

THE
UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST,
AND THE DUTIES
THE MEMBERS OWE ONE TO ANOTHER.

BEING
THE SUBSTANCE OF SEVERAL SERMONS

PREACHED ON

1 COR. x. 17.

*For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all
partakers of that one bread.*

ONE great reason why communions do so little good, is, that communicants are so little concerned in one another for their spiritual welfare. And this hath its rise from their not discerning, and seriously laying to heart the spiritual relation there is among them, by them avouched and publicly testified by their partaking of one bread at the communion-table. People readily have some notion that it is a communion with Christ; but few consider that it is a communion of saints, and what duties flow from it as such. I would therefore lay this matter before you, in order to pursue the benefit of our late solemn occasion.

The scope of these words is to show, That those who partaked of idolatrous feasts were by that action declared one body with idolaters. This is proven by a parity of reason, viz. that those who partake of the Lord's table declare themselves one body with the saints. In the preceding verse he shews the nature of the sacrament of the supper; it is the *communion of the body and blood of Christ*; a sign, seal, and appointed means of our joint feeding on a slain Saviour, like so many eagles on the slain body. Here he shows the nature of the society of saints, for whom it is appointed, viz. that they are one body, viz. the body of Christ; and therefore being united to him, they have certainly communion in his body and

blood. *For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*

In the words are two things.

1. The spiritual conjunction and communion of saints among themselves asserted; *We, many, &c.* He speaks of the whole multitude of believers. They being many particular saints, some men, some women, teachers, taught, weak, strong, are yet so joined, and have such intimate union and communion one with another, that they are one bread, i. e. one body represented by the one sacramental bread. If ye ask whose is that body? or who is the head of it? It is Christ's 1 Cor. xii. 27. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Not his natural body, but his mystical body: and therefore the many are not such as meet at one communion-table in one congregation, but all the members of Christ's mystical body through the world, for Christ has but one body: and as many grains do make up but one sacramental bread, so they being many do make up but one body.

2. This spiritual conjunction and communion of saints among themselves, inferred from their all partaking of that one bread; *For we being many are one bread, &c.* By that one bread is meant, that bread which is exhibited in the sacrament, viz. both the invisible bread, which is Christ himself, and the visible bread which we take into our mouths, the latter the sign of the former. Believing communicants partake of both: they partake of that bread, which is the Lord; so are all united to, and hold communion with the head as members, and therefore are one body among themselves: they partake of the sacramental bread, which is an instituted sign of the other, and thereby profess their communion with Christ the head, and consequently their communion with the saints, as members of the same body with them. And in this last, hypocritical communicants join with them, by their partaking, declaring, and avouching themselves to be of the communion of saints of the mystical body of Christ, and binding themselves to the duty of that communion; although in reality they are not so, as not partaking of the invisible bread, which is Christ the Lord. The case is the same as to baptism. "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles." 1 Cor. xii. 13.

The point to be handled is this doctrine.

Doct. There is a communion of saints among themselves, as being conjoined into one mystical body of Christ, declared and avouched by partakers of the sacraments, especially that of the Lord's supper, every one for themselves.

There are two parts of this doctrine. One is, That there is such a

strait and intimate communion and conjunction among the saints, that they are really and truly one body mystically, however many they be. The other is, That one's partaking of the sacrament is a declaring and avouching himself to be of that communion. By a communion I mean a society having a common interest in things.

I. I shall enquire into the nature of the communion of saints as one body. And,

1. Who are the members of this communion—of this happy society the body of Christ? There are two sorts of members of it, some in shew only, some in reality. As to the former I offer two things.

(1.) The openly wicked and profane, amongst whom must be reckoned the grossly ignorant, and all such as have no form of godliness, are not so much as visible or apparent members of the communion of saints. They are excluded from the communion of the saints above, Gal. v. 19—21. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest—adultery, fornication, &c.—of which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." From the communion of saints below, Acts xxvi. 18. "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light—that they may receive inheritance among them that are sanctified"—and visibly belong to the devil's family, John viii. 44. What though they have been baptized, and are yet in the visible church, they have in effect renounced it, Rom. ii. 25. "But if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." For though they were baptized into this one body, 1 Cor. xii. 13. yet they will have no communion with that body, nor the head of it. Though they got on Christ's mark of baptism in their infancy, they have now got the devil's mark on above it. So Rom. ii. 25. therefore not to be admitted to the Lord's table, Matth. vii. 6. "Give not that which is holy unto dogs."

(2.) Masked hypocrites are seeming visible members of this communion, but not real members of it. They are brethren of the saints, but only half brothers, Can. i. 6. false brethren, Gal. ii. 4. They are among them, and communicate among them, but they are not of them, 1 John ii. 19. They want the wedding-garment; and though the servants cannot but admit them as visible saints, the Master will throw them out, as none of that communion in his sight, Matth. xxii. 12.

Hypocrites belong to the mystical body, as a branch bound up, but not knitting with the stock belongs to the tree, or as a tree-leg belongs to the body; but not otherwise. See the case of these members in these three things.

1. They are useful for the mystical body of Christ with their gifts as the tree-leg with its strength to the natural body. So was Judas and Damas, &c. Graceless well-gifted ministers and professors, they may have a mouth to speak for truth, ay and hands to act for it too, and the profit redound to the saints, not themselves, who have no heart to embrace it in reality; and to adorn the communion as long as they keep green, as such branches do the tree, by which God is honoured before the world, Psal, lxxxi. 15.

They are under the particular care of the body, as the tree-leg—and the branch under the gardener's inspection. Hence they get their gifts increased for the good of the body, are preserved from many snares they would otherwise fall into if they had nothing at all to do with the communion of saints, as may appear from the way they go when they turn apostates. They fare the better they are in good company. But,

3. They are laid aside at length, as the branch, John xv. 2. and the tree-leg, if not before, yet at the time when the body goes to rest, Psal. cxxv. 5. Though the living leg be broken, so crazed that for the time it can be of no discernible use for the head, nor for the other members of the body, it is not cast by, nor separate from the body, but its weakness borne with, and it healed at length. But the tree-leg goes for altogether.

As to the latter, there are three sorts of these real members.

1. Real members in God's design, but not yet formed. These are all the elect, who are yet to be born, or yet to be born again, and we cannot have a full view of the body without eying them, Eph. i. 10. "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ.—They shall all of them be formed at length, all conjoined unto the body, and they all belong to the perfection of the body, for carrying on of which the ministry is appointed, Eph. iv. 11—13. For the body of Christ is all the elect knit to him as the head, Eph. v. 23. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church."—

2. Real members already perfected, at least as to their souls. These are the saints triumphant, who are with us members, fellow-members of the body of Christ, though glorified ones. Therefore, Heb. xii. 22, 23. "But you are come—to the general assembly and church of the first-born—and to the spirits of just men made perfect." Even they, as high as they are, are of this communion of saints, of the same family of heaven with us militant on earth, though they are in the upper rooms, and we in the lower, Eph. iii. 15.

3. Real members formed, but not perfected yet. These are the

saints on earth, even all of them upon the face of the earth, whatever particular visible church they belong to: at whatever distance they are one from another, though they never saw, nor never will see one another's face till they come to meet in glory, they are all one body, all members of that one body of Christ, 1 Cor. xii. 12. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members, being many are one body, so also in Christ."

These last are they whom our text speaks of, as one body partaking of the sacramental bread, viz. the body of Christ, as to that part of it which is on earth; and of this we speak. So there is a communion of saints on earth, and all the saints are members of it: wherever they dwell, whatever lesser points of doctrine, worship, &c. they differ in, they have communion with one another, as being all conjoined into one body.

II. Wherein this communion of saints consists; or how they are one body.

1. they have all one head, viz. the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of all the saints, Eph. i. 22. 23.—"And gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body."—They are all united to him by his Spirit, 1 Cor. vi. 17.—"He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." And from him as their head, they derive vital influences, Col. ii. 19. "From which all the body, by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." There may be great difference betwixt members, in respect of growth, liveliness, and usefulness; but the meanest have communion with the highest in one head, which is common to them all. So they are all under the direction, government and influence of Jesus Christ, as their common head.

2. They are all animated, enlivened and actuated by one Spirit, viz. the Holy Spirit of Christ. This Spirit dwells in Christ as the head, and in all the saints as his members, Rom. viii. 9. and unites them to the head, and among themselves too, so that they are one body, 1 Cor. xii. 13. A tree-leg, though bound close to the body, is no member of it, because it is not animated by the soul and life of that body; but if there were a body of a man, whose head did reach the clouds, any toe of that man's foot, though defiled by the ground it toucheth, is as really a member of that body as the shoulders are, having communion with them in the same soul or spirit, which actuates the one as well as the other.

Great is the difference of the saint's souls or spirits, as men and women; some are bold, some fearful. It is as easy for some to draw the sword in Christ's quarrel, as for others to speak a word for him. Some are of clear, cheerful, easy, active spirits; some un-

der a spirit of heaviness and indisposition for action; but as saints they have all one Spirit: whoso could discern, how unanimously they vote Christ to be king of the heart, of the church, of the world, against the torrent of solicitations from the devil, world, and flesh; how, as with one eye, they look up to God in Christ as their only happiness, and away from the world which the rest of mankind fix their eye on; how with one heart and one soul they all groan under the remains of sin, and for perfection in holiness, though some louder than others; he behoved to say, these have all one Spirit of faith, holiness, and contempt of the world, Ezek. xxxvi. 27. Numb. xiv. 24.

3. One grace of faith wrought by the self-same Spirit in them all, Col. ii. 12. terminates in and knits them to one head, the Lord Jesus, Eph. iii. 17. As all the lines drawn from the circumference meet in the centre, and there have communion; so the faith of all God's elect meet in Jesus Christ, and thus they have communion among themselves, Tit. i. 1.—4. Thus are they one body, as being all knit to the head, by one and the same spiritual band for kind. The strong faith gripes here, the weak faith reacheth to him; though the weak hand of faith is not so steady, nor gripes so hard as the other, yet both knit, Cant. iv. 9. and v. 1.

4. They have all one heart and one mind in respect of fundamentals, Eph. iv. 5. One faith, viz. of doctrine, the substance of which was and ever will be the same, Heb. xiii. 8. Whatever be their different sentiments as to inferior truths, they all agree in the main, Acts iv. 12. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Thus, according to the promise, Jer. xxxii. 39. they have "one heart and one way;" for they are all partakers of that one unction which teacheth all things necessary to salvation, 1 John ii. 20. "But ye have an unction from the holy One, and ye know all things." For they are all taught of God: and that doctrine which contradicts the experience of the saints, and relishes not with discerning souls exercised to godliness, is justly to be suspected, Matth. xi. 19.—"Wisdom is justified of her children."

5. They are united to one another in love, Col. iii. 14. Eph. iv. 16. This is a powerful cement. Love cements hearts and souls, and so knits fast. They love one another, though they never saw other's faces, if they do but know there are such persons in the world. They love them for the common image of God which they bear; and in all the company of saints this love will break over all the differences in lesser matters among them; so that it is made a mark of a member of that communion, 1 John iii. 14. "We know

that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Lastly, They have a communion in one another's gifts and graces, as the case stands in the natural body, Eph. iv. 16. There is a diversity of gifts and offices in the common body of saints; some are teachers, some taught; rulers, ruled. Some excel in one gift or grace, some in another: some perhaps cannot be said to excel their fellow-saints in any thing: but all these are for the common advantage of the body, 1 Cor. xii. 27. and the glory of the head. And, wherever they are, they belong to the whole body, as the light that is in the eye, the strength in the arms, the swiftness in the legs, belong to, and are for the good of the whole body. 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's." And every the meanest member and gift has its own use and necessity. See 1 Cor. xii. 13. and downwards.

USE. Here is a fellowship ye may all partake of, and I invite you all to the communion of saints, 1 John i. 3. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may also have fellowship with us." Many are ruined with their love of that they call good-fellowship. What is the fellowship deserves that name? Not the communion of sinners ruining one another under the influence of Satan and their lusts; not the fellowship of drunkards and revellers, whose common profit and pleasure goes away *like the crackling of thorns*—only it leaves a stink behind; not the fellowship of the men of the world, in advancing some temporal gain; but the communion of saints, the pleasantest, richest, best fellowship in all the world. O! leave the communion of sinners for this; come out from among them, and be ye separate, joining yourselves to this communion.

III. The properties of this communion.

1. It is a most honourable communion, for it is a communion with the holy Trinity, 1 John i. 3. "And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And,

(1.) The Father is the Head and Father of the communion, Eph. iv. 6. 1 Cor. xi. 3. He is Father Creator of all men, Acts xvii. 29. But of the communion of saints he is Father by a special, gracious, saving relation. So that they are all his children, John i. 12. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. And they have communion with him, and union through the Lord Jesus Christ, since he and the Father are one.

(2.) The centre of this communion is the Son, the blessed Mediator. In him all meet, 1 Cor. xi. 3. The saints meet in Christ as their head, and in him the Father meets with them, 2 Cor. v. 19.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Christ presents all believers through the world unto his Father, saying, "Behold, I, and the children which God hath given me," Heb. ii. 13. So, being the Mediator's, they become his, John xx. 17. In this respect Christ is called the way to the Father, John xiv. 6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

(3.) The Holy Spirit is the internal original bond of this communion, knitting all the members to Christ, and among themselves, Eph. iv. 4. He brings them together into Christ, and to his Father, fixes and holds them there by his infinite power, that they can never be broken off again. So believers, members of this communion, have communion with the Father and the Son, 1 John i. 3. and the Holy Ghost, 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

2. It is a most rich communion. There are societies and companies this day joining stocks together, to advance worldly wealth; but the richest of them have nothing but trifles in comparison with the company or communion of saints. The communion of saints is the company trading to heaven, and their wealth is past reckoning. For a view of it, consider only these two things.

(3.) They have communion with Christ, a common interest with him who is Heir of all things, so that they may set their name under his, on all that is his. They have communion with him in his perfect righteousness, Is. xlv. 24. Hence they are all fair, Cant. iv. 7. clear as the sun, Cant. vi. 10. In his active obedience, so that they have obeyed in Christ, as they sinned in Adam, Rom. viii. 3, 4. In his sufferings and death, Gal. ii. 20. In his resurrection and ascension, Eph. ii. 6. and glory. Compare Heb. vi. 20. They have a common interest in all his purchase, and, as poor as some of them sit, they want nothing, but are complete, Col. ii. 10. "And ye are complete in him."

They have a real participation of Christ himself, Heb. iii. 14. Of his death and his resurrection, Rom. vi. 4, 5. Of his Spirit, Phil. ii. 1. Of the divine nature, 2 Pet. i. 4. Of his offices; they are prophets, Psal. cv. 15; priests and kings, Rev. i. 6. And of his fulness, John i. 16.

(2.) They have communion with God; for so runs the covenant, "I will be your God." And Psal. cxliv. 15. God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is theirs. All his attributes are theirs; the power of God to protect them, the wisdom of God to guide them, &c. and with him all things, since all is his, and he is theirs, 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, 23.

Behold the riches of this company. And, (1.) None of the saints

bring any thing with them to put into the stock : but they are admitted freely. (2.) Not only is a part for every one, but each one has all ; and so it may be, since the stock is infinite.

