of the lawgiver ; and it is sufficient to justify this, that man had originally sufficient ability to obey all the will of God in a proper manner, but lost it by his own default. The blessed God, therefore, has a just right to command all that is justly due from the subjects of his government, in the most absolute manner, whatever their present internal qualifications may be. Nor can it be said, that even the unregenerate do not, in some sense, really consent to the covenant. The terms of the covenant are set before them ; they acknowledge these to be the terms, the only terms of salvation ; they yield, that it is just and right, that God should insist upon this as the only way of receiving sinners to favour ; and consent that this transaction shall stand as a witness against them if their hearts stand back. It will stand good against them as a visible public consent before God, angels, and men ; and be pleadable, yea pleaded against them in the great day of God, if their hearts shall be found wanting. This shews, it is not a vain thing to require their attendance. Here is a sufficiently important, though not the only end of these institutions. The transaction imports a declaration, that they are at least attempting to give their hearty consent, but not a declaration whether that consent be truly sincere or not. The Sacraments are not

instituted to be visible signs of persons' opinion or judgment concerning the exercises of their own hearts; but signs of visible consent they are, which will be of great importance for the illustration of the divine justice, in the aggravated condemnation of gospel sinners.

It is further objected, that unregenerate sinners, in partaking of Sacraments, perjure themselves in the very act; and sure God does not require perjury.

Ans. It is not the crime designed by the name of *perjury*. *That* consists in calling God to witness to the truth of what the party knows to be false. *This* consists in the non-concurrence of the heart in a solemn engagement, into which the party enters. This is the unregenerate sinner's great fault in every holy duty, his heart is not in it; and the greater solemnity of a covenant-transaction is, no doubt, a great aggravation of his crime: but it is not taking God to witness to a known falsehood: he takes God to witness, indeed, to a solemn engagement which he visibly, publicly, and really enters into, and declares: though his heart concurs not in the manner God requires, yet the engagement is real; he will feel himself held and obliged to be the Lord's. But he declares nothing herein about the sincerity or insincerity of his heart in this transaction, or the engagement he thus ratifies. Were it understood to import so solemn a declaration of the person's judgment of his own conduct, the child of God, whose heart sincerely consents, would often not dare to make

such a declaration. To give force to the objection, it should be supposed that the person knowingly dissembles. That he publicly engages, only to save appearances, and to impose upon others for some purpose or other, while he explicitly and formally resolves in his heart, he will not cleave to the Lord to serve him; but walk after the imagination of his own evil heart: but this is not to be alleged in this case. The person is supposed to set the terms of the covenant in view, consider the claim God has to him, and the obligations redeeming love lays upon him; sets himself, from conscience of duty, to present himself before the Lord, and attempt to give the consent of his heart; and wishes, upon some principle or other, there was such an heart in him. Thus far an unregenerate sinner may go; and however his heart fails in this matter, yet he constitutes a real engagement which binds him to accept of Christ, and be the Lord's forever. To this, God, angels, and men are witnesses. If these things be duly considered, the objection vanishes; and it will appear, the unregenerate sinner is no more chargeable with perjury in receiving the Sacraments, than with lying in prayer: but would any one persuade him by all means, not to dare to pray?

It is often objected, that the unregenerate, when they partake of Sacraments, put a seal to a blank.

Ans. If the Sacraments were primarily, and only seals of a personal interest in the covenant, there would be weight in the objection. But

while the Sacraments, in the use of them, even by the unregenerate, do really seal the truth and certainty of the covenant of grace, in its true tenor on God's part; and on the communicant's part, a solemn engagement, binding on his conscience to embrace this covenant with all his heart, and will stand firm against him for his aggravated condemnation if he does not; it is very far from being a seal to a blank.

Again, it will be said, if the Sacraments were converting ordinances, then all should attend upon them as well as prayer, hearing the word, &c. but as they are only sealing, and not converting ordinances, the case is otherwise.

Answ. All this is *gratis dictum*, a mere assertion without proof. For my part, I know not how divines have come by this distinction of ordinances into converting and non-converting. I do not know any ordinance of the gospel, which is not a converting ordinance. Surely, that the Sacraments are seals, does not hinder, but promotes their tendency to the conversion of sinners. I think we have no way to know, that any ordinance is a converting ordinance, but from its native tendency to that end, and its being used by God for that purpose. Now, what stronger tendency can there be to bring home sinners to God, than the exhibition the Sacraments give of Christ; of the way of salvation through faith in his blood; of the grace of God, and the stability of the new covenant? their very design is to engage men to come to a point.

and to close in with the terms of salvation proposed in the gospel.

If it be said, it will then follow that the profane and scandalous ought to be admitted to the Sacraments, that they may be converted.

Ans. So far from it, that directly the reverse is the consequence. This is one circumstance, from whence arises the strong tendency of Sacraments to convert sinners, viz. that they secure and promote the visible holiness and external purity of the church, and thereby distinguish her from the world. They thus assert the necessity of true holiness, and point it out as the distinguishing character of God's people; but the force of this argument would be lost, if no such distinction was made. Yea, not merely be lost, but sinners would be greatly encouraged to continue secure in sin.

It is an objection of great weight with some, that to admit unregenerate men to Sacraments, and teach them that they are bound to come, tends to flatter their vain hopes, make them secure, and build them up in self-righteousness. To make out this consequence, it is alleged we must in this case proceed upon this principle, viz. that some unregenerate men have some good principles, some sincere regard for, and liking to God in his proper character; are in heart friendly to the way of salvation by Jesus Christ; have some real and proper desires for holiness, (from a view of its excellency, or for its own sake, I suppose) and an interest in Jesus Christ; (which would be, I think, to sup-

pose they were not unregenerate, and so would be a contradiction in terms) and that God so far approves and accepts them, as on that ground to enter into covenant with them.

Ans. I think, it will appear from the whole I have said in the preceding pages, that the matter depends on no such principle. The acceptableness of the persons and duties of even the holiest saints on earth with God, is not at all the ground or reason of his entering into covenant with them. So far from it, that their acceptance with him is founded in the covenant of grace, and provided for by it. To allege otherwise, would be to take the Arminian side of the question indeed.

I readily grant the unhappy state and character of all unregenerate sinners; they are at enmity with God, and have no holy dispositions, but are wholly depraved. But is that any reason why the great God, their rightful sovereign, shall not demand their immediate submission and return to him? He offers his mercy, and requires their return in a way of covenant, and that transacted in a visible public manner. For this purpose he instituted sacraments, that they may render the covenant visible, and be a visible expression or token of consent. This transaction, and that with the whole heart, he requires without delay. Unregenerate though they be, yet since it is in the way of his own institutions he meets with sinners, they are to stretch out the withered hand, and attempt obedience. It is the careless admission of the profane and scandalous,

and the unfaithfulness of ministers in neglecting to lay matters fairly before people, and address the conscience with the arguments arising from this topic, that depreciates the sacraments, and promotes security and self-righteousness. Instead of the consequences above mentioned, there would be the strongest tendency to convince and awaken the conscience, and affect the heart, upon supposition of the following things, *viz.* that discipline, whereby the openly irreligious and profane are to be kept off, be duly exercised. That ministers deal faithfully with the conscience, set the terms of the covenant fairly before people, shew them that a consent to these is required in attending the sacraments, and nothing short of it will be accepted; that if their hearts refuse, they will grievously sin, and be found guilty before God; yet they may not neglect his institutions without *adding* to their guilt by open disobedience. That they awaken them to look to, and carefully examine their hearts before and after such solemn transactions, and press them to consider their awful guilt, if their hearts are found wanting: yet shew them, they are under the bond of the covenant; are bound in conscience to seek an interest in Christ with incessant anxiety, and yield up their hearts to God; and that, in the great day of account, they will be dealt with as covenant-breakers if they do not. Yea, those injurious consequences rather follow on the other side of the question. For, on that state of the case, such unregenerate sinners as come to sacraments, look up-

on their *admission* as a ground of confidence that they are true Christians ; and thinking they are safe, sit down secure. Such as look upon themselves as unprepared, apprehending they are not under a necessity of acting, conclude to neglect it, and so dismiss any further care about preparation, and think themselves more at liberty to indulge their corruptions through the course of life. Thus a sense of obligation by virtue of their baptism is much destroyed.

I presume I have now taken notice of the most weighty objections to my sentiments, and by removing them have gone, at least, a good length towards evincing the truth of what I have advanced. However, there remain sundry arguments, which to me appear conclusive on the affirmative side of the question ; these I shall here take the liberty to propose,

First, All those who are convinced that the Christian religion is true, are immediately obliged to embrace and openly profess it ; this is almost a self-evident proposition. For to suppose otherwise, would be to suppose, that the blessed God had made known his will, and proposed a system of religion, which yet men, convinced of its truth, were at liberty to reject ; and this would be the same thing, as to say, he had not a rightful authority to oblige them ; the very mention of this shews the glaring absurdity. Now it necessarily follows, that if such persons are immediately hound to embrace the true religion, they are immediately bound to profess it, that is publicly consent to it ; for, when reli-

gion is publicly proposed, not to profess and avow it, is openly to disavow and reject it, there is no medium. It is the flattest contradiction to imagine we embrace the true religion, and at the same time, openly neglect and disavow it. But I have already shewed, that to embrace the true religion is to enter into covenant with God ; without consenting to the covenant of grace, there is no such thing as embracing religion. So to profess religion is openly and visibly to transact that covenant ; and this is done in the participation of the sacraments, and not otherwise. There is no full formal profession of religion antecedent to this ; for without it, none are visibly in covenant, unless they can be visibly in covenant, without ratifying and sealing it. In this point of view, I think, the scripture sets the matter, * *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the Apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do ? then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.* The apostle had laid before them the evidence of Christ's being the true MESSIAH, from the fulfilment of ancient prophecies, concerning him in his resurrection from the dead. The consequence was, they were convinced of the truth of Christianity, and of their aggravated guilt in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, full of anxiety, they inquire what to do. The answer

* Act. ii. 37, 38.

is, REPENT and be BAPTIZED, *i. e.* enter into covenant with God, publicly transacting and ratifying it by the seal of baptism. If it be said here is the order, first repent, and then be baptized, I answer,

First, This is no more than I have insisted on as necessary to be done, *viz.* to set before persons the nature of true religion and the terms of salvation, and let them know that a cordial compliance with all this is required, and nothing short of it will do. This is fully consistent with what I have said, and this they are to profess in their baptism. Nor do they visibly profess repentance, while they stand back from this ordinance. 2d. Though they are called upon to repent, there is not the least hint, that they were to defer their baptism until they should have evidence, on which they might judge they had saving repentance. They were immediately to offer themselves to baptism, and were forthwith baptized; and in consequence thereof, they went on in the constant attendance on all other ordinances, *they continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread,* (*i. e.* the participation of the Lord's Supper) *and in prayer,* * Also, † Philip tells the Eunuch, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayst [be baptized.] The Eunuch does not pronounce whether his faith was saving or not, but only professes a belief of that foundation truth, *that Jesus Christ*

* Act. ii. 41, 42. † Act viii. 27

is the Son of God, and on this declaration he was baptized.

The heathen are not immediately obliged to embrace the Christian religion, but first to enquire into it; but such as are instructed and convinced in their judgment and conscience of the truth of religion, are under a necessity of acting one way or other about it, either to profess or reject it. This is one design of the institution of sacraments, that the persons may be reduced to this necessity. What then shall they do? If they apprehend they are still unregenerate, shall they, for that reason openly reject it? This is to go against the dictates of their own consciences; or shall they publicly profess their belief of it, consent to its obligation upon them, and resolve to appear on the side of religion? one would think it very easy to decide on this case, and determine which side was safest, and attended with least guilt.

2. All baptized persons are, thereby, bound to perform all the duties of true Christians, as they shall become capable and have opportunity, both as to internal exercises, and external actions. I say, as they shall become capable; for the greater part are baptized in infancy. But these, as well as all others, are brought under the bond of the covenant. This should be early impressed upon them, to let them see, that, by this dedication to God, they are bound to perform all duties of religion for which they have capacity, to receive instruction, and appear for religion as the professors thereof. As soon as they have a

competency of knowledge, and are capable of the discipline of the church, they are bound to commemorate the death of Christ, and renew their engagements to him at his table, unless regularly debarred by discipline for unchristian conduct. When they shall become parents, they are bound to dedicate their children to God in baptism. In one word, they are bound to continue stedfast in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and prayer. To say that baptism, even when received in infancy, does not bind to all this, is to say, they are not bound by this covenant to all Christian practice, till they come to the Lord's table; that they are not obliged to consider themselves as professors of religion in consequence of their baptism, and that they are not chargeable with breach of covenant in neglecting to appear for it, and standing back from the Lord's Supper; and that is, I think, to represent infant-baptism as a matter of no great benefit or importance. Or, are they hereby bound to all other Christian duties, but not to come to the Lord's table? where is the ground or scripture authority for that distinction? Is there any qualification requisite for this duty, different in kind from what is required in other duties? Is not true grace or holiness required in all other duties, as well as this? And is not this ordinance among the *all things whatsoever he has commanded his disciples*, and which they are taught to observe? Or, does the unregeneracy of any, who, according to God's own institution, are visible mem-

bers of his church, nullify this obligation, so that their omission of this ordinance is not their sin? If it be said, as indeed it frequently is, that they are, it is true, bound by the divine command, and non-attendance on the Lord's table is their sin; yet such is their disqualification, that they sin more, and contract greater guilt by coming, than staying away; so that upon the whole, it is safer for them to abstain. I answer, if there be any weight in the objection, it will hold equally with respect to all the other duties of religion; for such are equally disqualified for the performance of them; and so the unregenerate are at once set free from all obligation, as visible church members or baptized persons, to the law of God. A consequence, which I believe few, but the disciples of Sandiman, will choose to admit; besides this objection is self-contradictory. For if they sin more in coming, and upon the whole it is safer to abstain, it must be, because it is not the will of God they should attempt to obey him with respect to this ordinance: And they are excepted from the command to observe it; if so, they are under no obligation to observe it. To abstain, is, therefore, so far from being their sin, as this objection supposes, that it is their duty, they do right. For to suppose two contradictory obligations to take place at the same time, by the same law, is a gross contradiction; for they either mutually destroy each other, or, at least, the one of them makes the other void. And to suppose a present obligation, and yet that the safest course

is to counteract or violate it, is a glaring absurdity.

Arg. 3. The authority of God, instituting and appointing sacraments in his visible church, is the ground and reason of the obligation on visible church members to observe them; and his command to observe them, is the rule of their duty, and not any internal qualification in them. Therefore, all visible church-members are immediately obliged to attend upon them, let their internal state be what it will. The internal qualification required in attendance on sacraments, cannot be the ground or condition of the command to attend upon them; for God requires and commands the qualification itself, however destitute of it many may be. Surely he, who has a right to command the qualification, has a right to command immediately and absolutely the performance of the duty itself, in which such qualification is required, whether the persons be possessed of it or not. Consequently, all who share in the visible character, to which the Sacraments, by appointment belong; that is, all visible Church-members, stand immediately obliged to attend upon them, and that with the qualification required whether they actually have it or not. They stand obliged to this in the same manner, as they do to any other duty of religion. Now the divine command in the case is the rule, the only rule of their duty; and if the command extend to all visible church-members, then it is an explicit rule which can be applied with certainty. But upon this principle, *viz.*

that the command to attend Sacraments is so limited and qualified, as to exclude and prohibit all visible Church-members who are unregenerate, it will be impossible to apply it with certainty in many cases; for then, the rule of interpretation must be some judgment of people's internal states; but none, whose judgment deserves any notice, allege that church officers can judge in that case, for they know not the hearts of others, and therefore many ministers do not require any account of their exercises from those they admit; but only a profession of having, so far as they know their own hearts, embraced Jesus Christ, and given themselves up to God, upon which they are admitted. Now this profession is only a declaration of their opinion or judgment of their exercises of heart, or internal state. Consequently, the party's own judgment, in this case, is the rule of interpreting and applying the Divine command; and according to this, they are to conduct themselves. In this declaration, they place that profession of true religion, or their being visibly the people of God, which is required in order to their admission. But surely, we have nothing made visible here, but their judgment of themselves. Pray how does this render their profession of religion more visible, than their acknowledging the doctrines of the Gospel as divine truths, and manifesting their influence, by a practice agreeable to them? Nothing does this, short of publicly transacting a covenant with God in the way of his own appointment; that is, by partaking of the signs

and seals of his covenant. Such a judgment of themselves would be as precarious a ground of conduct to persons in coming to Sacraments, as any judgment formed of them would be to Church-officers in admitting them. For besides, that many judge favourably of themselves without sufficient ground to support it, and so mistake their case; there are others, who, though really the children of God, are in great suspense, and cannot determine on which side the evidence preponderates; while not a few, though at seasons they have comfortable hopes, yet frequently labour under distressing apprehensions that they have nothing more than common grace. Upon this footing, I think, persons, who doubt of their gracious state, could not with safety come to sacraments at all. For though they are told the Sacraments are appointed to strengthen weak faith, and cherish weak grace; yet that is the great matter in question, whether they have any true grace. The most plausible thing that can be said to them is, that if upon impartial self-examination, they find stronger ground of hope than the contrary; they are to follow the strongest evidence. But here even to a child of God, the ground of doubt may often seem strongest; and though at times he may have hopes, yet perhaps, he more frequently suspects his hopes to be false; and in that case, he is told, he will contract greater guilt by coming than by staying away. How then shall he run so awful a risk, when he fears that unregeneracy is his sad condition? Hence probably, and in many cases certain-

ly the exercised Christianis kept off, while the secure self-flattering sinner comes forward; yea, the doubting Christian cannot be certain, that the command so limited and qualified as aforesaid, includes him.

Arg. 4. If unregenerate visible Church-members contract greater guilt by abstaining from Sacraments than in coming to them, then they ought not to abstain. But they do contract greater guilt by abstaining, therefore they ought not.

Here, to prevent mistakes, I would observe, I mean coming in a conscientious manner, otherwise, if persons should come to the Lord's table merely to qualify for a civil post, or in a profane manner, they would contract much the greatest guilt in coming. This would be to eat and drink unworthily with a witness, and to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord; but to return,

I suppose the major proposition will not be denied by any. For if unregenerate visible Church-members contract greater guilt by abstaining, which is the same thing as to say they sin more; then certainly in coming, from a conscience of duty, attempting obedience to the divine command, they are less sinful, and consequently act more as they ought to do, than in omitting it. The only thing, therefore, to be confirmed is the minor proposition, *viz.*

That such unregenerate sinners do sin more, and contract greater guilt by abstaining.

I readily grant, that by their unbelief in so so-

lemn a transaction, which in its very nature so specially requires faith in Christ ; they sin and contract great and aggravated guilt. Their want of grace renders them altogether unacceptable to God, he disapproves them. The only question is, whether in omitting, they do not sin yet more, and God does not more highly disapprove them ?

Now, in order to decide on this question, let it be considered, that it is not to be supposed the blessed God, when he instituted these ordinances, left men at liberty to neglect them. All of the general character to which the Sacraments are appointed, are obliged by their very institution to observe them. But to suppose it to be the will of God, that such as are unregenerate, though visible church-members, should not approach to Sacraments under the notion of being disqualified, is inconsistent with any present obligation to attend upon them ; and that is to suppose that the institution of ordinances obliges only when men are suitably disposed towards them ; their want of faith and other graces sets them free, so that their non-attendance upon them adds nothing to their guilt ; yea, in that they obey God and act correctly, which is an absurdity, that, I believe, will meet with but small reception ; but if they are under a present and continual obligation to attend upon the Sacraments by virtue of their authoritative institution, then not to attend upon them is disobedience. In either case, a gracious heart is wanting ; but in the omission of the external duty,

another instance of disobedience is added; keeping back the heart is, as it were, avowed, and no attempt is made to yield it up. Surely to act according to the light of conscience, impressed with a sense of present obligation, must be less sinful, and incur less guilt, than to go against the dictates of conscience, and live in the neglect of a known duty. Even when persons abstain, in a sort conscientiously, from a reverence of the ordinance, and consideration of their unfitness, however that may extenuate the guilt of their omission, yet such an error in judgment cannot alter the nature of things, and take away all addition to their guilt thereby, or render their conduct innocent.

But to abstain from the Sacraments from a careless neglect of religion, and unwillingness to come under strict obligations to it, is sinning with a high hand. It is to say with proud Pharaoh, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? *Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry.** Surely none will hesitate to determine, that a conscience impressed with a sense of duty, and tenderly influencing to the performance thereof, is better, and discovers a less degree of wickedness and impiety, than such a contempt of religion and stubborn temper of mind. Thus, I think, the minor proposition is confirmed, and therefore the conclusion stands good.

Argument 5. That God should institute public covenant signs and seals to be administered

* 1 Sam. xv. 23.

in his church, on purpose to bring the whole visible church, in the celebration of them, to enter publicly into covenant with him; and consequently, require the whole visible church to attend upon them, is perfectly agreeable to his conduct towards the Jewish church in repeated instances.—Notwithstanding their sacramental covenanting in circumcision and the passover, that nation was exceedingly prone to idolatry, which they mingled with their worship of the true God. Their temptation hereto arose from the practice of the heathen nations round about them. To prevent this, and in order to their avouching the Lord more explicitly as the only true God, and renunciation of idols, Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah and Ezra, undoubtedly by divine direction, led the whole people to a verbal covenant-transaction, upon which I beg leave to observe,

1. That a holy cleaving to God with all the heart, a gracious closing in with, and consenting to his covenant, was as really, and as much required in these transactions, as in coming to the Lord's table. In this view Joshua sets the matter before the congregation of Israel. **And Joshua said unto the people, ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transgressions, nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he has done you good. As if he had said, consider the pure and holy cha-*

* Josh. xxiv. 19, 20.

racter of the great God with whom you have to do, in a very solemn manner; and consequently, the holiness of that service he demands of you, and now requires your covenant engagement to practise. It is no easy matter to approve yourselves to him in this affair: and terrible will be the consequence of turning aside from that constant holy obedience he requires. In short, he sets before them the requisitions of the great God in that transaction, in the same solemn pungent manner that ministers of the gospel are to do in administering the Sacraments of the new testament.—It is not holiness in a diminutive sense that he requires; it is the holiness of true saints. Yet,

2. He requires all Israel to enter into this covenant, and brings them under engagements to this holiness, without standing to inquire whether they are already regenerated or not.—He does not admit them to this covenant-transaction from a judgment of their appearing to be regenerate, upon a previous profession; but presses upon them then to choose the Lord for their God, by an induction of facts, as so many striking arguments to persuade them; and their yielding and actually consenting to the covenant then proposed, was itself the profession of holiness they made. It was by that they appeared to be a holy people.—No doubt a number of them were unregenerate; but Joshua does not consider that as an obstruction in the way. He considers them as rightfully the Lord's; and however depraved in consequence of their apos-

tacy, and the forfeiture they were under, yet he justly requires them to be holy ; and upon this principle, consistently commands their performance of all those external duties in which this holiness is professed, and required to be exercised : and consequently, requires them publicly to engage in a solemn covenant-transaction.—By a parity of reason, all this is still required of all visible church-members, and they are consistently required to make similar engagements by the participation of the Sacraments of the new testament. And in thus entering into covenant, the visible church appears as much, and as really now to be a holy people, as Israel did then. It is as much the duty of gospel ministers now to lead forward the whole church to covenant-transactions with God, in the solemn ordinances he has appointed for that very purpose, as it was the duty of Moses and others to bring the people of Israel to such verbal covenanting then, which imported the same profession, and as much required true holiness.

Argument 6. The steady attendance of all regular members of the visible church upon the Sacraments of the new testament, greatly tends to promote, and give efficacy to the discipline of the church ; and thereby one great end of their institution will be obtained. Consequently, it is the will of God that all such should attend upon them.

I have already observed, that the very existence and efficacy of discipline depends upon the Sacraments. The weight of censure upon

the conscience of an offender arises from his considering the enjoyment of Sacraments, and standing among God's visible covenant-people as a great privilege, which he would otherwise have a right to, but now is cut-off from, in consequence of his own offensive conduct.—But if he is taught, that as an unregenerate person he would have no right to them, were he never so regular, or externally religious; and that it is so far from being a privilege to him, that it would exceedingly increase his guilt, should he dare to approach; then the argument is lost. Upon that principle, he is not cut off from any thing he had a right to, or had any thing to do with. When a scandalous person is judicially dealt with, and upon conviction, sentence is pronounced, viz. that he is debarred from the Lord's table; what is done to him? In consequence of the instruction he had all along received, he had no thoughts of asking admission. He observes too, his very sober neighbour, who is not only orthodox in his sentiments, but conscientiously religious in his practice, stands off as unfit to come: yea the officers of the church are not free to admit him, because he apprehends after all, he is unregenerate. Is it then any blot upon him to be in the same case with his reputable neighbour? Does the aforesaid sentence bring any evil upon him, more than he would be under without it?

Upon this principle, that none but gracious persons ought to approach, the Sacraments are considered as designed to distinguish between

the regenerate and unregenerate members of the visible church (which yet can never be done in this state) rather than as public badges of distinction between the visibly holy and profane, the church and the world. Hence not the vicious only, but conscientious externally religious persons, are kept off from communion with the church. Now pray, to what class of mankind do these belong? They cannot well be numbered with the heathen, or the openly wicked? They some how belong to the church, yet are not esteemed proper members, and may not come to Sacraments more than the heathen; how then can the Sacraments make distinction between the church and the world?—What does it signify to an obstinate offender, who will not hear the church, though you esteem him as a heathen man and a publican, while he sees so many of his apparently religious neighbours, upon the matter, in the same case? thus discipline is depreciated and weakened. But surely this is not according to the will of God; but rather that conduct of visible church members, which will maintain and support discipline.

These arguments, I think, abundantly confirm the truth of what I am maintaining, viz. that all who are convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, and the obligation of its duties, are immediately bound to join themselves to the Lord and his church; and all baptized persons, who have arrived to a competent capacity, are bound to come to the Lord's table.—

I shall conclude the whole with a few general observations.

Observation 1. From what has been said we observe, upon what footing the visible church is called a *holy, a special people to the Lord*. *— *A holy nation*. †— *Holiness to the Lord*. ‡— *Saints*. §— And very commonly *the Lord's people*. It is from the covenant-transactions which have passed between God and them; whereby they stand related to him, and dedicated to his service for the purposes of holiness: and not from any previous appearance of holiness as the ground of their admission thereto.—Whatever awakenings, humiliations, or affections may be effected by the word amongst sinners, it is never to purpose, until they reject sin, and cleave to God by covenant. And therefore, nothing short of public covenanting is a visible sign of holiness, as before observed. From the solemnity of such transactions in their very nature, and the affecting arguments and considerations usually urged on such occasions, persons are commonly excited to much seriousness, which exhibits a more striking appearance of holiness, than on any other occasion.—Hence saith the Lord, *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness to the Lord.* ¶

Obs. 2. We may hence observe with what propriety the sacred scriptures require of all

* Deut. vii. 6. † Exod. xix. 6. ‡ Jer. ii. 2, 3. § Psal. lxxix. 2. lxxxix. 5. 7. ¶ Jer. ii. 2, 3.

who have been entered as members of the visible church by circumcision of old, or baptism now, that they live to God in the exercise of universal holiness of heart and life; and urge it by all the arguments belonging to the character of God's children: such as that he is their God; they are his people; the redemption of Christ; the rich grace and love of God; and the glories of heaven.—The great God addresses them in his word, not according to his knowledge of their real internal state as the searcher of hearts, but according to their external character and visible appearance, and the obligations they are brought under. Hence their sins are highly aggravated, and deeply resented as a contradiction to their public character; and so reflecting great dishonour upon the name and ways of God.*

For he said, surely they are MY PEOPLE, CHILDREN THAT WILL NOT LIE, so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the Angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they REBELLED and VEXED his holy spirit: therefore he was turned to be THEIR ENEMY, and he FOUGHT against them. It is resented as exceedingly offensive, that Israel walked in the statutes of the heathen; and aggravated from this circumstance, that it was against the Lord THEIR GOD;† and that hereby they rejected his statutes and HIS COVENANT.

Obs. 3. We may see from what has been

* Isa. lxiii. 8, 9, 10.

† 2 Kings xvii. 8, 9, 15.

said, the propriety and necessity there is that the ministers of Christ should, in the dispensation of God's word, distinguish characters, and address them to the consciences of men. For though their public character is that of saints, God's children, &c. and accordingly all the holiness of saints is demanded of them; yet the word of God assures us there are hypocrites in Zion, branches in Christ which are withered, foolish virgins amongst the wise, and tares growing among the wheat, in the best state of the church here below. Though the ministers of the Gospel cannot distinguish these, personally, from true saints, yet they can distinguish the characters which describe the one and the other, whereby the consciences of men may be enabled to discern their own proper character. It is one thing to be visibly a child of Abraham, and another to walk in the saving faith of Abraham. One thing to be a visible saint, another to be really one in the sight of the heart-searching God. Therefore, professors had need to look well to themselves; and examine, and *know themselves whether they be in the faith, and Christ be in them.* And not rest in this, that they have *Abraham to their father.* Hence John the Baptist dealt in so solemn and awakening a manner with those he baptized.* In like manner, let every Gospel minister acquit himself. Amen.

