

THE

EVIL AND DANGER OF SCHISM.

A Sermon preached at Ettrick in the Year 1708.

1 Cor. i. 10,

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together, in the same mind, and in the same judgment.

THE church of Corinth was now lying bleeding of her wounds, given her not by open and avowed enemies, but by her own children, some saying they were of Paul, others that they were of Apollos, &c. The apostle applies himself to the curing of this rent and broken church, in the words of the text, which is a most pathetic exhortation to unity. In the words we have three things.

1. The compellation, "Brethren:" it is a kindly compellation, whereby he insinuates himself into their affections, or endeavours so to do; for it is hard for faithful ministers to get peoples' affections kept where once divisions enter. In this compellation there is an argument for unity: he minds them that they are brethren; and it is a shameful thing for brethren to fall out by the ears, Gen. xiii. 8, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee," says Abraham to Lot, "betwixt me and thee," &c., "for we be brethren;" and Gen. xlv. 24, Joseph says to his brethren, "See that ye fall not out by the way."

2. There is a most pithy obsecration, "I beseech you, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul turns a petitioner to them for the church's peace, and begs of them, as he did of the jailor, Acts xvi. 28, that they would do themselves no harm, but lay by the sword of contention; and that it might have the more weight with their consciences, he interposeth the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, "I beseech you," says he, "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that," &c. It implies two things, 1. It is as much as if he had said, As ye have any regard to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath so often enjoined peace, unity, and brotherly love to his followers,

beware of divisions. It is not I, (as if he had said), but Christ, the Prince of peace, that requires this of you. 2. It is as much as if he had said, As ye love the Lord Jesus, as ye tender his honour and glory, speak the same thing, and let there be no divisions among you; for the name of Christ sadly suffers by your contentions, factions, and divisions. The apostle's beseeching of them notes his gentleness, but withal his vehemency of spirit, entreating with them for the peace and unity of the church; he handles their wounds tenderly, yet so as they might see he was in good earnest to have them healed. It imports also how heavy their contentions were to him, how grateful it would be to him if they would unite, and how grievous, if they should continue their divisions still; therefore he obtests them, and after a short adjures them by the name of the Lord, that they would all speak the same thing, and let no divisions be among them: If I cannot obtain this of you, says he, for my own sake, yet let me obtain it of you for Christ's sake. This is the manner of his exhortation.

3. We have the matter of his exhortation, which lies in three things.

1st, He exhorts them to unity of principles, "that ye all speak the same thing;" he beseecheth them, that they would not vent principles contrary to the truth, and to one another; for now, instead of unity, some were crying one thing, some another, like that confused multitude, Acts xxi. 34, there was nothing but contention and contradiction among them, till some of them came at length to deny the resurrection, 1 Cor. xv.

2dly, He dehorts them from divisions; the word in the Greek is schisms, as ye may see in the margins of some of your Bibles: the word properly signifies a cutting or section in a solid body, as in the cleaving of wood, when the parts of it before united are rent asunder. Thus the one church of Corinth was rent asunder into divers parties and factions, some following one minister, some following another; therefore says the apostle, 1 Cor. i. 13, "Is Christ divided?" As if he should say, Why, seeing there is but one Christ, are there so many bodies? Where will you get a Christ to head your different and divided party? Through these divisions among them, it would seem, from 1 Cor. xi. 33, they had separate communions, they would not tarry for one another. The apostle also taxeth their divisions, 1 Cor. iii. 3, "For whereas there is among you envying, strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?" Where the word translated "divisions" properly signifies separate standing, where one party stand upon one side, and another party on another side. It denotes such dissension, wherein men separate one from another.

3dly, He exhorts them to amend what was amiss already among them in that matter, to be perfectly joined together, in opposition to their contentions and divisions. The word in the original is very emphatic, and signifies two things, 1. To restore disjointed members into their proper places again, Gal. vi. 1, "Restore such an one." It is a metaphor from surgeons setting members or joints again; as if he had said, Set such an one in joint again: so it aims at healing the church of her rents, restoring such as had separated and withdrawn. 2. It signifies to perfect and establish in the state to which a person or thing is restored; and so it denotes a firm union betwixt the members of that church; he would have them compacted together as a body, in which all the parts do fitly cleave together, each of them in its proper place; and withal he adds here the bonds of this union, the same mind, that is, the same heart, will, and affections, as the word mind is taken, Rom. vii. 25, and the same judgment or opinion anent matters; if the last cannot be got, yet the first may. From the words, we draw these following doctrines:—

DOCT. I. That schism and division is an evil incident to the churches of Christ while in this world.