3. It is a most extensive communion. And it extends,

(1.) Over the earth ; and so is called the Catholic or universal church, 1 Cor. i. 2. Though vast tracks of land and huge seas interpose betwixt them ; though they have different languages, so that some of them cannot understand what others say, and their customs are very different ; yet none of all these prevent their being members of one and the same body.

(2.) To the heavens. The saints above belong to the communion of saints, Heb. xii. 23. Ay, and the holy angels too, in the same sense, ver. 22 ; for the head of the saints is the head of angels too, Col. ii. 10.

Lastly, It is a holy communion. It is a fellowship of saints, Eph. ii. 19. "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and household of God." The head, centre, and bond, and members of this communion, are all holy. They are a society set apart for God, drawn out of the world lying in wickedness, walking in the way of holiness with displayed banners towards the holy land.

SECONDLY, That one's partaking of the sacrament is a declaring and avouching himself to be of that communion. By partaking of baptism we have all done it once ; and by the Lord's supper it is done as oft as we communicate in it. By the former in our infancy, it is done with our virtual consent ; by the latter with our express consent. This point will be clear, if we consider the relation the sacrament has to the communion of saints.

1. It is a sign and badge of the communion of saints. *We are one bread*, says the text. The one bread signifying, that we are one body ; and by receiving the sign, and wearing the badge of the society, we declare two things, according to the nature of a distinguishing sign.

(1.) That we are no more of the communion of the world lying in wickedness, which is the opposite society, 1 Cor. x. 21. "Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils." That we have left our Father's house and people, and are no more to share with them in their way and manner of life. It is the putting on the sign of Zion's King, that we may be distinguished from those that belong to the enemy.

(2.) That we are henceforth of the communion of saints, and not neutrals, Rev. xiv. 1. That we have joined ourselves to that blessed society of saints, the head of which is Jesus Christ, to take part

with them for better and worse. We have said to them, as Ruth to Naomi, Ruth i. 16. "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

2. It is a seal of the communion of saints, and seals it effectually to all those that do sincerely take hold of the covenant, Rom. iv. 11. The righteousness of faith is the possession of the society of saints, and the sacrament sealing that to a man, seals his being of that communion. A believer may be sore pressed with that question, *How shall I put thee among the children?* But the sacrament, to put it out of doubt, seals and confirms his being put among them. Their being one body, is sealed by their partaking of one bread. So 1 Cor. xii. 13.

3. The sacraments are the external bonds of this communion, whereby they are visibly embodied into one select society, 1 Cor. xii. 13. And hence it is that the uncircumcised under the Old Testament were to be cut off from their people. The church of God makes a visible society in the world: and it is not the hearing of the word that is the bond of it, for that is left common to any who will; but the sacraments, which are not to be given but to visible believers.

4. It is an engagement to the duties of this communion of saints. "I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism," Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Whosoever is embodied into a regular society, by his entering into it, is obliged to walk by the rules of it. And so the sacrament is an engagement or oath to walk by the rules of holiness, which are the rules of the communion of saints.

Now, whosoever does receive the public sign, seal, bond, and engagements of a society, does thereby publicly declare and avouch himself to be of that society: but, by partaking of the sacrament, the partakers do take on the public sign—of the communion of saints: therefore, &c.

USE. I draw some practical inferences from this doctrine.

I. There is a very near and special particular relation amongst the partakers of the sacraments, visibly constitute by their joint partaking of them. They do thereby declare themselves to be of one body, the head whereof is Jesus Christ: even baptism alone constitutes this special relation, 1 Cor. xii. 13; for by that holy

sign, the baptized are distinguished from those without the visible church, and have all given up their names to Christ. Much more does the receiving of the Lord's supper also, as saith the text.

As for the invisible real members of the communion of saints, *i. e.* the real members of the invisible church, God alone certainly knows them in particular. But the visible members of it are saints by profession, not visibly contradicted by their habitual practice, Rom. i. 7. 1 Thess. v. 5. "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." Amongst these there is a special relation, as one visible body of Christ; those who are only baptized, though they may be complete members of the invisible body, being only incomplete members of the visible; and such as partake of the sacrament of the supper, complete ones, as admitted unto all external privileges of the communion of saints, even the highest of them, which is that of the Lord's table. And therefore there is a more full relation amongst communicants than others. Hence I would say,

1. Ye who are baptized, yet openly wicked and profane, or grossly ignorant of the fundamentals of religion, being come to years, are apostates in effect, having by your way visibly cut off yourselves from the communion of saints. For in your infancy ye were baptized into that body; but now by your unholy lives, ye openly declare yourselves to be none of it, and have taken on the devil's mark, and declare yourselves to be of the world lying in wickedness, Rom. ii. 25. To you I say,

1st, Have ye not thus openly rejected communion with God, that ye may maintain communion with the world? If you will have nothing ado with the family of heaven, do ye not renounce the Father of it for your Father? If you will be none of Christ's mystical body, do ye not refuse him for a head? Yea, sure, 1 John i. 3.

2dly, Had it not been better for you, if ye repent not, to have lived and died among Pagans, where the name of Christ was never heard, than to have been baptized into one body with the saints, and yet cast off all by your openly profane life? 2 Pet. ii. 21. "For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

2. Ye who are saints by profession, yet only baptized, not partakers of the Lord's table, why do ye continue so? Who is there that values a communion or society, and does not endeavour to partake of all the privileges thereof, that may be of use to them? And, if ye have any value for the communion of saints, why do ye not lay out yourselves to be one bread with them? Sist your con-

sciences before the Lord, and it will not be excused from contempt of communion with Christ; with his mystical body, and the means thereof.

3. Ye who are saints by profession, and both baptized and partakers of the Lord's table, your external privilege is great; ye stand visibly related to the communion of saints, as visible members thereof. What a sad miss will it be, if you fail of real membership, and all your interest in it be but shew and pretence, as it will be, if ye be not real saints? It will be a poor plea at the great day, Luke xiii. 26.—“We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.”

1st, The society ye are visible apparent members of, is the mystical body of Christ, enriched with the highest special privileges of communion with the holy Trinity, to their eternal happiness. It will be a sad matter for you to cheat yourselves with a shew and semblance only of partaking with them; with the empty name, while ye have nothing of the thing, Gal. vi. 3. “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”

2dly, Ye are not far from the kingdom of God. Will ye lose it for not going forward the other step, the main step? Ye have gone through the several gates of the outer court of religion, the door of the inner court stands open to you. Will you not enter in there where the great glory of the house lies? 2 Tim. iii. 7. The form of godliness will carry you all the length ye have gone in these externals; but the power of it is necessary to evidence you a real member of that body.

3dly, Ye will lose your good company ere long, if ye get not a surer holding than mere visible membership; if ye be not bound up with them by the Spirit of holiness dwelling in you, as in them, the external bands of sacraments will not do, John xv. 2. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away.” (1.) Ye may fall, 2 Tim. ii. 18, 19. out from among them, while you live, by apostacy, losing your fair leaves of a profession, as well as fruit, 1 John ii. 19. “They went out from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us.” (2.) Ye will certainly be separated from among them at death, Psal. cxxv. 5. and at judgment, Matth. xxv. 32.

4. Ye who are real saints, baptized with the Holy Ghost, and partakers of the invisible bread, as well as of the visible bread, in the Lord's supper, and the outward baptism, happy are ye in the thorough relation ye have with the communion of the saints. Ye are members of it to all intents and purposes, true and real members of the mystical body of Christ. Who can express the happiness of this privilege! I name only these.

1st, Ye have passed the gulf as to condemnation, Rom. viii. 1. Ye are set beyond the reach of the condemning law: the curse is removed, and ye have got your Father's blessing, and ye shall be blessed for time and eternity.

2dly, Ye are most honourably related, of the blood-royal of Heaven, since ye are of the mystical body of Christ. Christ's Father is your Father, John xx. 17. "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Himself is your head, Eph. i. 22, 23. His Spirit is the bond of your mystical union with him, Eph. iv. 4. The church is your mother, and ye are her true and genuine children, Gal. vi. 26. The glorified saints are your grown brethren, come to their full stature, and ye are the little ones of the same family, Eph. iii. 15. Ay, and the angels too are so, Rev. xix. 10. All these fall to you by that membership.

3dly, Ye are infinitely enriched; for on that society, whereof ye are members, all things are settled by the God of all, 1 Cor. iii. 21. "All things are yours." The purchase of the head belongs to the members, and they have a title to all, and possess all in their head, Col. ii. 10. So ye are heirs of the world to come, heirs of glory, Rom. viii. 17. The covenant is your charter, the sacraments the seals of it.

4thly, Ye are perfectly secured, ye shall never perish, come what will come, John iii. 16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Christ's natural body saw no corruption, even in a grave, and Christ's mystical body cannot perish, nor any member of it, John xiv. 19. "Because I live, ye shall live also." Ye are secured against,

(1.) Falling off. The tree-leg may fall off from the body, but the live-leg cannot: so hypocrites may fall away totally and finally; but the believer cannot, because a living member of Christ's body, John x. 28. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." A saint may fall down in a mire, he may fall back, but never fall off, nor fall away.

(2.) Cutting off. It is true, a child of God, as to his spiritual state, may be sick and sore; he may be bruised, wounded, and broken at such a rate, that he is of little or no use for the head, or for the body, but paining and bringing grief to both; and so think he is cut off, Psal. lxxxviii. 16. "Thy fierce wrath goeth over me, thy terrors have cut me off." But no man will ever yield to the cutting off a member of his body, while it is in his power to cure it: and therefore, forasmuch as no case of a saint is beyond the reach of the

great Physician's skill, be their case what it will, they shall be cured at length, but never cut off.

(3.) Dying off. Spiritual death can never overtake them again; the infinite Spirit, the bond of the union, will always preserve the communication betwixt the head and members, John xiv. 19. And temporal death cannot dissolve the union; though it separate betwixt soul and body, each of them still remains united to Christ, 1 Thess. iv. 14. All these things are sealed by the sacrament.

II. The sacramental declaration is a matter of such weight, as deserves the deepest impression on one's spirit, and the tenderest regard in one's life, for all time thereafter. What that is ye have already heard, *viz.* a solemn declaration made by one's partaking, that he is of the communion of saints, joined with them into one mystical body of Christ. This is the declaration ye made by your act of partaking; and this is what, I say, deserves the deepest impression, &c. This will be clear, if ye consider,

I. The subject-matter of that declaration, which is most important. It concerns the mystical body of Christ, and their joining themselves unto it. Is it possible that one can have a weightier matter than that in hand? Does not eternity depend upon it? heaven or hell hang upon it to thy soul? Can any rational man think that to be a matter for one to play with, not to be in deepest earnest about it?

2. The parties to whom it is made, God and all the saints. The Lord has erected the saints into a society under Christ the alone head; they have their patent in heaven, and God has endowed them with the richest privileges. He sends out the gospel-proclamation, inviting all to join them, and offering them admission into it freely, withal making the partaking of the sacraments to be their declaration of entering into it, 1 Cor. xii. 13. So it is evident the partaker, by his action, says unto God, Is. xlv. 5. "I am the Lord's;" and to all the saints, Zech. viii. 23. "We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you." If ye think light of making that declaration to them, do but consider the day when the Lord, and all his saints shall judge the world, and call you to an account of the declaration made to themselves.

3. The nature of that declaration. It is not indeed verbal, but real; not by words, but by an action, but that instituted by Christ, and so interpreted by him, as importing what it was designed to signify. As it is sacramental, it is of the nature of an oath, wherein God is invoked as judge and witness of the sincerity of your declaration. So that ye have in effect sworn yourselves of the communion of saints: and that is weighty.

4. The solemnity of it. It was not a business huddled up in secret, but done openly. The sacraments are public actions of their own nature: and therefore our church has wrested against private baptism and private communion. Ye were, I suppose, baptized in presence of the church, a lesser or greater number present. Ye did communicate in the Lord's supper in the face of the sun, and before many witnesses, in a most solemn manner. It was a very solemn covenanting betwixt God and Abram, Gen. xv. 9,—18. And your covenant-declaration was over the broken body and shed blood of Christ represented in the sacrament. What greater solemnity could there be?

Lastly, The amount of it. If ye do not sincerely cleave to it, but in your practice cast it behind your back, it will amount to a lie made to God himself, and to all his saints, in a matter of the utmost weight with the greatest solemnity, yea, to the guilt of perjury in effect. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for a lie made in the matter of the price of their land: what will be the punishment of a lie made with such solemnity to God, over the broken body of his Son? Matth. xxiv. 46. "He shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." Compared with Jer. xxxiv. 18,—20. "I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant,—which they have made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof.—I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life." Wherefore,

1. Reflect on, and seriously consider what ye have avouched solemnly in partaking of the sacraments. Think on the action deeply, and the import of it, and impress it on your spirits. Look back all of you to your baptism.

Consider that in your baptism ye were given up to Christ, to lay hold on him by faith, Acts xix. 4. That therein ye declared and avouched your putting on Christ, Gal. iii. 27. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Your dying to sin, and living to righteousness, Rom. vi. 3, 4. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized unto his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead—even so we also should walk in newness of life." Your being of the mystical body of Christ, 1 Cor. xii. 13. "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body." If people would seriously consider the import of their baptism, they who think themselves loose by their not being communicants, would see they are bound already; and that they do but cheat themselves in thinking, by

the neglect of the supper, to keep off these bands, which they are already firmly under; the which if they regard not, they will hear it afterwards to their cost.

Look back, communicants, to your partaking. Consider what ye have done. Ye have declared yourselves well pleased with the device of salvation through a crucified Christ, your taking of him to be your head and ruler, your joining yourselves to him by faith as lively members of his mystical body; that you are no more henceforth to be of the communion of the world lying in wickedness, but for the Lord only, wholly, and for ever; to take your part with the saints in the world, whatever your lot be, Psal. xlv. 10. Ye have said all this, and in effect sworn it, over the broken body of Christ, before angels and men.

Ye would do well to take some time alone to reflect on this, and to revive the impressions. We find the saints making such reflections, and putting themselves in mind of what they have done in such a case, Psal. xvi. 2. "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord." Psal. cxix. 57, 106. "I have sworn, and I will perform it—that I will keep thy righteous judgments."

2. Never forget it, Jer. i. 5. People use not to forget their marriage-day, and the transactions of it. But, alas! the declared marriage-consent to Christ is often forgotten, notwithstanding the solemnity at it, Jer. ii. 32. "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number." They are men of prostituted consciences, who forget their oaths, and have wrought themselves clean of the impressions of them. But, alas! there are many, who sometimes made this solemn declaration, who seem to have quite forgot it, and the impressions are razed. But have ye forgot it? God hath sworn he will never forget it, Amos viii. 7. "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." See Jer. ii. 2.

3. Remember it afresh on particular occasions, and awe your spirits with it, when temptations offer to come to you against it. Remember it as Jephthah did his vow, Judges xi. 35. "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

(1.) When your old lusts come back and fawn on you. No doubt they will come, but deny them, 1 Pet. i. 14 "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts, in your ignorance." Remember ye have solemnly declared against them of your own accord, and to go back to them must be to go over the belly of God's bands on you.

(2.) When your old companions in sin would draw you aside with

them, then say, as Joseph, Gen. xxxix. 9. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Remember ye are not of their communion, but have solemnly renounced it, and have embodied with the saints. Is it not a very good reason not to serve the devil with men, because ye are not of the communion of his servants and society?