* Matt. iii. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

* CASE OF CONSCIENCE.

Should not a person, who is not comfortably persuaded of his being a real Christian, abstain from the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, lest he should eat and drink damnation to himself?— And, what method must that person take to satisfy a church of Christ of his being a real Christian, who cannot relate any particular experience of the dealings of God with his soul.

These questions are of great importance, and therefore deserve a distinct consideration. They were occasioned by two letters sent to me, one of which is as follows, viz.

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ I Should be glad you would resolve the following case, on the *Wednesday* night, as soon as opportunity will permit.—A person has some hopes he has experienced a real saving change, and is therefore desirous of waiting upon Christ at his table; but is greatly discouraged, from a view of what the apostle says upon this subject. † This passage has occasioned the following thoughts, viz. If he has really experienced a saving change, he shall be saved, whether he is a partaker of this ordinance or not: but, on the other hand, if he should be deceived with regard to the state of his soul, he then must eat and drink damnation to himself, and so be excluded from even any future hopes of being saved at all. What

* From Pike and Hayward's Cases of Conscience.

† 1-Cor. xi. 27—29.

“therefore must he do in these circumstances?”

This short letter expresses the sentiments of many a Christian. The person who wrote it, is desirous of attending the ordinance of the *Lord's Supper*, but is not satisfied that he is a child of God, and is therefore afraid of *eating and drinking damnation to himself*. The word *damnation* fills him with a peculiar awe, and sets his soul a trembling—“Is this the consequence?” says he. Oh! what shall I do? How must I act? Must I attend in these circumstances, when I know not but my soul may be ruined for ever? Is it not rather my duty to abstain from the ordinance, as it is not absolutely necessary to my salvation? Here are two things that present themselves before me. (1.) I may be saved, and yet not attend at the *Lord's Table*. (2.) I am not such but on attending I may eat and drink *damnation* to myself. What therefore must I do?”—Thus we see the difficulty this person is under; to endeavour to remove which, and to quicken all that love our Lord Jesus Christ to the cheerful discharge of their duty, I would,

1. *Inquire whether a person may not satisfy himself in abstaining from the Lord's Supper because it is not a saving ordinance?* This is too often pleaded as an excuse by those who come not to the *table*: but it will appear weak, as well as ungrateful, if we consider these two things—

1. *Though the Lord's Supper is not a saving, yet it is an useful ordinance.* A person may be

saved, who never appeared at the *Lord's Table*. ✓
 This consideration should be an encouragement
 to those, who are deprived by the providence of
 God of the opportunity: but it should be no
 encouragement to negligence, when we are call-
 ed to attend. If it is not necessary to the being
 of a Christian, it is to his well being. Some ✓
 make a Saviour of it: they are never easy, till
 they have had this ordinance administered unto
 them: as if the bare receiving it was sufficient
 to wipe away every sin, and to entitle a person
 at once to the salvation of Christ. Others slight
 and neglect it. How happy to be kept from these
 two extremes! This ordinance was not designed
 to be a standing means of awakening and con-
 verting sinners, but it was of carrying on the
 work of grace in the heart, and of training up
 the soul for heaven. Particularly, it is designed
 to give us a greater hatred of sin, and fill our
 souls with a deeper humiliation for it. And this
 it does, as it exhibits all the riches of a Redeem-
 er's love, all the glories of his cross. A view
 of these, under the influences of the Spirit, pow-
 erfully, though sweetly, works upon an ingenu-
 ous mind, and comes with an energy that no-
 thing can withstand.—“ Oh, says the Christian,
 the hatefulness of sin! Canst thou love it, O my
 soul? Canst thou fondly embrace and pursue
 it? O melt, melt, my hard heart! Why dost
 thou not move to see thy pierced Saviour, a Sa-
 viour pierced for thee, pierced by thee? Dost
 thou not rise with resentment against the cruel
 and obstinate Jews, who thus put the Son of

God to a painful and ignominious death? But oh, stop thy resentment against them, and look at home! Thy sins, O my soul, were the murderers of thy Lord! These were the nails that fastened him to the *accursed tree*. These the spears that wounded his *side*, that covered his body with a *bloody sweat*, and prepared the *bitter cup* he drank! O weep, mourn, O my soul! Be ever humble under a sense of sin, and dishonour not that Jesus, who loved thee, and gave himself for thee?"

Again, *This ordinance tends to enliven and strengthen our graces, and bring us to a greater conformity to God.* When we are sitting and viewing the *matchless love* of Christ, it tends to fasten the deepest convictions of our obligations to him upon our minds, and to increase our love to him. It tends to strengthen our faith in him, under a sense of our guilt and unworthiness, to reconcile us to every difficulty, to quicken us when slothful, to restore us when wandering; to wean our affections from earthly things and carry on the work of God in the soul. "Oh, says the Christian, see what *love*! And shall I loiter thus? Shall I be so cold to Jesus? Oh, why does not the fire burn within me? why so slothful? Up, O my soul! and let thy Redeemer's glory be ever thy concern, as thy everlasting salvation was his."

Again, *This ordinance tends greatly to promote our spiritual comfort.* Here, behold a *Father's* love! He parts with his *only begotten Son*, and delivers him up to an *accursed death* for us!

Here, see the *Saviour's* heart how much it is set upon our salvation! View here the virtue, the glory of an infinitely atoning sacrifice! See justice sheathing its awful sword, death and hell vanquished, the uttermost farthing paid, and all the blessings of salvation fully purchased! Oh, here behold a righteousness provided, the promises confirmed, and grace and glory both secured to every chosen vessel! How animating, how comforting such a view!—"Oh how glorious says the Christian. See, O my soul, thy *Saviour's* love! And wilt thou any more distrust him! View the triumphs of the cross! And wilt thou any longer be afraid? Oh what a foundation is here laid for a strong faith and a lively hope!

Again, *This ordinance tends to increase our love to one another.* It is a cementing ordinance. It cannot but raise in us a mutual affection, whilst we view each other as purchased by the same blood, members of the same body, and children of the same family.—Thus then, though it may not be absolutely necessary to our salvation to wait upon Christ at his *table*, yet it is necessary to our growth in grace, our greater comfort here, and fitness for a better world; and therefore it is our duty and privilege to appear amongst his people there. But,

Christ himself instituted this ordinance, and invites his followers to wait upon him here. What our Lord said to his disciples, he says also to us in this distant age, * *Do this in remembrance of*

* 1 Cor. ii. 24.

me. And where is the expression of our love? where our gratitude, if we refuse to obey?—“Oh says the soul, has my Redeemer commanded those that love him to wait upon him here? This *command* is enough for me: I cannot but obey. Who can resist his love? Who can hear the compassionate Jesus, who came and suffered death; who can hear him inviting his dear followers to his table, and say, *I will not come, for I may be saved without it?* How disingenuous is this!”—What, has he, who loved us so as to give himself for us, called us? And will ye not obey his call, because you may get safe to a better world, and yet never attend at this *ordinance*? Where is your concern to honour your Redeemer?—These hints, I hope, are sufficient to shew the weakness of this argument, the Christian is so ready to make use of for his neglect of this institution, and to stir him up to a diligent and cheerful discharge of his duty, that he may glorify his once dead, but now exalted *Saviour*, and gain some saving advantage to his own soul. I now proceed,

11. *To consider the other objection which our friend makes to his waiting upon Christ in this ordinance, viz. a fear lest he should eat and drink damnation to himself.* This objection seems to lie in your mind, my dear Christian friend, thus—“If I should eat and drink unworthily, I shall eat and drink damnation to myself; and I am not sure that this will not be the case: therefore shall I attend, when the consequences may

be so awful? Oh, that word *damnation*, it strikes me with a peculiar terror!"—Thus the greatest stress appears to be laid upon this alarming *word*. If then I can set this circumstance in such a light, as to remove these distressing fears, I hope the case will be in some measure resolved. That this may be done, I would consider, *what that unworthy eating and drinking is, which is brought in as the cause of this damnation, and then the damnation itself.*

First, *Let us inquire what it is to eat and drink unworthily.* He that does so, attends upon this *ordinance* in a manner and with ends and views different from those for which it was appointed. This was the case with the Corinthians. * They had not the glory of Christ in view, when they met together to administer this *ordinance*. They fell into contentions and confusions, so that there could not be that harmony, which was necessary to be found in a church sitting down together at the *Lord's table*. They came not to view the *body and blood of Christ*, or to remember his matchless love, but to satisfy their craving appetites, and refresh animal nature; and they were so disorderly, that some even ate and drank to an excess, whilst others had not enough to satisfy their hunger. Thus we see what it is *to eat and drink unworthily*, viz. when we attend in an irreverent, disorderly, and carnal manner, and for ends different from those for which the ordinance was appointed by our

* 1 Cor. xi. 18—22.

Lord; when we prostitute it to some earthly purposes, and have no regard to the frame of soul in which we attend, or to the great ends to be answered by it.

Secondly, *Let us now consider what this damnation is.* And,

1. *Taking the word in the most awful sense, as signifying eternal condemnation, it should not deter us from waiting upon Christ in this ordinance.* In this case it does not signify, that there is no forgiveness after an *unworthy receiving*. Many have sat down at the table of the Lord, who were enemies to him, and yet have afterwards been the triumph of sovereign grace. Thus, ye timorous souls, who are so often distressed with a view of this *awful word*, and entertain from hence such solemn thoughts of this *ordinance*, see, here is nothing to affright you from this, any more than from any other sacred institution. You may as well not *read, hear, or pray*; because, if these are not the means of your *salvation*, the consequence will be your *damnation*. Doubtless, all the ordinances the impenitent sinner has attended upon, will appear against him, and increase his misery in the infernal regions. But this should not drive us from the house of God, but fill us with a serious concern that our waiting upon God may be effectual to bring our souls to Jesus Christ. But,

2. *The word damnation is to be taken in a softer sense.* As,

(1.) *It signifies temporal judgments or afflic-*

tions* Thus the apostle explains it, when he adds in the next verse, *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* As if he had said, As you come to the *table of the Lord* in so disorderly a manner, and have perverted the end and design of this *ordinance*; so God has manifested his displeasure, by laying his hand upon you, insomuch that many of you are in an unhealthy, feeble, and sickly condition, and many have been removed out of time into eternity. Thus this word *damnation* carries nothing frightful in it.

(2.) *It signifies here such afflictions as are a means of our spiritual good.* Thus says the apostle, ver. 32. *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world,*—That is when we are thus under outward afflictions, we are mercifully chastened and gently corrected of God, that we may not continue prostituting his sacred *ordinances* to the vilest purposes, and so be condemned with the world; but that we may be convinced, humbled, and reclaimed. Thus these considerations take every frightful idea from the mind, respecting this *formidable word*, and consequently tend to remove those distresses and discouragements occasioned by it.

Some perhaps may say, This is encouraging indeed! You say, a person's *unworthy receiving* does not expose him to eternal damnation, but only brings upon him a few temporal afflictions,

* Luke xxiii. 40. chap. xxiv. 20. 1 Pet. iv. 17.

which are in reality blessings : so that by this you give encouragement to persons to come and trifle with this *sacred ordinance*.—God forbid, that I should have such a view as this ! This, I am certain, is far from being the conclusion a real Christian will draw from what has been said. To do evil, that good may come, is not the character of a true follower of Jesus. Because God only gently chastises and corrects our negligence and slothfulness, and makes these corrections a means of our spiritual good, shall we therefore rush boldly upon this *ordinance* ? No. What has been said only tends to remove the distressing fears of the Christian about the word *damnation*, and to encourage him to come to the *table of his Lord* ; and does not promote a carelessness of spirit, nor will have this influence upon a mind under the power of gospel truths.

Come then, ye fearful souls, who start at the mention of this *ordinance*. Do you not love Jesus ? Have you not made choice of him as your *Saviour* ? Would you not love him more, and be brought into a greater conformity to him ? You are the very *persons* Christ invites. Would you prostitute this *ordinance* to any vile earthly purpose ? would you *eat* and *drink* in a disorderly and indecent manner ? No. You would come to remember the love of a *dying Redeemer*, and to view all that is here exhibited : you would come to be quickened, to behold a *suffering Saviour*, to admire the riches of distinguishing grace in the sacrifice of the *Son of God* :

but you are afraid you are unworthy, and unfit to make such an approach to God, and be indulged with such a privilege. If it be thus with you, do not be discouraged. Venture near your *Redeemer*. Come humbly to view your *expiring Lord*, and to plead and rest upon his atoning sacrifice, and you will be far from *eating and drinking damnation to yourselves*. If you were to come for some selfish ends, as the way to worldly advancement or profit, and to pay no regard to the *body and blood* of a Saviour, you might have reason to conclude you were *unworthy receivers*. But, if you have a humble sense of your sinfulness, if you desire to come looking to Jesus, that you may be strengthened, sanctified, and quickened; you need not be afraid, but come with liberty and cheerfulness. He that has invited you, will make you welcome, and carry on his work in you by all the ordinances he has appointed.

Thus I have endeavoured to answer the first question.

Since I received this, the second question was sent me, which I thought not improper to add here. "A person looks upon it as his duty to wait upon Christ in this ordinance: but the church with whom he would walk, require him to give an account of the dealings of God with his soul. As he cannot relate any particular experience of this, so he wants to know what he must do in this difficulty."

This, you see, is a general question, and leaves us at a loss to know wherein the particu-

lar difficulty of this person lies. I shall therefore endeavour to state in it two or three different views, and then shew what a person must do to satisfy a church in such circumstances.

You are desirous of waiting upon Christ in all the *ordinances* of his house; but you cannot relate any experience of God's dealings with you, so as to give the *church* satisfaction in admitting you to the enjoyment of such a privilege. *Perhaps you mean by this that you cannot relate the particular time and circumstances of your conversion.* This was the case with many of those happy souls, who are now standing before the throne of God; and I doubt not, but it is thus with many of those of whom the churches of Christ are composed here. Some God sanctifies from the womb: in others, the change, though effectually made, yet is done imperceptibly. To inquire of such an account of their conversion, or to refuse them because they are incapable of giving it, is what no church of Christ has a right to do, and therefore should be no cause of stumbling to you.

Again, *Perhaps you have had no extraordinary remarkable circumstances, in the course of your experience to relate to the church; and this may therefore involve you in some difficulty.* God does not deal with all his people in the same way. Some are led smoothly and silently on from step to step. They are savingly enlightened, and brought to Jesus, are carried on through the divine life, and get safe to glory, without any *noise* or any thing very remarkable

in their *experience*. They appear to be almost always the same, and yet go on from strength to strength. This may be your case, my friend. Others can give an account of *great distresses, great consolations and enjoyments, great meltings of soul in ordinances and duties, &c.* And because you cannot do the same, you are afraid you have no real experience of renewing grace. You have but very little to say, and that to no purpose, in your own apprehensions. But consider, those accounts are not always genuine, that appear to be the most *striking*; nor do those always turn out eminent Christians, who are *so long* and *so circumstantial* in their declarations.—But your question returns—*What must you do in your present case?*

1. *If you cannot remember the time and circumstances of your conversion, and how the work has been carried on, inquire into the evidences you can give of a change, and relate them to the church.* You know, my friend, whether you have made a practice of sinning or not; whether sin has been the object of your delight. If this has been the case, you have no experience of the grace of God. But, if you hope it has been your concern to hate sin, to have your corruptions subdued, and to have your heart cleansed from those secret evils, which have appeared detestable to you, and have caused you daily to mourn before God; if you have striven and prayed against them, and longed for deliverance from them; you have a comfortable evidence of your being a Christian indeed.

Again, *Have you been diligent in the use of those means God has appointed?* And what are your views herein? Is it to atone for sins you have committed, to establish a righteousness to justify you before God, or to answer some selfish purposes? You have then no reason to conclude that you are a Christian. But, if it has been out of obedience to the command of God, to meet with him, to feel the quickening, sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and to be fitted more for heaven, this is another evidence of your having received the grace of God.

Again, *Is Christ precious to you?* Have you committed your soul, so far as you know yourself, into his hands? Do you see a suitableness in all his characters? In fine, is he your all and in all? Never say then that you have no saving experience; for what is this?—Go, my friend, and tell the church, that though you are not able to fill up a sheet with a long detail of remarkable circumstances, yet you hope you see yourself guilty, you hate sin, have fled for refuge to Jesus the Mediator, and have left your soul with him; that he is precious to you, you have taken him for your Lord, your portion, your all, and desire to bear his image, and to live to his glory. Is not this enough to give satisfaction?—But perhaps you cannot positively say this is the case with you. You are under great fears, lest your heart should deceive you.—Declare your fears then, as well as your hopes, and leave your case to the decision of the church, praying that they may be guided in their duty towards you.

2. *Examine the present frame of your soul with a regard to this ordinance.* You say, you have no account to give of God's dealings with you, and yet you are convinced that it is your duty to wait upon Christ at his *table*. Now, if you have no real experience of the grace of God, you have no proper claim to this privilege. I would ask you therefore, and would beg you to ask yourself, whence is it that you are satisfied that it is your duty? A due examination of this will, in some measure, lay before you the ends you have in view in desiring to attend this solemn institution, and be a means of furnishing you with something to say to the church to direct them as to your admission amongst them. Do you apprehend then it is the duty of every common professor, and therefore yours, to appear at the Lord's *table*. If this is all we have to say, we are guided by a blind and ignorant zeal. But further are you desirous of coming to this *ordinance*, as you will be hereby more peculiarly entitled to the divine favour, or that it will gain you reputation amongst those you converse with? This shews you how much you are acquainted with the nature of the ordinance, and the gospel method of salvation, and that it is far from being your duty to attend. I would hope better things of you, my friend. But whence is it then that you see it your duty? Have you any reason to hope that you have given up yourself to Jesus Christ, and do you see your presence at the *table* necessary to testify your love publicly to him? Do you look

upon it as useful to quicken, strengthen, and comfort the soul? Do you see any excellency in it, as being peculiarly adapted, and made effectual by the Spirit, to crucify our lusts and corruptions, to enliven our graces, to kindle a fire of love to Jesus, and help to keep alive a sense of our obligations to him? In fine, do you desire to come here, that you may view a crucified *Saviour*, feel the influences of his love more on your heart, and be engaged to a more lively obedience? Do you desire to come as a miserable, guilty, naked creature to Christ, as exhibited in this ordinance, to plead his sacrifice, and to lie at the foot of his cross mourning for your sins? These are views suitable to this institution, shew that you are a Christian indeed, that you have a real experience, and that you have a right to all the privileges of God's house. To sum up all, if this be the case with you, God has been manifesting himself to your soul, as he does not to the world, and you have reason to be abundantly satisfied. Go, then, and tell the church what you have seen, what you have felt, what is your present frame, what the foundation of your hopes, and what you trust your desires, your ends and views are; and all this, I doubt not, will appear to them as a sufficient evidence of a work of grace in your heart, and therefore of your right to all the ordinances God has appointed.

A dialogue* between a *weak believer* that dares not come to, and a *strong believer* that dares not absent himself from the Lord's Supper.

Strong Believer. MY friend I am glad to meet with you. I rejoice in your health, and in the mercy vouchsafed to us both, that we have one Lord's day more to wait upon our God.

Weak Believer. I may account it a mercy indeed, who have been so dull and dead, so out of frame all the week long, and yet so uncertain what the state of my soul is. But I pray you, where are you going so cheerfully?

S. I am going to a feast.

W. Do you spend holy time in feasting?

S. Yes, in such feasting as I am going to.

W. What feast do you mean?

S. A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, fat things, full of marrow, of wines on the lees, well refined.

W. Who invites you to this feast, of which you speak such great things?

S. God himself makes the feast, and invites me to it: our Father makes a banquet for his children.

W. If God call you to a feast, the provisions surely are according to the state of so great a King?

S. Wisdom hath killed her beasts, she hath mingled her wine, she hath furnished her table, the oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things

* From a Treatise on the Lord's Supper by Thomas Doolittle, but somewhat modernized for the present purpose.

are ready : there is milk for the weak, and wine for the strong, and sorrowful of heart. There is bread for the hungry, water for the thirsty, and every thing that is necessary or delightful. Indeed it is the body and blood of Christ, who is the matter and Master of this feast.

W. You mean, I perceive, the Lord's Supper ; and I have heard indeed of some, that great and precious things are there prepared ?

S. Yes, there are, and I feel my heart burn within me, while I am speaking of them, and the love of him that hath prepared them, and called me unto them.

W. Surely you will be much delighted when you are there, since your heart is thus raised as you are going to it ?

S. Raised through the mercy of my God, at this time it is, but sometimes it is not so ; yet when without a sense of the love of God, I would not dare to absent myself from this holy supper ; for even then I endeavour to keep a sense of my *duty* towards him, and of my *wants*, to fetch supplies from him by this and other means, appointed in his word.

W. Whether therefore you have the light of God's countenance or no, you refrain not from partaking of the Supper of the Lord ?

S. Though I have no comfort, I would do my duty. Then my soul longs, thirsts, and exceedingly desires, that through the mercy of my God, and merits of my Saviour, I may taste of these provisions, and feed emblematically upon my Lord Redeemer, whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed.

W. But I pray you, what are these provisions that are thus prepared ; and do thus affect your heart ?

S. They are to him who partakes with faith, rich and costly provisions ; they are free, suitable, plentiful, sufficient, soul-nourishing, heart-cherishing provisions.

W. Will you not particularize some of these provisions for my better information ?

S. My soul rejoiceth within me.

W. Alas, how dull am I while he is thus affected !

S. My soul rejoiceth within me, while I am calling them up by recollection.

W. What are they ?

S. What ? Christ and all his privileges are ready to be exhibited, and sealed to my soul this day.

W. What privileges ?

S. Peace with God, pardon of sin, justifying righteousness, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, grace to persevere to the end of life, and at the end eternal happiness.

W. Show me the suitability of these provisions to your soul ?

S. A Saviour is suitable to a lost sinner ; pardon to a guilty sinner ; peace with God to a sinner that was an enemy to God ; peace of conscience to a sinner under apprehensions of God's wrath ; justification to a condemned sinner ; cleansing blood to a polluted sinner ; comfort to a dejected sinner ; these, these are the provisions which are set upon my Father's table.

W. These are great and excellent things indeed, but who are the guests invited to this feast? For whom are these provisions made?

S. For those that are burdened with sin, and forsake it; for those that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for the children of God; for the friends and followers of Christ; for those that are willing to receive him in all his offices.

W. But are the poor, and those that have no money, invited unto this feast?

S. Yes, yes, the poor in purse might be welcome, and the poor in spirit shall be welcome: God loves to see his table filled with those that are sensible of their wants and sins, and those he will satisfy abundantly with the fulness of his house, and cause them to drink of the rivers of his pleasures, when the full self-righteous pharisee shall be sent empty away.

W. This revives my heart, if you can make it good.

S. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it, and therefore you may not doubt thereof. He is most earnest with the hungry and thirsty to come, * Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price. And the Son calleth such. † In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and

* Isa. lv. 1. † John vii. 37.

drink. And the Spirit calleth such. * “ And the Spirit and the Bride say come; and let him that heareth, say, come; and let him that is a-thirst, come; and whosoever will let him drink of the water of life freely.” And the ministers of God are sent to call such. † “ The master of the house said to his servants, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt and the blind.” “ And the Lord said unto his servants, Go out into the highways,” (where the poor men are wont to beg) “ and hedges,” (where poor men are wont to work) “ and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

W. And do these scriptures encourage you to frequent this ordinance?

S. Yes: And because the same God that commandeth me to pray, commands me to receive, and hath given me hopes, that I shall be partaker of the benefits thereof, I am bound to wait upon the Lord therein.

W. What do you hope to be partaker of, by going to this ordinance?

S. I hope to have my heart enflamed with love to God, and desires after Christ, to have my Saviour more endeared to my soul, my heart softened, my sins subdued, my faith strengthened, my evidences cleared, and my soul assured of eternal life.

W. What reason have you to hope that you

* Rev. xxii. 17.

† Luke xiv. 21.

shall have these advantages by going to the Lord's Supper ?

S. Not for any worth in me ; but God is pleased to give those things freely for the sake of Christ, to those that in obedience to his command, in a right manner, and for a right end, do make conscience of this duty.

W. What course have you taken beforehand, that you have such hopes of such benefits by this ordinance ?

S. I do not wish to declare what my secret duties are, but if it might be for your edification, or instruction I shall not be unwilling to acquaint you.

W. do, I pray you for I stand in need of help, from others more experienced in holy duties ?

S. I cannot say, I am more experienced; but this I did, I seriously searched my heart to find the truth of grace, my interest in Christ, my right unto this ordinance ; to find out my sins, and have renewed my repentance for them, my wants, and have begged of God, as earnestly as I could, that I might be supplied at his table, and strengthened to discharge this duty to his glory, and my own comfort.

W. O happy man ! that hath these provisions prepared you ; and can go with such delight, and holy confidence to partake of them ?

S. You also may draw near unto this table of the Lord, and have a share of these gospel benefits, and be assured of them.

W. I ? Alas ! alas ! you know not what

I am, and what I have been ; I dare not meddle with the blood of Christ in this ordinance.

S. You may come and eat of this bread, and drink of the cup.

W. What I ! Shall a dog eat of the children's bread ? I dare not do it.

S. You must ; you sin if you neglect it.

W. Sin ! I absent myself from it, because I would not sin against the blood of Christ ; But how can you say, I sin if I do not come ?

S. Because you live in the neglect of a plain commanded duty. It is a slighting of a special token of the love of your dying Lord.

W. But I would come if I were fit.

S. It is a neglecting of the seal of the covenant of grace. It is hypocrisy to complain of the hardness of your heart, whilst you refuse the means to have it softened ; and of the power of your sin, and will not use the means to have it weakened.

W. Surely no one under my doubts and fears ever went to this ordinance, and found good thereby.

S. Many have. I myself was long under the same doubts and fears, and know my heart was as bad as yours can be : but when I was willing to forsake my sin, and close with Christ, sense of duty, and fear of sinning moved me to the use thereof ; and there God resolved my doubts, removed my fears, and made it profitable to my soul, in my comfort and increase of grace.

W. But it would be sin in me, to go because

that which is a duty, and would be food unto another, might be a sin and poison unto me, for I am not fit for such an ordinance.

S. If you be not fit, that is your sin.

W. Then my case is miserable indeed. If I do not come, I sin, and if I be unfit and come, I sin. Alas that I am under this necessity of sinning! Tell me then, what I must do?

S. You must not abide in that condition, wherein you are unfit for the supper of the Lord, but prepare yourself and come.

W. Truly no one will pity my pining soul, that hath food before it, and yet unworthy to meddle with it.

S. A legal worthiness you cannot have, neither doth God expect it at your hands; but an evangelical worthiness you may have.

W. I would fain know what I may do in reference to this ordinance. I pray you tell me, when is a person said to be worthy in a gospel-sense?

S. When he is clothed with the righteousness of Christ, hath his soul sanctified by divine grace, and exercises such grace at the Lord's Supper.

W. Then I perceive that a man might be a sinner, and yet a worthy receiver?

S. Yes.

W. What, a great sinner too?

S. Yes he may.

W. This is some support to my fainting soul: But yet my soul is cast down within me, for I doubt I am not one of those sinners that you mean.

S. It grieves me to see you in this distress of spirit, I am persuaded, that if you would go unto this ordinance, you would in time hear God speaking peace and comfort to your soul.

W. My desires and my fears are such, I know not which exceeds. Fain I would, but I dare not. It is grief unto my soul, when I see the children of God approach unto the Father's table, and I absent myself, as though not of his family; but I am such a sinner, that I dare not go?

S. Why, what is there in your guilt that excludes you more than other sinners.

W. I am the chief of sinners.

S. So was Paul in his own esteem, but Christ came to save such, *. God's mercy and promise, and Christ's merits are as great, yea, greater than your sins, † You have not been a greater sinner than Adam, or Manasseh, ‡ or Mary Magdalene, § you have not committed more sins than all the sins of all the elect of God in all the ages of the world amount unto: and God will pardon all these. How can your sins be too great for pardoning mercy?

W. It does appear that neither the greatness, nor the number of sinners' abominations shall keep mercy from them; yet these had their hearts of stone turned into hearts of flesh; but my heart is hard, like an adamant. It must be a broken heart, that can behold a broken Christ

* 1 Tim. i. 10. † Psal. ciii. 12. Matth. xii. 31. ‡ 2 Chron. xlii. 1. to the 14. § Luke vii. 37, 39.

in the sacrament: Thus my case differs from theirs.

S. Sense of hardness of heart, is some degree of softness of heart, * Pharaoh complained of his judgments, not of the hardness of his heart. Are you sensible, and do you grieve for the hardness of your heart, or do you not? If you do not, why then do you complain? If you do, your hardness is not the hardness that obtains in reprobates: but such as may be, and is in the people of God: And this sacrament is a means to have it softened.