4. Do not retract it. It is too solemn and weighty a business to eat in again, Prov. xx. 25. "It is a snare to the man to devour that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry." Eccles. v. 5. "Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay." Some poor wretches expressly retract and renounce their sacramental vows, giving themselves to Satan. Many practically retract their sacramental declaration, particularly, (1.) By slighting the renewing of it, when the Lord puts an occasion of it in their hands. Thus many baptized persons never set themselves to partake of the Lord's table: some that have partaken of it sometime, leave it off again. Does not this plainly say, that, if they had that to do which is done in that matter, it should not be done for them now? and is not that retracting practically? Luke ix. 62. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Lot's wife's rueful looking back was dear to her. (2.) By living a loose and licentious life, as if one had never come under bonds to be the Lord's, Tit. i. 16. The language of the conversation of many is, "Let us break their bands," &c. O that such would consider, Heb. x. 38. "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Lastly, Beware of every thing unsuitable to it. Ye have declared yourselves of the communion of saints, do nothing unsuitable to that communion, and your own solemn declaration. Let not the way of God be evil-spoken of through your unsuitable walk, Rom. ii. 24. Always remember your character as professed members of the communion of saints, and walk accordingly.

III. Separation from the men of the world lying in wickedness, and fixed standing off from the communion of sinners, is the necessary duty of all saints by profession, and particularly of communicants. Numb. xxiii. 9. "The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." 2 Cor. vi. 14—17. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?—Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

First, Whereto this holy separation extends itself.

1. *Negatively*, It doth not extend,

(1.) To the casting off the duties of natural affections, and relations to them, 1 Cor. vii. 12, 13. "If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away," &c. Religion doth not weaken, but purify and strengthen natural affection, Rom. ix. 4. And the nearer that sinners stand related unto saints, they will have, and ought to have the greater concern for them, both for their spiritual and temporal good.

(2.) Not to the casting off civil converse with the men of the world, according as one has the call of providence thereto. 1 Cor. vii. 9, 10. "I wrote unto you—not to company with fornicators. Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world." The saints are not shut up in a corner of the world by themselves, and therefore must needs have civil society with the men of this world. Neither doth religion divest Christians of humanity, or give them a liberty to be rude and indiscreet to others; but obliges them to "live peaceably with all men,"—Rom. xii. 18. to "honour them," 1 Pet. ii. 17. to be "courteous," Chap. iii. 8, 9.

(3.) Nor to the hindering of us to do them all the good we can. Nay, religion obligeth us to seek their good, 1 Tim. ii. 1. "I exhort therefore, that—supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men:" and to do good to their souls and bodies, as we have opportunity, Gal. vi. 10. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men."

(4.) Nor to the refusing to serve God, and worship him with them according to his own institution. This our Saviour himself did, Luke iv. 16. "And he came to Nazareth—and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and stood up for to read." Thus did the apostles also with the Jews. Thus, in all congregations of saints in the world, there are readily found some who have no appearance of saint-ship, whom yet they do not so shun as to refuse to worship God with them in his own way.

2. *Positively*, It extends to, and consists in,

(1.) Shunning all unnecessary society and familiarity with them, Psal. xxiv. 4, 5. "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil-doers: and will not sit with the wicked." They are not to be chosen for our companions of converse, or friendship, far less for companions of life, where we can have a choice; but we are to be companions of those that fear the Lord. The company of sinners has been fatal to

many, Prov. xiii. 20. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Men of the same employment, or that are going to one place, draw together: and should not Christians draw to Christians? It is sad to make Christian congregations and families, like Noah's ark, a receptacle for clean and unclean, 1 Cor. xvi. 33. "Be not deceived: Evil communications corrupt good manners."

(2.) Non-conformity to the world, Rom. xii. 2. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."—Ye must have another manner of life and conversation than they, if ye be of the communion of saints. It is a disgrace to religion, for the men of the world to have it to say of a saint by profession, "Behold, the man is as one of us." Make them not your rule, your example, nor do you think to stamp an offensive way into a lawful one, by the authority of the multitude. For the multitude is in the way to destruction, Matth. vii. 13.—"Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:" and their principles are lax, and their practice licentious: they look on tenderness as niceness and preciseness, and wonder that you cannot take the same liberty they do, 1 Pet. iv. 4. "Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you." But look you to God's word for your way, and see yourselves obliged to separate from them in your manner of life. See the general rule, Philip. iv. 8. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

(3.) Refusing communion with them in sin, Prov. i. 10. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Every man is for his own master's interest, and therefore they are for bringing you over into the service of the devil their master, as you will be for bringing them to Christ, if you be real Christians. Beware of fellowship with them in sin, Eph. v. 11. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Do not homologate their sinful courses by approving or consenting any manner of way thereto, far less by actual joining with them in their sin, Psal. i. 18. It is an affront to Heaven, but a pleasure to hell, to see Christ's sheep and the devil's goats yoked together in one sinful course. Nay, communicant, thou shouldst be like the ermine, that will by no means pass over the mud, that would stain its precious fur.

(4.) Refusing communion with them in the worship of God, in a false way, or even in a right way upon sinful terms. The saints must separate from all false worship, that is, worship which is not instituted by God himself wholly, but is mixed with human inventions and ordinances, Rev. xviii. 4. Nay, where the worship is pure, but some sinful thing is imposed upon you as a term of communion with the worshippers, you must refuse communion with them in worship on these terms, Rom. iii. 8. In these cases separation is not only lawful, but a necessary duty. And could I perceive either of these this day, in our case, in the communion of this church, I should not only think it my duty to separate, but also to press you to it. But though our mother has gone far back, she has not gone that length yet.

Secondly, Reasons of this separation. Because,

1. The communion of saints and the communion of sinners are opposite societies, 1 John v. 19. "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." So that joining to the one particularly infers separation from the other. You may as well imagine to bring east and west together, to make fire and water agree, as to make God's family and the devil's to agree; the seed of the woman and serpent. Wherefore, having joined to the communion of saints, ye must needs separate from the communion of sinners, Matth. vi. 24. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

2. The communion of saints is gathered out of the world lying in wickedness; so that separation from the world is wrapt up in the very constitution of the society of saints, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."—The mystical body of Christ is made up of those that were sometimes limbs of the devil: the branches ingrafted into the true vine were all broken off from our natural stock, the old Adam, that degenerate, dead, and killing stock: Christ's family of mankind is wholly made up of run-aways from the devil's family, Psal. xlv. 10. So that if ye be saints at all, ye are separatists.

3. The design of erecting the communion of saints is, that they may be a separate society by themselves, under Christ their head, to his honour, Numb. xxiii. 9. Eph. v. 25.—27. They are a peculiar people, 1 Pet. ii. 9. How will they answer the design of their erection, and the honour of their head, if they be not thus a separate people? Our Lord Christ has appointed badges of this communion, viz. the sacraments, to be external signs of distinction,

betwixt his and the world : and can it be thought but they will distinguish themselves by their practice ?

4. The profession of saintship is the profession of this separation, 1 Cor. xii. 13. Let baptized persons and communicants be ashamed to say they do not pretend to be saints. If ye pretend not to be saints, renounce your pretensions to heaven, for none other come there, Heb. xii. 14. "Follow peace with men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." If ye pretend not to be saints, ye must own yourselves apostates, that have renounced and cast off the communion of saints. And, communicants, if ye pretend not to be saints, how durst ye adventure to sit down at the Lord's table ? Well, in so far as ye were baptized and communicated, ye professed yourselves members of Christ's body, saints, and so separate from the world : therefore ye must live separate from them.

Wherefore, I say unto all saints by profession, and particularly communicants—"Save yourselves from this untoward generation," Acts ii. 14. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. Shun all unnecessary society with those of the world lying in wickedness, conform not to their ways, have no communion with them in sin, nor in the service of God on sinful terms. Remember ye have solemnly declared yourselves of another communion than with them.

Motive 1. Consider the authority of God that binds this upon you. Eph. v. 7, 8, 11. "Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord : walks as children of light.—And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." The men and women of the world are separated from God, Eph. ii. 12. They are walking contrary to him : and therefore he will have you to separate from them, and be as a *people dwelling alone*, in the midst of the world's throng, because they are not of your communion.

2. The proof of the sincerity of your pretension to saintship depends very much on it. Psal. xvi. 2. 3. "My goodness extendeth not to thee ; but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." See also, Psal. xxvi. 4, 5. and xv. 4. It is evident men will choose such company as is most agreeable, in their opinion, to their own temper and disposition. And so one may very well guess at the disposition of a person by the company he chooses and delights in. And if thou art inclined to be a companion of the graceless, rather than of the gracious, it is a shrewd sign of a graceless heart.

3. The honour of God lies at stake here, Rom. ii. 24. If thou dost wear Christ's badge, and will not separate from the communion of sinners, but go with them in their way, religion will be wounded

through thy sides, and exposed to the mockery of profane men. And there are particularly three communions of sinners I would warn you against, as ye would not stab religion to the heart.

(1.) The communion of drunkards. O how unlike is that to the communion of saints at the Lord's table! For the Lord's sake communicants, when ye have the temptation, remember that word, 1 Cor. x. 21, 22. "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils. Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?"

(2.) The communion of harlots. That is a communion of sinners, in an eminent manner, most inconsistent with the communion of saints, from which the apostle argues against it, 1 Cor. vi. 15—17. "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What, know ye not that he who is joined to an harlot is one body?—But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."

(3.) The communion of unjust men, in sinful dishonest ways of getting gain. Solomon speaks of this, Prov. i. 14, 15. It is dear bought that is got at the rate of God's displeasure.

Lastly, If ye separate not from them, ye will perish with them, Rev. xviii. 4. If ye partake of their sins, ye must partake of their plagues.

IV. There are certain duties of the communion of saints lying on all the members of it, by virtue of their membership: the which duties all saints by profession, and especially communicants, are solemnly engaged unto by their partaking of the sacraments.

To clear the first part of this inference, consider,

1. Every relation wherein one stands brings along with it a train of duties with respect to one's relatives. Relations are the joints of society, whereby persons are joined together for mutual usefulness; and their union is the ground of this debt they owe to one another. This holds in all relations, natural relations, and voluntary ones too made by consent. If one be a father of children, there are paternal duties lying on him by virtue of that relation; if he be a child of such parents, he owes a duty to them. If one become a member of a family, a kingdom, or any corporation, his membership lays him under such and such duties: wherefore it is not to be doubted, but, in as much as one is a member of the communion of saints, he is under obligations to the duties of that society.

2. There is a certain connection between privilege bestowed on a

man, and duty required of him. If one be admitted to the privilege of any society, he must with the honour receive the burden of duty belonging to it. If we receive the privilege of sons of God, we must be obedient children—"not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance," 1 Pet. i. 14. If we are members of the holy society whereof Christ is the head, we must be holy as he is, ver. 15, 16. "But as he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy." If we be advanced to the communion of saints, we must act as becomes saints.

3. The principle of self-preservation, natural to all men, evidences this. If one be taken with a pain in his foot, all the members of the body will do their best to recover it; for if one member suffer, all suffer by reason of the union among them, and the evil, if not removed, creeps from one to another. So the apostle will have the saints in Corinth to take heed to a corrupt member, and use the means to recover him, from this principle of self-preservation, 1 Cor. v. 6. They who dwell together find themselves obliged to take heed every one to his neighbour's house, lest, when the neighbour's house is on fire, the flames also catch hold of their own: wherefore whosoever is a member of the communion of saints, must see a duty lying on him as such.

To clear the second part of the inference, consider,

1. By partaking of the sacrament one declares himself to be of the communion of saints, and consequently declares his being engaged to the duties of that communion, 1 John ii. 6. He voluntarily takes on the yoke, while he yokes himself with those who bear it. If one pretends to the privilege, he cannot in reason shake himself loose of the duty. "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Luke vi. 46.

2. The sacraments are the external bands of our union with Christ the head, and the members, 1 Cor. xii. 13. Thereby we are sacramentally joined with the saints into one body, one bread. What is the partaking of them, then, less than solemnly, as it were by oath, engaging ourselves to the duties of the communion of saints?

Wherefore, all ye who are saints by profession, particularly communicants, as ye are one visible body of Christ, a visible communion of saints, I would press on you the duties which lie upon you as such. And they are of three sorts.

First, There are duties ye owe to the head. Christ is the head of this body the communion of saints, Eph. i. 22, 23. Ye are the pro-

fessed members of Christ, and of his body; consider and conscientiously practise the duty ye owe to your head.

1. Acknowledge not, nor own any other for head of the church or communion of saints, but Jesus Christ, Eph. v. 23. Men may distinguish as they will; but, as a body with more heads than one is a monster in nature, the scripture is plain, the communion of saints, which is the church, is no such monster, Eph. iv. 4, 5. "One body one Lord." The Roman Antichrist has long blasphemously arrogated to himself the headship and supremacy, and, at the lame reformation of England, it was taken from the pope there, but not restored to the royal Mediator, but made a part of their king's royal dignity. And in the days of Scotland's apostacy from their covenanted God, it was sacrilegiously usurped over this church by the powers then reigning, but contended against by the sufferings of many of this church, the Lord having made the Mediator's alone headship and supremacy a peculiar piece of this church's testimony, for which, alas! the present generation has not been duly jealous, the which has helped to bring this church into the miserable pass she is at this day. But why should any pretend to be head of the body of Christ? to be her head, while they cannot communicate life or spirit to her? This is Christ's peculiar prerogative, communicable to no mortal.

2. Depend by faith on Jesus Christ, as your head, for all. He is constituted the head of that society whereof ye are members, and by virtue of his headship their life lies in him, the direction and care of them lies on him.

1st, Depend on him for vital influences, Col. ii. 19.—"From which all the body by joints and bands, having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." The believer's life lies in him, Col. iii. 3.—"Your life is hid with Christ in God." Therefore it cannot be lost, John xiv. 19.—"Because I live ye shall live also." The church is liable to great decay; she may be under a spiritual consumption, her pulse may beat very low, yet the sickness cannot be unto death, because there is still life in the head, which will be communicated more abundantly to the members. It is our business to live by faith, and draw virtue from him, and not to live on our inherent stock of life and grace, 2 Tim. ii. 1. Two things are here to be observed.

(1.) That there is a fulness lodged in Christ as the head of the body, to be communicated to all the members, Col. i. 19. A fulness of a fountain, which has not only enough for itself, but those that come to draw. There is a fulness of merit in him, for the life of pure pardon and comfort, and refreshment for the soul slain with a

sense of guilt: a fulness of Spirit for the life of sanctification; and ready access to it for all the members, John i. 16. "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."

(2.) The promises are the conduit-pipes by which influences of grace run into us, and faith is the drawing grace by which they are brought into the soul, Gal. ii. 20. The settled method of the dispensation of grace is that, "According to thy faith, so be it unto thee." Faith believes and applies the promises, and so life more abundantly is conveyed, Hos. xiv. 7.

2dly, Depend upon him for direction, Prov. iii. 5, 6. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart: and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy steps." The direction of the whole body belongs to the head, and the direction and guidance of all the members of Christ to him, by virtue of his headship. Therefore,

(1.) Take not the guiding of yourselves upon yourselves, trust not to your own wit and skill. If ye do, it is an usurping of Christ's prerogative, Is. lv. 5. and ye will not prosper in it, but stumble at noon-day. Where are the eyes but in the head? And therefore since Christ is the head of all the saints, he is appointed of the Father to be eyes to them in the wilderness. And the way of carnal wit has ay been ruining to churches, and particular members. The end of the way, pointed out by it, is always misery.

(2.) Look to him, and trust him for direction in all cases, Prov. iii. 3. God brings his people into a thicket of perplexities, and they are at their wits end, that faith may begin, and wait for a way when they can see none, Is. xlii. 16. Then he leads them by his word, providence, and Spirit. He is the pilot of the ship bound to Emmanuel's land with all the heirs of glory as passengers; their guide through the wayless wilderness, and they must keep their eye on him.

3dly, Depend on his care, 1 Pet. v. 7. "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." The care of the whole communion of saints lies on Christ as their head, 1 Pet. ii. 25. The Father has given them to him, devolved the care of them upon him, in such sort that he is to be answerable for them, that none of them be lost, John vi. 39. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing."—Thus the hearts of his people may safely trust in him,

(1.) For provision. He, as their head, sees to the provision of their souls, "providing them green pastures, and still waters," Psal. xxiii. 2. He provides for their bodies, Is. xxxiii. 16.—"Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure." The faith of Christ's

headship might still all anxious thoughts about one's through-bearing in any case whatsoever: for, come what will come, surely the head will ay see to the provision of the members.

(2.) For protection, Eph. v. 23. The saints have many enemies without and within; but, being settled under such a head, they may be sure of protection in all dangers. They will ay be safe, if not from trouble, yet in it, John xvi. 33. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." From the sting of it, that it shall do them no real harm, 1 Pet. iii. 13. "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"

The saints are oft-times in a mighty stir, having great cares on their own heads: but O how happy would they be, if they would lay their cares all on their mystical head, and be at their duty, and leave them all on him! "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication—let your requests be made known unto God," Philip. iv. 6.

3. Subject yourselves wholly to his government, as to your head, Eph. v. 22—24. The head must rule the body, and Christ must rule you, if you be his members. Coming into the communion of saints, ye resign yourselves to the head of that society, for good and all, for ever.

(1.) Be obedient to his commands, Luke vi. 46. Our Lord Jesus has freed the members of his mystical body from the law as a covenant of works, but with his own hands he binds on them the yoke of obedience to the commands thereof as his own commands, 1 Cor. ix. 21. "Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ." What confusion would there be in the natural body, for the head to be directing and pointing out one way, and the members going another? If Christ be your head, be ruled by him, renouncing your own will, and making his your law.

(2.) Resign yourselves to the disposals of his providence, 1 Sam. iii. 18. 2 Sam. 25, 26. The members of Christ have good reason for an absolute resignation of themselves and all their concerns to the Lord. The sovereignty of their head may silence them; the wisdom and love of their head to his own members may satisfy them, that whatever he does with them is best done. Their interest is his own, as that of the members is the interest of the head.

4. Let the interests of Jesus Christ, as your head, be your interest, his honour and glory be dear unto you, Psal. lxxix. 9. "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." All the members of the body

are concerned for the head, as the head is for all the members; and those who are not touched with the care of Christ's honour in the world, give shrewd evidences they are none of his members. Then,

(1.) Act for the honour of your head, in every capacity seeking to advance his glory, Psal. xlv. 17. "I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations."—There is a party in the world opposed to Christ, and they act against him. He has been going among us, saying, Who is on my side? And ye, by professing your submission to him, and declaring yourselves sacramentally to be of the communion of saints, have solemnly gone over to his side. Then act for him, his truths and ways; act for him in your families, in your neighbourhoods, wherever ye have access, whoever they are that act against him.

(2.) Be ready to suffer for him, as he may call you. Remember the communion of which ye have declared yourselves members, is, in this world, like a lily among thorns, which will be uneasy to them; and ye were warned of what is expected of all the members, Luke xiv. 26. In such a long time of peace, it is no wonder many limbs of the devil have got in among Christ's members, and many a hollow-hearted sinner is externally got into the communion of saints, and the saints by this time, are much the worse of their company; and between foolish virgins, and sleeping wise ones, the interest of Christ and religion is going to decay. So that the case of the church, in the common course of providence, seems to presage such a trying stroke as will awaken living members, and make many dead lifeless members fly off. But if Christ be your head, ye will be so minded as to suffer for him in his strength: ye know nothing is more natural, than, when a stroke is directed against one's head, to lift up one's arm to ward off the blow from the head. The rage of enemies is against Christ himself; and to quit Christ, and go over to their side, is the way many take in such a day. But the real members of Christ's body take not that way, more than a man will put out his head to keep off a stroke designed against his arms, the head being that which all the members will take special care of. In the mean time,

(3.) Suffer with him, Psal. lxi. 9. If the members suffer, the head suffers with them; and if the head be pained, all the body suffers with it; such is the sympathy. If Christ's members suffer, he sympathizeth with them, Acts ix. 4. And it is reasonable that they who think to reign with Christ after, suffer with him now. This is a day wherein the glorious head of the mystical body is suffering egregiously amongst us, and wherein all his members are called to mourn as suffering with him, Psal. cxix. 136. "Rivers of waters

run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law." Our head suffers from his open enemies, is wounded in the house of his friends, is suffering from professors and profane, ministers and people of all ranks. Happy they who shall be found mourning for the dishonours done to his name, truths, ways, &c. they are like to be hid in the day he rises up to resent the affronts.

Lastly, Take care of yourselves for the sake of your head. The follies of a wife reflect dishonour on her husband. Men will take care of their feet, for that, if they catch cold in them, it will fly up to their head. O saints by profession, communicants, remember that from the day you give up your names to Christ, and declare yourselves of the communion of saints, the honour of Christ is concerned in your walk at another rate than ever before. Your sins have a peculiar aggravation in them of dishonour to your head, Rom. ii. 24. "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." Therefore, if ye have any respect to the honour of Christ, take heed that your conversation be as becometh the gospel.

Secondly, There are duties ye owe to the body in general, the mystical body of Christ, which is the church or communion of saints, Eph. i. 22, 23. Ye are professed members of this body, whereof Christ is the head; and this body is not confined to one particular church, but is made up of all the churches of Christ, and particular saints through the world, united to Christ by his Spirit dwelling in them. Consider, and practise the duties to this body, lying on you by virtue of your membership.

1. Sympathize with the body, as being yourselves of it, 1 Cor. xii. 26. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." The concerns of the church of Christ through the world should be the concern of every member. Distance of place, and differences in lesser things among those of the mystical body of Christ, should not take away this concern. Whosoever are allowed a place in Christ's mystical body, should have room allowed them in our hearts.

(1.) Mourn with the body under its affliction and evils. Such a kindly member was Nehemiah, chap. ii. 2. The distresses of foreign churches, as well as of our own, require our cordial sympathy; and the saints are naturally led to it, as knit with them to one common head.

(2.) Rejoice with it in its prosperity, 1 Cor. xii. 26. "And whether one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." The thriving of the kingdom of Christ, in any place through the world, should be refreshful to all the members of Christ, and fill

their mouths with praises. To bear a part in the joys and moans of the church every where, is the natural duty of all the members.

2. Pray continually for the welfare of the body, Psal. cxxii. 6. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee." Is. lxii. 6, 7, "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." The apostle is express for all saints, Eph. vi. 18. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Confine not your prayers to your own private case, but in all earnestness extend them to the church of Christ in the land where you live, and through the world. Prayer is a duty wherein all the members of Christ on earth can have actual communion; they meet at the throne of grace who never saw one another's face. It is the joint petition of all the saints, "Thy kingdom come." Pray for the building up, increase, peace, and purity of the church universal.

3. Take your lot with the body in foul or fair weather. Ye have said in effect, to this happy society, as Ruth i. 16. Sometimes there is a storm on the church of Christ, when the world lying in wickedness enjoys a calm. This occasions many naughty members to change sides, to desert the communion of saints, and fall in with the communion of sinners, 2 Tim. iv. 10. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Ye know not how soon ye may be tried in this point; but do ye resolutely adhere to the mystical body. To move you to which, consider these three things.

(1.) It is safer to be with the saints in their lowest condition, than with sinners in the highest pinnacle of prosperity: for the darkest night with the former will have a joyful morning, Psal. xcvii. 11. while the fairest day with the latter will issue in a black and fearful night, Eccles. vii. 5, 6.

(2.) The trial of sincerity of members is one of the great ends of the Lord's bringing trouble on the body, to try who are wise and foolish builders. It is true, when the natural body being sick is laid upon a-bed, the tree-leg is laid by, but all the living members of the body go with it. So, &c.

(3.) Backsliding is dangerous, and speaks one not fit for the kingdom of God, Luke ix. 62. "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God;" it exposes one to the fearful displeasure of God, Heb. x. 38. "But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him;" and makes their case worse than if they had never set out heavenward.

4. Strive in all lawful ways to maintain and advance the interests

of the body; for the interest of the church is the interest of Christ, and dear therefore to every member. The truths of God are a sacred trust committed to the church, the pillar of truth; and they require our deep concern for the defence thereof, against the assaults of error, Jude 3. "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Christ's ordinances and institutions, and the several privileges thereof, which Satan and the world seek to deprive her of and corrupt, they are Christ's purchase for his mystical body, and therefore they are to be held fast, and the purity of them contended for, refusing to subject them or ourselves to the lusts of men, Gal. v. 1. 1 Cor. vii. 23. This will always require doing of us, holding hand to the maintenance of the precious interests of the mystical body, Psal. xlv. 17. and sometimes suffering, Heb. xii. 3, 4. It is a debt we owe to Christ, to the church, to posterity, and to our own souls.

Lastly, Be tender of the unity of the body, Eph. v. 3, 4. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," 1 Cor. xii. 25. Schisms, rents, and divisions in the church, are like wounds, cuts, and breaking of bones in the natural body, which exceedingly weaken it, and mar its beauty. They are the sin and judgment of a church, bringing dishonour to the Lord Jesus, marring the success of the gospel, and ruining the church at length: they bring much grief to tender souls, and expose religion to the mockery of enemies. The renting of the body of Christ has so much of horror about it, as may make it frightful to serious members. We must separate from none farther than they separate from Christ. We must not go into sin with members of the mystical body, more than with the world, under the pain of the displeasure of the Head: but we may lawfully serve the Lord in his own ordinances with sinful members; even as though when one foot is in a mire, the other must not go into the mire with it, yet there is no necessity of rending the one leg from the other, but the one may still walk with the other on clean ground.

Thirdly, There are duties ye owe to the members in particular, as ye are fellow-members with them of the same body, 1 Cor. xii. 25. "That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another." It is not in your power to know certainly and infallibly who are real members of this body, as others cannot know the same concerning you: but the visible body of Christ is made up of saints by profession, not openly contradicted by their habitual practice, 1 Cor. i. 2. and as such they are admitted to the Lord's table, upon their desire.

So there is a particular visible relation among all saints by pro-

fession, and particularly among communicants, as visible members of the same mystical body of Christ. And therefore, though they owe a duty to all men, of love, good-will and beneficence, yet they are in a particular manner engaged to dutifulness to one another, as members of the visible communion of saints separate from the world.

Of this visible body or communion there are two sorts of members, official and simple ones; the former bearing office in the body, the other not so, but private persons; both members of the one body.

First, The official members are the office-bearers in the church, which is the body, and these are pastors, teachers, ruling-elders, and deacons. These are in the mystical body, as in man's natural body are the stomach, bearing the office of provisor for the whole body, the legs of supporters, the eyes of light to the whole body. And,

1. The duty of the official members to the rest may be summed up in these two, as they are, Acts xx. 28. viz.

1st, That they take heed to themselves. They must take heed to their feet, that they walk as becomes the gospel, and their office and character: to their tongues, that their doctrine and instructions be sound: to their hearts, that these be upright, that so both word and walk may be holy. This I reckon a duty they owe to the rest of the members, as well as to themselves: because their holy tender walk is an ordinance of Christ for edifying the body, as well as sound doctrine, 1 Tim. iv. 12. "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." 1 Pet. v. 3. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples unto the flock." And a scandalous, untender practice, in a church-officer, wounds not only his own conscience, but does a singular mischief to the church; as a hurt in the eye does not only wrong it, but the whole body.

2dly, That they take heed to the rest of the members over whom they are overseers, conscientiously following the duties of their respective offices in the body. It is not enough that they be good men in their private capacity; but that they be good ministers, elders, &c. in their public capacity. If the stomach had never such a good disposition, yet if it keep all the nourishment to itself only, the body would go to ruin: so, if church-officers ply not their official duty, the church suffers by them; they are useless, and worse than useless in the place they have in the body.

2. There is also a special duty that the rest of the members owe to the official members in the body. And this also may be summed up in two things.

1st, A peculiar concern for them, Gal. iv. 15. "For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." It is evident nature itself teacheth a peculiar concern for those members which are of the most diffusive usefulness in the natural body, by virtue of their office. Who would not take many thrusts through the leg rather than one through the heart? Who will put a toe in the balance with an eye? So, in the mystical body, however selfish many are, yet tender considering Christians will have a peculiar concern for official members.

(1.) This should proceed from a reverential estimation of them for their work's sake, 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake." Their work is great; if they have the honour, they have the burden with it. Their work is for the honour of the head, and the profit of the body: and many a time they are like the candle, which, giving light to others, wastes itself. The Master has put an honour on them, and a reverend regard to them, as his officers, is a duty acceptable to God in Christ; yet this respect to them is but civil respect, though the motive is sacred.

(2.) It should vent itself in these.

[1.] Praying for them seriously, 2 Thess. iii. 1. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified." As their work is great, their needs, temptations, and trials are many. The better it fares with them, it is likely to fare the better with you: on the contrary, the worse it fares with them, the worse it will fare with you. So much is your own case wrapt up in theirs. Pinch the stomach with hunger, the plump members of the body will soon fall: let the disorders of it be cured, and the rest of the body will soon feel the good of it. The devil strikes at them, that in them he may strike at the whole congregation. And ministers get not only comforts, but afflictions from the hand of God, for the good of the people, 2 Cor. iv. 5, 6. Then even help them by your prayers that bear the burden.

[2.] Supporting of them cordially, 2 Tim. i. 16. "The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me." Encourage them in their work, which will be a lightening under a heavy burden. Ye should support their credit, and cast a veil over their infirmities, Gal. iv. 14. "And my temptation which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as angel of God, even as Christ Jesus;" and not make molehills in them mountains, as many do, who delight to blacken those of that character; unlike a

kindly member of the body, which will not spread, but endeavour to cure the weakness of an official member. And by divine right the rest owe them a competent maintenance according to their ability, 1 Cor. ix. 14. "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel."

2dly, A ready compliance with them in the work of their office, as the body goes whither the eyes direct, and the legs carry. An implicit faith and blind obedience is due to no man; but the mind of the Lord, held out by official members to the rest, is to be readily complied with, as they would not incur the displeasure of the head, 1 Thess. ii. 13. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

(1.) Imitate them, and follow their steps so far as they follow Christ. "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ," 1 Cor. xi. 1. "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample," Philip. iii. 17. It is a part of the work of their office to be examples to the flock: and if that be a divine ordinance, for the edification of the church, surely the rest of the members are obliged to follow the example; and if they do not, their practice, so far as it is holy, as well as their doctrine, will be a witness against them. This is a point but little regarded. Many will tell how church-officers should walk, that never once look on themselves as obliged to follow their steps in the way of holiness: but the way of holiness is but one to ministers and people, though many are ready to make two of them, and take the broadest to themselves.