W. This gives me some relief. I pray you proceed to discover in what things hardness in a child of God, differs from the hardness that is in a wicked man?

S. Sense of sin, and of God's dishonour, a judging of yourself for sin, unfeigned turning from sin, earnest prayers for softening grace, a desire to cast yourself upon Christ, tenderness of conscience, and holy fear of sinning against God, holy care to please him, teachableness of heart, and holy restlessness till you have Christ, do distinguish your hardness from the hardness of heart in a wicked man.

W. How else?

S. Your hardness is occasional, not constant; the hardness of a reprobate, is like that of a stone, but your hardness, is like the hardness of ice, that is dissolved by the rays of the sun.

W. But if I had a heart of flesh, I do not

* Isaiah. lxiii. 17.

think there would be so much hardness remaining in me more than others.

S. God cures the hardness of his people's hearts in their conversion, effectually ; in sanctification, gradually ; and at their dissolution, perfectly ; but not till then.

W. This proves my hardness to be more than the hardness of God's people, because I mourn not for my sin as they do, nor can I be so deeply humbled for it, and what should I do at the Sacrament, if I cannot mourn for sin ?

S. You imitate those that mourn for sin. But your conclusion is incorrect, that you mourn not truly, nor at all, because you mourn not constantly, or as much as others do. The word of God, and not the attainments of others, must be the rule by which you ought to judge of the truth of your mourning for sin. Besides, if you do not mourn directly, you mourn reflectively ; you mourn that you cannot mourn, and you pray that you may mourn. Besides, it is not your tears that can justify you in the sight of God : for if you could mourn more than any, yet you must be justified freely by the blood of Christ, and so you will, when you mourn truly, though less than some others do.

W. If it be so, then tell me when my mourning for sin is right, and the mourning of a true penitent ?

S. When you mourn for sin as sin ; for all sin, because it is against God ; * as an evil greater than any affliction. † Paul never cried

* Psal. v. 4.

† Rom. vii. 4.

out for the evil of affliction, as he did for the evil of sin : when you rejoice in the law of God, that doth discover it ; and bless God that he ever wrote it, and that you ever knew it.* When your mourning for sin makes you loath it, and leave it, and prize Christ, and hasten to him, and close with him.

W. I fear my mourning for my sin ariseth from the fear of hell ?

S. You may quicken your heart to mourn for sin, from the torments of hell, that it hath deserved ; but that this is not the principal ground of your mourning appears, because you can mourn and grieve for other men's sins, as well as your own. Also when you have no thoughts of hell, but you have the strongest persuasion of God's mercy to you, in saving you from wrath to come, you mourn most : and you mourn for the power and filth of sin, being part of your misery thereby, and are willing to accept of Christ for your Lord, as well as for your Saviour.

W. I do not deny it to be thus with me, that I am willing to accept of Christ upon any terms. Let me have Christ upon any terms. But I fear Christ is not willing to give himself, nor God willing to give his Son for such an one as I : and what should I do at the sacrament, if Christ be not willing to give himself, and his benefits unto me ?

S. Is it possible you should be willing to receive Christ, if Christ were not willing to give

himself to you? for you could not be willing, if Christ had not first been willing: and it is the intolerable pride of your heart, to think you can be more willing to be, and receive good, than God and Christ is to give, and make you good. Besides, then such an one may come, and plead at the last day, Lord, I am not damned, because I was not willing to accept of Christ; but because thou wouldest not give Christ to me; when I was willing to receive him.

W. Truly I think there shall be no such plea at the day of judgment.

S. Then your condition is good, if you be willing; for if you be willing to receive Christ, and God be willing to give him unto you, you have him: will you not then go to commemorate his death?

W. What strange conviction is this? Surely I had Christ, and did not know it; I was happy, and did not perceive it. But alas! no sooner do I perceive a little light to shine into my soul, than it is clouded; for my heart is deceitful, and I may think I am willing when I am not?

S. I discern you will now suspect, that you yourself are unwilling, rather than that God is not willing, and this you have more reason to do: but though your heart be so deceitful, that you cannot understand all the particular sinful actings of it; yet by serious search, and prayer unto God, you may know what it is that you do love, desire, and choose above all things in the world, and what is the general bent and inclination of your heart and will.

W. I do not know my heart.

S. What would you ask of God, if he should say, ask any one thing, and thou shalt have it?

W. Christ, I think; but still I am afraid lest this should be from love unto myself, and not unto the person of Christ.

S. An holy self-love you ought to have, and that is not inconsistent with predominant love to the person of Christ.

W. How may I know that it is an innocent self-love which moveth me to be willing to accept of Christ?

S. If you desire Christ to make you holy, as well as to make you happy, and to free you from the power and dominion, as well as from the punishment and damnation of your sin.

W. If there were no hell, yet I wish not to sin against the Lord.

S. You have made an answer to your own inquiry.

W. But if I had been willing to accept of Christ, to destroy the power of sin, it would not have been so strong as yet it is, and the power of sin makes me question the truth of grace.

S. Strength of sin might argue weakness of grace, but not the nullity of it; because sin may rage, when it doth not reign.

W. That I desire to understand; for if sin reign, you will say I must not go?

S. True, but if you can say with Paul,*
 “That which I do, I allow not: for what I would,
 “that I do not; but what I hate, that do I. For

* Rom. vii. 15.

the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. You may then conclude with him, Now, if I do that which I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth (he saith not reigneth) in me. And if it rages, when it doth not reign, you have the more need to go unto the Lord's Supper, that sin, this usurping tyrant (not your acknowledged Lord) may be thrown down.

W. But sin hath great power in my thoughts, for not only vain, but blasphemous thoughts, are frequently crowding into my mind, and I cannot remove them.

S. That temptations have power over your thoughts, is your sin; but that they have not such power over your will, that proves your grace; for you would remove them when you cannot; and whether they be injected by the devil, or do arise from your own heart, if grieved for, groaned under, and striven against, it is no otherwise with you, than with many others of God's dearest children.

W. I have so long neglected Christ, I fear now it is too late, to what end then should I go unto this ordinance?

S. Who told you it was too late? where do you read it? The damned in hell might say it is too late, but not you; you might have had him, if you would; and may have him, if you will: and have him indeed, if you are willing. And it is not by what you have been, but by what you are, and would be, that you must judge your state.

W. But if the day of grace be past with me, and the door of mercy shut against me, it is too late; how then should I be sealed in this ordinance unto the day of redemption?

S. The day of grace is not past with him, that would fain have grace above all earthly riches, nor is the door of mercy shut against him, that doth set open the door of his heart for Christ the King of glory to enter in; and doth importunately pray for the fruits of the Spirit.

W. But, alas! I cannot pray, how then should I receive?

S. An infant cannot ask, yet crieth for the breast. Though you cannot word your desires, yet you can cry to God, and nothing will satisfy you but a Christ. Some may utter words in prayer, and not pray, and you may want words, and yet pray fervently, acceptably unto God: for prayer doth not consist in the exercise of parts, memory, &c. but of grace.

W. I cannot cry to God, my eyes are dry, and sometimes cannot drop a tear, when I am confessing my sin, though so many and heinous. When others can shed many tears for one sin, I cannot shed one tear for many sins.

S. Is it so with you but sometimes? Besides, as there may be tears in the eyes, when there is no sorrow in the heart; so when your eyes are dry, your heart may grieve. An hypocrite, as he may have more words, so he may have more tears in prayer than a true child of God.

W. How then may I judge of my prayers, when I want these outward signs of sorrow, &c?

S. By your inward frame of mind, when you cannot shed a tear, you feel your heart burdened with, and rising in hatred against your sin; and when you beg for Christ and grace, you find your heart sincerely reaching forth after both Christ and grace.

W. I do pray indeed, and hear, that I may have Christ, but I doubt all this is in hypocrisy: and that all my duties are the service of an hypocrite: and what did Judas get by eating with Christ?

S. If you delight to do a duty so, that no man might know that you do it, and that when you be with others in a holy ordinance, you find you had rather be affected, and not seem to be so to others, than seem to be affected, and not to be so before God, where is your hypocrisy? Besides, if you do your duties *from a right principle*, love to, and fear of God; *in a right manner*, viz. humbly, believingly, fervently, in the name of Christ, and *for a right end*; that you may glorify God, have communion with him, be made more like him, that you may have more love to him, and more power and strength against your sin, you are sincere, and not an hypocrite in your duties.

W. But sometimes I find a secret content in my heart, that men take notice of the outward signs of inward affections, and this when the outward signs are more than my inward affections; is not that hypocrisy?

S. Yes it is, and much to be lamented and opposed; mourn so, if you can, that none but

God might perceive it, except when it might be more for the glory of God, and the edification of another, that your mourning should be manifested rather than concealed.

W. May such a duty then be accepted of God, that is done in such hypocrisy?

S. Such a hypocrite, a sincere Christian may sometimes be, and is; for as there is something of unbelief in one that hath faith in Christ, and something of pride in one that is humble, &c. so there is something of hypocrisy in every one that is sincere: for in nothing are we perfect as to degrees, while in this life. Therefore as you must not conclude, that your prayers and duties are not accepted of God, because there are some actings of unbelief and pride in them: so neither because there is something of hypocrisy mingled with them, when the principle, manner, and end, in the main are right.

W. I doubt whether the principle of my duties be love to God, or only a natural conscience; and if I should go to the Sacrament, but not from a principle of love, God would not be pleased with me?

S. As you tender your own safety, take heed, that at no time you absent yourself from duty, against the dictates of a sanctified enlightened conscience.

W. I pray to God I may not: but speak unto my doubts.

S. You may perform duty from a principle of love, when it is not from a sense of love; when a natural conscience is the principle, it puts you

upon the duty, but gives you no strength to perform the duty; but the Spirit of God does both.

Natural conscience is satisfied, if the duty be done: but you are not satisfied, except God be enjoyed in the duty. Natural conscience puts on-to duty in time of temporal, or for fear of eternal punishments; but you pray, &c. that you may please God, have communion with him, and be delivered from the filth and power of sin. When natural conscience only is the principle, a duty is done with much backwardness of heart, conscience drags the sinner to his knees; but you love it, and delight in duty, or are grieved if you neglect it. When natural conscience only is the principle, if a man can get an excuse which will silence conscience, the duty with gladness is omitted: but if you are kept (though by lawful cause) from a duty, it is some grief and trouble to your soul; and nothing but what is weighty, or judged by you to be duty, shall divert you from the ordinance of God. Are you not yet satisfied in this, that you may go unto the Lord's Supper?

W. I have proposed to you the chief grounds of my doubts and fears, and at present, have some hopes that God hath done some special work upon my heart?

S. Then I beg you will make conscience of this duty, that the work of grace may be promoted, and carried on in your soul.

W. I shall further consider of what you have said and shall beg of God his holy Spirit, to make me know the things that are freely given (if given) to me of God; and if I shall by further

searching of my heart, and prayer unto God be convinced that it is my duty, I will no more absent myself.

S. May the God of heaven guide you to and in this work : and smile upon your soul, when you shall be present at his table.

THE PREVIOUS SELF-EXAMINATION IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATION. *

AFTER we have seen some account of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper ; the great and indispensable obligations which all Christians are under to partake of it ; and have heard some sort of answer made to those difficulties and doubts with which either pious persons distress themselves in the prospect of approaching it, or with which wicked and careless men have endeavoured to lull their consciences asleep, while they continued in the habitual neglect of so plain and important a duty ; it will now be esteemed needful, that I proceed to shew what is required of us to enable us, in a worthy manner, to partake of the Lord's Supper. The Apostle's advice, in this case, is, " Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup *."

The most restricted and confined meaning of which words is, by some, taken to be, That the

* From Duncan's Devout Communicant's Assistant.

* 1 Cor. xi. 28.

Corinthians should examine themselves, and their conduct in partaking of the Lord's Supper, by the account which he had just now given of the original institution of it; and thereby they would see how very different their irreverent and indevout, their proud, intemperate, and uncharitable manner of celebrating it in Corinth, was from the primary intent, and native design of eating the Lord's Supper.

But, without any violence done to the words, the holy Apostle's exhortation may, very justly, be understood as including much more than this: That to prevent coming unworthily, every one should examine himself, and rectify whatever, on careful recollection, he may find amiss, that so he might partake of the Lord's Supper with comfort.

A very useful rule, in this case, would be, for every one calmly to read over the ten commandments of God's law, and stop at each of them, attentively to hear the voice of his own conscience, how far he hath in thought, word, or action, obeyed that law. This recollection, very probably, would shew him what things are wrong, that ought to be amended: what guilt, yet unrepented of, needs to be forgiven; and what remains of irregular affections and passions, that must be rectified and set right. This would contribute much to make every man, in the light of the cross of Christ, acquainted with his own sore, and the plague of his own heart, and be a mean of making him anxious to have them healed.

The following questions seem to be very naturally included in our examining ourselves, as preparatory to the Lord's Supper.

1. We ought to examine, whether we really understand the nature and design of the Lord's Supper? which was instituted to perpetuate and keep up the remembrance of the death and sufferings of Christ till he return to judgment. For, by the bread broken, is represented his body, that was nailed to the cross, was pierced and crucified; and, by the wine in the cup, his blood, that was "shed for many, for the remission of sins."

This is indeed the primary intent and native design of the Lord's Supper. It is a commemoration of a sacrifice; not a proper sacrifice, in any other sense, than prayers or praises are called spiritual sacrifices. It was instituted to perpetuate to all generations the memory of so important and interesting an event as the death of Jesus, "the Son of God, made a propitiation for the sins of the whole world," and to preserve on the hearts of all his followers an affectionate and grateful remembrance of his love, as a powerful motive to obedience, till he come again.

There are, indeed, other ends which this ordinance may promote.—It affords us an opportunity of renewing and ratifying our acceptance of the covenant of mercy, when we commemorate that blood by which the gracious terms of it were first sealed.—It is a means of maintaining communion and fellowship among all the follow-

ers of Christ, as being members of that one body of which he is the head; "for there is one body, as there is but one bread, whereof all are partakers *."—By it, also, we are made sharers of the blessings of Christ's purchase: Yet, commemoration, doing this in remembrance of Christ, is the original and primary design of the Lord's Supper.

This part of self-examination is indispensably necessary to enable us to communicate worthily. No man, with any propriety, can discharge a duty which he does not understand. No servant can suitably perform a work to his master of which he is entirely ignorant. Neither can any man worthily partake of the Lord's Supper who is unacquainted with the nature and design of it. The Apostle, therefore, says, the reason of their eating and drinking unworthily, was their *not discerning the Lord's body* †.

2. Whether we have a right or title to come to the Lord's table? A right may either be considered as external, founded on a judgment of charity, in the sight of men; or internal, in the approbation of our own hearts, in the sight of God.

A man who was baptized in the faith of the gospel, has all his life adhered to this good confession, and professed subjection to the laws of Christ, hath, in the judgment of Christian charity, full claim to be admitted as a disciple of

* 1 Cor. x. 17.

† 1 Cor. xi. 29.

Christ, to partake of the Lord's Supper. Whereas a person who makes no profession of his belief in Christ, has no relation to him ; though he may have been baptized in his name, yet, if he has lived any considerable time in the open contempt of his laws, by works he has denied him ; and, therefore, without repentance, and amendment of life, forfeits his title to be admitted to the Lord's table, or to the kingdom of God.

There is also an internal right, or claim of admission to the Lord's Supper, established by the testimony of a man's own conscience, in the sight of God. For, he who really believes the gospel has the witness in himself ; that is, has a proof of the power of religion on his own heart, subduing the power of sin, raising him above the world, and bringing him daily to a greater conformity to the image of Christ. By this real change, which is not instantaneous, and is not equally clear to all men, but is gradually promoted in our souls, " we are sealed by the Holy Spirit to the day of redemption." Where this work is in any good measure begun, it " witnesseth with our spirits, that we are the sons of God."

Every one then, who approaches to the Lord's table, should ask himself, Have I, in the sight of my brethren, a right to be admitted to the Lord's table? Or, Has my conversation before men been such, as would justly give offence, if I came to it? And when Christ asks me, in the prospect of the performance of this duty, as he

did his Apostle of old, "Simon, son of Jonas, "lovest thou me*?" am I able to answer, looking into my own heart, and appealing to his omniscient eye, "Lord, thou knowest all "things; thou knowest that I love thee," and wish to approve myself to thee. The inward calm approbation of a man's own heart, will show this right in the most comfortable view. If our hearts, in this case, approve of us, we shall have confidence toward God, and be able to lift up our faces before him.

3. What motives induce us to partake of the Lord's Supper? In all moral duties, and acts of religious worship, something more is required to render them acceptable in the sight of God, than the mere performance of the external action. The Pharisees prayed, and made great noise about the outward parts of religion; but all this was done from vanity, to be seen of men: from men verily, when they were seen of them, they had all their reward. Such services could not be acceptable in the sight of God.

God seeth not as man seeth; he judgeth righteous judgment, and regardeth the heart. In order, therefore, to approach worthily to the Lord's table, it is very necessary to examine the motives that induce us to come to it:—Whether from a sense of that love and duty, which we owe to God, and as an evidence of that regard and gratitude due to Christ the Son of

* John xxi. 17.

God, that we may contribute what is in our power to preserve the memory of his love to generations yet to come:—That we ourselves may be the more established in the faith of Christ; our hearts and lives daily brought into a greater conformity unto his death.—That beholding ourselves in the view of his cross, we may be filled with contrition, and sorrow for past sins: when we look on him, whom they have pierced, we may renew our covenant engagements to forsake them, and live more answerably to his death.—Finally, that commemorating the death of Christ, as the alone propitiation for sin, and pleading forgiveness from God on account of it, we may have ground to hope, that past transgressions shall be pardoned, and we be washed from them, in the fountain that is opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.

Our comfort and acceptance with God very much depend on the sincerity of the motives that bring us to this ordinance. For, if a man who does not really believe the gospel, or who is living impenitent in sin, and has no resolution to forsake it, should come to the Lord's table, to serve some worldly purpose, to obtain some reputation for religion, or because it is the custom of the place where he lives, perhaps to attach himself to some sect of Christians, and gain the protection of his party; such a person could not expect acceptance with God, as

he wants the wedding garment of sincerity and truth.

If we heard a man pray with appearance of great fervency and devotion, or heard him profess great zeal for religion and his party, whom we knew to be dishonest and covetous, intemperate and cruel, we could not but despise such a man, and his conduct: or, if a person should profess great friendship for us, who, we were certain, was in secret our enemy, it would fill us with indignation, instead of esteem: When, therefore, we raise our thoughts to God, who seeth all things, and from whom the secret purposes of the heart cannot be concealed, we must certainly be persuaded, that when he seeth men, who live in the habitual neglect of his commandments, approach to the holy table of the Lord, from low and base motives, with no desire at all to approve themselves to him, their offerings must be an abomination in his sight. How happy on such an occasion, if a person can say with the devout Psalmist, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart; for thy loving kindness is before mine eyes: I have walked in thy truth *."

4. What sort of preparation do we make to enable us to partake worthily of the Lord's Supper?

If God be the Sovereign Lord, and great majesty of heaven and earth, we ought, at all times, to approach him with reverence. The more so-

* Psal xxvi. 2. 3.

lemn the acts of worship in which we are to be employed, the more attention and serious preparation of mind is needful, to enable us to perform them in an acceptable manner. If a person was to come into the presence of his superior, or of his prince, upon some matter of great importance, in order to behave as he ought, he would endeavour to call in all that attention and presence of mind of which he was capable.

When, therefore, we are to come into the presence of God, and, at his holy table, to commemorate the most amazing instance of divine goodness ever shown to the sons of men, of which also we ourselves profess to be partakers; when we are, if I may so express it, personally to covenant and transact with God, on matters of no less importance than the eternal salvation of our souls, it well becometh us attentively to consider how we are prepared for such an approach.

No body can determine what precise time is necessary to prepare every man for the Lord's Supper: that must, in a great measure depend on a person's situation in the world, as I formerly observed. A man who is just turning from the ways of sin, has to examine himself, and repent of the whole course of his past life. Young people, when they first approach the Lord's table, to take their baptismal vows on themselves, and ratify, by the consent of their own hearts, what their parents early did for them, have more to do, in this view, than those who are holding on in the ways of God, and have formerly "tasted of the heavenly gift."

A good life, or a constant endeavour to live answerably to the death of Christ, is the best, and has been usually called an *habitual* preparation for the Lord's Supper. But, in this light also, every one has something that needs to be set right, something wrong that ought to be amended, or wanting that needs to be supplied; and therefore, some time, in reason, should be set apart for serious recollection.

“Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” The first part of preparation, then, is to consider, how consistent we have lived with the ends of Christ's death; what sins need to be repented of; what remains of guilt to be pardoned, or irregular passions to be subdued. Thus it is needful to think on our former ways.

By the death of Christ also, the covenant of grace and mercy, through which we hope to be saved, was at first ratified: by our coming to the Lord's table, we profess to adhere to this covenant, and, on the terms thereof, plead acceptance with God. Very proper, therefore, it is, that we consider how far we have fulfilled, or come short of the terms of this covenant. The commemoration of the death of Christ affords an opportunity of renewing these engagements, and of bringing ourselves under new and stricter obligations to perform them.

In the death of Christ, we see a display of the divine goodness, into which the angels themselves, with earnestness and wonder, desire to

look; the Son of God leaving all that glory which he possessed in heaven, and coming to earth, and, after a life of sorrows, and well acquainted with grief, submitting to an ignominious and painful death, to save us from eternal misery. Justly therefore ought we to stir up our souls, and all that is within us, gratefully to remember this unspeakable gift. An ingenuous person would be ashamed to commemorate a great obligation with indifference. When David the king called to remembrance the mercies of God to himself and house, his heart was so full of gratitude, that words could not express all that he felt; so that he was obliged to vent himself in broken speeches, saying, “Who am
 “I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that
 “thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was
 “yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God;
 “but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s
 “house for a great while to come; and is this
 “the manner of men, O Lord God? And thou,
 “Lord, knowest thy servant, and what can thy
 “servant say more unto thee?*” At other
 times, “Be stirred up, O my soul, and all that
 “is within me, to bless God.—Awake, O psal-
 “tery and harp, to praise him; myself I will
 “awake early.—What shall I render to the Lord
 “for all his benefits towards me?”

5. How do I purpose to behave after the Lord’s Supper? This question is of great importance; for many imagine, that all that is in-

* 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19, 20.

tended by this religious service is over when they depart from the Lord's table : forgetting, that there they come under new engagements ; afterward they must fulfil them : there they put on good resolutions ; in time to come, they must reduce them to practice.

In whatever other light we view the Lord's Supper, if we fail of this purpose, we come short of the great end of it. For the great design of Christ's death and resurrection (as the apostle assures us) was, that he might be the Lord of the dead and of the living ; *i. e.* that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again. One principal design, therefore, of our Lord's Supper is, that the steady belief and affectionate remembrance of the death of Christ, impressed on our minds, might be a constant and powerful motive to love and obey him, who loved us, and gave himself to death for us.

What will it avail us to have pretended, before our coming to the Lord's table, that we were sorrowful and deeply humbled for our sins, if afterward we return to the practice of them ? The latter end of the man, who after some partial reformation, or some stated season of devotion, returns to his former sins, is worse than the beginning. We can only prove our professions of love to Christ to be sincere, and ourselves to be his friends, by doing those things which he hath commanded us.

To partake of the Lord's Supper is not only a duty, but also a mean of grace, and of promo-

ting holiness in our hearts and lives : since we profess, by coming there, to be not our own, but bought with a price, it is designed to excite us to glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are God's. A person, then, who comes to the Lord's table with no serious purpose henceforth to walk circumspectly, or who departs from it with no endeavour to put this resolution in practice, is little better than he who stays away : he is like the ground, that, being often watered, bringeth forth nothing but briars and thorns, whose end is to be burned.

These questions, I hope, seriously proposed by every person who comes to the Lord's table, and answered by his own heart, might greatly contribute to enable us to profit by the Sacrament of the Supper. I might have added some other useful questions, that might be asked, with great advantage, in this view. Such as,

What benefit have we reaped from the former occasions on which we partook of the Lord's Supper? What fruit have we brought forth thereby?

How consistently have we lived with the resolutions which we put on at the Lord's table, of behaving ourselves as became the disciples of Christ? Or, What hath been the cause why we have not made improvement proportional to what might have been expected from us?

In what condition am I now to partake of this ordinance, compared to what I have formerly been? The Lord puts his people in remem-

brance of what they once were, in order to excite them to diligence and watchfulness. "I remember thee, the love of thine espousals, and the kindness of thy youth, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness.—Israel was holiness to the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase."* Our Lord also complains of the church, that she had left "her first love."†

We should, therefore, ask ourselves, Do I now more carefully discharge the duties which God requireth of me? and have I more delight in the performance of them than formerly?

Do I make conscience of my relative duties in the stations and offices in which God hath placed me? and do I perform them as from the heart?

Am I able more successfully to overcome the temptations of this world? to subdue pride, malice, or resentment? Can I, from the heart, forgive an injury done to myself? and, have I more pleasure now in doing good offices to others?

Have I any quarrel with any man? Is it not my duty, in the sight of God and of his people; to forgive him, ere I adventure to come and offer my gift on his altar? Or, have I done injury to any person, of whom, in the same spirit, I ought to ask forgiveness?

As we are all liable to self-deceit, it would be a good rule to begin this duty of self-examination with the prayer of the holy Psalmist:

* Jer. ii. 2.

† Rev. ii. 4.

“ Search me, O God, and know my heart : try
 “ me, and know my thoughts : and see if there
 “ be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the
 “ way everlasting.”* And, if it were gone a-
 bout with care and attention, it would make
 such discoveries of many infirmities, and trans-
 gressions in the sight of God, as to induce us
 to conclude, in the words of the same devout
 person, “ Who can understand his errors?
 “ cleanse thou me from secret faults : keep
 “ back thy servant also from presumptuous
 “ sins.”†

This necessary duty of self-examination should by no means be so understood, as restricted to the Lord's Supper, and never practiced but with a view to that institution. For no office of religion is more really beneficial, or better calculated to promote our progress in the Christian life. The frequent exercise of this duty would produce very salutary and comfortable effects on those who are employed in it. For, when we thus make diligent search, we will see what things are amiss in us that need to be amended : when we commune with our own hearts, we will find out what is our infirmity ; and to be thoroughly acquainted with the disease, goes a great way to lead us to the cure. On inquiry also, the answer of a good conscience towards God will afford us solid ground of continual rejoicing.

* Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24.

† Psalm xix. 12, 13.

* THIS duty of preparation may be reduced to these four heads, meditation, examination, supplication, expectation. And if I mistake not, they are all given us in one verse; and though not directly applied to this ordinance, yet to this among other ways of our intimate communion with Christ: † “ I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born.” There is (1.) Meditation: *they shall look upon him*; this is no otherwise to be performed but by the meditation of faith. Our looking upon Christ is by believing meditation. Looking argues the fixing of the sight; and meditation is the fixing of faith in its actings. Looking is a fixing of the eye; faith is the eye of the soul; and to look is to fix faith in meditation. And there is (2.) Examination, which produceth the mourning here mentioned. For though it is said, *They shall mourn for him*; it was not to mourn for his sufferings; for so he said, “ Weep not for me;” but to mourn upon the account of those things wherein they were concerned in his sufferings. It brings to repentance; which is the principal design of this examination. (3.) There is Supplication; for there shall be poured out a spirit of grace

* From Dr. Owen's Discourses on the Lord's Supper.

† Zech. xii. 10.

and supplication. And (4.) there is Expectation; which is included also in that of looking unto Christ.

1. The first part of this duty of preparation consists in *meditation*: and meditation is a duty, in which by reason of the vanity of our own minds, and the variety of objects which they are apt to fix upon, even believers themselves do find as great a difficulty as any.

I shall only mention those special objects which our thoughts are to be fixed upon in this preparatory duty; and you may reduce them to the following heads.

(1.) The principal object of meditation in our preparation for this ordinance, is the horrible guilt and provocation that is in sin. There is a representation of the guilt of sin made in the cross of Christ. There was a great representation of it in the punishment of angels; a great representation of it is made in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; and both these are proposed unto us in a special manner,* to set forth the heinous nature of the guilt of sin; but they come very short, nay, give me leave to say, that hell itself comes short of representing the guilt of sin, in comparison of the cross of Christ. And the Holy Ghost would have us mind it; where he saith, "He was made sin for us."† See what comes of sin, saith he, what demerit, what provocation there is in it; to see the Son of God praying, crying, trembling, bleeding,

* 2 Pet. ii. 4, 5, 6.

† 2 Cor. v. 21.

dying, God hiding his face from him ; the earth trembling under him ; darkness round about him ; how can the soul but cry out, O Lord is this the effect of sin ! is all this in sin ! Here then take a view of sin. Others look on it in its pleasures and the advantages of it ; and cry, Is it not a little one ? as Lot of Zoar. But look on it in the cross of Christ, and there it appears in another hue. All this is from my sin, saith the contrite soul.