(2.) Submit to their instructions, admonitions, exhortations, &c. Heb. xiii. 17. "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account."—What confusion would be in the natural body, if the members would not be guided by the light of the eye, or refuse the nourishment prepared by the stomach? So unnatural is it for the members of the mystical body, to be refractory to the official members in the discharge of their duty, to refuse their wholesome instructions, and to be satisfied without receiving benefit of ordinances dispensed by them.

O learn to look on ministers, and other church-officers, as standing in this capacity and relation to the body whereof ye are members. Consider them as members of the same mystical body with yourselves, and as official members, in whose welfare, and regular discharge of their office, your own welfare is wrapt up. This would,

(1.) Make you modestly and Christianly concerned that they may do their duty to the edification of the body, Psal. cxxxii. 9. For people to treat their ministers imperiously and disrespectfully, and superciliously to dictate to them how to behave in the exercise of their office, as many do, and value themselves upon it, is an argument of pride and emptiness, of men's forgetting themselves, and regardlessness of that order which Christ the head has appointed in his mystical body. But for people, in a modest, serious, and Christian way, to excite their ministers to their duty, to inform and advise them of what may contribute to their carrying on the Lord's work most successfully, as the Lord's word gives them warrant to do it, Col. iv. 17. and their own soul's interest in the matter gives them a right to it; so a godly minister would bless God for having such an advantage. Are not all the members concerned for the eye, stomach, &c. in the natural body? But do they fall a beating of them, or overcharging them, that they may do their office? No, but with all tenderness to them they endeavour to enable them to do their respective offices.

(2.) It would put you on to a conscientious performance of your duty to them, your own soul's interest engaging you thereto, 1 Thes. v. 12. The fable of the members conspiring against the belly, to pinch it by withholding food, and being forced to give it over by reason that they themselves suffered by that means, may represent to us, as in an emblem, the folly of a people undutiful to their ministers to their own souls' great loss. The relation is so very near, that undutifulness on either hand must be hurtful to both.

Secondly, The simple members are such as are not office-bearers in the body, but private Christians. These owe a duty one to another, as members of the same mystical body. They are the visible members of the body of Christ, and so obliged to a native care for one another, 1 Cor. xii. 25.—“That the members should have the same care one for another.” This extends to all such Christians, through the world, as we have occasion to do this duty towards; but in a special manner it is to be exercised towards those with whom we live in actual church-communion; and partakers of the Lord's supper together are in a special manner under this obligation. *As ye are one bread and one body,* so I would exhort you to make conscience of the duties you owe to one another as such.

Communicants are a separated body from others, distinguished from others, by the most solemn badge of the Christian profession: O if they would carry themselves as a people separated from the world to Jesus Christ, and joined together for him in one body, then would we see the benefit of communions, to the honour of Christ, the success of the gospel, and the good of their own souls.

The church is a society gathered out of the world, visibly joined together by the use of the sacraments; though they are in the world, they are not of it; and all the members of it should be a people dwelling alone, though in the midst of others, not reckoned among the nations. The truth is, there are many baptized in their infancy, who openly go over to the world's side; but all ye who are saints by profession, and particularly communicants, as ye profess yourselves to be of one body, and owe a Christian duty to them that are without; so I would lay before you the duties ye owe to one another, by virtue of your being visible members of one and the same body.

1. Love one another affectionately and sincerely, John xv. 12. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." To walk rightly in Christian communion, we must "walk in love," Eph. v. 2. Ye ought to love all men, being ready to desire their good, and do them all the good ye can: but ye owe brotherly love to all the visible members of Christ's body, which is so often recommended to the followers of Christ, 1 Thess. iii. 12. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men, even as we do towards you." Rom. xii. 10. "Be kindly affectionated one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another." O what an inconsistency is there in sitting down at the Lord's table together, the table of love, and the hearts of the partakers never united in love!

Object. There are some so naughty in their way and manner of life, that it is hard to love them with brotherly love.

Ans. The decay of love among the professors of Christianity is most visible at this day: and I must say, I despair of seeing due love among church-members restored, as long as the church among us is so mixed with, and so little separated from the world, and until the church be more distinguished from the nation, for as fond as we have been of a national church. God separated them in the late times by the fire of persecution, and then this love flamed among them: peace being restored, the church even mixed again with the world lying in wickedness, and that love died out of course. And while many are acknowledged as church-members, few, very few are loved as such. The New-Testament churches, though there were many hypocrites in them, yet they seem to have been constituted of visible saints, saints by profession, not visibly contradicted by their practices, Rom. i. 7. 1 Cor. i. 2. 1 Thess. v. 5. But more directly to the objection.

It is plain that brotherly love is to be proportioned to the degrees of the divine image discernible in any. And therefore, (1.) where

nothing of it appears, but people are openly wicked, we owe not this brotherly love to them : and every member of the church, private Christians as well as church officers, should endeavour that they partake not of that one bread in the sacrament. But, (2.) since the best are not free of some evils hanging about them, even to the discerning of others, we ought not to refuse brotherly love to any in whom any lineaments of God's image appears, though they have several things in their way altogether unlovely. It is the work of grace here to pick the pearl of grace out of a dunghill of sinful qualities, and to love the person for it, drawing a veil over many sins, 1 Pet. iv. 8. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover a multitude of sins." And not to aggravate the ills about them, so as to hide their good from our eyes. Wo unto us if God should treat us so, yea, or the saints; wherefore love one another.

Motive (1.) It is the principle of the duties of church-communion, therefore called *the bond of perfectness in the church*, Col. iii. 12, 13, 14. In the primitive church they were most dutiful one to another; see the source of it, Acts iv. 32. "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."—Where it prevails, it will make every one concerned for the good of his fellow-Christian, as for his own: where it is not, people, though in church-communion, will be ready to say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" So the want of it turns all loose.

(2.) It is a badge of sincerity. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren," 1 John iii. 14. And without it we cannot prove ourselves true Christians, neither to ourselves, nor to the world of onlookers, John xiii. 35. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." For love to God will produce love to all those who bear his image.

(3.) It is the most natural result of the love of Christ to us, John xiii. 34.—"As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Never was there such love as that of Christ to his people in his dying for them: this shed abroad in the heart must needs make a loving disposition to him, and all that belong to him, for his sake.

Lastly, The near relation in which the followers of Christ stand to one another, pleads for it. They are fellow-members of the same body, joined together under one head, are members of one heavenly family, shall dwell together for evermore in heaven, and are joint objects of the world's hatred.

2. Bear with one another's weaknesses, failures, and infirmities. This has many branches, see Col. iii. 12, 13. "Put on therefore (as

the elect of God holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man has a quarrel against another: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Be of a meek, patient, forbearing and forgiving temper, as to all men, so particularly to the members of the body of Christ, your fellow-members, and that because they are so. When we come to heaven we will have nothing to bear with; but till we come there, we will have occasion to exercise this grace towards others, and others towards us, since every one has their own imperfections, and there is not one to cast a stone at another on this score.

It is sad to see how easily professors are brought to cast at one another, how they cannot bear the least provocation, cannot forgive nor forget injuries; yea, many there are who rejoice in the failures of others, and are glad when they get an ill tale of them, or see some false step made by them, which they improve to run them down, and to the judging of their state. But consider, I pray you,

(1.) How the Lord bears with you, Eph. iv. 32. "And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." O what would come of us if God would bear no more with us than we can bear with our fellow-servants! Dreadful would the measure be, if God should mete to us as we often do to our fellow-Christians. Does the Spirit of the Lord suffer us long, and will not we learn long-suffering? Are we forgiven talents, and will not forgive a few pence?

(2.) How the Lord bears with them. He overlooks many things in his people, though he does not approve of them. Shall not his example draw us to imitation?

(3.) Do not we ourselves stand in need of forbearance and forgiveness from others? Eccles. vii. 21, 22. "Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee. For often times also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others." And are every day in hazard of being led aside with temptation, Gal. iv. 1. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted." Why should we then so forget ourselves, as not to allow to others what we need from them?

Lastly, Is not your interest in the matter, since you are of the body with them? When one hand labours under any sore, does not the other tenderly dress it, and even "those members of the body, which we think less honourable, do not we bestow abundant honour on them?" 1 Cor. xii. 23. So should we be ready to cast a veil of love over the infirmities of our brethren.

3. Watch over one another, Heb. x. 24. "And let us consider one another, to provoke to love, and to good works:" And xii. 15. "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness, springing up, trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." This is one of the principal duties of church-communion, and, if duly managed, would be of notable use for the honour of the head, and good of the body. It is true the Lord has appointed some watchmen, by office, in his church: but the law of love among the members of the mystical body, and the appointment of the head, makes also every one watchman over another.

I mean not to encourage men to a censorious prying into other men's matters, malicious searching into the hidden faults of others, to get something whereupon to make them odious. There are abundance of these who are spies from the devil's camp, improving their discoveries, fancied or real, to the dishonour of religion, and wounding the reputation of the brethren. But that, with an eye of love, you would observe one another's walk, for your mutual advantage, to imitate what is lovely in one another, and endeavour to amend what is amiss, or to prevent it. I take in under this these following things.

1st, Excite and stir up one another to a holy tender walk, in the several parts or duties of it, Heb. x. 24. Every member of the body should be a spur to another, to quicken his pace in the way of duty: so far should they be from being hinderances to, and clogs upon one another. All of us have a principle of sloth in us, which disposes us to flag and sink in our endeavours after holiness; and happy they who have a fellow Christian to quicken them by word and example, Prov. xxvii. 17. "Iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

2dly, Warn one another of snares in your way, as fellow-travelers towards Zion, 1 Thess. v. 14. "Now, we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly." One may see a snare before another, which he is not aware of that is in the greatest hazard of it; and it is a piece of Christian duty to warn one of it. This is to blow the trumpet as a watchman, the trumpet of private warning, the which if he does not, he is guilty of the sin his brother falls into, as not preventing it.

3dly, Confirm the staggering, and labour to bear up him who is ready to fall, 1 Thess. v. 14. "Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak." O what a substantial kindness did Abigail to David, in preventing the sin he was slipping into! An enemy is to be helped to raise up his ass lying under a burden, Exod. xxiii. 5. that he may not lose it: how much more, when one sees his brother under a

weight of temptation, is he to help him above it? like to be carried away with the stream, is he to catch hold of him, and do his best to draw him out?

Lastly, Admonish and reprove one another, in a spirit of meekness, for what is amiss, Rom. xv. 14. 2 Thess. iii. 15. Eph. v. 11. The infirmity cleaving to the best, with the variety of snares lying in our way, occasions every one sometimes to go wrong: and though it is easy to step aside, it is not so easy to recover, and come into the way again. This makes admonition necessary. There is a corrupt principle of self-love in us, that we are apt to look on our own faults with an eye prejudged in favour of them; therefore God has appointed this ordinance of mutual reproof and admonition, that each one holding the glass to his neighbour's face, he may see his spots, and wipe them off.

There is an authoritative admonition and reproof administered by church-officers, in virtue of their office, not only to hearers promiscuously, in the preaching of the word, but to persons particularly by themselves, in the way of discipline, 1 Tim. v. 20. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." Or privately, as Nathan did to David. See 1 Thess. v. 12. "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which are over you in the Lord, and admonish you." The which, though privately administered, is public, in respect of the public person who gives it. But of this we speak not.

There is a charitable admonition and reproof belonging to private persons, in virtue of the law of charity or love, which makes them monitors of, and reprovers to one another. This, in respect of the objects of it, is twofold.

1. General; common to all men within or without the church, whether visible members of the mystical body or not. It goes as wide as the holy law carries love to our neighbour. We are not to confine our charitable admonitions and reproofs to saints by profession, more than our love of benevolence and beneficence to them. We owe this duty, even to these of the world lying in wickedness, Eph. v. 11. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," compare with verse 8. 12. and ought to do it, if so we may contribute to the plucking of the brands out of the burning.

It is true there are some arrived at such a daring pitch of wickedness, that there is not the least hope of doing them good by admonition or reproof; but, on the contrary, they are in hazard of being the worse of them. Concerning such our Lord's rule is, Matth. vii. 6. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your

pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." But we should take heed that we do not rashly put men into this class: they may be the worse of a reproof at one time, who may be bettered by it at another time. And besides, a testimony against sin may be necessary, even in the case of such a one, in respect of others, witnesses thereto. But neither is it of this sort of admonition and reproof we speak. But,

2. Fraternal or brotherly admonition and reproof, competent to the visible members of the mystical body among themselves, 2 Thess. iii. 15. Though we owe this duty and kindness to all men, yet it is plain there are special obligations to it on saints by profession towards one another, and especially on communicants, who sit at one table of the Lord together. They are one body; they owe more than a common, *viz.* a brotherly love to one another; therefore, as in the natural body one hand washes the other by special duty: so let all communicants, and all saints by profession, know that they are obliged in conscience to mutual brotherly admonition and reproof, as they are "one body, and members one of another," Rom. xii. 5. And the sacraments, whether baptism or the Lord's supper, much more both, bind them thereto.

This ordinance and special duty of church-communion, which would be of exceeding usefulness, if rightly managed, as it is, alas, very little in use in our degenerate age, is often so marred, when it is used, that matters are made worse thereby, and the disease takes strength from the remedy. People's minds are alienated one from another; grudges are raised betwixt the parties; and so it is an occasion of evil. This ariseth from two causes.

First, The indiscreet management of the reprover, who often ministers his remedy in such a manner as that it is apt to irritate the corruption of his brother, instead of exciting his grace or goodness, as it ought. To rectify this, and remove this grand hinderance of benefit by this duty, I lay before you these following things.

1. Look upon this duty of fraternal admonition and reproof, as an ordinance of the Lord Jesus Christ, appointed by him, in his visible mystical body, for the spiritual good of the body. It is as really so, as preaching, prayer, sacraments, &c. are, Matth. xviii. 15. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." It has a blessing annexed to it, Prov. ix. 8. "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." The consideration of this might influence men to go about it with awful solemnity, and to fear its being marred in their hands.

2. Begin at home, in thy own life and conversation, to purge it,

Matth. vii. 3, 5. "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? First cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." A man who attempts to reprove his brother, and is guilty in the same or the like offence, is like a profane minister reproving profanity, who cannot expect success, but to have it cast up to him, *Physician cure thyself*. And this may let one see the mischief that his untenderness does, not only involving him in personal guilt, but in the guilt of his neighbour's sin too, whom he puts himself out of capacity to do good to.

Quest. *Is one in such a case free from this duty then?* **Answ.** No, by no means; one's own sin can never free him from this natural duty. His business is to set about the work, removing the impediment of the success by repentance before the Lord; and to accuse himself, and profess resolution to amend, in the first place, to his brother, and then to admonish him of his fault.

3. Be not precipitant and rash in your reproofs, but proceed on knowledge of the offence, in which so much moral certainty is required, as one cannot be justly blamed for rashness in thinking his brother to have offended so and so. The too ready crediting every thing that is spoken to our brother's disadvantage, or judging a thing to be an offence which may be is none; a readiness to take other men's actions by the wrong handle, when there is a right one, and thereupon to reprove them, will more argue the want of that charity, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. than prudent zeal for God's honour and our brother's good; yet, in doubtful matters, it will often be found duty prudently to insinuate that there is a suspicion, and what way he ought to remove it, 1 Thess. v. 22. "Abstain from all appearance of evil."

4. Let love to God's honour, and your brother's good, be the principle from which your admonition or reproof proceeds, and let it appear so, as much as may be, to his conviction, 2 Thess. iii. 15. "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." 2 Cor. ii. 4. "For, out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears, not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." So little of this appears in the reproofs of many, that they seem to the reprov'd rather reproaches than reproofs, and to show more contempt of the offender than love to him; and so the benefit by them is marred.

5. Be sure to found your admonitions or reproofs on the word of God, and convey them to your brother in a word of the holy scripture, the proper vehicle of a medicine for the soul or conscience.

Col. iii. 16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another." How else can you think to reach his conscience? The word is the instrument where-with the Spirit works, and upon which we have ground to expect the blessing. And happy is he in whom the word dwells richly for this end.

6. Let it be managed with meekness, Gal. vi. 1. "Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Zeal and meekness are very consistent; they are fruits of the same holy Spirit. Beware of mixing your own passions with this duty; that is to bring common fire to God's altar, which mars the acceptance of the sacrifice with God, and is ready to mar the success of it with your brother, Jam. i. 20. "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." O it is hard to hold off splitting on this rock! Moses dashed on it, though the meekest man on earth, Numb. xx. 10. "Ye rebels." Which should make us jealous of ourselves upon such an occasion. Happy is that man who, when he declares God's wrath, can best hold down his own. In a special manner use mildness when the offence is a personal injury against yourselves. Men who are like lions in their own cause, and lambs in the cause of God, are selfish naughty men. They who are like lions in their own cause, and in God's too, owe their pretended zeal to their own spirits, not to the Spirit of God: but they who are as lambs in their own cause, but as lions in God's cause, leave convictions, in the breasts of others, that they are acted by God's Spirit.

7. Be patient and continue at the duty as occasion offers, though the fruit do not soon appear, or though one and the same person may give frequent occasion, 2 Pet. i. 13. "Yea I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance." Luke xvii. 3, 4. "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him; and if he trespass against thee seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." Thus the Lord deals with us with long-suffering: so should we with our brethren. We should hold on as long as there is any hope of doing good by it.

Quest. *What should we do, when all we can do appears to be fruitless, and to no purpose?* Ans. Our Lord's directions are very plain in this case, though very little practised, Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17. "Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother: but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more; in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established: and if he shall neglect to

hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Lastly, Be sure to take the fittest season for discharge of this duty. Every thing is beautiful in the season thereof, and there is a season for reproof, Eccles. iii. 7. The Spirit of the Lord takes notice of Abigail's observing it with her husband, 1 Sam. xxv. 36, 37. And of the blessed man it is said, he brings forth fruit in his season, Psal. i. 3. Unseasonable reproofs rarely do good, but often do much harm.

Secondly, An undue entertainment of it by the reprov'd. God has prescribed, in his word, how admonitions and reproofs are to be taken, as well as how to be given. They are to be received, (1.) with love and esteem of the party that does us that good office, 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. As we esteem the physician that would cure us of bodily blemishes, so him that endeavours to cure us of spiritual blemishes much more. (2.) With humbleness of mind, suffering ourselves to be told of our faults, in order to our amendment, Heb. xiii. 22. "And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation." So David, Psal. cxli. 5. "Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." (3.) With a practical answering of the end of it. This our Lord calls *hearing of our brother*, Matth. xviii. 15. Compare Prov. xv. 31, 32. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.—He that heareth reproof getteth understanding."

But where are they to be found who thus entertain admonitions and reproofs? Nay, the most part cannot endure to be reprov'd or admonish'd of any thing amiss in their way. Instead of giving a Christian entertainment to admonition or reproof, their proud hearts rise in passion against him that dares tell them their fault; they will defend their deed, which in calm blood their own conscience condemns; and if they can gather any dirt against the reprover, right or wrong, they will be sure to fling it in his face on that occasion. This deserves to be lamented with tears of blood, if we could command them. To such I would say,

1. Admonition and reproof is an ordinance of Christ, appointed by him in his church among the visible members of his body, Matth. xviii. 15. and downwards, 1 Tim. v. 20. Why are ye angry at your brother for doing his duty he is oblig'd to do under the pain of the Lord's displeasure? Why will ye be reckon'd members of Christ's family, and will not submit to the ordinances and laws of his house? Is it fit the church of Christ should be as when there was no king in Israel, every one doing that which is right in his own eyes?

2. It is that which thy brother has a special interest in, and a right to see to, as being a member of the body. Nothing more ordinary than, What are you concerned? The eye might as well question the concern of the hand in drawing a mote out of it, or the face in wiping a spot off it. "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee."—1 Cor. xi. 21. His concern is plain, he is a visible member of the same body with you, and your faults which give offence, affect him and the body too. In a corporation of tradesmen, every member has a right to quarrel what is done against the laws of the corporation. In a neighbourhood of husbandmen, every one has a right to quarrel what is done against the laws of the neighbourhood. Yet, in a society of Christians by profession, one may not be allowed to reprove another for what is done against the laws of Christianity. "Be astonished, O ye heavens!"

3. It is thy own interest, and the advantage of thy soul, to be admonished and reproofed for thy faults. Prov. vi. 23.—"Reproofs of instruction are the way of life." It is a real kindness done thee, Psal. cxli. 5. Why wilt thou be angry with thy mercy? Many are ruined through the want of a faithful friend to admonish them of what is amiss in their way. Men do not readily espy their own faults in full light; and when they have none to say it is ill they do, they are apt to flatter themselves in their iniquity to their own ruin. But admonition and reproof is the way to repentance and reformation.

4. The trial of thy state whether thou art a real Christian or not, depends more on the way of entertaining admonition and reproof than thou art aware of, Prov. ix. 8. "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." It is a good sign of a gracious soul, to entertain it in a Christian way, Prov. xv. 5.—"He that regardeth reproof is prudent." It speaks a humble soul, one ready and willing to know his faults and amend them, to whom conscience is dearer than credit, and the approbation of God than the applause of men. But, on the contrary, it is a very black mark in one not to be able to bear admonition and reproof, Prov. xii. 1. "Whoso loveth instruction, loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish," and chap. xv. 12. See how the Spirit of God describes a wicked generation, Is. xxix. 21. "That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate."—Amos v. 10. "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly." This temper of spirit speaks a man to be unwilling to see his sin, and therefore unwilling to part with it; to be a lover of darkness rather than light; a lover of his own credit more than God's ho-

nour ; to be proud, selfish, without due regard either to God or his brother. It is true a good man may, at a time, take a just reproof very ill, as Asa, 2 Chron. xvi. 10. but it is not the habitual disposition of his spirit.

Lastly, Not taking with admonition and reproof is a forerunner of ruin, Prov. xv. 10.—“He that hateth reproof shall die;” and xxix. 1. “He that being often reprovèd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” As it is a high pitch of sin, and runs up the offence to a height, so it is a presage of the approach of a heavy stroke—“Let no man strive, nor reprove another : for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet shall fall with thee in the night,”—Hos. iv. 4, 5. They who will not take an admonition or reproof from their brethren, may expect God will reach them one from heaven, that they shall not get shifted. It is a terrible remark made on Eli’s sons, their not taking with reproof, 1 Sam. ii. 25, “They hearkened not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them.” See Prov. v. 12. The sum of what is said, you may find, Prov. xxv. 12. “As an ear-ring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold : so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.” Let the reprover manage wisely, and the reprovèd entertain it obediently, so shall it be profitable to both. The impediments thus removed, I would press this duty of brotherly admonition and reproof among all the visible members of the mystical body, all saints by profession, and communicants particularly. Admonish and reprove one another, for what ye discern to be offensive in one another’s way. Make conscience of this duty.

Mot. 1. For the sake of the head, that is, for Christ’s sake. The sins of professors and communicants do, in a special manner, reflect dishonour on Jesus Christ, 2 Sam. xii. 14. And therefore, while we see the visible members of that body dishonouring their head, our hearts should stir within us for that dishonour. Here is a fair occasion to vent our zeal for Christ, to declare our sympathy with him, Psal. lxi. 9, “The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.” And, in such a case, ye are upon your trials as to what regard ye have to his honour.

2. For the sake of the body. The welfare of the mystical body lies in the welfare of the members : it cannot be right while the members are wrong. Consider the offending party as a member of the body, and thou wilt see the body of Christ is concerned in his not walking with a straight foot, which may stir thee up to admonish him. Scandalous practices or offensive steps in a member, reflect dishonour on the whole body, Eccl. ix. 18. Yea, and the

contagion, if not timely prevented, is apt to creep from one member to another, and so to annoy the whole body, Heb. xii. 15, "Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." For this cause Paul openly reproveth Peter, Gal. ii. 14.

3. For the sake of the offending member. It is one of the greatest offices of love thou canst do to his soul, to admonish him of his offence, James v. 19, 20. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Thou wilt thereby do him a double kindness. (1.) Remove sin from off him, which is a load so much the more dangerous, as he is not aware of it, Lev. xix. 17. It is hating him, in God's account, not to rebuke him, as it would be not to draw him out of the mire, when he is sticking in it. If he had disjoined a leg or arm, wouldst thou not set it again if thou couldst? Such harm do wrong steps in a Christian's way to his soul; therefore, "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness," Gal. vi. 1. (2.) Prevent his sinning more in that way. One wrong step, if not righted, makes way for another; and much guilt is contracted by one's not being told of his fault, being in that case, "like a son left to himself, who brings his father to shame;" whereas a faithful reproof might prevent the repeating of the same folly. And as it would thus be a kindness to him in respect of the putting away of sin, so consequently in preventing strokes from the hand of the Lord.

4. For your own sake. God has laid this duty upon you, under the pain of his displeasure; so your own interest is engaged here. As ye would not partake of other men's sins, make conscience of this duty, without which the guilt will creep over on your own souls, and the punishment thereof with it, Eph. v. 11. And why should one by the neglect of this duty, adopt other men's sins, defile his own conscience, and mar his peace with God? Better displease all the world than make a breach betwixt God and your own souls.

5. For the sake of the common badge of the visible mystical body of the Christian profession, the holy sacraments, 1 Tim. vi. 1. Is it not cutting to hear men say, Take up your professors, your communicants? O that professors would consider the Christian profession to be of that dignity, and so tender a point, that they might tremble to think of bringing a stain upon it by their loose walking! O that communicants would remember, that though the partaking of the Lord's table is in itself a passing action, yet it is an abiding holy sign, whereby they are externally distinguished for Christ; and that

they would beware of such practices as may render their badge mean and despised in the eyes of the world. Or if some will be so untender as not duly to regard it, that others would be so tender thereof as to check them for their offensive carriage, out of a regard to the holy badge of the Christian profession, the holy sacraments.

Lastly, For the sake of those who are not of the body, but of the world lying in wickedness. It is a piece of Christian duty to regard these, Col. iv. 5. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without." God writes his impartiality in his judgments, in not passing by the offences of those called by his own name, Is. xlii. 4. And it would much contribute to commend religion to those who are strangers to it, and impress them with honourable thoughts of the communion of saints, if the members of it were faithful to check every thing among themselves, Acts v. 1. and downwards, compare with ver. 13. otherwise snares and stumbling-blocks are laid before the blind world.

4. Walk holily and tenderly, so as your conversation may be exemplary and edifying to one another, Matth. v. 16. Heb. xii. 14. Rom. xiv. 19. The church, in scripture-language, is often called Heaven, and every member thereof ought to be as a shining light there, and not the pastors only, Phil. ii. 15, 16. "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world: holding forth the word of life." This is the most effectual way of edifying one another, *viz.* by a holy example. And it is one great advantage of church-communion, whereby one's soul is edified, while the members labour so to walk. For understanding of this, two things are to be marked.

1st, There is a holiness of heart, and a holiness of conversation, Psal. xxiv. 3, 4. The former is the spring of the latter; the former lies in the inner man, the latter in the outward. Holiness of heart is a personal duty, which not the church, but God and one's own conscience can take notice of directly: therefore I speak not of it, while treating of the duties of the members of the body one to another. Holiness of conversation is a relative duty, in so far as our fellow-members ought to see it in us all, and may see it where it is to their own edification: and we owe it as an indispensable duty to the body whereof we are members, *viz.* that our conversation be exemplarily holy and tender, Cant. i. 8. For we are not only to know Christ, and speak of him, but to live unto him, Phil. i. 21. "For me to live is Christ." This is the holiness and tenderness I speak of.

2dly, Though it is abominable hypocrisy to do good works to be seen of men, that we may gain their applause; yet it is not only

lawful, but a necessary duty of Christianity, and particularly of church-communion, to walk so as your walk may be exemplary, and to have an eye to the edification of others in walking tenderly before them, Matth. v. 16. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." 2 Thess. iii. 9. Though our internal religion lies only betwixt God and us, yet our outward acts are apt to be copied by our brethren; therefore we should endeavour to get the copy fair, chiefly to please God, and next to edify our brethren.

Now this exemplary, tender, holy walking, required of every visible church-member, for edifying the fellow-members of the body, hath many branches, being as broad as the whole law of God on the outward man. I shall reduce them to these two general heads.

1. Be exemplarily holy and tender, with respect to the doing part of religion and a holy life, Luke i. 6. The members of Christ are not to be idle, but active, dying to sin, and living unto righteousness. Be exemplarily holy and tender,

(1.) With respect to duty, Eccles. ix. 10. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Let your conversation be filled up with the performance and conscientious discharge of every duty required at your hands, that it may be uniform, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments," Psal. cxix. 6. Let your duty to God be conscientiously performed in all the parts of it; since he is your Creator and Redeemer, refuse him no piece of required service, for ye are wholly his, Acts xxvii. 23. Be conscientious in your duty to man for God's sake, and so join in your practice what God has joined in the commandment, Acts xxiv. 16. Neglect not personal duty which lies betwixt you, Tit. ii. 12. and have a special regard to the duties of your station, and the relation wherein ye stand, if ever ye would have your conversation edifying. God has set every one of us in some station and relation, and the conscientious practice of the duty of our respective stations makes a man or woman shine, however low a sphere they move in, 1 Tim. vi. 1. "Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed," 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. There is no person who may not this way edify the body of Christ, and be an useful member for their own and others' good.

(2.) With respect to sin, Jude 23. O the mischief done by the sinful liberty church-members take to themselves! They fearlessly break down and go over the holy hedge, and others, seeing them before, do follow after, and so they prove ruining to themselves and others too, Matth. xviii. 7. Think no sin little, since it is an offence

against a great God, and makes way for greater, not only in yourselves, but in others too. For the sake of the head, and the rest of the members, abhor it as hell, Rom. xii. 9. and 1 Thess. v. 22.

(3.) In the practice and use of indifferent things. There the apostle's rule should take place, Rom. xv. 1, 2. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." It is not enough that the thing is in itself lawful; ye are also, in respect of your brother, to consider if it be expedient, 1 Cor. vi. 12. What is in itself indifferent, may in its circumstances be rendered unlawful to you, in so far as ye cannot do it without the scandal of your brother, Rom. xiv. 20. The neglect of this is one of the crying sins of this day. Men consider their own-selves, without regard to others, and hence fearlessly lay stumbling-blocks before others. The sense of the duties of church-communion is much lost among all parties in this church this day: in the natural body a thing will be refused, though it be good for the stomach, if it be ill for the head, &c. But, in this degenerate generation, the members of the visible mystical body are grown so selfish, that to please themselves they can drive over others, without any regard to their good or hurt.