(2.) The *purity*, the *holiness*, and the *severity* of God, that would not pass by sin, when it was charged upon his Son. “ He set him forth to declare his righteousness.”* As there was a representation of the guilt of sin, so there was an everlasting representation of the holiness and righteousness of God in the cross of Jesus Christ. He spared him not. And may the soul say, Is God thus holy in his nature, thus severe in the execution of his wrath, so to punish, and so to revenge sin, when his Son undertook to answer for it ? How dreadful is this God ! how glorious ! what a consuming fire ! It is that which will make sinners in Zion cry, “ Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire ? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings ? ” † Consider the holiness and the severity of God in the cross of Christ, and it will make the soul look about him, how to appear in the presence of that God.

(3.) Would you have another object of your

* Rom. iii. 25.

† Isa. xxxiii. 14.

meditation in this matter; let it be the infinite wisdom and the infinite love of God that found out this way of glorifying his holiness and justice, and dealing with sin according to its demerit. “God so loved the world, as to send “his only begotten Son.* And herein is love, “love indeed! that God sent his Son to die for “for us.”† And the apostle‡ lays it upon the manifold wisdom of God. Bring forth your faith; be your faith never so weak, never so little a reality, do but realize it, and do not let common thoughts and notions take up and possess your spirits: here is a glorious object for it to work upon, to consider the infinite wisdom and love that found out this way. It was out of love unsearchable. And now what may not my poor sinful soul expect from this love? what difficulties can I be entangled in, but this wisdom can disentangle me? and what distempers can I be under, but this love may heal and recover? There is hope then, saith the soul, in preparation for these things.

(4.) Let the infinite love of Jesus Christ himself be also at such a season had in remembrance. “Who loved me, and gave himself for “me.”§ “Who loved us, and washed us in “his own blood.”|| “Who, when he was in “the form of God, and thought it no robbery “to be equal with God, humbled himself, and “became obedient unto death, even the death “of the cross.”¶ “This was the grace of our

* John iii. 16. † 1 John iv. 10. ‡ Eph. iii. 10. § Gal. iii. 10.
 || Rev. i. 5. ¶ Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8.

“ Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”[§] The all-conquering and all endearing love of Christ, is a blessed preparative meditation for this great ordinance.

(5.) There is the *end*, what all this came to; this guilt of sin, this holiness of God, this wisdom of grace, this love of Christ; what did all this come to? Let the apostle tells us, “ He hath made peace through the blood of his cross.”[†] The end of it all was to make peace between God and us; and this undertaking issued in his blood, that was able to do it, and nothing else; yea, that hath done it. It is a very hard thing for a soul to believe, that there is peace made with God for him, and for his sin; but really trace it through these steps, and it will give a great deal of strength to faith. Derive it from the lowest, the deepest pit of the guilt of sin; carry it into the presence of the severity of God, and so bring it to the love of Christ; and the issue which the scriptures testify of all these things was, to make peace and reconciliation.

Some may say, that they would willingly meditate upon these things, but they cannot remember them, they cannot retain them, and it would be long work to go through and think of them all; and such as they have not strength and season for.

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

† Col. i. 20.

I answer 1. My intention is not to burden your memory, or your practice, but to help your faith. I do not prescribe these things as all of them necessary to be gone through in every duty of preparation; but you all know, they are such as may be used, every one of them singly, in the duty; though they that would go through them all again and again, would be no losers by it, but will find something that will be food and refreshment for their souls. But,

[2.] Let your peculiar meditation be regulated by your peculiar present condition. Suppose, for instance, the soul is pressed with a sense of the guilt of any sin, or of many sins; let the preparative meditation be fixed upon the grace of God, and upon the love of Jesus Christ, which are suited to give relief unto the soul in such a condition.—Is the soul burdened with an insensibility of sin? doth it not find itself so sensible of sin as it would be; but rather that it can entertain slight thoughts of sin? let meditation be principally directed unto the great guilt of sin as represented in the death and cross of Christ, and to the severity of God as there represented. Other things may lay hold on our carnal affections; but if this lay not hold upon faith, nothing will.

I have one rule more in these meditations; doth any thing fall in, that doth peculiarly affect your spirits, as to that regard which you have to God? Set it down. Most Christians are poor in experience; they have no stock; they have not laid up any thing for a dear year or a hard

time: though they may have had many tokens for good, yet they have forgotten them. When your hearts are raised by intercourse between God and yourselves in the performance of this duty, be at pains to set them down for your own use; if any thing do immediately affect your spirits you will be no loser by it; it is as easy a way to grow rich in spiritual experiences as any I know.—This is the part of this duty of preparation, which, with the rules given, may be constantly so observed, as to be no way burdensome nor wearisome to you; but very much to your advantage. The other duties I shall but name, and so have done.

2. There is examination. Examination is the duty which most have commonly spoke unto, that have treated any thing about preparation for this ordinance. It respects principally two things, viz. Repentance and Faith.

Our examination as to repentance, as far as it concerns preparation unto this duty, may be referred to three heads.

[1.] To call ourselves to account, whether indeed we have habitually that mourning frame of spirit upon us, which is required in them who converse with God in the cross of Jesus Christ. "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn." There is an habitual mourning frame of spirit required in us; and we may do well to search ourselves about it, whether it is maintained and kept up, or no? whether worldly security and carnal joys do not

devour it? For spiritual joys will not do it. Spiritual joys will take off nothing from spiritual mourning; but worldly security, and carnal joy and pleasures will devour that frame of spirit.

[2.] Our examination as to repentance respects actual sins, especially as for those who have the privilege and advantage of frequent and ordinary participation of this ordinance. It respects the surprisals that have befallen us, (as there is no man that doth good and sinneth not,) since we received the last pledge of the love of God in the administration of that ordinance. Friends, let us not be afraid of calling ourselves to a strict account. We have to do with him that is greater than we, and knoweth all things. Let us not be afraid to look into the book of conscience and conversation, to look over our surprisals, our neglects, our sinful failings and miscarriages. These things belong to this preparation, to look over them, and mourn over them also. I would not be thought to myself or you to prescribe an hard burden in this duty of preparation. It is nothing but what God expects from us, and what we must do if we intend any communion with him in this ordinance. I may add,

[3.] Whether we have kept alive our last received pledges of the love of God? It may be at an ordinance we have received some special intimations of the good will of God. It is our duty to keep them alive in our spirits; and let us never be afraid we shall have no room for more. The keeping of them makes way for what farther is to come. Have we lost such sensible

impressions? there is then matter for repentance and humiliation.

Examination also concerns faith; and that in general and in particular. In general: Is not my heart hypocritical? or do I really do what in this ordinance I profess? which is placing all my faith and hope in Jesus Christ for life, mercy, salvation, and for peace with God. And in particular, Do I stir up and act faith to meet Christ in this ordinance? I shall not enlarge upon these things that are commonly spoken unto.

The third part of our preparation, is *supplication*: that is adding prayer to this meditation and examination. Add prayer, which may inlay and digest all the rest in the soul. Pray over what we have thought on, what we have conceived, what we have apprehended, what we desire, and what we fear: gather all up into supplications to God.

There belongs unto this duty, *expectation* also; that is, to expect that God will answer his promise, and meet us according to the desire of our hearts. We should look to meet God, because he hath promised to meet us there; and we go upon his promise of grace, expecting he will answer his word and meet us. Not going at all adventures, as not knowing whether we shall find him or not; God may indeed then surprise us, as he did Jacob when he appeared unto him, and made him say, "God is in this place, and I knew it not." But we go where we know God is. He hath placed his name up-

on his ordinances, and there he is ; go to them with expectation, and rise from the rest of the duties with this expectation.

This is the substance of what might be of use to some in reference unto this duty of preparation for this great and solemn ordinance, which God hath graciously given unto any of you the privilege to be made partakers of.

Have we failed in these things, or in things of a like nature ? Let us admire the infinite patience of God, that hath borne with us all this while, that he hath not cast us out of his house, that he hath not deprived us of these enjoyments, which he might justly have done, when we have so undervalued them, as far as lay in us, and despised them ; when we have had so little care to make entertainment for the receiving of the great God and our Lord Jesus Christ, who comes to visit us in this ordinance. We may be ready to complain of what outward concerns, in and about the worship of God some have been deprived of. We have infinite more reason to admire, that there is any thing left unto us, any name, any place, any nail, any remembrance in the house of God ; considering the regardlessness which hath been upon spirits in our communion with him. “ Go away, and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall us.” If there be in any, that have not risen up in a due manner in this duty, any conviction of the necessity and usefulness of it, God forbid we should be found sinning against this conviction.

* CASE OF CONSCIENCE.

How may a professor, who fears lest his experiences are counterfeit and not genuine graces, come to such a satisfaction concerning his state, as shall encourage his continued reception of the Lord's Supper?

This question, which so much regards 'all members of Gospel churches, is taken into consideration upon account of the following letter.

“ Reverend Sir,

“ I AM a young person, who have had a religious education, and have had hopes that
 “ it was not entirely in vain; though I desire to
 “ be ashamed, that I have improved it no better.
 “ I should be very much obliged to you, if you
 “ would form a question, and answer it, as soon
 “ as possible; from the following broken account of myself. I was under convictions,
 “ when I was very young; but they were too
 “ often stifled by me. But since that, I have
 “ returned, and did believe God had begun a
 “ good work on my soul. I then thought it my
 “ duty to give myself up to the Lord in a public manner, was received into a church of
 “ Christ, have often found pleasure in attending
 “ upon those ordinances, and in particular have
 “ found comfort at the Lord's table. Though it
 “ has not been always the same with me when
 “ there, yet I have hoped, that when the ordi-

* From Pike and Hayward's Cases of Conscience.

“ nance was not so comfortable, it was a hum-
 “ bling one. I am often in darkness about my
 “ state, and am ready to fear lest I should have
 “ deceived myself : but desire still to seek God,
 “ and would esteem an interest in Christ above
 “ all the perishing riches of this vain world, nay,
 “ above ten thousand worlds. But, sir, I know
 “ not what to think of myself after all. If there
 “ is a false faith, a false love, a false hope, a false
 “ humility, and the like, perhaps mine may be
 “ no better. Is it my duty to go to the table of
 “ the Lord, if I have no real love to him, and
 “ no true faith in him ? Is not this an ordinance
 “ of love ? And when we attend upon it, is not
 “ this a time to put faith in Christ in exercise ?
 “ But if my faith and love are false, what must
 “ I do ? Am I not deceiving myself and others,
 “ and mocking God ? Surely none ought to go
 “ to this ordinance, who have not a change
 “ wrought in them ; and if there be a false plea-
 “ sure in such an ordinance, as well as a false
 “ faith, how can I know that mine is not so ? I
 “ fear I lean too much to outward duties. I
 “ should esteem it a favour, if you would, sir,
 “ shew me what is true faith, true love, &c. and
 “ what is the difference between them and false
 “ experiences, that I may know in some mea-
 “ sure how it is with me. If I belong to
 “ Christ, I desire to honour him both living
 “ and dying.”

This letter plainly expresses the doubtful
 state of many a serious Christian, that has had
 the enjoyment of gospel ordinances for a consi-

derable time, and has been admitted into the peculiar privileges of church-fellowship. For I doubt not but that there is many a person whose heart reasons after this manner: "I hope I have received the grace of God in truth, and do now make a public profession of it: but oh! when I hear that even professors may deceive themselves with false instead of true hopes, with a false instead of a true love, I am afraid of myself, lest all my experiences should have been of this kind. And since there is so much perplexity in my case, so much deceitfulness in my heart, and so much confusion in my mind concerning myself, how shall I come to know whether it is my duty to go on receiving the Lord's Supper, as usual? I am afraid all is not right between God and my soul; and if, after all, it should appear, that my faith is a false faith, my hope a false hope, my humility a false humility, and the like, it is plain I have no right to partake of the Lord's Supper. Though indeed I have a visible right to the ordinance by reason of my profession and church-membership, yet I am afraid I have no spiritual right to it. Had I not then better suspend an attendance upon the Lord at his table, lest I should go on deceiving myself and others, until I can gain a clearer satisfaction concerning my state? And if I should thus withhold for a time, how shall I arrive at this desired satisfaction, or how shall I attain to a well-grounded persuasion that my experiences are true and genuine graces, not spurious and counterfeit?"

In this way of reasoning, many a conscien-

tious professor and serious Christian often perplexes himself about his present duty; while the mere nominal Christian, the hypocritical professor, has generally no doubts upon this head, but goes on in the outward participation of gospel privileges, to the deceiving of others, and the hardening his own heart more and more. May the Lord enable me to speak to this important point with faithfulness and clearness; and may the blessed Spirit set it home upon each of our hearts for our humiliation or consolation.

In order therefore to answer this question, I must desire all who make a visible profession, to look closely into these four things: 1. Look into your conduct and practice. 2. Into the nature and ground of your doubts and jealousies. 3. Into the frame and temper of your mind with respect to the Lord's Supper. And, 4. Into the tendency of those experiences you feel in yourselves.

1. Look attentively *into your conduct and practice*. For we must take that as a general rule in all cases, which the apostle lays down, *
 "If we say we have fellowship with him, and
 "walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.
 "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the
 "light, we have fellowship one with another;
 "and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleans
 "eth us from all sin." Be careful therefore to
 put these two suppositions faithfully to yourselves. If you *walk in darkness*, that is, if you

* John 1. 6, 7.

go on knowingly and willingly in the path of sin, or in the omission of known incumbent duty, you may take it for granted that all your pretensions are vain, that your profession is hypocrisy, and though you are church-members, and so have a *visible* right to all the ordinances of the church, yet you are strangers to Christ, his truth, and Spirit. Your allowed practice of any known sin, whether secret or open, gives your profession the lie ; or, as the apostle strongly expresses it, *you lie and do not the truth*. But if, on the contrary, it is your real desire to walk in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless ; if you desire to be found in the way of your duty, to watch, strive, and pray against sin ; if you are sincerely desirous to honour and serve the Lord from a principle of love to him, and from a sense of his love to you ; then you have real spiritual fellowship with one another, and with the church of God ; and will happily find, that the blood of Jesus Christ, represented in the sacrament, cleanses you more and more from all sin. I hope this is the case with the young person who wrote this letter ; for there are many things in it that seem to prove the sincerity of his profession ; such as these : he desires to seek God ; esteems an interest in Christ above all the perishing things of this vain world, nay, above ten thousand worlds ; is afraid that he leans too much to his own outward duties, and has a desire to honour Christ both living and dying. Surely this is not the language of an unregenerate heart. Thus then let all

professors inquire into their conduct and practice.

2. Inquire into *the nature and ground of these doubts and jealousies*. You say you are often in darkness about your state, and are ready to fear that you have been all along deceiving yourself; and understanding that there are such things as false experiences, false faith, false hope, false humility, false delight, and the like, your suspicions are strengthened, and your heart is discouraged. Now, I say, ask yourselves what is the reason of these doubts and suspicions? I know that Satan and an unbelieving heart will unite to cast a damp upon the mind, and inject a surmise with special strength and weight. But perhaps it is only a surmise that is injected, which does not offer any particular reason for its support. Now if these injections and surmises offer nothing to ground themselves upon, they are not to be attended to, but to be resisted and rejected. You are in this case to take the shield of faith, in order to quench these fiery darts of the wicked one. Whensoever such jealousies seize your mind, ask that question seriously, which the Psalmist put to himself, *
 “Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and
 “why art thou disquieted within me?” Do not hearken to the suggestion, unless it gives some sufficient reason for its support.

But if your mind offers any reason for these doubts and fears, then look attentively to them.

Perhaps you will say, "Oh, I see much reason to doubt, for I feel much corruption in my heart, much deadness and carnal security, much vanity and selfishness, and every abomination in me, while I experience but little of love to God, or faith in his Son." And are such things as these the true reasons of your fears? You have then great ground to hope that all is well with you. For this is an intimation, that the Lord has enlightened you into a knowledge of yourself; has given you a view of the plague of your own heart, and does not suffer you to be contented under the prevalency of any corruption. This sort of doubt is so far from rendering your experiences the more suspicious, that it rather proves all you feel, that is like faith, hope and love, to be true and genuine: for this jealousy proceeds upon a spiritual sight and conviction of your own unworthiness, guilt and corruption.

Again, look into the tendency of these suspicions. Which way do they work? Do they not tend to make you more humble and watchful; and while you thus walk in the dark, do you not therefore walk the more slowly and cautiously? Do they not make you more desirous after true grace and greater enlargement in duty? Do they not make you long more for holiness? if they work this way, you have great reason to conclude, from the very nature of your suspicions, that your hearts are right with God, and principled with his saving grace.

3. Inquire into *the frame and temper of your spirit with regard to the Lord's Supper*. Why do you desire a continued enjoyment of this privilege? What is it makes you want to have free access to this ordinance? Is it to subserve some temporal interest? Is it to make a justifying righteousness of this privilege? Or is it that you may be the better esteemed among Christians or professors? If it be, then you have sad reason to fear, that you have no real right to the ordinance.

But do you desire the continued enjoyment of this privilege to testify your love to Christ, to have your sins subdued, to have your graces strengthened, your affections for Christ inflamed, and to have some sweet enjoyment of him along with the saints of God? In a word, are your views and desires conformable to the designs of Christ, in appointing this spiritual ordinance? If they are, how dark soever your frame may be, how dubious soever you may be as to your state, or how much soever you complain under the power of corruption, you may come and welcome to the Lord's table; since your designs and desires in coming are to behold that which Christ therein exhibits, and to receive what Christ has to bestow. This ordinance was particularly designed to comfort and establish such as are worried by the temptations of Satan, and oppressed by their tyrannizing corruptions.

As therefore you have a visible right by being a church member, and under no church

censure, you ought to account that you have a real right to it; because the Lord draws forth your desires, and directs your views to that, which is the very design of this sacred institution. Come then, and welcome: continue your attendance; for you are welcomed to the table by Christ himself, as well as by his church.

Lastly, Inquire into *the tendency of those experiences you feel in yourselves*. In looking over the particulars of the letter which occasioned this question, I find there are five fundamental graces of the Spirit mentioned; concerning all of which, our friend desires to know how he shall be satisfied, that they are true and genuine, namely, *faith, hope, love, humility, and spiritual pleasure*. It is true, there is a counterfeit to each of these in the hearts and experiences of temporary believers, and mere notionalists. But, if you would know whether yours are true or false, look into the tendency and working of them in your hearts. It would require much time and several discourses to enter deeply into the consideration of each of these graces, and to set forth the evidences and marks of their being either spurious or genuine. But I shall endeavour to run through them in as brief a manner as I can, suggesting a few thoughts that may give some satisfaction concerning the truth of each of them.

1. Look into your faith. You sometimes feel motions in your heart, that have the appearance of faith in, and reliance upon, the Lord Jesus. But, as there is a false faith, you are afraid yours

may be such. Consider then, and ask yourselves such questions as these : whether your faith is only notional, or whether it be joined with a serious concern for yourselves; about an interest in Christ and his salvation. Again, inquire whether you go to Christ for sanctification, as well as for justification; inquire likewise whether the reason of your application to Christ be an inward conviction of your own guilt, corruption, and helplessness, or whether it be only a flighty affection, without any serious insight into yourselves. Now you may be sure, that if your souls act towards Christ from a serious concern for holiness as well as for happiness, proceeding from an inward knowledge of yourselves, and founded upon the free encouragement of the Gospel, you may be sure your faith is true and genuine.

2. As to your hope. You have at seasons some pleasing hope in your souls concerning an interest in Christ, and the possession of his salvation. You not only fly to Christ, but you have received some hope in your souls that he will save you with an everlasting salvation. Take notice then what is the foundation, and what is the tendency of this hope.

Observe what is the foundation of this hope. If it be grounded upon an imagination of the excellency of your duties, and the goodness of your heart, it is a hope that will make you ashamed; because it betrays your ignorance of your own imperfections and corruptions. But if it be founded upon the freeness of divine grace,

the riches of divine love, and the faithfulness of the divine promises, it will stand the trial, because it proceeds from *the love of God shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Spirit*, *

Again, Look into the tendency of your hope. If it tend to make you careless under the power of sin, or more careless about walking with God, because you have a prospect of being happy for ever, this is all wrong; such a hope is certainly spurious and presumptuous. But if, on the contrary, it is your heart's desire to glorify God, to fly from sin, and to increase in holiness, the more your hopes grow, this is a token your hope is genuine; for he that has a gospel hope in him, "purifies himself even as Christ is pure," †

3. As to your love. You feel some outgoings of affection to Christ, to his ordinances, to his people; but you fear lest all this may be counterfeit; and so it is, if this your love be consistent with delighting in sin: but if your affection for Christ teaches you to cleave unto the Lord, to delight in his ordinances, and to love his people on account of their being such, and if it make you the more willing and desirous to serve and honour the Lord Jesus Christ, it is surely a genuine love.

4. As to your pleasure and delight in spiritual things. You sometimes feel a delight in divine ordinances, a secret pleasure in atten-

* Rom. v. 5.

† 1 John iii. 12.

ding upon the means of grace, because they are sweet and comfortable to your souls; but fear lest this likewise should be false. Indeed we must acknowledge, that even a hypocrite may have a pleasure in enjoying the means of grace, as we are told,* concerning the hypocritical Israelites, that *they sought God daily, delighted to know his ways, and even delighted in approaching to God.* But what was the reason and ground of their delight? It was because they hoped by such services to make atonement for their sins, and bring themselves into the divine favour by their own duties, as appears,† *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge?* They had such a high opinion of their duties, that they thought it strange God did not smile upon and reward them for their religious services. But now ask yourselves this question, What is the reason of your delight in divine ordinances? Is it from a hope of being justified thereby, or of laying God under some obligation to you? Do you take pleasure in them merely because they are suited to your own sentiments, or because they convey a pleasure to your ears? Then indeed it may be counterfeit. But if your pleasure in approaching to God is, because you desire and hope to find him in his ordinances, because you would receive supplies from, and enjoy communion with him, and would be brought nearer to him, and

* Isa. lviii. 2.

† Isa. lviii. 3.

be made more like him, you may then be sure that your pleasure and delight are genuine.

Lastly, as to your humility. You find something within you that looks like a proper humiliation before God and his people; but your fear is, lest this likewise should be spurious and counterfeit. To be satisfied as to this matter, seriously inquire into the nature of your humility, whether it be feigned, or forced, or whether it arises from a real sight and conviction of your own meanness, guilt, and pollution, as before God. There is a kind of voluntary humility, which some are very fond of; striving to represent themselves before their fellow Christians as very contemptible and polluted, as very ignorant and weak, professing themselves to be such before men, when they know in their own consciences they would not chuse their companions should have that opinion of them; but they do it on purpose that their friends may think them very modest and self-abased. It is evident at first thought, that this humility has a most hateful pride at the bottom of it; and those that are given to it, and fond of it, have great reason to suspect themselves; as they would certainly be suspected by their friends, could they see through the disguise.

But true humility is an unfeigned, unforced thing: the person that has it is really low in his own eyes; he sees and laments before God his own guilt, weakness, and impurity; he confesses himself, in the sight of God, as the chief of sinners; and the more he sees of the grace of God

in Christ, the more he admires at it, is affected with it, yea, and is humbled by it. None are more humble in reality than those, who can view and receive the grace of the gospel as entirely free. The truly humble person, the more he sees of the divine glory, and the more he beholds of the riches of grace, the more he lays himself low at the divine foot-stool. He says with Job,* "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." This is *that broken spirit and contrite heart which God will not despise*. But God does and man too would, despise a feigned, voluntary, and affected humility. Inquire therefore whether your being abased is thus sincere or feigned.

Once more, look into the depth of your humility. Perhaps you are low in your own eyes, merely because of some particular defects of capacity or knowledge; or chiefly because of some enormities or irregularities in your practice. If this be all, it is not sufficiently deep. But if that which makes you self-abased, is a view of your own spiritual emptiness and poverty, a view of the corruptions of your nature, and the sins of your thoughts and affections; and you see yourselves in such a light, as to be heartily willing to receive all salvation as a gift entirely free, and to be truly thankful for every degree of hope you are favoured with, as utterly undeserved and unprocured by you; then you are among

* Job xlii. 5, 6.

the number of those, whom Christ, first of all, pronounces blessed, saying, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Thus inquire into the genuineness of your experiences, and look up to the blessed Spirit to enable you to pass a right judgment upon them. The whole is this; if that *faith, hope, love, delight, and humility* you experience in yourselves, tend to wean you more and more from sin and the world, to win you over to embrace and admire the free grace of the gospel, and to make you depend upon and delight in Christ both for justification and sanctification, your graces are true and genuine, not spurious and counterfeit.

But, after all that can be said upon this searching subject, I know that in many cases no clear satisfaction can be given or received in a way of self-examination. There is a necessity that God's Spirit should shine upon his own work to assure us that we are the children of God. There is so much darkness in our minds, deceitfulness in our hearts, and perplexity in our thoughts, that the clearest cases will sometimes be clouded, and the brightest evidences obscured.

You will say then, What must a poor soul do in such circumstances? When he cannot gain the satisfaction he wants by reason of the Spirit's withdrawal, must he abstain from the peculiar privileges of church fellowship? Must he desist from a regular reception of the

* Matt. v. 3.

Lord's Supper, until these matters be cleared up to satisfaction?

I shall give my answer to this in the application, which shall be, (1.) for *encouragement*, (2.) for *reproof*, (3.) for *warning*.

1. For *encouragement*. Let me here speak a free word to such poor doubting souls. Let me ask you, are you conscious of indulging and embracing any secret or open sin? Do you harbour any sinister or worldly views in desiring to eat of the children's bread? Do you want to make a justifying righteousness of this special ordinance? I hope you can answer in the negative to these queries, by saying, that, so far as you know your own hearts, you would not, you dare not. If so, then you do not impose upon the church, or pervert the design of the ordinance in your reception of it.

Do you still say, "Oh, but I fear, and have great reason to fear, that I have been a self-deceiver; for I cannot come to any clear evidence of the truth of my graces and experiences!" And do you therefore think it your duty to desist, upon this account, from attending at the Lord's table? Think again, what would be the consequence, if every doubting soul were to reason in this manner. If none but those that were free from doubts would attend, I fear that very few would be found at the Sacramental feast. Our churches are thin enough already; many gracious persons keep themselves from the fellowship of a church upon the same account. And how few, very few, would honour Christ by such

a profession of his name, if all were to act upon this plan? And what will you say as to the pastor himself? Do you think him to be always free from such doubts, fears, and perplexities of soul? If you do, you are very much mistaken. And what if he should absent himself every time his heart is dubious and perplexed? This would run church ordinances into confusion indeed. It is therefore abundantly evident, that a serious church member should not absent himself from the Lord's table, because of his doubts and fears. No, no: doubting, distressed souls, should rather come, that their doubts may be scattered, their faith strengthened, and their comforts restored. Come and welcome, so that you come with views and desires to meet with Christ, to see him, to receive from him, and to testify your regard for him, as the chief desire and only hope of your souls. You need not fear receiving any damage by coming unworthily, if you come with such views as these; but may rather hope to find Christ and his love there shed abroad in your hearts.

2. I have now a word of reproof to many serious Christians. I cannot but find fault with several for being always upon the complaint. You harbour your doubts and fears, you encourage them; your souls refuse to be comforted; you are always making scruples, raising objections, and seem to be resolved not to be satisfied with the plainest evidences. Such a temper as this is surely dishonourable to Christianity; it is grieving the good Spirit; and it is ungrateful

to God, who has given you some tokens of his love. Because he has not given you all the grace and comfort he has to others, you will therefore continually suspect his love. But I must leave this charge to every one's own conscience; and while I heartily pity those, who are truly in darkness and distress of soul, I must say that those are much to be blamed, who are fond of recommending themselves to their fellow Christians by making themselves appear as very dark and discouraged. Those who are this way inclined, do insensibly sink themselves lower and lower, and provoke the Spirit of God more and more to withdraw his enlightening and comforting influence. Once more.

3. A word for warning and conviction. Remember there are three sorts of church members: those who have their evidences clear, and graces in exercise; and those who are under darkness and doubts; and those who mind none of these things, so as they can but keep up a visible profession, and maintain their credit among Christians. These last are very easy and satisfied; they have no scruples nor doubts; and think it enough, if they can but keep themselves from falling under censure of the church, or of their fellow professors. Let me tell you, that such as these, it is to be feared; are tares among the wheat.—These have great reason to suspect, that all is not right with them. And though I would do and say all I could to encourage the serious, dubious soul; yet I must proclaim, that such carnal gospellers are in the most dangerous condition. They receive this Sacrament only to

keep the name alive ; and, by continuing in this way, they stifle the convictions of their own consciences, harden their own hearts more and more, and are in danger of falling into sin and hell from all their profession and privileges. If these lines come into the hands of any such, oh, that they may be made to strike home to their consciences ; and remind them, that the case of the serious, fearful, and dubious soul, who comes with trembling and concern to the table of the Lord, is abundantly preferable to theirs, who boldly claim a privilege with no higher view, than to support the name they bear in the eyes of others. May the Lord convince and deter such, while he comforts and encourages the feeble-minded by his word and Spirit.

**LET a man examine himself, and so let him eat*, says the inspired apostle. Come, then, O my soul ! call thyself to an account, whether thou art in any measure that which God expects every worthy communicant should be.

Have I *knowledge to discern the Lord's body* ? am I apprised of the nature and end of this ordinance ? has not the minister *bestowed upon me labour in vain*, when he opened these mysteries to me ? Has what I have read and heard about this matter, given me a tolerable notion of it ? I know a man may have knowledge enough, and yet eat and drink unworthily ; but yet, without some good measure of understanding, he cannot be an acceptable communicant.

Have I therefore knowledge to discern the Lord's body? Have I knowledge to understand that the body which is figuratively exhibited here, is the human nature of no less a person than the Son of God, the Lord of glory,* by whom all things were made, by whom they all consist,† and by whom they are governed?‡ How stupendous is the love of God, in not sparing his own Son! How mighty must he be, to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through him! What infinite merit must there be in his obedience! what infinite virtue in his atoning blood!

Do I understand the nature of the gospel-covenant, the covenant of grace, of which the Sacraments are seals?

Do I know how the first covenant was broken? into what a sad condition the fall of our first parents brought their wretched offspring? how it pleased God, in infinite mercy, to enter into a new covenant, through a Redeemer, in which he has provided for his own honour, and our happiness? Do I understand who is the Mediator, and what are the promises and blessings of this covenant? Read with care the summary which we have of them, in Heb. viii. 10, 11, 12.

Do I understand the relation that this sacrament bears to that covenant: that it is instituted by the Mediator, to whom "all power is given both in heaven and earth:"* that it is designed

* 1 Cor. ii. 8.
xxviii. 18.

† Col. i. 16, 17.

‡ Eph. i. 22.

§ Matt.

to represent the blessings he has purchased, with the manner in which they were procured, and are applied : that I am at the Lord's table, to " shew forth his death : " that the broken bread represents his body, which was broken for us ; and the wine his precious blood, which was shed for us ; " and by which, not only the remission of sins, but every other blessing promised in the gospel, was purchased, and secured to every real believer : " * that our eating that bread, and drinking that cup, signifies that fiducial feeding upon him who is that (and more) to our souls, than bread, the " staff of life, and wine " that cheers the heart, " is to our bodies ?

Do I understand how it seals the covenant to every worthy receiver : how hereby God obliges himself to be their God, to pardon their sins, sanctify their souls, and at last bring them to eternal happiness and glory : how therein they engage themselves to him, thankfully accepting what he offers, and cheerfully complying with what he demands : that herein we open our mouths to God, and swear that we will be his in the bonds of an " everlasting covenant, that " shall not be forgotten, " accepting him, and resigning ourselves ?

Do I know of what advantage this ordinance is to every worthy communicant ; how it is designed to confirm their faith, to inflame their love, purify their consciences, and comfort their souls ?

* 2 Cor. i. 20.

Do I understand how it produces these effects; not in a natural way, nor merely in a moral one, but by the powerful influences of the Spirit, dispensed, and to be expected, in a devout attendance upon the appointments of infinite wisdom and goodness?—Let me put to my soul, that question which my Saviour put to his disciples, “Hast thou understood all these things?”

I must confess, my apprehensions of these things are too dark and confused: but I dare not deny the grace of God, who has given me some acquaintance with these awful mysteries; and I hope I do desire to improve in knowledge, and am willing to receive instruction.

“And, O that God would teach me what I yet know not, and lead me farther into the knowledge of all necessary truth! Oh that he would “shew me his covenant;”* and help me to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of my “Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!”† that he would reveal to me, by his Spirit, those “deep “things of God, which the natural man receiv-
“eth not, because they are spiritually discern-
“ed!”‡ “O Father of lights, who giveth wis-
“dom liberally, and upbraidest not, make me
“to know the love of Christ which passeth
“knowledge, and help me to comprehend with
“all saints, the breadth and length, and depth
“and height of it!”|| Amen.

Consider, O my soul! that mere knowledge is not a sufficient qualification for the holy com-

* Psalm xxv. 14. † 2 Pet. iii. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 18. || Eph. iii. 18, 19.

munion. If I have knowledge to discern the Lord's body, and want faith to feed upon him, I shall return from his table disappointed and ashamed. My blessed Lord has told me, that "except I eat his flesh, and drink his blood, I have no life in me."* Now, this I know must be by faith, not after a corporal and carnal manner: let me therefore put that question to my soul, which my Saviour put to his disciples, "Where is thy faith?" Do I believe in an unseen Jesus? Do I really believe that he is the Son of God, and that he died, was buried, and rose again, according to the scriptures? Do I heartily approve the method which God has appointed for man's salvation, that "being justified by faith, he should have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?" Do I heartily "submit to the righteousness of God, and rejoice in God through him by whom we have now received the atonement?" Do I earnestly desire to "be found in Christ, not having mine own righteousness, &c. but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," that Christ may be made unto me *righteousness*? Do I believe that "Christ died for my sins," and so was "made sin (a sin-offering) for me, that I might be made the righteousness of God in him?" Do I truly desire to lay the stress of my hopes upon the mercy of God in Christ; and, under a con-

* John vi. 53.

sciousness of guilt, apply to that "blood which cleanses from all sin?" Can my soul make her applications to him, and derive from "his fullness even grace for grace?" Am I in any measure acquainted with this mystery? and can I understand, by any experience of my own, what the apostle meant when he said, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me?"* What should he do at a royal feast, that cannot taste of the provision? Am I therefore taught of God to believe in Jesus?

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" I hope I have "tasted that the Lord is gracious." I can remember when I sat under his "shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste." "My soul has followed hard after him," and I have reason to remember his love more than wine. But alas! I have too much occasion for that prayer, "Lord, increase my faith! without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness;" and I am too often apt to stumble at the cross: my temptations to unbelief often find me much sorrowful employment; and, at best, my faith is but weak and languid. O my God! "perfect that which is lacking in my faith;" and when I find its strength, I shall not doubt its reality.

I must also inquire concerning my repentance. An impenitent communicant, I know, must be an unworthy one. That I am a sinner, is a matter past question; and that, as such, I

* Gal. ii. 20.

am exposed to the displeasure of God, so that if he should enter into judgment with me, I could not stand, is what I know and believe: yea, that the least sin I ever committed, deserves the wrath and curse of God, both in this world and that which is to come. But, all this is general and common; let me therefore, O my soul! press the matter close and home.

Have I laid these things to heart? have my convictions been affecting? have I not only known but felt these things? have I been *wearry and heavy laden* under a sense of sin? have I groaned and trembled under the apprehension of God's displeasure? has "destruction from the Lord been a terror to me, has my flesh trembled for fear of him, and have I been afraid of his judgments?" yea, have I been ashamed of sin, as a nauseous, loathsome thing, contrary to the nature and law of God, and my own happiness too, which consists in conformity to God, and enjoyment of him? has the remembrance of my sins filled my heart with grief, and my face with shame, especially considering how it has been committed against a God of infinite love and goodness? does this thought give a peculiar accent to my grief, that I have sinned against a bleeding, dying, Jesus, and a forbearing and forgiving God? and does the apprehension of pardoning mercy through a Redeemer promote in me the most kindly relentings, according to that, Ezek. xvi. 63.

In the next place, have I been influenced by these convictions, to take up a hearty and sin-

cere resolution of better obedience? do I *hate every false way*? and have I *a respect to all God's commandments*? Oh! let me remember, that nothing is repentance that consists with an habitual love to any sin, or an allowed aversion to any instance of duty, or branch of holiness. Is my heart and life changed? He that is the same after repentance as he was before, can never be accounted a true penitent.

O my conscience! be faithful: have I “put off the old man with his lusts, and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness?”

I hope it is thus with me in some measure, that though I offend in many things, I allow myself in nothing that God in his word disallows.—But, alas! my repentance is far short of what I know it should be, and wish it were.

“Oh that he, whose gift repentance (as well as faith) is, would carry on the work which I trust is begun! Lord, open my eyes, that I may see more of the evil of sin! strike this heart, this rock, that it may more freely bleed at the remembrance of my past follies! confirm my resolutions, that I may have “nothing more to do with idols;” but may be “stedfast and unmoveable, and alway abounding in the work of the Lord! search me, and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

I must also examine myself concerning my love, an essential and comprehensive grace. If I do not sincerely love the Master of the blessed

feast, and all the regular guests, I cannot be welcome. Come, then, O my soul! is thy "heart circumcised to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?"* this is "the first commandment." Canst thou truly say, that thy desire is towards him, and thy delight in him? dost thou love "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth?"† Has he the pre-eminence in thy soul? Canst thou say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I can desire besides thee?"‡ Is Christ precious to thee, beyond comparison and competition? and canst thou truly say, "Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord?"§

Is this thy love to him a rational love, the effect of serious thought, and deep conviction of his transcendent excellency? Has the Spirit of God opened thy eyes, to see that he is the "Chief of ten thousands, and altogether lovely?" and canst thou tell what the church's "beloved is more than another's beloved?"

Is it a constant and fixed love; not a sudden flash or transient passion, but a rooted, settled thing; a vigorous flame, which many "waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown it?" and though thy love to some dear creatures may unhappily be more passionate, yet art thou come to a point, that thou wilt sacrifice the dearest object rather than part with "him whom thy

* Deut. xxx. 6. † 1 John iii. 18. ‡ Psal. lxxiii. 25. § Philip. iii. 8.

“soul loves?”—But to bring the matter to a more certain issue, is thy love practical? this is an infallible test; for my Lord has said, “Ye
 “are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I com-
 “mand you;”* dost thou count his “yoke
 “easy, and his burden light?” are none of his
 “commandments grievous?” dost thou delight
 to do his will, and hast thou chosen his “testi-
 “monies as an heritage for ever?” dost thou
 find his love sweetly constraining thee to the
 severest instances of self denial? and art thou
 fully purposed, in a better strength than thine
 own, that thou wilt “follow the Lamb whither-
 “soever he goes,” whatever it costs thee If it
 be thus with thee, thou mayest cheerfully say,
 “Lord thou that knowest all things, knowest
 “that I love thee!”

And, as a yet farther evidence, dost thou
 “love thy neighbour as thyself?” hast thou a
 real *love* for all men, and a special peculiar one
 to thy fellow Christians? is there no man for
 whom thou dost not most heartily wish well,
 whatever provocations he has given thee, or in-
 juries he has done thee? though thou hast many
 enemies, has no man an enemy of thee? if there
 are those that “hate thee with a cruel hatred,”
 canst thou appeal to God that the hatred is not
 mutual and reciprocal? canst thou sincerely
 pray, “Forgive our trespasses, as we forgive
 “them that trespass against us?”

And as to the people of God dost thou honour

* John xv. 14.

and delight in them? hereby “we know that
 “we have passed from death unto life, because
 “we love the brethren?”* dost thou love every
 soul where thou seest the image of Christ? is
 not thy love confined to those of thy own party
 or persuasion? but is it unrestrained and large,
 as that catholic church of which thou art a mem-
 ber? does this love engage thee to all proper
 acts of kindness, and expressions of brotherly
 love! dost thou pity and help, to the utmost of
 thy power, all those whom Christ calls brethren,
 with this view, that what thou dost for them,
 terminates ultimately upon him, according to
 Matthew xxv.? Canst thou read the first epis-
 tle of John, and thy heart not condemn thee?

I hope my love is sincere.—

“But, O my God, how weak and how im-
 perfect is it! I even hate myself, that I can love
 thee no more: I abhor myself, that I love thy
 Christ no better; and blush to think that I am
 no more kindly affectioned to those whom thou
 hast loved with an everlasting love, and with
 whom I hope to live and converse for ever.

My only comfort is, that I would love thee,
 I desire to love thee, I long to love thee, even
 as thou wouldst be loved.—Lord! kindle my
 spark into a flame, and let that flame be strong
 and steady: and especially grant that my obe-
 dience may prove my love to be of the right
 kind: “How can I say I love thee, if my heart
 “be not right with thee:” And for thy sake,

* 1 John iii. 14.

may I love my neighbour, especially the happy members of that glorious family, to which it is my highest honour to belong: O may I love them as myself, and in honour prefer them before myself, and think no office of love too mean for me to stoop to, in imitation of him, “ who
 “ came not to be ministered unto, but to minis-
 “ ter :* this I pray, that my love may abound
 “ more and more ;”† and being hearty and fervent in this request, is, I hope, an evidence that I do truly love thee. Oh ! let me not be mistaken, for the sake of Christ.

I must also examine myself concerning my *new obedience*. This, I know, is the ultimate test of all my pretences : without it, faith, repentance, love, &c. are empty names, and insignificant shadows. Is the will of God my law, his word my rule, and his glory the end of all my actions ? Do I allow myself in the commission of no known sin, or omission of no known duty ? Is it my constant care to “ keep a conscience void of offence, both towards God and
 “ towards man ?” Can my closet, my family, my shop, my companions, as well as the public assemblies of God’s people, bear me witness, that, notwithstanding my unallowed failings, I do endeavour to walk in all the “ ordinances
 “ and commandments of God blameless ?” Am I willing to know my duty, and careful to do it ; am I thankful for instruction, and reproof too ; and do I count them my friends that tell

* Matt. xx. 28.

† Philip. i. 9.

me the truth? Are my remaining corruptions, and my many failings, matter of humiliation to me? Do I pray for daily grace, as heartily as for my daily bread? And can I appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that I am never more in earnest, than when I pray that I may be “perfect in every good work to do his will *;” that I may be cleansed from all “filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord †; that I may be sanctified wholly, and my whole spirit, soul and body, be preserved blameless to the coming of our Lord ‡?”

I hope it is thus with me in some measure—

“But, O my God! let me not be deceived. If my obedience be feigned, or partial, or legal; if it do not exceed “that of the Scribes and Pharisees; if I have a form of godliness without the power, or a name to live while I am dead;” discover to me the truth of my case, that I may be upon a right bottom, and may get that “gospel holiness, without which I cannot see the Lord.” If there be a good work begun, O carry it on to the *day of Jesus!* and let the solemn ordinance I am preparing for, be a means of my spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.”

I hope I have been impartial in my self-examinations.—And though, upon review, I find abundant matter for humiliation; yet I cannot conclude myself a hypocrite, but must enter-

* Heb. xiii. 21.

† 2 Cor. vii. 1.

‡ 1 Thess. v. 23.

tain some “good hope through grace,” that I am a sincere, though very imperfect Christian, and shall be a welcome guest at the Lord’s table.

That which now remains, is that I put myself in as good a posture as may be, to meet my Lord at that solemnity; that I may not provoke his displeasure, nor disappoint my own expectations. To this end I must see that every grace be in lively and vigorous exercise, lest having “in my flock a male, I should vow and sacrifice to the Lord a corrupt thing*.”

I am sensible, faith is a principal and leading grace: it is the substance (or confident expectation) “of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen; without faith it is impossible to please God †.” I cannot question the being of a God, and the certainty of a future state, which are the great principles of natural religion, and pre-supposed to all revealed. I believe that “God is, and that he is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek him ‡. But this is not enough; my Lord has said, “Ye believe in God, believe also in me §:” no knowledge of the only true God is sufficient to eternal life, while men are ignorant of “that Jesus Christ whom he has sent ||.”—Come, then, O my soul! let thy faith in him be strong and lively: Have I not abundant evidence, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ of God, that “him hath God the Father sealed.” The Scriptures of the Old

* Mal. i. 14.

† Heb. xi. 1, 6.

‡ Heb. xi. 6.

§ John xiv. 1.

|| John xvii. 3.

Testament testify of him *. To him “Moses and all the prophets bear witness †. In him there was a full and exact accomplishment of every promise and prediction: he is the substance of all the legal shadows; and to him referred are the types, &c.: he was evidently the Promised Seed, the Shiloh, the Branch, &c. of the ancient fathers, who “waited for the consolation of Israel ‡.”

Consider, O my soul! what a glorious testimony God bore to him by *a voice from heaven*; by vast numbers of great, public, and uncontested miracles; and, finally, by raising him from the dead: of which he appointed competent witnesses, men of ability and integrity, who could not be imposed upon in so plain a matter, and who could never be supposed to practise upon the world, because there was no interest in view that should engage them in so base a design; and it is utterly impossible that holy and prudent men should be guilty of the blackest villainy, in prospect of nothing but misery and ruin.

Besides, did not “God also bear them witness, both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost §?” To which may be added this other consideration, that that doctrine must needs be from God, which has so visible and peculiar a tendency to make men God-like in the temper of their minds, and course of their actions; that gospel

* John vi. 27, and 39.

† Acts x. 43.

‡ Luke ii. 25.

§ Heb. ii. 4.

must needs be the grace of God, which teaches us so effectually, "that denying ungodliness and all worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world."* I find, by the records of past ages, and the observations I have made in the compass of my own acquaintance, that the best Christians have been the best men. And, O my soul! canst thou not bear thine own testimony, that the interest of God in thee, bears a constant proportion to the measure of thy faith in Christ Jesus? Dost thou not always find, that when thy faith is ready to fail, the good "things that remain are ready to die?"† And, on the contrary, is thy heart ever so pure, and thy life so clean, as when thy faith is vigorous and lively? Now, can any thing be more incredible, than that the Great God should make use of an impostor to renew his own image upon the souls of men? I will as soon believe any absurdity, as that the most holy God should erect and support his kingdom in the world by a lie, and destroy the interest of the devil by arts and methods perfectly hellish and diabolical.

Come, then, O my soul! "be strong in faith, giving glory to God."‡ 'Tis true, believing is hard work; but consider whence the difficulties arise! from a corrupt heart, and a malicious enemy; and let this thought be a farther evidence to the credibility of the doc-

* Tit. ii. 11, 12.

† Rev. iii. 2.

‡ Rom. iv. 20.

trine of the cross. Why should the disingenuousness of an evil heart, make such mighty opposition to the work of faith? If it were not the work of God, the enemies of God would never make such efforts to hinder it: Satan would cherish his own creature; the world would love its own; and the flesh would never express such a reluctancy against the gospel, if it were not spiritual in its tendency, and divine in its original. Therefore, O my soul! let me form arguments out of difficulties, and pave my way with the very stumbling-blocks that are thrown in it.

It is indeed an astonishing thought, that God should assume the human nature, and, in it die: "without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness," &c. * But let not this stagger thee. Consider seriously; that the more awful and surprising the mysteries of the gospel are, the more likely they are to be from God, who can scarce be supposed to declare any thing but what was extraordinary, and out of the reach of unassisted reason, with such a solemn pomp, and train of mighty works, as were wrought to confirm the mission of our Lord. It would have been matter of suspicion, if Christ and his disciples had preached nothing but what the Pagan Philosophers taught, and the Jewish doctors owned. And it should recommend the doctrine of Christ to a considering unprejudiced mind, that it was to the Jews "a

* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." *

Are not these things so? Come, then, O my soul! believe, and be established. Believe what Jesus testifies to thee in his holy ordinance: "This is my body broken for you; and this is the blood of the New Covenant, which was shed for you, for the remission of sins."

But, O wretched man that I am! "who shall deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief?" It is not bare external evidence, that will produce a divine faith. Faith, I know, is the work, the mighty work of God, and produced in the heart by no less power than that which "raised up Jesus from the dead: it is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.†

"And therefore, O my God! I turn me unto thee, in whose hand my heart is, and who canst prevail against the united force of my confederate enemies; and not only begin, but carry on the "work of faith with power. I believe: Lord! help mine unbelief," and "perfect that which is lacking in my faith." Not only propose the object, but open my eyes, that I may no more question what the Gospel reveals, than what my eyes see, "that believing in him whom I do not see, I may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

† Eph. i. 20. and ii. 8.

WITH WHAT DISPOSITIONS AND IN WHAT MANNER
WE ARE TO PARTAKE.

* **I** Proceed now to consider with what affections or dispositions we ought to approach the Lord's Supper, if we would wish worthily to partake of it. Upon these our own comfort, and the blessings of God also very much depend: for neither can the elements of bread and wine of themselves confer grace, nor the hand or intention of the pastor or minister sanctify the office. When the sinner is going on in his trespasses, as he regards iniquity in his heart, he can hope for no acceptance with God; the Lord will not hear him.

Whatever was the restricted meaning of the Corinthians, eating and drinking *unworthily*, it would be unreasonable to conclude, that in no other sense could Christians now be said to eat and drink unworthily. They very probably ate and drank with intemperance, pride, and uncharitableness: while one was hungry, another was drunken, and treated their poor brethren with contempt, who had no suppers of their own, nor houses where they might eat at home.

But if we understand the word *worthily*, in the proper sense, that is *suitably*; as the person to be remembered is possessed of so much dignity and excellence, and the blessings which we have received from him very precious, to com-

* From Dr. Duncan's Devout Communicant's Assistant.

memorate him worthily or suitably, to the end of this institution, must include affections. Thus worthily to commemorate an act of friendship, or generosity, or benevolence, implies our having an esteem of the person, and a thankful sense of the obligation which he laid on us. To remember suitably a parent or friend deceased or absent, always means our having that affectionate sense of duty and of friendship that is worthy of such a character, and of the obligations which we have received from him. For the same reason, to partake as we ought of our Lord's supper, implies the following sentiments, affections, or dispositions.

1. That we partake of it with faith; which respects not only our belief of the truth of this great event, the death of Jesus the Son of God; but also the end of his death, and our making application to it.

A person who comes to the Lord's table ought, in reason, to be as firmly persuaded of the truth of the death of Christ, as the beloved disciple was when he stood by the cross and saw him crucified, and his side pierced with a spear; or as the Apostle Thomas was, when with his fingers he felt in Christ's hands and his feet the print of the nails wherewith he had been fastened to the cross, and thrust his hand into the wounds made in his side by the spear.

We must in like manner believe the end of Christ's death; not only that he died as our master, to witness a good confession, and ratify his doctrine, and as a King to lay a foundation

for his kingdom in his sufferings; but also, that he laid down his life as the propitiation for our sins, and is employed in heaven in making intercession for us. For, it is certain, the whole strain of the New Testament considers the death of Christ as a proper sacrifice for sin; that is, makes mention of his sufferings as a consideration for which the wisdom and justice of God have thought fit to grant forgiveness to the penitent. John Baptist laid down his life, or, in a very eminent manner, suffered in support of his doctrine; as did the holy martyr Stephen, and the apostle James, the brother of John, also suffered in confirmation of those truths and that doctrine which they preached; and yet no writer of the New Testament ever called the death of any of these eminent and worthy persons, a sacrifice or propitiation for sin.

The particular employment of faith, at the Lord's table, is, with the consent of the heart, thankfully to accept and ratify, on our part, the terms of mercy published through the death of Christ; and there to make application to God for the pardon of sin, for the sake of the death of which we then commemorate. For "the blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever;" as mighty to save us now, as if we had made application to him while bleeding on the cross. "He is able to save to the very uttermost, all that come to God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

When devout persons do thus, with faith in

the death of Christ, with holy contrition and sorrow for sin, and sincere purposes of amendment, make application at the Lord's table for the forgiveness of past transgressions, they have great reason to hope that they shall obtain it.

2. We ought to partake of the Lord's Supper with love and thanksgiving, for the great blessings brought to us by the death of Christ.

Great blessings require suitable returns and expressions of gratitude. The Jews, when they celebrated the passover, were wont to sing a hymn of praise, called by them the *Great Hallel*, or *Hallelujah*, in thanksgiving to God, who had in so remarkable a manner delivered their forefathers from the devouring angel, and from the slavery and oppression of Egypt. With much juster reason ought the disciples of Christ to commemorate with praise and thanksgiving, the great salvation which he hath brought us by his death, from more terrible evils, of which the deliverance out of Egypt was but a faint emblem. For, by the sacrifice of Christ, the penitent is delivered from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the fear of death, and the power of Satan, as well as from the dread of eternal misery; enemies far more dreadful than the Egyptian task-masters, or Pharaoh and all his host. On this account, the Lord's Supper, in ancient times, was called *the Eucharist*, or the feast of thanksgiving.

Proper, therefore, it surely is, on such an occasion, that our hearts be filled with gratitude, and our mouths with praise.

To God the Father, who, as original Judge, and Sovereign of the World, did, of his own goodness, remit the punishment which he might justly have executed on us sinners; and in mercy sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

To the Son also ought we to ascribe thanksgiving and praise, even as we honour the Father; that he so cheerfully undertook the important work of our salvation, and behaved with so much affection and constancy in it; bore so much contradiction of sinners against himself, yet neither failed, nor was discouraged, till the great end of his coming was accomplished.

If temporal favours, whose nature is perishing and unsatisfactory, claim returns of duty and gratitude, how much stronger a sense of love and praise ought to possess our hearts at the remembrance of the unspeakable gift of God? On such occasions it well becometh us to bestir every tender, every devout and grateful affection of our souls, saying, in the language of the psalmist; "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and
 " all that is within me bless his holy name, and
 " forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all
 " thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases,
 " who crowneth thee with loving kindnesses
 " and tender mercies."

3. Sorrow for past sins, and sincere purpose of amendment. Repentance is an indispensable condition of our forgiveness. It consists in genuine confession of our sins, in contrition and sorrow for them, and purposes, by the grace of

God, wherein we have done iniquity, that we will do no more. Yet, according to the terms of the gospel, nothing is esteemed true repentance, but that which issues in change of life and conversation. The best proof to our own hearts that our profession of repentance is sincere, will be our afterwards bringing forth the fruit of righteousness.

We commemorate the death of Christ as the only ground of our hope of that forgiveness which is published to the penitent. And, when we compare ourselves with his death, and remember what strict obligations it layeth on us to depart from iniquity; and, at the same time, consider how far we have come short of that justice, goodness, or purity which the law of God requires, and to which we are bound as the disciples of Jesus: this will shew us with how good reason sorrow ought to fill our hearts, for having so ill requited his love.

In this view, it well becometh us to take up the words of the penitent prodigal, "I will arise and go to my Father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son;" and to acknowledge, that if God should strictly "mark iniquity," or plead against us the breaches of our covenant, we, on our part, have forfeited all the blessings of it. As the review of our past lives ought justly to fill us with sorrow and dread of punishment on account of our sins, it well becomes us to deprecate the wrath of God, and implore forgiveness of our

transgressions, and, in sight of the cross of Christ, to renew our engagements to watch against sin more carefully, and to “walk before him in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life.”

The particular test of the sincerity of those resolutions will be our vowing and striving against “the sin that doth most easily beset us.” This is indeed “purging out the old leaven, that we may keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

4. The Lord’s Supper ought to be celebrated with love and charity, maintaining communion with all, who, in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, with credible sincerity.

This is too generally misunderstood: for, many look on communicating as a mark of their party, not as an evidence of their being Christians; and, whenever any small difference in opinions arises, all angry weak men are earnest to add exclusive articles of faith, and straiten the terms of communion, so as to seclude from the fellowship of the saints others who really believe in Christ, and are, in the general course of their lives, serious and unblameable. This is, indeed, shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men.

Yet nothing is more inculcated by our holy religion than this charity, which is the badge of Christ’s disciples. Therein we are taught, that Christ is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only, but for those also of the whole world; that he is to redeem to himself a glorious church

out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation: that all, who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus, and hold communion with him as the head, are members of that Church, which is his body; and, as redeemed by the same precious blood, partakers of the same grace, sanctified by the same Holy Spirit, and heirs of the same eternal inheritance, all the real members of that church, have communion one with another.

Christians therefore, when they commemorate the death of Christ, the head, ought to do it, professing love and charity for all the members of the body. This is maintaining the “unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, as there is one body and one spirit; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is through all, above all, and in us all.” Thus the apostle expresses this communion: “We being many are one body, and one bread, for we are all partakers of that one bread.”*

In a special manner ought every one, who approaches to the Lord’s table, to do it in terms of forgiveness with all men, as the gospel hath made our forgiveness of others a necessary condition of our own acceptance with God. “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”—“But if ye forgive not

* 1 Cor. x. 17.

“men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”†

5. With sincerity. This the apostle calls “drawing near with a true heart,” and “keeping the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

A person may be said to be sincere, when his motives are single, and his outward conduct, in word and action, agreeable to the sense and persuasion of his heart. This, instead of being one virtue, or particular good disposition, is rather what animates and influences all the virtues of the Christian life, and gives worth to every part of a good character. Sincerity makes our professions of friendship to be relied on by men, and renders our piety acceptable before in God Christ. The want of it, or hypocrisy, infects the whole of a man’s religious conduct, and renders it an abomination to him that seeth the heart. Thus the Pharisees made great noise about religion; but their hearts were not right with God; while without they were as whited sepulchres, within they were full of putrefaction and rottenness.