2. Be exemplarily holy and tender in the suffering part of religion. And be so for the edification of the body. Others have been so for our good, Heb. xii. 1. so should we be for the good of others. What crosses and afflictions the Lord may be pleased to lay on you, bear christianly, with patience, submission, and resignation, bringing forth the fruit of them, Rom. xii. 12. "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." They are trials, and in them we ought to carry so, as God may be honoured and our brethren edified, while we are by divine providence brought upon the stage to undergo our respective trials. Consider here,

(1.) God, in laying afflictions on some of his people, has an eye to others' good, as well as that of the afflicted party: even as blood is let out of the arm or foot, not for the good of the arm or foot only, but the good of the whole body; though it is only one member that gets the wound, yet the design is for the rest of the members too, 2 Cor. i. 6. "And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation." As when one is examined the rest are instructed; when one of the children of a family is chastised, the rest are thereby bettered; so our gracious God often teaches many at the expence of one only.

(2.) A Christian behaviour under trouble is one of the most influential points of Christian practice, likely to have the greatest efficacy on others, spectators of it and witnesses to it, or to whose knowledge it may come, Heb. xii. 1, 2, 3. Hence the blood of the martyrs was said to be the seed of the church: and the cause of the gospel never lost by persecution, while the persecuted were honestly carried through. Doing well is ready to influence others, but suffering well is far more so. A cross carried evenly and Christianly has a certain force to draw others to imitation, as it is most admired.

(3.) Those who, by reason of their afflictions, seem to themselves to be laid by as useless, are mistaken; they have a most precious opportunity put into their hand, to be serviceable to Christ and the members of his body, Col. i. 24. "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body's sake." God has brought them forth on the stage, to take trial of their suffering graces, for the instructing, exciting, strengthening, and edifying of others. Job was a man who did much for God in his day; but the suffering part of his life has been of the greatest use in all ages since, and will be to the end. The Psalmist David complains, Psal. xxxi. 12. that he was *like a broken vessel*; but every sherd of that broken pot has been of good use to the church of Christ since, and has helped to heal many.

(4.) Wherefore Christians under their afflictions ought to consider that they suffer as members of the body, bearing that part allotted for them of the sufferings appointed for mystical Christ; for the sufferings of Christ personal are at an end, but the sufferings of Christ mystical are but yet a filling up, Col. i. 24. This would arm them with patience, as considering their particular trials to be, in some sort, a common cause for the good of others, as well as their own; and may excite them, in the blackest lines of providence, to cast such a fair copy as others may write after.

To press this duty of church-communion, consider,

1. The interest of God's name and honour in it, John xv. 8. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The fruitfulness of those who are planted in the house of the Lord brings much glory to the Master of the house; and their barrenness brings much dishonour to him before the world. And should not the one be vigorously pursued, and the other guarded against, by all those whom he has "called into the fellowship of his Son?"

2. The interest of your fellow-members in it. It is a dark world; they are the most useful in the communion of saints, who most shine

as lights. Every action of yours, every piece of your carriage, being in church communion, is apt to be copied. By your tender example you may do good to many; by your untenderness you may prove stumbling-blocks to others.

3. The interest of the gospel in it, Tit. ii. 9, 10. "Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters—not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." It is the glory of the gospel, that the power thereof appears in the lives of the professors thereof, stamping holiness and tenderness upon every part of their own walk: and, on the other hand, it brings great scandal on the doctrine of Christ, that the professors of it are unholy in their lives.

Lastly, Your own interest is in it for time and eternity. As ye sow ye shall reap, both for kind and quantity.

5. Bear one another's burdens of afflictions, crosses, temptations and trials, Gal. vi. 2. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Heb. xiii. 3. "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." 1 Cor. xii. 26. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it." This is a natural duty of the members of one body. That part of the communion of saints, which is above, is got quite beyond these; but those of them who are yet in the world, are in the place of trial, where the clouds return after the rain. But not being standing each one by himself, but in the body with other fellow-members, bearing their part of the sufferings allotted for the body, there is all reason that the afflicted's lot should be looked on as a common cause, and each one should help to bear the burden with them; their burden of simple affliction, or burden of temptation. And,

1. Have a cordial sympathy with them, and hearty concern in their afflictions and temptations; and so express it as they may know it, Rom. xii. 15. Let your hearts be touched with fellow-feeling of the distresses of your brethren; and therefore "put on bowels of mercy," &c. Col. iii. 12. and lay aside selfishness and unconcernedness with the case of others. It is a mortified member that is not touched with the pain of other members of the body; and he who has no kindly sympathy with the saints, in their troubles and temptations, seems not to partake of the spirit of that communion, Amos vi. 1, 6. "Wo to them that are at ease in Zion—that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." And let them know it: for what comfort can it afford to them, though your bowels yearn toward them, if they understand it not? if they see it not, it is all a case to them as if it were not.

2. Bear their burden as it affects them, and not always as it would affect yourselves, Rom. xv. 1. Many weigh the afflictions and temptations of others in their own balance, so find them very light; and therefore pass them as unworthy of their concern. Job xii. 5. "He that is ready to slip with his feet, is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease." But the true way of judging of the weight of these things is, as they are apt to affect the afflicted party, and with that weight we should bear them, 2 Cor. xi. 29. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" One mote will disturb the eye, when a hundred of them lying on the hand will create no trouble, no hazard. Shall the hand then be unconcerned to pluck it out? That may make a heavy affliction and dangerous temptation to one, which would be a very light one, and perhaps none at all to another. And it may be a greater act of Christian obedience in one to make his way through a temptation or affliction in itself small, than in another through one ten times greater; as the widow's throwing in her mite was more than all the gifts of the rich men, Luke xxi. 1, 2, 3.

3. Let your mouths be open to enquire into their griefs, as far as Christian prudence will allow, and your hearts open to receive their moans, Col. iv. 7, 8. "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you—whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts." If any member of the natural body be sore and wounded, how natural is it for the hand tenderly to uncover and open it up, the eye to pry with compassion on the several parts of the sore, &c. even when they cannot remove the trouble? Such is the case of human nature in its present state of weakness, that there is a kind of relief, though but a sorry one, in venting of their grief into the bosom of one where it may be entertained with sympathy. The want of which makes afflictions and temptations often like a fire shut up, preying on one's spirits, Psal. xxxix. 3. and has made the best of men complain heavily, Mic. vii. 1, 5. and downwards.

4. Comfort, encourage, advise, and direct them suitable to their case, 1 Thess. iv. 18. This is all that is within the compass of one's power to do for their afflicted brethren, in some cases, Matth. xxv. 36. And thus may one by a word fitly spoken, be a happy instrument to refresh the bowels of the afflicted, and blunt the edge of a temptation, 2 Tim. i. 16. Job xvi. 5.—"I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief." And here a special tenderness is required; and, with a due regard to the circumstances of the afflicted, all harshness is to be evited, lest one add affliction to the afflicted; which was the rock Job's

friends split upon, and caused him to make that affecting resentment, Job xvi. 4, 5.

5. What you can in conscience and reason ward off, or carry off of their burden, do it, for *ye are members one of another*; Rom. xii. 5. Philip. ii. 4. "Look not every one on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." So ye are to give all your spiritual or temporal assistances to the lessening or removing of their trial in a way of duty. This should particularly appear in shielding one another's reputation, which is often blasted by venomous tongues and open ears, which together lay a heavy burden on the suffering party, Prov. xxv. 23.

6. In troubles and temptations from men, support and stand by the oppressed for their deliverance, especially in the cause of Christ and religion, 2 Tim. iv. 16. "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." And chap. i. 16, 17. "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me." We are not born for ourselves, but for God's honour, and the good of our brethren. And the leaving of those helpless, on whom, by the divine providence, the storm of the trial or temptation falls, is a forsaking and being ashamed of the cause of Christ in the world. Thus ought we to bear one another's burden, as members of the body of Christ. To stir you up to which necessary duty, consider,

Lastly, Earnest prayer is to be made to God for our brethren under their trials, that they may be supported, refreshed, and delivered, according to the will of God; and this whether their trials be from the immediate hand of God or man, Acts xii. 5. "Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." 2 Thess. iii. 1, 2. "Finally, brethren, pray for us—that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men."—This is a special way of bearing one another's burdens, to bear them before the throne of grace, and to wrestle with God for them there. This is one of the great advantages of the communion of saints, *viz.* a communion of prayers, that when any known weight lies upon a member, the rest cry unto the head on behalf of it. And here I offer four things.

(1.) It is much to be wished that Christians praying together, when occasionally meeting, were more in use. And particularly that those who are in distress would not only require ministers or elders to pray with them, but even fellow-Christians visiting them, and that such should readily comply with such a desire, both ob-

serving circumstances so as to discern when and in what cases it may be to edification. It is very agreeable to the communion of saints, and to that love and sympathy which ought to be among the members of Christ.

(2.) As it is a commendable practice in the church, to require public prayers on behalf of the sick or those otherwise afflicted ; and as the minister is the mouth of the congregation, so ye would consider that ye ought affectionately to join in these prayers, as parties nearly concerned, and whose prayers for the afflicted are desired, forasmuch as the prayers desired are the prayers of the congregation, and not the minister's only. The language of these prayers is, Brethren, pray for us. And therefore, I beseech you, let not this be a matter of mere form to you, in which you may only notice what is begged for them ; but let your hearts go along with the words even the length of the throne, for a brother or sister in distress.

(3.) Carry home with you the case of those to your family and secret prayers, and confine not your concern for them within the walls of the church. If the afflictions of others do touch your hearts as they ought, you may carry a copy of the paper home with you on your sympathizing hearts, to mind you to put up petitions for them in your families and in secret. If ye have neglected this formerly, mend it in time to come, and, when ye have done it, know ye have done no more than what is your duty, Heb. xiii. 3. "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them ; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

(4.) Some cases of others in affliction may require of you extraordinary prayer, by setting some time apart for that very end, either yourselves alone, or in conjunction with fellow-Christians. So David in the case of the child, "fasted, and went in and lay all night on the earth," 2 Sam. xii. 16. And in the case of others too, Psal. xxxv. 13, 14. And so in the case of Peter in prison, Acts xii. 12. "Many were gathered together in the house of Mary, praying." The serious consideration of the kind of the affliction, and of the person under it, with respect to the honour of God, the good of the church, and your own particular interest depending thereon, must determine these cases.

I will add, by the bye, that where prayers are desired for those in affliction, the affliction being removed, thanksgiving should likewise be desired. It is but the prevalency of an unallowable custom, to give up notes for praying for the sick, and yet to give none for thanksgiving for the recovery of the party when recovered. If the congregation weep with them, it is reasonable they have occasion to

rejoice with them too; if to petition for the mercy, to give thanks for it too, Luke xvii. 17, 18.

Motive 1. Consider it is the special command of your head, Gal. vi. 2. it is a "fulfilling of the law of Christ," viz. the law of love. Our Lord Jesus loved his people so as to die for them, therefore he requires them particularly to love one another. His compassion to them was without a parallel, therefore he will have them full of bowels towards each other; he bare the burdens of the whole, the burden of guilt, and curse due to them for sin, therefore he will have them bear one another's burden. Here is the special reason why it is called the law of Christ.

2. Ye have the example of the head for it, John xiii. 15. "For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." He is touched with all their afflictions, Isa. lxiii. 9. If any annoy them, he reckons himself persecuted, Acts ix. 4. A most tender sympathy he has with them—"for he that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye," Zech. ii. 8. And as for their temptations, he is not unconcerned about them, Heb. iv. 15. Imitate your head, O members of the body: sympathize with them whom Christ sympathizes with, lest ye pour contempt on those whom Christ honours, and forget the afflictions of those whom he tenderly remembers.

3. The trials and distresses of others are designed for your good, as was said before. Our merciful Father, in compassion to the rest, teaches them at the expence of one. Does it not then require your sympathy, that others are afflicted for your sake? Col. i. 24. Should not ye answer the design of providence, in exercising of those duties and graces which providence lays afflictions and temptations on others to bring forth into exercise on you? He lays the rod on your fellow-members, to bring you and many others to the throne of grace.

4. What is thy brother's case to-day, may be thine to-morrow. Is he under affliction now? Thou mayest be in the same hereafter, or in another as hard for thee to bear, as it is for him now to bear his. Is he under temptation? As fast as thou seemest to stand now, thou mayst be as low under the same or a worse, to-morrow, as he is to-day, Gal. vi. 1. 1 Cor. x. 12. Refuse him not that help of thee, which thou mayst need of him ere long. There is no trouble, no temptation, which befalls one member of the body, which another can certainly secure himself from.

Lastly, It is necessary to evidence thy being of the body, 1 Cor. xii. 26. Col. iii. 12. How can it be accounted a live member, that has not sympathy with the rest in pain? but that Christian sympa-

thy of bearing one another's burden speaks union with the members of the head. That hardness, selfishness, and carelessness about the trials and temptations of others, which is found in many, cannot but darken the evidences of good people so far as it prevails, and cast them as naught in whom it reigns.

6. Edify one another by Christian conference, Eph. iv. 29. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." 1 Thess. v. 11. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another." In so far as the body is made up of several Christians, they ought to have suitable conference, for the edification of one another as members, as they are brought together by divine providence. It is the duty of joint members of any lawful society, to treat among themselves of the interests of it and its concerns. Fellow-travellers to one place are to be useful this way to one another. Christians are a society by themselves, the communion of saints, they are fellow-travellers towards Zion: Christian conference is the native result of the relation. I shall branch out this in these things.

1. Those who by providence are cast together ordinarily, whether in a family or neighbourhood, so as they must ordinarily converse together, should labour to be useful to, and edify one another by their communication, Heb. iii. 13. "But exhort one another daily while it is called, To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Religion should be carried by us into all our relations, and however we be posted in particular societies, we should always remember our general calling and relation, as visible members of the mystical body, that we converse together as becometh saints.

2. Occasional meetings of Christians together should be thus improved. There is a commandment "to speak of those things while men walk by the way together," Deut. vi. 7. We find the two disciples going to Emmaus thus exercised, and a happy issue of their conference, Luke xxiv. 14, 15. Were men's spirits habitually heavenly, even occasional encounters would produce something of this sort betwixt fellow-Christians.

3. Christians meeting together on holy and spiritual sacred occasions should, in a special manner, be thus improved, as on Sabbath-days, and at sermons. Then it is the day calls for it, and the Lord's word and ordinances minister matter of Christian conference. Days have been, when people going to or coming from ordinances, have been sweetly employed this way, Psal. lv. 14. and between sermons, either went alone for prayer and meditation, or gathered together for

Christian conference. But, alas! this is much decayed, and among none more perhaps than among us. I often see people standing busy speaking together, after the public worship is begun, and with my eye or voice, must labour to break off the conference, the which if it were not worldly, would surely be broken off by the beginning of the public worship. The worldly discourse in our church-yard* has been, and is an offence and stumbling-block to strangers, and is like to turn to the reproach of the place, whereby God is highly dishonoured. This is a horrid profanation of the Lord's day, an open contempt of it and his ordinances, which speaks the gospel sapless and tasteless to you, and is a presage of a stroke, Neh. xiii. 18. Alas! how think ye one should preach to people making such preparation for hearing? How shall ye profit by preaching after such communications? Is. lviii. 13, 14. How shall we pray for God's blessing on your labours and substance, or look to be heard, when ye sacrilegiously rob God of his own day at this rate? I beseech you, for the Lord's sake, and your own souls' sake, and as ye would not provoke the Lord to leave me as an idol-shepherd among you, who shall have no power to profit your souls, reform this practice, and either go by yourselves for prayer and meditation, or converse like Christians.