That sincerity wherewith we ought to celebrate the Lord’s Supper implies, that our faith in Christ be unfeigned, and our outward profession consistent with the inward persuasion of our minds: that our motives are upright in partaking of it. That is to say, that we are persuaded that the gospel is the wisdom of God,

* Matt. v. 23. vi. 15.

and the power of God unto salvation; that Christ crucified is the only propitiation for sin. We come to his table, to make open profession of this belief. We set to our seal to this, that God is true, and declare that we hope for salvation through him alone, whom God hath sent. For as “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” so “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Our motives, in so doing, ought to be, that we may approve ourselves unto God; express our gratitude for his unspeakable gift; manifest our love to Christ, who loved us, and gave himself to the death for us; to contribute what we can, that the memory of his love may be preserved in the world to generations yet to come, and a powerful and abiding sense of it cultivated in our own hearts, that we may thereby be made more conformable unto his death.

Our love to God is sincere, when our constant endeavour is to approve ourselves to him, and our desire, carefully to avoid whatever would offend him.

Our repentance or sorrow for sin is sincere, when we purpose fervently to watch against all temptations, with no secret reserve afterward to return to the commission of any sin. To such persons, who, with these dispositions, draw near to this ordinance, we may say, in the words of the Psalmist: “He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lift up his soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully, he shall receive

“ the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness
 “ from the God of his salvation.*”

It will be proper to observe, ere we leave this part of the subject, that, when we speak of dispositions requisite to communicate worthily, the meaning is not as if we could acquire them only for this end, to partake of the Lord's Supper; neither does it mean that every one can possess them in an equal degree, or that no person should come to the Lord's table who is convinced that he does not possess them all: but the meaning is, that these are the dispositions and characters of good Christians. Every one ought to endeavour to acquire them, and not neglect to partake of the Sacrament, because he has not yet fully attained them; but should devoutly employ this ordinance as a mean to acquire and perfect all those holy affections, that may render him worthy of communion with God in this world, or meet for the enjoyment of him in heaven.

He alone can relish the pleasures of friendship who in some degree, is possessed of sentiments and dispositions of friendship; yet both sentiments and dispositions may be greatly cultivated and improved by mutual intercourse of affection and good offices. In like manner, the pure and unmixed delight that accompanies a devout and religious life, is only found of them that take pleasure therein; but these joys may be greatly heightened, and our relish of them

* Psalm xxiv. 4, 5.

increased, by a diligent and careful use of the means of grace. "Then shall I praise thee," said the Psalmist, "with uprightness of heart, when I have learned thy judgments."

* IT should be our concern, to let none of that time run to waste, which we spend in the house of our God, but to improve every minute of it to some good purpose. And as to the spaces, or intervals, that may be between one ordinance and another, it will be proper to fill them up with pious thoughts and ejaculations. This may be a means to render those ordinances, that are over, the more useful to us, and to prepare us for such as we are to be found in. As soon therefore, as the rest of the public worship is ended, you may speak to yourselves in some such language as this.

"Now the Lord furnisheth a table for us in his house, and setteth thereon the choicest dainties. There will be bread, which strengtheneth man's heart, and wine, that maketh it glad; bread which came down from Heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die; wine, which whosoever drinketh, hath eternal life.

"There the crucified Jesus, and all the blessed fruits of his sufferings and death, will be set before us. And behold! though vile, and sinful, and utterly unworthy of such a favour, I am invited to be a guest! The Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say

• From Dr. Owen's discourses on the Lord's Supper.

“ come, and let him that is athirst come ; and
 “ whosoever will, let him freely take of this spiri-
 “ tual provision. With what satisfaction, delight
 “ and joy ; with what admiration of the love of
 “ God in Christ ; and with what thankfulness
 “ and praise shouldest thou, O my soul, accept
 “ of the invitation !

“ Oh ! may I be aright prepared for this feast.
 “ When the king shall come in to see the guests,
 “ let me not be found without a wedding gar-
 “ ment. Forbid it, O Lord, that I should eat
 “ and drink at thy table, in token of friendship
 “ with thee, and secretly purpose to go on in sin
 “ and rebellion against thee. Give me to be
 “ found in all the duties now incumbent on me ;
 “ and to hunger and thirst after all the good
 “ things thou hast prepared for me. And O
 “ bless me with all spiritual blessings in heaven-
 “ ly places in Christ. On his grace I depend
 “ for assistance ; I trust to his merits for accep-
 “ tance.”

And now being come to the table, and look-
 ing on the bread, and on the cup, let them lead
 your thoughts to the Lord Jesus, and fix them
 on him as one, who came from heaven that he
 might give his flesh, and shed his blood for the
 life of the world.

“ Although thou hast sinned, O my soul ! and
 by sin destroyed thyself, yet there is hope. In
 God is thine help. He has laid help on one that
 is mighty ; mighty to save. In this was mani-
 fested the love of God towards us, because he
 sent his only begotten Son into the world, that

we might live through him. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!

“He spared not the angels that sinned; but cast them down to hell; and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment. The Son of God did not come from heaven with a design to take hold on them, or help and save them, no, but with a view to our salvation; and took part of our flesh and blood, that he might deliver us from all the evils, which our sins had brought upon us, and raise us up to endless bliss and glory.

“Hosannah to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosannah in the highest. God is the Lord which hath shewed us light. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee. Thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever. Come, and let us offer the sacrifice of praise unto God, the fruit of our lips, and call upon his name. Let the heart of them rejoice that seek him, seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face for evermore; remember his marvellous works that he hath done.”

Who knows but that while engaged in such exercises as these, your hearts may grow warm within you; while you are thus musing, the sacred fire of devotion may be kindled in your breasts. This is certainly a very proper means to prepare our minds for those public prayers and thanksgivings in which every communicant is to join; and as when these are over, the next

thing to be attended to, is the breaking of the bread; so this rite setting Christ before us as suffering and dying for us, we may spend the time it takes up in thus speaking within ourselves.

“Thou art now, O my soul, to fix thine eye on the blessed Jesus, the Lord of life and glory, suffering and dying for thee. This he did now more than seventeen hundred years ago, and he has instituted this rite, the breaking of this bread, to preserve the memory of it; and it now presents it to thy thoughts. Lord help me to turn aside and see this great sight; may I view it on all sides; view it thoroughly, and with a becoming temper. What more amazing! what more affecting!

“See here a righteous and innocent person, given up into the power of his blood-thirsty enemies, to be crucified and slain by their wicked hands, as if he had been the vilest of malefactors; nay, see here, the only begotten Son of God bruised, and put to grief by his beloved Father.

“Who can say how great his sufferings were! what an agony was he in when he prayed again and again unto God, with strong crying and tears, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt:” and when he was so depressed with sorrow and amazement; when such was the distress and anguish of his soul, that his sweat ran from him like great drops of blood!

“ How shall we account for these sufferings of the Holy Jesus, the Son of God, his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased ! Where were the bowels of his Father ! nay, where his justice ! The scripture answers, God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us *. He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all †. And this he might do without any injustice, or want of affection to him ; for Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet smelling savour ‡.

“ See then, O my soul, this love of God, this grace of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Lord, give me to know more of this grace ; raise in me the highest thoughts of this love. Oh ! may I feel that it constraineth me henceforth to live, not unto myself, but unto him that died for me, and rose again.”

And now the bread being broken, it is next presented to the communicants, and the words of our Lord Jesus are repeated ; Take, eat, this is my body, which is given and broken for you. This may lead us to add as follows.

“ What words do I hear ! with what mournful pleasure should I receive them ! Is not this the same as if the blessed Jesus were saying unto thee, O my soul ! Let all thy fears and doubts, of the forgiveness of sin through my sufferings and death, immediately vanish ; and know, assuredly, that

* Rom. v. 8. † chap. viii. 32. ‡ Eph. v. 2.

as my body was given and broken upon the cross, so it was for thee that this was done ; for thee I suffered ; for thee I was crucified : for thy good ; for thy salvation : And I am willing, heartily willing, to be thy Saviour. “ To this end I was born, and for this cause came I into the world, and made my soul an offering for sin.” And I now give thee this bread, the symbol of my body given and broken for thee, in token of my calling on thee to look to me, with hope and joy, for all the blessed fruits of my sufferings and death : “ be not faithless, but believing.”

“ And surely it will become thee to say, in return, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief. Mine iniquities testify against me, and my transgressions, which have been multiplied. Ah, how have I despised the commandments of God, and done evil in his sight. It is of his mercies, that I am not consumed. But why should the sense of my sins cause my heart to despair, when thou, O blessed Jesus, the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof, callest to all the ends of the earth, to look unto thee, that they may be saved ; * to come unto thee, that they may have rest. †

“ Encouraged therefore, not only by thy word, but by this sensible pledge of thy favour, which thou here givest me, I now fly to thee as my Saviour. In thee alone I trust : Lord, save me, or I perish. To thee I now look for repentance, and the forgiveness of all

* Isa. xlv. 22. † Matt. xi. 26.

“ my sins ; for a righteousness to justify me ;
 “ for thy Spirit to sanctify me ; for reconcilia-
 “ tion and peace with God, and all the blessings
 “ thou hast purchased.

“ To thee I now solemnly and heartily devote
 “ myself. Lord, I am thine ; fully resolved, in
 “ an human dependence on thy grace, to spend
 “ all my days in thy service : and I now take,
 “ and eat this bread, in token of my acknowledg-
 “ ing thee as my Lord, and of my trusting and
 “ hoping in thee as my Saviour.”

If there be any time between the receiving of
 the bread, and the other part of this ordinance,
 it may be employed in some such thoughts as
 these :

“ Thou hast now named the name of Christ,
 “ let it be thy care, O my soul ! to depart from
 “ all iniquity. Like one of his familiar friends,
 “ thou hast been eating of his bread, give proof
 “ of thy loving him, by keeping his command-
 “ ments. Be concerned to approve thyself to
 “ him, as his disciple indeed, by continuing in
 “ his word, living in his service. Let thy con-
 “ versation be as it becometh his gospel ; so as
 “ to adorn this doctrine of God our Saviour in
 “ all things. As thou hast received Christ Jesus
 “ the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built
 “ up in him, and established in the faith, a-
 “ bounding therein with thanksgiving. O may-
 “ est thou never forget that he is thy Lord, but
 “ daily worship and serve him. Always re-
 “ member that he is thy Saviour : the life which
 “ I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of

“ the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

“ O Lord ! do thou enable me to maintain a constant dependence on thy grace, and grant that I may find it sufficient for me in all difficulties and trials. O thou blessed Jesus ! thou almighty Saviour ! keep that which I have committed unto thee against that day. Pray for me, that my faith may never fail ! Lord, increase and strengthen it ; perfect that which is lacking in it. Fulfil all the good pleasure of thy goodness, and the work of faith with power. May its actings be more vigorous and lively, in the remaining part of this duty, than they have been in that which is now over. Mine eyes are unto thee, O Lord, have mercy upon me.”

Our meditations and ejaculations, relating to the cup, should be suitable to the several things that our Lord observed, as he presented it to his disciples ; as that it is the symbol of his blood, which he shed for us, for the remission of sins ; that this blood, of which the cup is the appointed symbol, is the blood of the new covenant ; and that agreeably to this, the cup is also to be considered as the token and seal of this covenant, in Christ's blood, both on God's part and on ours.

The considering the cup, as representing the blood of Jesus shed for us, and for many, for the remission of sins, “ that whosoever believeth, through him might be saved,” may lead us to express our thoughts in such words as these :

“ Thou art now again, O my soul! to view
“ the crucified Jesus; for he is again evidently
“ set forth before thine eyes, as crucified among
“ us. Behold the price of thy redemption, the
“ forgiveness of thy sins; not corruptible things,
“ as silver and gold, but the precious blood of
“ Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and
“ without spot. How great is that salvation,
“ which was purchased by the Son of God at
“ so dear a rate! how shall I escape if I neglect
“ it!

“ But be not cast down, O my soul! why
“ shouldst thou fear, and not hope in the Sa-
“ viour of all men, even of every one who belie-
“ veth, when he assureth thee, that he suffered
“ and died for thee, and again calleth on thee to
“ look to him for all the blessed fruits of his
“ sufferings and death; nay, again presenteth
“ them unto thee!

“ Do not forget that he who was delivered for
“ thine offences, was raised again for thy justi-
“ fication; and that, as by his blood, that blood
“ which he shed for the remission of thy sins,
“ he entered into the holy place, heaven itself,
“ now to appear in the presence of God for
“ thee; so he is able to save them to the ut-
“ termost, that come unto God by him, see-
“ ing he ever liveth to make intercession for
“ them.”

“ O may the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
“ the Father of glory, enlighten the eyes of my
“ understanding, that I may know what is the
“ hope of his calling; what the exceeding riches

of his grace, in his kindness towards me through Jesus Christ; how very desirable that blessedness is, which is now set before me.

Had no more been said of the blood of Jesus, than that it was shed for the remission of sins, it might have been thought, that the being saved from wrath through him, is all I am to look for. But how shouldst thou wonder, O my soul! at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth! *This is my blood of the new covenant*: words evidently designed to encourage thy hopes of the sum of all blessedness, the having the Lord for thy God, in covenant with thee.

And now thou art not merely to view, but receive Christ by faith, as having once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring thee to God; that God, of an enemy, might be thy friend; that his covenant of life and peace might be with thee; that all the exceeding great and precious promises in his word, promises of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, might be thy portion. In Christ they are yea, and in him, amen; ratified and confirmed by his blood.

Now thou art to look up to God in the heavens, as sitting on the throne of his grace, holding out the golden sceptre, inviting thee to draw near, and in how condescending, how kind, and moving a manner! incline thine ear; come unto me; hear, and thou shalt live, and

“ I will make an everlasting covenant with thee,
 “ even the sure mercies of David.*

“ Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this ! let
 “ angels, as well as saints, stand amazed at the
 “ love of God, in giving his Son ; and the love
 “ of Christ, in giving himself to suffer and die
 “ that we might partake of this blessedness. Oh
 “ how rich is God in mercy ! how great is the
 “ love wherewith he hath loved us ! how ex-
 “ ceeding abundant is the grace of our Lord Je-
 “ sus Christ ! shouldst thou not love him who
 “ first loved thee !

“ What is there, O my soul ! of greater im-
 “ portance than this, the having God’s covenant
 “ with thee. Thy life ; thy all ; thy peace and
 “ comfort, in this world, and eternal blessedness
 “ in the other depend upon it. Happy is he that
 “ hath the God of Jacob for his help ; whose
 “ hope is in the Lord his God, who made hea-
 “ ven, earth, and sea, and all that is therein ;
 “ who keepeth truth, and shall reign for ever,
 “ even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations !”

“ And what can do more to silence all thy
 “ fears, nay, to fill thee with all joy, and peace in
 “ believing ; and even give thee to abound in
 “ hope of this unspeakable privilege, through
 “ the power of the Holy Ghost, than that, which
 “ thy blessed Saviour has observed concerning
 “ his blood ?

“ Thy sins, O my soul, have been many, thy
 “ guilt has been great ; but be of good com-

* Isaiah lv. 5.

“ fort ; the blood of Jesus was shed for thee,
 “ for the remission of thy sins : if therefore thou
 “ confessest and forsakest them, even the faith-
 “ fulness, as well as mercy, of God, may encour-
 “ rage thy hopes of forgiveness,*

“ Thou hast rebelled against the most high
 “ God, the possessor and Lord of heaven and
 “ earth ; and there is nothing thou canst do to
 “ merit his favour ; but dost thou repent of thy
 “ wickedness and choose the things that please
 “ him, it is no presumption in thee to take hold
 “ of his covenant, and look for all the blessings
 “ it speaks of ; for this blood, which was shed
 “ for the remission of thy sins, is also the
 “ blood of the covenant, the price of these
 “ blessings.

“ And should it not remove every discourag-
 “ ing thought, to behold the Lord Jesus pre-
 “ senting thee with this cup, the symbol of his
 “ blood, and commanding thee to receive it, as
 “ the new covenant in his blood. It is a sensible
 “ pledge of God’s favour to thee ; the seal, as
 “ well as token of his covenant ; and designed,
 “ not merely to lead thy thoughts to the gra-
 “ cious declarations and promises of the word ;
 “ but to excite and strengthen thy faith and thy
 “ hope in them, and to serve as a witness for
 “ God, that there shall not fail one word of all his
 “ good promises.

“ Make use then, O my soul, of that liberty
 “ that is granted thee, to enter into the holiest by

“ the blood of Jesus ; that blood by which he
“ himself is entered ; and go boldly, though with
“ reverence and godly fear, to the throne of
“ grace, that thou mayest obtain mercy, and find
“ grace to help in time of need.

“ And now, O Lord, I draw near to thee. O
“ may I do it with a true and upright heart ! in
“ thy favour is life. Thy loving kindness is bet-
“ ter than life. My flesh and my heart may fail ;
“ and all things here will fail ; but if I have thee
“ for my God, in covenant with me, my happi-
“ ness will be secure and lasting ; for thou wilt
“ be the strength of my heart and my portion for
“ ever. This is all my salvation, and all my
“ desire.

“ I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine
“ iniquity will I not hide ; to me belongeth con-
“ fusion of face, because I have sinned against
“ thee, I am not worthy of the least of all thy
“ mercies ; if thy compassions had failed, how
“ very miserable had I now been ! who am I,
“ O Lord God ! whence is this to me, that thou
“ shouldst speak of making with me an everlast-
“ ing covenant, ordered in all things and sure ;
“ but such are the riches of thy grace, that as
“ in thy word thou settest this blessedness be-
“ fore me, so this cup is presented to me to en-
“ courage my hopes of enjoying it.

“ And now having full assurance of faith be-
“ ing firmly persuaded of the efficacy of the blood
“ of Jesus ; that blood which he shed for the re-
“ mission of my sins, the blood of the new co-

“ venant, I receive, and drink of this cup as the
 “ symbol of this blood and as the token and
 “ seal of this covenant and this I do for a tes-
 “ timony of my taking thee for my God and
 “ dedicating myself to thy service.

“ O Lord thou art my Lord, my lot, my
 portion the life of my soul; the father of mer-
 cies; the God of all comfort. All my springs
 are in thee. In thee will I put my trust. In thee
 will I boast all the day long. I will praise thy
 name for ever. In this alone will I glory in
 understanding and knowing thee. Thy mercy,
 O Lord, is in the heavens; thy faithfulness
 reacheth unto the clouds. Thou exercisest lov-
 ing kindness, judgment and righteousness in
 the earth. Thou wilt abundantly satisfy thy
 people; thou wilt make them to drink of thy
 pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life.
 In thy light shall we see light.

“ I now yield myself unto thee as thy ser-
 vant; all the powers and faculties of my soul,
 and all the members of my body, as instruments
 of righteousness unto God. I now enter into thy
 covenant and into thine oath, that I will be thine;
 and will walk in thy ways, will live in thy ser-
 vice. I now solemnly engage to make thy word
 the rule of my life, and thy glory the end of my
 living.

“ O take away all iniquity, and receive me
 graciously: turn not away from me, but rejoice
 over me to do me good, and put thy fear in my
 heart, that I may never depart from thee. Thou
 who art the God of peace, that hast brought

again from the dead our Lord Jesus, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make me perfect in every good work to do thy will, working in me that which is well pleasing in thy sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

These devotional exercises relating to the cup, may prepare your hearts for the praises as well as prayers which are to be offered up to God in public, after the receiving it.

I speak of praises as well as prayers, because it appears from the history of the institution of the Lord's supper, as might have been observed in the review, that Christ and his apostles sang an hymn before they left the house in which he had instituted it.* We cannot say, whether this was the hallel of the Jews, which began at Psal. cxiii. and ended with Psal. cxviii. ; or a part of it only ; or some other hymn more suited to his new institution. But, be this as it will, as the reason of things led the Jews to sing praises to God, when they had eaten the passover, so it should much more lead Christians to do the same, on their having received the Lord's supper : for no instance of the love and grace of God is equal to that, which this ordinance sets before us.

But the laudable custom that prevails amongst us, makes it needless to insist on the proof of this point. The Church of England, in her communion service, directs communicants to say, or

* Matth. xxvi. 30. Mark xiv. 26.

sing, " Glory be to God on high, and on earth
 " peace, good will towards men ; we praise
 " thee, we bless thee, we worship thee, we glo-
 " rify thee, we give thanks to thee for thy great
 " glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the
 " Father Almighty." The Presbyterians also
 have various collections of hymns for their use
 at the Lord's table. I shall transcribe a few lines
 from Dr. Watts, because of their suitableness to
 that which I have observed concerning the sa-
 cramental cup.

Hope in the Covenant.

HOW oft have sin and Satan strove
 To rend my soul from thee, my God !
 But everlasting is thy love,
 And Jesus seals it with his blood.

The oath and promise of the Lord
 Join to confirm the wondrous grace ;
 Eternal power performs the word,
 And fills all heaven with endless praise.

Amidst temptations sharp and long
 My soul to this dear refuge flies :
 Hope is my anchor firm and strong,
 While tempests blow and billows rise.

The gospel bears my spirits up ;
 A faithful and unchanging God
 Lays the foundation for my hope
 In oaths, and promises, and blood.

Hymns, B. J. cxxxix.

The new Covenant sealed.

THE promise of my Father's love
 Shall stand for ever good ;
 He said, and gave his soul to death,
 And seal'd the grace with blood.

To this dear cov'nant of thy word
 I set my worthless name ;
 I seal the engagement to my Lord,
 And make my humble claim.

Thy light and strength, and pard'ning grace
 And glory shall be mine ;
 My life and soul, my heart and flesh,
 And all my powers are thine.

B. III. 3.

Here in thy courts I leave my vow,
 And thy rich grace record ;
 Witness, ye saints, who hear me now,
 If I forsake the Lord. Psal. cxvi.

Unless John xvii. is one of Christ's Sacramental prayers, we cannot plead his example for praying after receiving of the cup. But since there is no colour of reason for thinking that this duty is then improper, or unseasonable, why should any be for breaking in upon the custom of concluding this feast with prayer, which so generally prevails? *

And now the public worship being over, all that remains is for every communicant to make

the most serious reflection on what he has done, and to be found in such exercises of the heart in his retirements as are suitable to his case.

If Deists as well as Christians, they who deny, as well as they who believe the gospel of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, are among the communicants, they may put such questions as these to themselves.

“ Is this that I have done to be justified? have I acted honestly, and with a regard to truth? were I in Turkey, or in China, might I not join with the Mahometans, or Pagans in their superstitions, as well as join with the Christians in this, which they look upon as the most solemn institution of what they call their Religion? may not Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be justly applauded for the bravery and nobleness of their spirits in hazarding their lives rather than fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up? and may not I as justly be condemned for being governed by the basest principle in receiving the sacrament with no other view than that I may obtain the favour of others? Is it fit upon any consideration whatever to be found in any act of false worship, and to do honour to an impostor?

“ But why should I thus speak of Jesus of Nazareth, who, if the histories of him in the New Testament be true, was a man without guile; and approved of God, as a teacher come from Him, by many miracles, and wonders and signs, which were openly done by him, and at

length declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead?

“ This institution, indeed, sets him before us as crucified; but is this the only notion under which I ought, in reason, to consider him? had he been a deceiver of the people, must there not have been a full end of all faith in him, and regard to him, upon his having been put to death, and in so infamous a manner? but is it not certain that Christianity very much prevailed, and that the number of his disciples mightily increased for many years after his crucifixion? and is it not also certain that men in those times, could not reasonably hope for any worldly advantages from professing themselves Christians; so far from it, that this was the way to endanger the loss of their estates, their friends, their liberties, and even their lives? what then should lead such multitudes to this, but the full evidence they had of the truth of Christ’s resurrection; and that he was indeed exalted by the right hand of God, to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins?

“ When this was the case, have I no cause to suspect that there is some passion, some prejudice or other, that has hitherto blinded my mind, and hindered the light of his gospel from shining upon me? will it not be prudent, is it not necessary, to examine my heart with all possible care, that I may discover the secret springs of my carriage?

“ Was not the author and finisher of the

Christian's faith for this purpose manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil? and sin and iniquity being the devil's work, did he not come into the world to save his people from their sins, and to bless them in turning away every one of them from his iniquities? is not this, the leading us to holiness in heart and in life, the end of the doctrine he taught, and is it not proper to answer this end? should not this recommend it to us as a doctrine worthy of God, and profitable to men? and yet is not this that which makes me unwilling to receive it, and acknowledge the divine authority of its teacher? but if this be so, does not my reason, my conscience condemn me? and must I not conclude that the God of truth does also condemn me? and that I may escape his righteous judgment ought I not immediately to fall down on my knees, and pray, Lord pardon the sins of which I have been guilty, and give me to do thy will, that I may know of the doctrine of Jesus, whether it be of thee or whether he spake of himself?"

Let the Deists make the experiment, and I am apt to think they will find that their giving a satisfactory answer to these questions will shew that it is highly reasonable for them, to resolve either to go to the Lord's table no more, or to observe his institution for the future with other affections and to a different purpose than they have ever done it before.

And that it may be the same with another sort of communicants, those I mean who pro-

fess to believe the gospel of Christ, but do not obey it, such as call him, Lord, Lord, but know in their consciences that they do not the things that he saith; let them, as is meet, reason with themselves after some such manner as this.

“Wherein is it better with me than with a Deist? what benefit may I expect from partaking of the sacrament, which he may not look for? we are acted by the same principles and aim at the like ends in that which we have done. I may say as well as he, that it was not inclination to this duty, affection to Christ, a desire to shew respect to him, a concern for my spiritual advantage, or any thing of this nature, that carried me to the Lord’s table, no; but the love of this world, and a regard to its profits, its pleasures, or its honours. Had it not been to please my friends, or to gain the reputation of a pious man, or to qualify me for such an office, or for some end like these, I had thought nothing of eating this bread and drinking this wine.

“But what hypocrisy and folly have I been guilty of! I may have imposed on my fellow communicants; but be not deceived, O my soul, God is not mocked. He who searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts, cannot but know all the springs of my actions; even my most secret sins are not hid from his eyes, and whatsoever I sow that shall I also reap.

“What an evil servant have I been! I have trodden under foot the Son of God, I have counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing,

and done despite to the Spirit of grace: and I may justly be thought worthy of the sorest punishment. What a wonder of mercies is it that my Lord did not come and cut me assunder, and appoint me my portion with hypocrites, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth!

“But hitherto, O Lord, thou hast kept silence, and waited to be gracious unto me. Should I go on to despise the riches of thy goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, and not be led thereby to repentance, what can I think but that I shall treasure up unto myself wrath against the day of thy wrath, and revelation of thy righteous judgment, who wilt render to every man according to his deeds?

“Blessed be thy name that life and the day of grace are still afforded me, and that I have some sight of the danger I am in: impress my heart with a more affecting sense of it. May my flesh tremble for fear of thee. May I be so afraid of thy judgments, as not to dare to take one step more in the way of sin.

“But why, O Lord, should I give up all hopes of being saved when I yet hear of a Saviour; and when his blood which cleanseth from all sin, is yet set before me: and when I yet enjoy the ministry of reconciliation by which I am assured that thou art in Christ reconciling the world unto thyself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and beseechest me to be reconciled unto thee.

“What amazing love and grace is this! Lord give me to feel that it constraineth me to throw

down my arms immediately, and yield myself unto thee: and O have mercy upon me according to thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, in Christ, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquities, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God! and renew a right spirit within me. Let no iniquity any longer have dominion over me; but break all the cords of my sins, wherewith I have been holden: set my soul at liberty, by the power of thy grace; make me thy servant, and help me to spend the remainder of my days in thy service."

It may be some who fear that they are among this sort of communicants may be secretly moved, while thus praying, to add with pleasure and joy; and now, O Lord, thou givest me my heart's desire, and hast not withholden the requests of my lips. For now I feel the holy fire kindling in my breast, and am made willing to be thine. Thou art my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in thee. Thou art my rightful Sovereign, and I now submit myself unto thee. Other lords, in time past, have had dominion over me; but by the assistance of thy grace, thee only will I serve for the future. O that my heart may be right with thee, stedfast in thy covenant; and that having my fruit unto holiness, my end may be everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

But this leads our thoughts to the truly pious;

for it cannot justly be said of any other persons, that their hearts speak such language: and the proper workings of their minds, when retired, after they have been at the Lord's table, may be thus expressed: I have lifted up my hand unto the most high God, and I cannot go back. I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep his righteous commandments. I love my master, and I will not go out free. Lord to whom shall I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; I love thy service, and am fully resolved never to leave it. It is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.

“But knowing that I am in an evil world, in which I shall meet with many temptations to forget God, and deal falsely in his covenant, and being sensible that the flesh is weak, and ready to comply with them, I dare not trust in my own heart, nor place any confidence in my own strength; but I fly to thee, my blessed and almighty Saviour. Thou art the Mediator of the new covenant, and a witness of my oath; be thou a surety for me, and help me by thy Spirit to act agreeably to all my solemn engagements. Lord, confirm me unto the end. Perform the good work begun in my soul. Keep me by thy power through faith unto salvation.

“How great is that blessedness which has been presented to me at the Lord's table! all the fruits of his sufferings and death, all the blessings of the new covenant. Look diligent-

ly, O my soul, lest thou fail of this grace of God. Fear lest thou shouldst so much as seem to come short of it. Seek after a bright and continued evidence of thine interest in this blessedness; that Christ is thy Saviour, and that the Lord is thy God in covenant with thee. This will be the way to have that cheerful heart which doth good like a medicine, and to be rejoicing in all thy tribulations with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

“ Press then, O my soul, toward the mark for this prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Be not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Give all diligence to add to thy faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness, charity.

“ O that these things may be in me and abound, that I may be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus my calling and election being made sure, I shall go on my way rejoicing, and an entrance shall be ministered unto me abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE COMMUNICANT'S SUBSEQUENT
LIFE AND WALK.

* **T**HE conclusion of this treatise is intended as some exhortation, directing us how we ought to behave after the performance of this religious duty.

It is necessary to say somewhat on this part of the subject, for the sake of some who sincerely wish to approve themselves to God; yet, oft-times, after they have been at the Lord's table, are ready to distress themselves with imaginary fears about the state of their souls, and with doubts whether they have profited by that solemn ordinance.

Let us hear then "what God the Lord will speak; for he will speak peace to his people, and to his saints, but let them not return to folly."† According to the declarations of the gospel, "if we confess and forsake our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There is no positive promise, that every time that a person partakes of the Lord's Supper, his sins shall be forgiven; yet, from the tenor of the covenant of mercy, a devout Christian who has humbly confessed, and sincerely forsaken his past transgressions, and, at the table of the Lord, earnestly implored the forgiveness of them

* From Dr. Duncan's *Devout Communicant's Assistant*.

† Psalm lxxxv. 8.

for the sake of that death which he there commemorates, has good reason to hope, that if he return not to the love and commission of sins thus repented of, they shall never rise in judgment against him : yet this comfortable hope ministers no sort of encouragement to the man that goes on in his trespasses.

Some modest timorous persons are ready to distress themselves with fears lest they have offended God, by their approach to his holy table ; and are apt to conclude they have not enjoyed communion with him, because they were not able to come with all that fervency of love, or melting of affections, of which they have read, or with which they themselves have sometimes been favoured.

Such persons ought carefully to consider, that we may enjoy *real* communion with God, though it is not *sensible*. The power of God *really* supports us every moment, though we are not *sensible* of it. Almighty God hath thought fit, in great condescension to our weakness, to maintain communion with us in the use of means. We carry on correspondence with our absent friends, when we see them not, by messages or letters, or exchange of kind offices, and expressions of affection and regard to them : even so, by reading and hearing the word of God, by the use of the holy sacraments, by meditation and prayer, we preserve intercourse or conversation with heaven ; and that communion is real when those means are blessed to enlarge our knowledge, establish our faith, or amend

our lives. These improvements in religion are gradual, but we cannot pretend that the progress is always *sensible*.

Our natural food is really blessed to us, when it strengthens our bodies for the ordinary functions of life, though we cannot pretend sensibly to distinguish what particular parts were most subservient to that purpose. Thus ought we also to judge of our religious improvement by partaking of the Lord's Supper. Our spiritual food is blessed to us, when we are thereby strengthened in the Christian life; that is to say, are more confirmed in the faith, enabled more to love God, have more pleasure in doing good, live above the temptations of this world, and, from the heart can more cheerfully forgive an injury, though we are not favoured with those warm affections and fervent desires, which are no where promised to attend this ordinance at all times, and which the best of men oftener wish for than enjoy.

So that we may safely conclude, if our motives were sincere in coming to the Lord's table, we have been accepted of God; and the most solid proof to ourselves of our having reaped benefit from it, will be the good fruits which it shall afterward produce on our hearts and lives. This will be a source of joy more lasting than that which flows from momentary warm emotions of the soul, on which many lay so great stress.

We do not usually depend so much on resolutions and professions of friendship from peo-

ple who are easily heated, and moved to warm expressions, as from those who are calm and sedate, whose purposes seem to proceed from principle and established affections. The former soon fly off; while the effects of the latter continually remain. Even so it is in religion; for the natural dispositions work the same way in both.

The conduct of two of the disciples of Christ compared together, will illustrate this matter.

The holy apostle Peter sat at the Supper of our Lord on the first appointment of it, and made as warm professions of love and zeal for his Master as words could possibly express. "Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I; yea, though I should die with thee, yet will I not forsake thee—I am ready to go with thee both to prison and to death." Nicodemus was a disciple of Christ, but secretly, for fear of the Jews. At first he made no open profession, but came to Jesus by night. Yet we find afterwards, that Nicodemus made a very rational and steady defence for Christ, when he was accused by the rulers, and said, "Doth our law judge (condemn) any man before it hear him, and know what he doth?"* And, when all the disciples had fled, and, alas! this zealous and warm apostle Peter denied his Lord and master with oaths, modest Nicodemus continued stedfast, attended the dead body of Jesus, and brought spices and ointments to embalm him for his burial.†

* John vii. 51.

† John xix. 39.

If such a timorous modest person was even persuaded that he had not been so well prepared, or in such good disposition as he ought to have been, when he approached the Lord's table, the consequence is not that, therefore, he ought to be discouraged from the service of God, or from attending again on this duty. If we were not all imperfect, and had not things about us that needed to be amended, the helps of religion, and the means of grace, would be unnecessary ; but the disciples of Christ should reason in this case, as an attentive scholar would do with respect to any lesson prescribed to him, or pattern of writing set him by his master. If his imitation or endeavours, at one time, came short of what he wished, he would attend, and study, on another occasion, to come nearer to his master's directions. Thus also must we, by care and perseverance in our duty, strive to arrive at "the measure of the stature of the fulness of a perfect man in Christ."

Let us even carry this supposition to the greatest height, that a person, going on in sin, had rashly approached to the Lord's table, without due consideration of the importance of that duty, without contrition and sorrow for past sins, or careful resolutions of amendment of life ; yet such a person ought not to be driven to despair, as it is no where said, that unworthy communicating is an unpardonable sin. He ought rather to be exhorted speedily to arise and renew himself by repentance, that the thoughts of his heart may be forgiven him. When the holy

apostle Peter preached early at Jerusalem the guilt of that people in having killed the holy One and the just, and having desired a murderer to be granted unto them, he did not bid them despair of mercy, but says, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it." And he adds, "Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

2. In our attendance on the offices of religion, and the use of the means of grace, we ought always to refer them to the great end for which they were appointed, and judge of our profiting by them according to the degrees in which that is promoted. The great end of religion is to present us at last perfect in Christ Jesus. How is this perfection described?

The precepts of our religion oblige us, by every tie, to love the Lord our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind. The best test of their love is, that it induce us to keep his commandments, and delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man. The wisdom that is from above, is pure, and peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. It induceth us to put on bowels of mercy, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. It animates also by the most affectionate considerations to the practice of all the duties incumbent

on us in the relative stations in which providence hath placed us.

We ought frequently to turn our thoughts to these great lines of duty, and, by our conformity to them, we will be best able to judge of our profiting by the Gospel. This will produce permanent and lasting effects, and be a much better foundation of peace, and far more to be depended on, than the fleeting emotions of the soul, that bring forth no fruit. By this also, our light will be made to shine before men; and by our good works, which men behold, we will be able to put to silence those, who would be ready to speak against us as evil-doers. For the licentious spirit of this age, has, in some men, even come the length of speaking contemptuously of those who dare put on the decent appearance of religion.

3. Keep yourselves in the love of God. Cultivate and cherish in your souls, those devout impressions of the love of God and of Christ, and that sense of the evil of sin, which you had while you sat at the Lord's table, within sight of the cross of Christ. You cannot perhaps expect that these impressions will always be so warm, as they then were; yet without affectation of preciseness or singularity, study to act consistently with them, and carefully avoid every thing that would extinguish or suppress them.

Nothing can contribute more to keep them alive, than being mindful of the duty of secret prayer, and resolving stately to attend to it. There is an inseparable connexion among all

the virtues and duties of the Christian life, so that the study of one of them helps to the practice of another. Thus diligence in our callings contributes to sobriety, temperance to justice, and the love of God sweetens our tempers with benevolence and good-will toward all men. But a constant attention to the duty of prayer has a very great influence on them all. It cherishes in our souls a sense of the love and fear of God; it strengthens the belief of our constant dependence on him; it awakens a care to please him; and makes us watchful against doing any thing to our brethren that would forfeit the approbation of our own hearts, or prevent our acceptance with God.

The religion of Christians has enjoined the duties of piety and morality with equal authority. The first duty is to, "Love the Lord thy God with "all thy heart," said our blessed Saviour, is a great commandment: "The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself *.—These ye ought to have done, and "not have left the other undone." It is therefore necessary, that we should always remember, that our attendance on the duties of one table of the law, will not atone for the neglect of those of the other: But the Christian, who would act consistently, must be careful that his performance of the duties which he owes to God be no hinderance to those of his relative stations,

* Matth. xxii. 38. and xxiii. 23.

and that his duty to his neighbour do not interfere with the offices of religion.

4. As to aged persons, it is very reasonable, that people in the decline of life, who are in some measure disentangled from several of the cares of it, should apply themselves with greater diligence to the offices of religion; in order to rectify what hath been amiss in their hearts and lives, and to redeem time, that hath been mispent; that so, when their Lord cometh, they may be ready.

It is particularly incumbent on such persons to do what they can to recommend religion to others, especially to young people, by manifesting what cheerfulness and quiet of mind godliness brings along with it; how it supports them under age and infirmities; what blessed prospects it sets before them in a better world; and, under all the increasing frailties of nature, induces them to make every allowance, which is not sinful, to others who are younger than themselves, or may in opinion differ from them.

Many fail in this important article, who, while they seem to be more than ordinarily employed about religion, indulge a peevish or censorious temper. This gives unfavourable impressions of devotion, and makes others ready to imagine, that the natural effect of such exercises is to render those sour and melancholy who are most employed in them: or else, that such people, when they could not relish what they once called the pleasures of life, have fled to the offices

of religion, that, under pretence of zeal, they might vent their spleen and ill nature against all those whose conduct is not directed by their humour.

It is of great consequence to be able, from our own experience, to recommend religion to those who may come after us. This is the most effectual method of promoting the interest thereof to generations yet to come. What the aged are able to say of the importance and advantages of a religious course of life, and the evident good effects it hath produced on themselves, will be a testimony for godliness in the mouth of two witnesses. This, indeed, will make “the path of the just as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

In this manner did David the King bear witness for the service of God: “I have been young, and now am old, yet I never saw the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*.—My heart and my flesh fail; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever †.” The same testimony aged Joshua, the leader of Israel, gave to the cause of religion: “And behold, this day, I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know, in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. ‡”

* Psalm xxxvii. 25.

† lxxiii. 26.

‡ Josh. xxiii. 14.

5. It is very fit that young people should early partake of the Lord's Supper; but it is of great consequence, in what manner their first approach is made. Early impressions abide long. Care ought, therefore, to be had, that their first coming to the Lord's table be their own choice, as the effect of their having been properly instructed in the principles of religion, and particularly in the nature of this duty; that they should neither be brought to it in a careless irreverent manner, nor terrified with dread and horror of this ordinance. It ought to appear to be the work of love, rather than of fear; that they may draw near to God as children to an affectionate father, and, from the choice of their own hearts, dedicate themselves to his service and obedience, and ratify, over the memorials of the death of Christ, the obligations which their parents came under for them in baptism.

When this duty is performed, care should be taken to direct their after behaviour; for too many are apt to think, the whole that is meant by partaking of the Lord's Supper is over, when they come from the table. No body imagines, when he rises from prayers, that all his Christian labour is at an end. Even so, though to partake of the Lord's Supper is a very necessary and important office, it is but the performance of one duty; but never should be gone about, as unconnected with the other duties of religion; for it really implies an obligation carefully to attend to them all.

Young people should be directed to consider religion as what will make them happy, will lay a foundation of great peace in their minds, either by subduing their irregular passions, or directing to the right application of their best affections, comforting them at present in the approbation of their own hearts, and in the hopes at last of acceptance with God.

The principles of piety and religion carefully instilled, will animate them to perform, with love and great delight, the duties which they owe to their parents and relations. They will excite them to do good to all within their power, to relieve the distressed, and comfort the afflicted; as the disciples of the blessed Jesus, who went about doing good, that they may be called the children of their Father which is in heaven.

These impressions of piety will induce them to love and shew regard to all good men, to endeavour to imitate their example, and make them disregard or avoid the society of all wicked and profligate persons. No friendship is safe, but what is founded in virtue; the company of worthless men is dangerous and infectious. "He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise; but the companion of fools shall be destroyed." * Goodness only is the object of esteem; power and riches may be the objects of envy and covetousness, but never can be of esteem.

* Prov. xiii. 20.

Finally, to keep awake all those good sentiments and dispositions, it will be necessary, that young people, as an expression of their love and trust in God, make secret prayer their daily employment. This will preserve on their minds, a sense of Providence; and a belief of his all-seeing eye; a sense also of their own weakness, of the manifold dangers and temptations with which they are surrounded, and their need of the mercy and protection of God, and be a means of obtaining them.

While they persevere in this course of life, they have the greatest security, that the constant and affectionate care of their heavenly Father will ever watch over them. In all events, he will be their guide, their friend, and their protector; though father and mother should forsake them, the Lord will take them up.

Thus pleads King David, his early acquaintance with religion, as a ground of hope, that in frailty and age God would not forsake him: "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not.*" This also was the last and most important advice he gave to his son Solomon: "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth the imaginations

* Psalm lxxi. 17, 18.

“ of the thoughts : If thou seek him, he will
 “ be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he
 “ will cast thee off for ever. † ”

* HAVING hitherto led you on from the nature of the ordinance to the dispositions necessary for partaking of it, and the frame wherein we should approach the Lord's Table, I would conclude the whole with some considerations of what sort our after consideration should be, and by what means we may be enabled so to walk, as becomes our profession. This being the great end of the ordinance, that its influence may abide with us, and that it be not looked upon as a ceremonious visit, which we may forget till the time returns again. And here I solemnly admonish all you, who have partaken in these holy mysteries, to *take heed to yourselves, lest you lose the things you have wrought.* Remember Judas, who no sooner received the sop, but Satan entered into him ; and, though he so often had eat and drank at Christ's Table, was a son of perdition, and betrayed his master.—And therefore if, as we have engaged, we would take Christ for our master, and live as his faithful and covenant servants, or rather brethren and friends, then must we show forth the following conversation.

1. We should go forth into the world professing his name. We must not be ashamed

† 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

* Haweis, Communicant's Spiritual Companion.

of Christ, nor his cause ; we should speak for his honour, and glory in his cross. Profession now becomes peculiarly demanded from us as Communicants ; and whilst in these evil days, vital Christianity and real religion is branded with every opprobrious name that an ungodly world, who know not the truth, can invent ; we must heartily welcome these reproaches, and walk so as to deserve them ; not silent, hiding our heads, sealing up our lips, and leaving the world to their own ways, but by an open declaration, at every proper season bearing testimony against them, that their works are evil ; boldly rebuking vice by word as well as practice ; having *no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*, but separating ourselves from all intimate society with every brother who walketh disorderly, whose conversation agrees not with the simplicity of the gospel. This will make us singular, it is true ; we shall be unlike the world, and displease the world ; but wherefore did we meet at Christ's Table, but to make our solemn declaration to him, that *we are not of the world, even as he is not of the world?* and how shall we dare be so unfaithful, as to go forth and mix again familiarly, and as bosom friends, with those who are *enemies to the cross of Christ, who glory in their shame, who mind earthly things?* To take up our cross, and follow Christ, was our sacramental vow. But how unfaithfully have many of you hitherto performed it ? How utterly strangers are you this day to any reproach or shame for Christ's sake ?

Where is your cross that you have borne in the world? Alas! you go from the Lord's Table and return again to the world just as before, lost in its cares, pleasures and vanities; and how then should the world possibly have any quarrel with you? *Ye are of the world, and therefore the world loves its own.* You never by your professions disturb the slumbers or security of the unawakened souls around you; the form of a ceremonious duty will reprove nobody, unless there be afterwards something more of profession, than this mere act of communicating. But be sincere, and then you cannot escape; go into the world, speak as a christian, profess your views, live for Christ, and then the world and you will have no longer fellowship; for if you are thus chosen out of the world, the world cannot but hate you. Let this, brethren, comfort you who bear forth Christ's name in the world, as well as at his Table; the cross is an honourable badge, to be reproached for righteousness' sake is happiness. The remembrance of our surrender to Christ, will make us count all things light and easy; and suffering as a christian, we need not be ashamed; *we know in whom we have believed;* we know under whose banners we have taken the Sacrament to fight; and God forbid we should quit our colours for shame, reproach, evil report, dishonour or reviling, yea, though we were called for his sake to prison or to death.

2. We must practice as we profess. Going forth to give up our whole bodies, souls and

spirits to Christ, and to walk worthy the high vocation wherewith we are called, we should carry away with us impressed upon our hearts the vows we have made, that so whenever sin would tempt us, we may have this answer to make, *How shall I do this wicked thing, and sin against God*, who have but lately so solemnly given up myself to him? If Christ hath been pleased to take us for his own, shall we rob him of the purchase of his blood, and dishonour him who hath so highly exalted us? surely this would be as ungrateful as guilty. The eyes of the world will be upon us, and they are piercing and quick. If they see our conversation to be nothing different from their own, they will say, *What do ye more than others?* and what advantage will this give to the adversaries of the Lord to blaspheme? “These, say they, are your
“Communicants; here they are all devotion,
“but go home with them from Church, and you
“see them as passionate and proud, as covetous
“and worldly, as vain and trifling, as false and
“deceitful, as any of their neighbours.—And if this be the case with any of you, brethren, what a curse will it bring upon you? what a disgrace will it be to your profession! and how will religion be wounded, even in the house of its friends, by your unbecoming conversation? May not the adversaries of the Lord then be hardened in their sins, and confirmed in their prejudices, whilst they see, under the outward cloak of profession, that rank hypocrisy lurks within; and saving outward appearance, that

you are neither more humble, more holy, more mortified, more heavenly-minded than themselves? Surely it were better for such an one, unless mercy restore him, *that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the midst of the sea*, than that ever he approached the Table of the Lord. But if you would not have this heavy guilt lying upon your souls, then you must labor to *adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things*, by such an unblameable conduct, that they who seek occasion against you may be disappointed, and find no evil thing justly to say of you. Your lives should be as the light of the morning, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day, and your works such as may glorify your Father which is in heaven. Then, if men speak evil of your good conversation in Christ, these adversaries of the Lord shall be found liars; and all who will inquire even *here*, will detect their malice; and *in the great day of the Lord*, they shall be covered with confusion, and receive the reward of *lying lips and a deceitful tongue, in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*.

3. We must go forth particularly to exercise the duties of our respective stations and relations in life. Herein especially the power of religion is shewn forth; a passionate master, a fretful mistress, a haughty husband, a self-willed wife, a cruel father, an undutiful son, a slothful servant, or a false friend, none of these can have any just pretensions to real Christianity.

To suppose it possible, would be supposing a contradiction possible, that light and darkness, Christ and *Belial* could agree. Particularly watchfulness will be needful. In every family lies the greatest proof of the sincerity of the members of it; they will prove their fidelity to Christ by their love one towards another, shown in the conscientious discharge of their several relations; the master ruling with gentleness, the servant laboring with cheerfulness and fidelity; the husband kind and tender, the wife meek and obedient; the father mixing parental affection with correction, the son manifesting filial love with dutiful submission, and so in every other case. This will make our houses temples; and the charity, forbearance, patience and submission, shown one to another in such families, will be the most convincing proof that Christ really dwells under that roof: and such it is required of Communicants to be: and towards those who are without, the same spirit must show itself.

(1.) In the uprightness of all our dealings, in our intercourse with the world: *We shall not go beyond, or defraud our brother in any matter, but rendering to every man their dues, shall owe no man any thing.* We shall do our work as under the bonds of the covenant, *not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of the Lord, doing the will of God from the heart.* We shall deal with each other in the simplicity which is in Christ, renouncing every hidden work of dishonesty, and abhorring the appearances of fraud

and injustice. And thus walking under an higher principle than the world is ever acquainted with, even under the eye, and as in the presence of a heart searching God, shall convince even those we cannot convert, that there is a power in the religion of Jesus Christ to do that which nothing upon earth can do besides.

(2.) We must show it in the meekness of our conversations. The power of religion is glorious, when it tames the impetuosity of our passions, softens our severity into mildness, and puts a bridle both on our hearts and tongues. Coming from the table of a meek and lowly Jesus, we must needs learn of him to be meek and lowly of heart, if we would find rest unto our souls. It is strange hypocrisy to come with pretence of seeking *the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated*, and going home to disturb all around us by our passions and perverseness; instead of gentleness, to be a lion in our house, and frantic among our servants; instead of easiness to be entreated, implacable and unmerciful; this is not to partake of the Table of the Lord, but the table of devils, for these are the dispositions of Satan. Let this thing, brethren, be seriously attended to, let it appear what Christ at his Table hath done for you, by the change wrought in your temper, by the mildness, sweetness, compassion, forbearance and gentleness of your conversation.

(3.) Be temperate in all things. In the *world*, that its anxious cares and concerns do not en-

gage you immoderately. In your *body*, that you deny its cravings, *making no provision for the flesh*, by sloth, drunkenness, gluttony or pleasure, *to fulfil the lusts thereof*: *They that are Christ's, have both crucified the world and the flesh with its affections and lusts*. A worldly covetous Communicant, a drunken intemperate Communicant, a lewd and carnal Communicant, what a contrast! How absurd! Can we receive the body of Christ in one hand, whilst we grasp the world in the other? Can the same eyes that have looked upon a crucified Saviour, indulge wantonness or be greedy of gain? can these hearts that have been made the temples of the Holy Ghost, erect the altar of mammon there, or entertain those vile affections which must defile the sacred place? Let it appear then that you are now no longer debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh; that the *world is crucified unto you, and you unto the world*; that you have higher enjoyments than flesh or sense, and nobler prospects than earth can give you; and this may well make you dead to the love of worldly things, and temperate in the use of them.

(4.) Show forth your love to your brethren. *As good stewards of the manifold gifts of God, according as God hath given to every one, let him minister the same to him that lacketh*. Do we abound in riches? let us abound also in liberality. Have we but little? let us *show our diligence to give of that little*. The trifle we contribute at the Table, should be as the first fruits,

to sanctify our other gifts, in token that we do them all in Christ's name, and for his sake. But there are other and far greater demonstrations of love, which we are called to exercise towards our brethren, than the relief of their poverty, such as bearing the infirmities of the weak, condescending to the meanest, ready to help them with our presence, advice or influence, where any or all of these may be necessary ; counting none beneath our notice or regard ; seeing the unspeakable condescensions of Christ to us, who, *though he was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God, yet humbled himself, and made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.* Have we really seen him come *not to be ministered unto, but to minister ?* Have we seen his love *in giving his life a ransom for us ?* How ought we then to love one another, yea, to be ready, to lay down, if need be, our lives for the brethren, for how dear ought those bodies to be to us, for which Christ's body was given ? How precious ought those souls to be in our eyes, for which Christ's soul *was sorrowful, even unto death ?* This universal love to all, but especially to those *who are of the household of faith,* we must bring into exercise, that so all men may know we are Christ's disciples, by that unfeigned affection we bear one towards another.

(5.) Our conversation after this ordinance should be more heavenly. What hath a Christian any longer to do among the tombs of this world, who is come from remembering a living,

dying, risen and ascended Saviour? *Our conversation*, says St. Paul, *is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*. Have we there remembered his coming again? what have we then to do but to make ready for it, that our affections being set on things in heaven, not on things on earth, we may welcome the day of his appearance and glory. Here is the grand evidence of a Christian. Others direct all their aims, pursuits and designs after the things which are seen, and are temporal; he seeks always the things above, the things which are unseen to others, but realized by faith to him, and most important, because eternal. See that this be your experience, that every time you communicate, you find the effects of it thus evident, in lifting up your hearts after Christ in the heavens; in quickening your preparation to meet him in the clouds, and continually making you more ready and disposed for that inheritance among the saints in light, which in the ordinance was sealed to you, and to which you were called.

Such should be our conversation after every sacramental occasion, that all who see us may take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus; and behold from our walk the brightness of the grace communicated to us, making us shine as lights in the world, like *Moses'* face when he came down from the mount of vision. I would to God this was more the case; and that all who have been joined to the Lord in bonds of outward communion with him, were thus one.

spirit with him ; walked more as Christ walked. I am very sure it is the great grief of every truly Christian heart, whenever they behold the contrary, and see these spots at our feasts, *feasting themselves without fear, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.* May you and I fear for ourselves, and give greater *diligence to make our calling and election sure*, continuing to walk thus as persons professing godliness. In order to which, we shall find the following means most highly conducive ; and I pray God you may have such desires thus to give up your hearts to God, as heartily to exercise yourselves unto godliness in all the ways the Spirit points out to you ; and these are chiefly,

1. WATCHFULNESS.

2. PRAYER.

3. The WORD.

4. The Company of LIVELY Christians.

1. To walk as becometh your Christian profession, you must be watchful. The enemies whom you renounce are mightier than you, wise, watchful and ensnaring.—The devil continually spreads his toils, and is never perhaps busier with us than after such a season, when the fervor of devotion being somewhat abated, our hearts are more exposed to his attacks ; then he would step in, tempt us to return unto folly, follow his insinuations with some bait laid in our way, and so work upon the remainders of corruption within us, in order to betray us into his hands. Thus after the sop, Satan en-

tered into *Judas*. As not ignorant therefore of his devices, we should especially beware of security. *Let not him that putteth on the armour, boast as he who taketh it off.* When the cold turf covers our head, *then the wicked will cease from troubling, and the weary have perfect rest;* but here every step we take we are among lions, and must stand on our watch-tower, fearing always, and working out our salvation with that trembling and care which can only secure it. A holy jealousy is the great preservative against falling away. The moment we begin to slumber, our watchful adversary is ready to take advantage against us: but *blessed is the man whom his Lord when he cometh shall find watching.*

2. Prayer is the greatest means of preserving the influence of this ordinance upon our hearts. This is closely connected with the former, watchfulness and prayer go together; we must pray that we may watch, and continue watching unto prayer. It is not enough once to draw nigh unto God, but we should daily be keeping near to him, and upon our knees in our closets acting over again that surrender which we have made at the table. Prayer is the breath of the divine nature, of the new creation begun in us, and by it we should be offering up our souls daily to him, from whom cometh our salvation. By prayer we should seek to maintain an holy frame of spirit, appearing solemnly and frequently in secret in God's presence, that we may habitually walk under the sense of it. Whoever hath any experience of divine things, will find his

constant need, and the gracious influence of earnest and importunate prayer ; such an one cannot but pray, all his soul depends upon it, he knows he shall quickly grow careless the moment he becomes prayerless ; and therefore he remarks the smallest decays in private prayer, stirs up his soul to the lively exercise of it, and pleads for the Spirit to blow up the fire of all holy graces in his heart. To neglect prayer, or to perform it with an habitual negligence and formality, is a most suspicious sign that all approaches to God at his table were mere matters of form, the work of a day, not the spiritual exercises of the heart, desiring nearness to, and communion with God ; for where this is the case in one ordinance, it must be so in another : they who long to see Christ at his table, are daily setting him before them, when they bow their knees at his footstool ; and this both prepares the way before, and keeps alive the sense of what they have found at Christ's communion afterwards. Pray therefore, I beseech you, without ceasing, as you hope to stand fast, as you would be true to your engagements, as you profess the name of Christian, as you would walk as becometh your profession, as you would show forth the sincerity of your surrender to Christ by the discharge of your several relations in life, as you would have your conversation in heaven, I beseech you be diligent in private prayer ; else you will dishonour your vocation, you will walk in disobedience, as do others ; you will have your conversation upon earth, you

will be a slave to the world; and notwithstanding all you may do besides, your fall will be more dreadful, and your ruin most inevitable. You must pray or perish.

3. The word of God is another great means to keep us from falling. Herein we must exercise ourselves day and night. Out of it we must be taught the way wherein we must go. This must be *the guide to our feet, and the lantern to our paths*; and in our course to glory, be our map and chart. Communion seasons are places of refreshment in the way, to strengthen us for our journey: Christ in the Word is the way itself, in which after such refreshment we are to walk. To the Word therefore you must apply, to know more perfectly the mind of God, that you may follow it more faithfully; and if you have been sincere with Christ, you will do so; *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments*; you will keep the scriptures upon your heart, rising up and lying down; they will be daily in your hands at any season of leisure, and particularly before you set yourself to the exercise of prayer. This is the way to be taught of God, and instructed in the way that you should go. You will find thus your heart built up, more determined for Christ, and more steadfast in his service; having set his commandments ever before you, and being stedfastly purposed through grace not to sin against them.