4. Fellow-Christians should communicate their cases one to another, as far as Christian prudence will allow, and strengthen, instruct, and edify one another, Psal. lxi. 16. The wise man observes, that "two are better than one; for if the one fall, the other will lift him up," Eccles. iv. 10. And happy are they who thus have a friend in need. How many might have instruction in what they know not, the edge of temptations blunted, their hearts warmed, and their souls bettered, by a mutual communication of cases, troubles, temptations, and experiences?

Lastly, Appointed private meetings of several Christians together, for prayer and Christian conference for their mutual edification, provided it mar not family-worship, nor be improved to the prejudice of public ordinances, as they are warranted by the word of God, so might be of good use (if rightly improved) to the advancement of religion, Acts xii. 12. Mal. iii. 16. Col. iii. 16. By this means Christians might improve both in gifts and grace, in knowledge and love, and they have been blessed of God to these holy ends unto many: and ordinarily, in parishes where the gospel begins to thrive, they are set up almost as naturally as the birds draw together in the

* What the worthy author here complains of is far from being a singular case, but may too justly be applied to most other places.

spring: and, where the gospel work is going back, they decay, owing their fall, either to coldriveness in God's matters creeping in, or to the fiery heat of division.

Motive 1. The necessity and usefulness of it is great. It is necessary and useful for the honour of God, 1 Pet. ii. 9. for the good of our brethren, Rom. xiv. 19. and for our own good, Prov. xi. 25 The tongue is called our glory, because it is the instrument of glorifying God, and so doing good to others: and, without this, men are chargeable with laying up their talents in a napkin, hiding their light under a bushel.

2. The thriving or decay of religion goes hand in hand with it. Look to the times wherein religion prospered, and you will find that "they who feared the Lord spoke often one to another;" and as that wore away, so religion decayed. Nearest the heart nearest the mouth. Where the fire is burning on the hearth, the smoke is going forth of the chimney. Where religion is lively in the heart, it will appear in men's converse.

Lastly, Times of abounding sin and approaching wrath is a special season for it, and calls the fearers of God to set about it, Mal. iii. 16. Such is the day in which we live, "wherein iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold." God is removing the pillars, and his judgments are abroad in the world, and lesser strokes are sent as forerunners of greater.

7. and *lastly,* Be ready to assist the needy members, and to communicate of your worldly goods to the poor in the body. 1 John iii. 17, 18. "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Rom. xii. 13. "Distributing to the necessity of saints, given to hospitality." It is much to be regretted, that many of the poor, especially the vagrant ones, have no semblance of piety or membership in the body of Christ. Yet even these have a right to supply from us, because they are God's creatures. But the poor saints have a double right to it, not only as God's creatures, but as members of Christ, and therefore the church is bound particularly to see to them, Gal. vi. 10. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." The Lord in his wisdom has seen it meet to make some of his members poor in the world, not only for their own trial, but the trial of their brethren, who are obliged to supply them, Deut. xv. 11. "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy

brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in the land," Matth. xxvi. 11. This duty I branch out in five particulars.

1. Seasonably act towards the relief of those members who are fallen into decay in the world, as ye have opportunity, Lev. xxv. 35. "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him, yea, though he be a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with thee." As the keeping of a man that is stumbling from quite falling down, is much alike with helping him up when he is fallen; so the relieving of a man at the brink of poverty, is much alike with relieving him in it. This duty I take to be aimed at, Luke vi. 35. "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again." And if it were more exercised, there would be fewer poor than there are.

2. Abound in private distributions towards the poor members, at your houses, or otherwise, as you have occasion, Matth. vi. 3. Heb. xiii. 16. "But, to do good, and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Occasions of this nature are ordinary, which try what sort of stewards we are of the good things of this life which providence has put into our hand. It was Job's comfort in his poverty, that when he was wealthy, he communicated of what he had to the poor, Job xxxi. 19. and downward.

3. Conscientiously give in to the Sabbath's collections, to be distributed by the church. God has appointed these, and the Lord Jesus has appointed church-officers for taking care of the poor in the church, Acts vi. 1, 3. And what they are to give out is to come into their hand by the church-collections, 1 Cor. xvi. 2. "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." So this matter of the Sabbath-day's collections is not to be looked upon as a business of mere fashion, but as a divine ordinance in the church, which should make people, out of conscience towards God, to give into it, in a suitable proportion to the substance God has put in their hands.

4. Grudge not extraordinary distributions, towards the relief not only of those of other congregations, but of other churches, whom you never saw, nor will perhaps see in the face, Rom. xv. 26. "For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia, to make a certain contribution for the saints which are at Jerusalem." This is a duty of the communion of saints; for all the churches and congregations of saints in the world make but one body of Christ, and they who are at the greatest distance from you are your brethren. Why should any then think themselves unconcerned with their distress?"

Lastly, Be ready to give of your substance for pious uses, towards

the advancing of the good of the body, which is the church, Prov. iii. 9. There are several occasions people have of laying out money for pious uses, which want of due consideration makes them to do grudgingly. But if thou hast an occasion put into thy hand, by this money to honour God, to bring about good for the souls of others, to contribute to the good of the church, thou art to look on it as a special duty of the communion of saints, and an occasion of bestowing it to a noble use.

As to what one is to give, every one must conscientiously determine that for himself: but here is the general rule, viz. that people are to give in a proportion to the necessity of their brethren, and their own ability, Rom. xii. 13. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. One is to eye,

1. The necessity of their brethren: for that may be too little for some, which may be more than enough to others whose straits are not so great. And withal, in weighing this their necessity, it is to be noticed, if the poor walk snitable to their condition; for neither religion nor reason requires us to foster them in voluntary idleness, or in living beyond the bounds of their condition, 2 Thess. iii. 10, 11.

2. Their own ability. What one gives must be his own, and not another's, for God hates robbery for burnt-offering. Those to whom God has given much, of them much is required; those who have little, the less is required. Our own strait condition does not altogether excuse from it. The widow's two mites were required and accepted; yea, people are bound to labour for that they may have what to give to the poor, Eph. iv. 28. "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." And whatever is in their power to do for them, they are obliged to do, Acts iii. 6.

Motive 1. Consider our Lord Christ looks on what is given to his poor members as given to himself, and will make honourable mention of it at the great day, Matth. xxv. 35, 36. "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Christ is in them, his image upon them, they and he are one, and shall not their fellow-members regard them as such, in supplying of their necessities? We are to part with our all to him at his call. Sometimes he requires it by persecutors, and then we are to give it up at his call for his sake: sometimes by his needy members; and then also it is given to him, *Lent to the Lord*.

2. We are not absolute masters of our substance, but stewards of

it, accountable to the Lord for our management. The church is God's household, and Christ has secured, by the covenant, necessities for this life to all that are his, Is. xxxiii. 16.—“Bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure.” Only he has put the portion of the poor members in the hands of others, to give it out to them, according to their necessity, and what of it is in their hand, Luke xvi. 10, 11, 12. Therefore we shall be unfaithful stewards, if we distribute not to the necessities of the saints.

3. They are fellow-members of the same body with you, and fellow-heirs of the same inheritance, Gal. vi. 10. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” The spiritual relation that is betwixt us and them challengeth it as a debt of love. Have we not all one Father, one elder Brother, one Spirit knitting us to one Head, and one heritage for ever, to which men are admitted without respect of persons? Suppose several men were travelling together into a far country to receive a common inheritance, would not those who have abundance of spending money supply those who are run short in the way? So should we do with the poor saints.

4. It tends much to the honour of God, and the credit of the gospel and of the church. Every society looks on themselves as obliged to see to the supply of the wants of their members: and should not the communion of saints be exemplary thereiu, considering the most strait ties among them? By our Lord's own verdict, “Giving is a more blessed thing than receiving,” Acts xx. 35. therein we do in a special manner appear in likeness to the Lord, Luke vi. 35, 36. And O should we not honour with our substance him, who, for our sakes, became poor, that we might be rich?” 2 Cor. viii. 9.

Lastly, It has a reward of grace annexed to it, being rightly performed. It is the best way to secure a throughbearing for us and ours, Prov. xxviii. 27. “He that giveth to the poor shall not have lack.” What we have is liable to many accidents; but laying out for God is better security than laying up what God calls for at our hand, Eccles. xi. 1. “Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.” What is thus laid out brings in to the giver, Prov. iii. 9, 10. “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” Solomon observes the accomplishment of it, Prov. xi. 24. “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth.” And though our good works do not merit either the temporal or eternal reward of glory; yet even the eternal reward will be according to our works, and that is

an eternal truth, 2 Cor. ix. 6. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

V. Admission to the Lord's table is a matter of the greatest weight and concern, to be managed and gone about with all solemn seriousness and caution. Whoso considers that, being one bread, we declare ourselves thereby one body of Christ, must needs see this, and that there is great need to take heed to our feet in entering on that holy ground. And considering that the church is a communion of saints in profession, whereof Christ is the head, there is need to look well who be admitted thereto as complete members of the visible body. And here it is evident,

1. That there ought not to be a promiscuous admission to the Lord's table, which some have contended for. It is not only contrary to our Lord's express command, Matth. vii. 6. "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs," but contrary to the nature, use and ends of that ordinance. It is a distinguishing sign, to put a visible difference betwixt the communion of saints and communion of sinners; and therefore cannot be common to both. Shall the badge of the members of Christ be put upon those who bear Satan's mark on their foreheads? Shall they be declared of the body of Christ, who are, to the conviction of the church, *of the world lying in wickedness*?

2. Admission to the Lord's table is an act of church power and government: for, if the church be a body or society by itself, and the Lord's table the special privilege of that body, whereby one is declared and allowed to be of that body, there can be no lawful admission thereto but in the way of church power and government. For what corporation is there, whereinto one may be admitted without an act of the governing part of it? Our Lord has appointed governors in his church, 1 Cor. xii. 28. who have a power to admit to, and debar from the sacrament, Matth. vii. 6; and this belongs not to the minister alone, but to the society of ruling church-officers, that is, the minister and elders; for the keys of government, to which admission belongs, are not given to one, but to the unity of church-officers, 2 Cor. ii. 6.

3. There ought to be a due trial of those who are admitted to the Lord's table, that it may be seen, whether or not those who seek to be admitted are qualified according to the laws of the visible kingdom of Christ, lest such be brought in as may bring a stain on the society, and corrupt and defile them, instead of edifying them. This also flows from the nature of the church as a separate society, and a communion of saints. For, to bring in hand over head, without consideration of the persons, is much a case with throwing open the

doors of the sanctuary, that any who pleases may enter. It is true, since God only knows the heart, no doubt hypocrites and naughty persons may be let in as honest-hearted Christians; the devil's goats may come in by their likeness to Christ's sheep; but if their outside be promising, that is all the church can judge of, other things are left to God's judgment.

4. The whole matter is of the greatest weight and deepest concern; and that,

1st, To the admitters, who are, as it were, the porters of the Lord's house, and should look well whom they admit to the Lord's table, that it be not profaned through their default. There are two things requisite to give one a right before the church, to the Lord's table. (1.) A competent measure of knowledge; without this people cannot examine themselves, nor rightly discern the Lord's body, 1 Cor. xi. 28, 29. and they are declared none of the Lord's people, Is. xxvii. 11. "It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour." The minister, whose office it is to teach, is the most competent, though perhaps not the only judge in this point. (2.) A blameless life, not scandalous and profane, Matth. vii. 6. These cannot be fit guests at the holy table, whose conversation is openly wicked. And ministers and elders, who are, by their office, overseers of the manners of the people, are to enquire into this. And whoso duly considers it, will find it a most weighty piece of work.

2dly, To the church, and every member thereof. Is it not the concern of every one in the society, who be admitted as fellow-members of the body, to partake of the greatest privileges of the church? It is the duty of all to do what in them lies, that God's ordinance be not profaned, that the communion of saints, which is one bread, receive not harm by the bringing in thereto such as will stain and defile it, and that they be not partakers of other men's sins, 1 Cor. v. 6, 7. "Your glorying is not good: know ye not, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."

Quest. *What can and ought private Christians to do in this case?*
 Ans. If the case or offence of the party being such as renders him unworthy to be admitted, cannot be removed by private admonition, either through the party's obstinacy, or the publicness of it, in that case, they ought to bring it to the church-officers, in order to stop the admission, Matth. xviii. 15. If they do not this, they partake of the guilt; if they do, they have delivered their own souls, though

the church-officers do not their duty, and may partake with a good conscience.

3dly, To the party himself. It is the taking on of the external public badge of the communion of saints, a solemn declaration of his being one body with the members of Christ, the which must needs be of great concern to any one who duly considers how solemn and awful an action this is. To go about this work ignorantly, indeliberately and rashly, without due preparation, is a taking of God's name in vain with a witness. Wherefore,

(1.) Let those who have a hand in admission to the Lord's table, be careful and conscientious to approve themselves to God in this weighty matter. (2.) Let the whole communicants be concerned to see to it as they have opportunity. (3.) Let persons looking that way duly consider the weight of the matter.

Those who have been once orderly admitted, may at every occasion thereafter claim their privilege in case they have kept free from public scandal. But as for those who have not yet been orderly admitted, they ought to make it a matter of time, that there be no hurry in their admission. I have often complained, that some never shew their desire of admission, till there be little time left either for themselves or us to consider of that weighty business. I have endeavoured to prevent that, by giving intimation some weeks before, but almost still in vain as to some. May we be helped to take some method hereafter that may effectually prevent it. Is it not highly reasonable, that those who by office are to see to this, be satisfied both as to the knowledge and conversation of those they must admit? And why should people be so conceited of themselves as not to allow a competent time for this? Let all consider,

1. The honour of Christ, how it is concerned in this matter, that that be not said concerning us, Rom. ii. 24.—“The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.”—The comely order of the Lord's house is for his sake to be carefully observed.

2. The ordinance is in hazard of profanation, and all are in hazard of being guilty of it. The admitters bring guilt on themselves when they are negligent in this matter, Ezek. xlv. 7. “In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread.”—The whole church when they are not in their duty, Lev. v. 1. and the party, Ezek. xxiii. 39.

3. The church is in hazard of being defiled, Heb. xii. 15.—“Lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” Some profane leaven brought in, may soon leaven the whole lump.

4. The party who comes unwarrantably runs a terrible risk 1 Cor. xi. 29. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

Lastly, The sacrament of the Lord's supper is to be highly prized, and the partakers of it to walk worthy of their character and privilege.

1. Let all those who are come to the years of discretion duly value this high privilege, and timeously prepare themselves to partake of it. They must needs be under mighty prejudices, or very untender persons, who, without much ado, live without this ordinance time after time.

2. Let those who are partakers remember their character, as declared visible members of the body of Christ, and walk towards the Lord, and towards one another, as those who are the Lord's by personal dedication, and live in church-communion.

Thus have I shewn you what a society professors and communicants are, and what lies upon them by virtue of their being thus joined in church-communion.

END OF VOLUME III.

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