4. Lastly, The company of lively Christians is a choice means and wondrous help to keep alive the serious impressions made upon the

soul. *As iron sharpeneth iron; so does the countenance of a man his friend.*—Experience will best confirm the truth of this observation. Man is by nature social, needing the help one of another; and Christians more so than other men, who have new and stronger bands than nature to unite them, and have many enemies that none others know. To associate therefore for the purposes of religious improvement, is not more comfortable than necessary; *How can one be warm alone?* says the Prophet. But when we join to exhort, reprove, rebuke, and admonish one another, then the fire catches from heart to heart, each receives some quickening, or consolation, or correction from the other's experience and conversation; and thus the communion of saints before the Lord is still maintained, till the season returns when we shall come together again in God's house, and renew the bonds of union and fellowship one with another. Let me therefore recommend it to you to seek the company of those, whose course and conduct is most holy, heavenly, and zealous; to be free one with another; to open your hearts, as Christians, in that mutual confidence, which none but real Christians have any experience of, to delight in social prayer, and be desirous to join in it whenever you have opportunity. A conduct indeed, which, to those who know nothing of heart-religion, is always unpleasant or offensive; but which all, who have seriously set their souls to seek the kingdom of God in the first place, have found both most necessary to

keep alive their holy purposes, and most conducive to the comfort as well as edification of their souls.

In this way you will always be progressing in Christian knowledge and experience, and becoming riper for glory as you advance towards it. You will be walking in an holy conformity to your profession, and approving your fidelity to Christ your Master. And thus from eating and drinking at Christ's table below, you will shortly go to drink with him the new wine of eternal consolation in the kingdom of your Father.

FREQUENT COMMUNICATING PROVED FROM THE
SCRIPTURES AND ANCIENT FATHERS.

* **T**HE Lord's Supper is the ordinance our Saviour has peculiarly set apart to keep up the remembrance of his sufferings and death. There we see the loving and lovely *Jesus* laying down his life as a sacrifice and atonement for our sins; and shedding his precious blood to purchase for us a happiness large as our wishes, and lasting as eternity. We see the *Lord of Life* suffering a painful, an ignominious, an accursed *Death*; that by thus fulfilling the condition of the covenant of redemption, he might secure grace and glory, and every good thing, not to us only, but

* From Dr. Erskine's Theological Dissertations.

to an innumerable multitude, which no man can number, of all tongues, and kindreds, and nations, and languages. We behold the height and depth, the length and breadth of divine love to a perishing world: of *the Father's* love, in inflicting upon him such unparalleled sufferings, that we might not suffer; of his own love and condescension in cheerfully bearing them. We behold *the Son of Man* glorified, in bearing that load of wrath, without fainting under it, which would have sunk a whole world in irrecoverable misery. We behold *God* glorified in him, and all the divine perfections shining with united lustre, the justice of *God* sweetly combining with his mercy to punish our Surety, that we the offenders might be forgiven. From a deep and heart-affecting sense, that we, and all the children of men, who obtain salvation, must be wholly indebted to that amazing transaction for obtaining it, we are made to say, "God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of Christ. We will remember thy love more than wine: we will rejoice in thy salvation; and in the name of thee, our God, will we lift up our banners: for thou, Lord, hast made us glad through thy work, and we will triumph in the works of thy hands. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift: and blessed be he who hath come in the name of the Lord to save us. Hosannah in the highest.

Ask your own hearts, *O Christians*, are you in any danger of remembering these things too much? And if you remember them at all, can

you do it in any better method than that which infinite wisdom has prescribed?

Suppose a *Friend*, who has received a deadly wound in defending us from danger, should, when about to expire, present us with his picture, and recommend it to us with his dying breath, to keep it as a token and remembrance of his friendship and affection, what would gratitude oblige us to do? Would we cast it into some by-corner out of sight? Would we suffer it to be sullied with dust? or buried under lumber, neglected and forgotten? Would we not rather hang it in our chief room? Would we not honour it, not only by care to preserve it from abuse, but by frequent looks, thereby to renew, and, if possible, to increase an affectionate remembrance how much we were indebted to our *departed Friend*?—Can we then pretend to honour our *Redeemer*, when we answer his care in providing and recommending his Supper as a representative of his death, by a contrary care, in seeking pretences to lay it aside?

The Lord's Supper is a visible badge of our Christian profession.—Nature has taught mankind, and God himself has confirmed it, that every religion should have some solemn rite whereby it may be known to the very eye, from other religions. Circumcision, the passover, &c. under the *Mosaic* economy, were all intended (not excluding other ends) to be signs between God and his people, i. e. rites whereby they might be distinguished from idolaters: and

therefore a terrible threatening was levelled against the neglecters of these rites, *that soul must be cut off from his people*: he has put off the badge of my people, and therefore must not share in their privileges. All this being highly rational, *Christianity* has its distinguishing rites, as well as *Judaism* had.

Prayer, thanksgiving, and such-like holy exercises, are common to almost all religions, and observed by the Jew, the Turk, and the Heathen, as well as the Christian.—Baptism we receive in our infancy, and without our own consent; and is therefore rather a proof of God's goodness to us than an evidence of our Christian profession. But by partaking of the Lord's Supper, we distinguish ourselves from all who despise the gospel of Christ, and testify, in the most public manner our regard to a crucified Saviour, our concern to keep up the remembrance of his death, and our resolutions to adhere to him and his cause, while by others it is disregarded and set at naught.

Our Lord, well knowing how reluctant we are to undertake any thing difficult, although for the sake of him who was our best Benefactor, would not burden us with a number of troublesome ceremonies: and therefore he only appointed this one ordinance, by which we should openly declare ourselves on Christ's side, and proclaim to the world our grateful, affectionate sense of his unparalleled love. Ought we not, then, to be frequent in thus openly *confessing Christ before men*, while too many are *ashamed of him*

and his words in this adulterous and perverse generation?

The Lord's supper is also intended as a seal and confirmation of the fulness and freedom of the offers of grace in the everlasting gospel. For as really as the minister offers the bread and wine to the communicants, so really God the Father offers Christ, the bread of life, to every one of us for the nourishment of our souls.— And are there any, whose faith is so lively and vigorous, that they seldom need the help of this ordinance to strengthen and increase it?

Is not the Lord's supper an ordinance, in which God is often pleased to vouchsafe special communion with himself, and his Son Jesus Christ? Does it not greatly tend, through the divine blessing, to strengthen the communion of the mystical body of Christ, and to warm and enlarge our affection to all who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity? Does it not often prove meat indeed, and drink indeed, to the fainting soul; a means to convey large measures of spiritual nourishment and growth in grace? Indeed, suitable impressions of *Christ's* loving us, and giving himself for us a sacrifice and an offering to *God*, of a sweet-smelling savour, are the great means by which holy dispositions are begun, carried on, and perfected in the soul. And what can tend more to awaken a lively sense of these things, than beholding the symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Christ? How many, who went to the Lord's table feeble and faint-hearted, have received such plenteous com-

communications of light and life from the glorious head of influences, that they have been made to renew their strength, to mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint?

Who is there amongst us, whose need of the Lord's supper, for one or other of the above purposes, does not frequently return? Has, then, God provided for us so rich an entertainment? Does he allow us often to regale ourselves with it; yea, even invite us in the most warm and earnest manner? And, is it not a contempt of the goodness and condescension of God, and injuring our own spiritual interests, to neglect any opportunity of sitting down at the table of the Lord? "Our soul-necessities," says the judicious Mr. Willison,* "do call for frequency in partaking: for we are oft ready to forget Christ, and therefore we oft need this ordinance to bring him to our remembrance. We are oft subject to spiritual deadness, weakness of faith, and decays of grace; and therefore have frequent need of this ordinance for strength and quickening. There is ground to fear, that the unfrequent celebration and participation of this blessed feast, which Christ hath prepared for us, is an evil that many in his church are chargeable with, and for which the Lord may plead a controversy with us. How can we expect but he will depart from us, when we stand at such a distance from him, and come so seldom near

* Sacramental Catechism, p. 86. and Preface, p. 9.

him in the method he hath appointed? Can we look for the smiles of Christ's countenance, when we live so much in the neglect of his dying words? Is it any wonder our hearts are so hard, when we are so seldom applying the blood of Christ for softening them? or that our graces be so weak and withered, when we so little use the means for strengthening and cherishing them? Is not the frequent use of this ordinance, in the way Christ hath appointed, an excellent help to soften our hearts, renew our repentance, strengthen our faith, inflame our love, increase our thankfulness, animate our resolutions against sin, and encourage us to holy duties; and shall we willingly neglect it? It is no wonder that we complain we miss what we aim at and expect in this ordinance, when we are so little sensible of former neglects. It is a sad sign our receiving of the sacrament is not right, when it leaves not in us earnest breathings for the like opportunity. It is impossible for us to meet with Christ, and taste of his sweetness and fulness in this ordinance, and not long for another meeting."

The two preceding paragraphs abundantly prove, that if frequent communicating cannot be urged as absolutely necessary, it may safely be recommended as highly expedient and beneficial. But, perhaps, upon inquiry, we shall find in scripture an express injunction of frequency in partaking of the Lord's supper. For, that a prince should require a tribute to be paid him by every one of his subjects, and yet

never express what sum should be paid, and at what time, is incredible. In like manner, I cannot easily bring myself to believe, that our Lord should require his church, to the end of the world; to eat bread, and drink wine, in commemoration of his death, without specifying how often he would have it done.—The Jews, though they understood not the utmost signification of the *Paschal* rite, yet had full directions how often, and in what day, they were to sacrifice and eat the lamb. If, then, the word of God has assigned no precise time for partaking of the Lord's supper, will it not follow, that the gospel is more obscure than the law; and that our Lord, when he took the vail from off Moses's face, covered with a thicker vail his own?

We are told of Peter's *converts*,* that they *continued stedfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.* The words *ἠσταν προσκαρτερευτες*, which we render *continued stedfastly*, properly denote *constancy, or perseverance in an exercise, or waiting continually upon any thing*, as appears from the use of the same word. † And, therefore, whatever is meant by *breaking of bread*, it is plain they were as constant in that, as in attending on the apostle's doctrine, and in public prayer.

It is said of the same persons, ‡ *And they,*

* Acts, ii. 42. † Acts, i. 14. vi. 4: viii. 13. and x. 7. Rom. xii. 12. and xiii. 6. ‡ Acts, ii. 46.

continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread in a house, did participate the food with gladness and singleness of heart.

Suppose we were to retain the common translation, *breaking of bread from house to house*, that would be no conclusive argument, that the Lord's supper is not intended; for the multitude of the faithful might render it inconvenient for all to partake of the sacrament in one house, and on that account it might have been dispensed successively, in different houses.

From this passage, it is probable, that the church at Jerusalem received the Lord's supper every day.

The next passage to our purpose is, * *And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, &c.*

Surely one design of their meeting was to *break bread*, i. e. to celebrate the Lord's supper. This was with them therefore one part of the sanctification of the *Sabbath*; and perhaps their thus remembering the death of Christ on that day, is none of the least causes of its being termed *the Lord's day*. It adds probability to this, that Chrysostom † terms the *Sabbath the day of bread*.

That in all church-meetings the Lord's supper was dispensed, is further evident from the first epistle to the Corinthians. ‡ The apostle had said

* Acts, xx. 7. † Chrysost. Hom. y. de Resur.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 20, 21.

that their meeting together was not for the better, but for the worse; this he proves from their behaving themselves so in these meetings, that they neither did nor could eat the Lord's supper as became that holy institution. *When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper*, i. e. it is not so to do it as that sacred action ought to be performed. Now, this argument evidently supposes, that whenever they assembled together, they came to eat the Lord's supper; for otherwise their coming together, so as not to eat the Lord's supper, would be no proof that their coming together was for the worse. Had the apostle charged the Corinthians, as guilty in some particular meetings in which the Lord's supper was immediately concerned, we had then understood, that it was not a constant exercise in their worshipping assemblies; but, on the contrary, he charges them with profaning the Lord's supper in all their meetings; and what is termed *coming together*, ver. 17. *coming to the church*, ver. 18. *coming to one place*, ver. 19. is termed *coming together to eat*, ver. 33.* Which shews, that whenever the Christians met together in one place for religious exercises, eating of bread was a part of their employment.

Pliny, in his epistle to the emperor Tra-

* *Coming together to eat*, is an expression as liable to be perverted for excluding the laity from the cup, as Luke, xxiv. 30. and Acts, ii. 42. But none, to ward off that silly argument, have ever said that the passage has no relation to the sacrament. Why then need they say so in these other instances?

jan *, wrote about the year of Christ 110, which was only six years after the death of the evangelist John, acquaints the emperor, that he had found nothing to allege against the Christians, but their obstinacy in their superstition; and that it was their custom to meet together on a set day before it was light, and to sing a hymn to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by the sacrament, that they would commit no wickedness.

Justin Martyr, who wrote A. D. 155, is another witness †, On the day, says he, that is called Sunday, all the Christians meet together, because that is the day of our Saviour's resurrection, and then we have read to us the writings of the prophets and apostles. This done, the president makes a speech, exhorting the people to practice what they have heard. Then we all join in prayer; then bread, wine, and water, are brought forth, and the president having again poured out prayers and praises to God, there is a distribution and communication made of the sacramental elements. Last of all, those that are willing and able, contribute what they think fit for the relief of the indigent.—How exactly does this account of the worship of the primitive church tally with that of St. Luke !‡

Tertullian, who lived about A. D. 200 ||, takes notice of some who declined receiving the sacrament on the stationary days (Wednesday

* Plin. Epist. lib. 10. ep. 97. Seque sacramento obstringere, &c.

† Justin Martyr, Apol. I. sect. 96, 97. τῇ δὲ τοῦ ἡμεῶν λεγομένην
 ‡ Acts ii. 42. || Tertullian de Orat. cap. xiv. p. 136.

and Friday) for fear of breaking their fast; and blames them for this as a foolish scruple.—This passage not only proves that he thought it a duty incumbent on the faithful to communicate as often as possible, but that it was then a common practice, to communicate on other days as well as Sundays.

Minutius Felix, who flourished A. D. 230, speaks of the Christians assembling to eat on the solemn day *.

Cyprian (A. D. 250.) tells us, that *daily communions* were the common practice of his time †. And Fortunatus, his contemporary, made use of the fourth petition of the Lord's prayer as an argument for communicating daily.

Victorinus Petavionensis (A. D. 290.) tells us, that it was usual on the Lord's day to receive the Sacrament ‡.

Basil, about the year 372, recommends communicating *every day*; and informs us, that it was the practice of the church of Cæsarea, where he was, to celebrate the sacrament four times a-week, viz. on Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday ||.

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who was contemporary with Basil, or whoever is author of the tract, in his works, *de Sacramentis*, justly blames the infrequent use of the Sacrament

* Epulas die solenni coeunt. Min. Fel. p. 30. † Cyprian de Orat. Domin. p. 209. 210. ed. Bened. Eucharistian quotidie ad cibum salutis accipimus, &c.

‡ Vict. Petav. de Fabric. Mundi, ap. Cave, p. 103. Die dominico cum gratiarum actione ad panem exeamus.

|| Basil, ep. 289.

among the Greeks, where some communicated only once a-year; and seems to intimate, that *daily communions* were in use at Milan*.

St. Hierom tells us, that they were likewise kept up in his time, (i. e. about the year 390.), in the churches of Spain, and at Rome †.

Augustine (about the year 410) tells us, that the eucharist was received by many on Saturday, as well as the Lord's day, *every week*; and by some even *daily* ‡.

These passages are more than sufficient to prove, that during the *first four centuries*, the sacrament of the Lord's supper was dispensed even oftener than once a-week, and that it was a constant branch of the sanctification of the Sabbath. We next inquire after the practice of the reformed Churches.

In Bohemia, the holy Supper is usually celebrated four times a-year. They dispense it oftener when the need of the faithful requires it; but thus often they enjoin it to be dispensed for the sake of uniformity ||.

A national synod of the Protestants in France; met at Charinton 1644, give it as their judgment, "That though the Lord's supper is dispensed in their church only four times a-year, greater frequency would be desirable, the reverence requisite at the Lord's table being preserved, that so saints might increase in faith,

* Ambros. de Sacram. lib. v. cap. 4. p. 449.

† Hieronym. ep. 52. ad Lucin.

‡ Augustin. ep. 118. ad Januar.

|| Account of the church order and discipline in the unity of the brethren of Bohemia, chap. iii. sect. 4.

through frequent partaking of the Sacrament, as the primitive church did.*”

The Lutherans have a communion every Sunday and holiday throughout the year.† And though the number of communicants is often but small,‡ yet it is usual among them to communicate three or four times a year.§

The church of England enjoins, that “in every parish-church, and chapel, where Sacraments are to be administered within this realm, the holy communion shall be ministered by the parson, vicar, or minister, so often, and at such times, as every parishioner may communicate at least *thrice* in the year.”||

From the form of dispensing the Sacraments, composed by Calvin for the use of the church of Geneva, it appears, that the Lord’s day preceding, intimation was made to the people, that they might prepare for that holy ordinance; and that strangers, who inclined to communicate, might converse with the minister. On the Sacrament-day, the minister, at the end of the sermon, explained the design of that ordinance, and how it ought to be received: or, if he judged it necessary, spent his whole sermon on that subject. How often in the year the Sacrament was dispensed, is not there mentioned; but from Calvin’s zeal to revive even weekly communicating, it is probable it was at least once a

* La Discipline des Englisés Reformés de France, cap. xii. sect. 4.

† Johnson’s Unbloody Sacrifice, Part ii. p. 151.

‡ Calvoer de Tit. Eccl. t. i. p. 758.

§ Buddei Inst. Theol. Dogm. lib. v. cap. 1. sect. 19.

|| Canon xxi. of the Province of Canterbury.

month: especially as Calvin approved the Book of Common Order of the English church at Geneva, where Knox was minister; which book takes notice, that the Lord's supper was commonly used by them once a *month*, so oft as the congregation think expedient.*

The Greek church celebrate the Sacrament every Sunday, and solemn *Festival*, in their great churches, and the laity are obliged to receive it *four times* a year. †

The 29th of April 1560, the great council of Scotland laid their orders upon six ministers, whereof Mr. John Knox was one, to commit to writing their judgment touching the reformation of religion. Upon this they drew up the first book of discipline, and presented it to the great council, May 20, 1560.

Their opinion touching the times of dispensing the Lord's Supper, they give in these words: ‡ “ Four times in the year we think sufficient to the administration of the Lord's table, which we desire to be distincted, that the superstitions of times may be avoided, so far as may be; for your Honours are not ignorant how superstitiously the people run to that action at Pasche, even as if that time gave virtue to the Sacrament; and how the rest of the whole year they are careless and negligent, as if it appertained not unto them, but at that time only. We think therefore most expedient, that the

* Book of Common Order, &c. Preamble to chap. x.

† Smith's Account of the Greek Church.

‡ First Book of Discipline, chap. xi. sect. 5. of Dunlop's edition.

first Sunday of March be appointed for one time to that service; the first Sunday of June for another; the first Sunday of September for the third; and the first Sunday of December for the fourth. We do not deny, but any several kirk, for reasonable causes, may change the time, and may minister oftener; but we study to repress superstition."

It is alleded, that "the primitive Christians were so eminent in religion, and so well prepared for the sacrament, that weekly communions might, in their time, be highly expedient; but that in our degenerate times, the case is altered, and our frequently partaking, considering our low attainments in grace, would be highly dangerous."

But, if our attainments are so low, *is there not a cause?* And what cause more probable, than our seldom attendance on that ordinance, which our Lord intended as the principal means of keeping up a lively sense of his dying love? Besides, as Calvin well observes,* the weaker our graces are, the greater is our need of frequent attendance on this ordinance, to strengthen and increase them. It ought also to be remembered, that even the primitive church had *spots in their feasts of charity*. St. Paul does not describe a Christian deportment in the church-

* Quo enim majore imbecillitate premimur, eo majus ac frequentius in eo exerceri debemus, quod tum ad confirmandam fidem nostram, tum etiam ad sanctitatem vitæ promovendam nobis usui esse et potest et debet.—Calvin de Cœna Domini, in Tract. Theol. Genev. 1617. fol. p. 5.

meetings of the Corinthians; but he no where advises them to communicate seldomer, but only enjoins them to do it in a more becoming manner.

“ The Jewish passover was celebrated only once a year; therefore, “ say some, “ the Lord’s Supper, which comes in its place, should be dispensed no oftener.” To this I reply, in the words of Mr. Charnock,* The passover indeed was annual. God fixed it to that time; but they had their daily sacrifices in the temple, which were types of Christ, and remembrancers to them of what was in time to be exhibited. We have no ordinance settled by Christ in commemoration of his death, but this only.

But the argument on which most stress is laid, is, that frequency will lessen the solemnity of the ordinance, and bring it into contempt. They argue thus: “ Affections are wound up to a higher pitch by the novelty and rarity of any thing, whereas, the commonness of a thing, however excellent it be, causes them to flag and cool. Scarcity advanceth, plenty abateth, the value of every thing. Those acts of worship, which are frequently, are also slightly performed; and since we cannot preserve both, we had better part with frequency than reverence. For we shall more honour our Lord, by partaking of his supper more reverently, though less frequently, than more frequently, with less reverence.—To this I reply,

* Charnock’s Works, vol. II. p. 756.

(I.) If frequent communicating is a duty, then danger of doing it with less advantage does not lessen our obligations to that duty. For whatever danger there is, God foresaw it, but yet did not see meet to guard against it, by enjoining us to communicate seldom. Shall we then pretend to be wiser than God? Have we found out better means for securing the honour of his institutions, than the means prescribed and practised by those who were under the infallible guidance of his Spirit? Have not attempts of this kind proved the source of the worst corruptions in Popery? Reason has no power to dispense with, or to derogate from the positive laws of God, on pretence of doing them a service. It is blasphemous presumption, though it may put on a cloak of humility, to judge that a sufficient reason to hinder thee from frequent communicating, which our Lord did not judge a sufficient reason to hinder him from commanding it. *If thou thus judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.* Is there, in the whole Bible, any express or tacit dispensation from frequent communicating, if we happen to imagine, that frequency will lessen our reverence? Disobedience to Christ is no part of the respect we owe to the Lord's table: *To obey is better than sacrifice.* Our Lord did not say, Honour the sacrament, or dread it, or admire it, or adore it, but partake of it. We are not therefore at liberty to substitute any other mark of respect to this ordinance, in room of partaking of it. How singularly unfortunate is

the command, *Do this in remembrance of me*, to be disobeyed from too much regard?

(2.) Conjecture is lighter than experience. Let us then see, whether the objection is verified or disproved by matter of fact. And here, on the one side, the history of the primitive church, for more than three hundred years, proves, that constancy and reverence happily conspired together to God's glory, and his church's benefit. But, on the other hand, when succeeding ages attempted, by lessening the frequency to increase the reverence, the consequence was, that by degrees, the very being of the ordinance was in danger of being lost, and a multitude of the most terrible mischiefs, and particularly a general decay of the power of godliness, overspread the *Christian world*.

(3.) Does not the Bible speak strongly on the solemnity of prayer, and the danger of rashness in speaking to God? And does it not tell us, that the word, when heard unworthily, is *a savour of death unto death*? Shall we then pray seldom, and hear the word seldom, that we may do it with the greater solemnity; and so not expose ourselves to the danger of praying unworthily, and hearing unworthily? Would not this way of reasoning be fallacious, if applied to prayer, and hearing the word? And is it not equally so, when applied to the sacrament? The godly will not quit their reverence to the Lord's table upon any the greatest frequency, as appears by their uniting frequency and reverence in other religious institutions. And the shew of reve-

rence the ungodly bring to it, is not worth the preserving; and much less is it worth the purchasing at so dear a rate, as the depriving saints of this ordinance.

(4.) Prayer, hearing the word, &c. are not less useful by reason of their frequency. Those who abound in them most, find most benefit in them. The same may be said of meditation, self-examination, and other religious exercises. Why, then, should it be supposed, that rareness in remembering Christ's death in the sacrament, should add to the effect of that ordinance?—Novelty, it must be owned, adds a force to every thing. Fulness brings cheapness on the very bread of life; yet who would infer from this, that it ought to be withheld till famine enhance the price? Or, that we ought to be seldom in preaching the great and heart-affecting truths of the gospel, lest by oftener insisting on them, they should affect less?

I shall conclude this head; with the words of Mr. Charnock: * “To be frequent in communicating, is agreeable to the nature of the ordinance, and necessary for the wants of a Christian. By too much fasting we often lose our stomachs. Too much deferring does more hurt than frequent communicating. The oftener we carefully and believingly communicate, the more disposed we shall be for it. If it be worthily received, it increaseth our reverence of God, and affection to him. And that is the best re-

* Charnock, ubi supra, and p. 747.

verence of God, which owneth his authority. Christ's death is to be every day fixed in our thoughts; and to help our weakness, there should be a frequent representation of it to our senses, in such a way as Christ has instituted, not as men may prescribe."

Calvin handles this subject with great accuracy, in his Institutions.* He tells us, it was then the practice, to receive the communion but once a-year, and that in a formal, superficial manner.† And after having urged frequent communicating from the design of the ordinance, and the practice of the apostolic and primitive church, he adds, "And doubtless the custom of communicating only *once a-year*, is the invention of the *devil*, whoever was the instrument of introducing it." And a little after: "Our practice ought to be the very reverse. *Every week at least*, the Lord's table should be spread before the assembly of Christians, and the promises upon which they should feed, there opened up to them. None, indeed, should be forced to it, but all should be exhorted and encouraged. ‡"

* Lib. iv. cap. 17. § 44.—46.

† Hæc abunde ostendunt, sacramentum non institutum ideo fuisse, ut semel quotannis acciperetur, idque perfunctorie, ut nunc communiter moris est. § 44.

‡ Et sane hæc consuetudo, quæ semel quotannis communicare jubet, certissimum est Diaboli inventum cujuscunque tandem ministerio inducta fuerit. *Et paulo post*: Longe aliter factum oportuit. Singulis ab minimis hebdomadibus proponenda erat Christianorum cætui mensa Domini, declarandæ promissiones, quæ nos in ea spiritualiter pascere. Nullus quidem necessitate cogendus, sed cohortandi omnes et stimulandi. § 46.

Mr. Baxter, in his *Christian Directory*, part II. p. 101. having proposed the question, "How often should the sacrament be now administered, that it neither grow into contempt nor strangeness?" He thus answers it.

Ordinarily, in well-disciplined churches, it should be still every Lord's day. For, (1.) We have no reason to prove, that the apostles' example and appointment in this case was proper to those times, any more than that praise and thanksgiving daily is proper to them: and we may as well deny the obligation of other institutions, or apostolical orders, as that. (2.) It is a part of the settled order for the Lord's day's worship; and omitting it *maimeth and altereth the worship of the day*, and occasioneth the omission of the thanksgiving and praise, and lively commemorations of Christ, which should be then most performed; and so Christians, by use, grow habituated to sadness, and a mourning, melancholy religion, and grow unacquainted with much of the worship and spirit of the gospel. (3.) Hereby many lamentable corruptions of this ordinance have grown up, even by an excess of reverence and fear, which seldom receiving doth increase, till they are come to worship bread as their God. (4.) By seldom communicating, men are seduced to think all proper *communion of churches* lieth in that *sacrament*, and to be more profanely bold in abusing many other parts of worship. There are better means, by teaching and discipline, to keep the *sacrament* from contempt, than the omitting

or displacing of it. (6.) Every Lord's day is no oftener than Christians need it. (7.) The frequency will teach them to live prepared, and not only to make much ado once a-month, or quarter, when the same work is neglected all the year besides; even as one that liveth in continual expectation of death, will live in continual preparation; when he that expecteth it but in some grievous sickness, will then be frightened into some seeming preparations, which are not the habit of his soul, but laid bye again when the disease is over.

But yet I must add, that in some undisciplined churches, and upon some occasions, it may be longer omitted, or seldomer used. No duty is a duty at all times. And therefore extraordinary cases may raise such expediments, as may hinder us a long time from this, and many other privileges. But the ordinary faultiness of our imperfect hearts, that are apt to grow customary and dull, is no good reason why it should be seldom, any more than why other special duties of worship and church-communion should be seldom. Read well the epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, and you will find that they were then as bad as the true Christians are now, and that even in the sacrament they were very culpable; and yet Paul seeketh not to cure them by their seldomer communicating.

Mr. Jonathan Edwards, of Northampton in New-England, in a book, entitled, *Some Thoughts concerning the present revival of religion*, says,

“It seems plain, by the scripture, that the primitive Christians were wont to celebrate this memorial of the sufferings of their dear Redeemer every Lord’s day; and so, I believe, it will be again in the church of Christ, in days that are approaching.”

FINIS.

CHAPTER I
THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES
The first European settlement in North America was established by Christopher Columbus in 1492. He discovered the continent of America while sailing westward from Europe in search of a shorter route to the Indies. Columbus's discovery led to the beginning of European exploration and settlement in the Americas.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUNDING OF THE UNITED STATES
The American Revolution was a war fought between the thirteen original colonies and Great Britain from 1775 to 1781. The colonies sought independence from British rule due to various grievances, including taxation without representation and the lack of self-governance. The war culminated in the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the final victory at Yorktown in 1781. The new nation was established as the United States of America.