DOCT. II. That professors ought to beware of schism and division, as they tender the authority and honour of our Lord Jesus Christ.

DOCT. III. Where schism and division enter into a church, there will be great heats, diversity, yea, contrariety of opinions, people contradicting one another in matters of religion, "That ye all speak the same things," &c.

DOCT. IV. That however hard it be, yet it is possible to get a rent church healed.

DOCT. V. That it is the duty of all church members to endeavour the unity of the church, and the cure of schisms: and particularly, it is the duty of disjointed members to take their own places in the body again.

LASTLY, that schisms and divisions, as they are grievous to all the sons of peace, so they are in a special manner heavy and afflicting to faithful ministers of the gospel of peace.

Here is work shapen out for many days, but I design not to insist.

As to the first of these doctrines, to wit, That schism and division is an evil incident to the churches of Christ in this world; I. I shall illustrate the truth of this doctrine. II. I shall give you some observations, as to the rise and way of carrying on this sad plague in churches. And I challenge your attention, and beseech you by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, without prejudice, ye will hear

and consider what I am to say; and if I say any thing contrary to the word of God, reject it; but what I may say, as agreeable to God's word, I require it may have place in, and weight with your consciences. I shall endeavour to hold off personal reflections, but must take liberty freely to handle the cause.

I. Then, I shall illustrate this sad doctrine. Alas! it is written, I may say, in letters of the blood of our mother, who cries out, "She is wounded in the house of her friends." This broken, bleeding church, exposed to the laughter of Papists and malignants by her divisions, is a sad instance of it. Now, seeing some are apt to stumble at all religion, by reason of our divisions, and others are apt to pride themselves in them, I shall, for the sake of both, shew, that these things are uncouth, strange, or new things. For which consider,

1. These things are foretold in the scriptures. Our Lord Christ has given us fair warning, Matth. x. 34, 35, 36, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother," and so forth. Not that this is the kindly and native effect of the gospel of peace, but so it proves, by reason of the corruptions of men. The apostle tells the church of Ephesus, Acts xx. 30, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." I shall only add another scripture, 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4, "After their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: and they shall turn away their ears from the truth," &c. From all which we may see, that church-renders shall not be wanting, nor shall they want success.

2. Consider the sad experience of the church in several ages; I shall give you two instances out of the Old Testament; the first you have, Num. xvi. Even when the church had a Moses and Aaron in it, there was a violent schism set a-foot in it by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. That this business was not so much a sedition in the state, as a schism in the church, (though I deny not but there was something of sedition in it, for schism and sedition go often together), is clear from the great cause of the quarrel, which was about the priesthood, as is clear from Numb. xvi. 3—9, which ye may read at your leisure, but consider especially the 10th and 11th verses, where Moses says, "And seek ye the priesthood also? For which cause both thou, and all thy company are gathered together against the Lord: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?" Compare with this Jude 11, where the seducers, the disturbers of the church, are said to perish in the gainsaying of Core. Many were

led aside into this schism, Numb. xvi. 19, "And Korah gathered all the congregation against them," viz. against Moses and Aaron. Two of the heads of it, being called to come before Moses, sent him a declination, stuffed with scandalous defamations against him, Numb. xvi. 12, 13, 14, "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up. Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness?" &c. Yea, when God himself had inflicted the censure on them, the people would not quit their good opinion of them; but as it is in the 41st verse, "They murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord." Another notable schism was that made by the ten tribes, 1 Kings xii., where two things are very remarkable, 1st, The rise of it, their dissatisfaction with the civil government whereupon they refused to own Rehoboam as their king, and also separated from the church of Jerusalem, who owned his authority, though he was very far degenerate from the piety and wisdom of David and Solomon. 2d Thing remarkable in it, is the way how it was maintained, viz. by priests that were not of the sons of Levi, ver. 31, of that chapter, that is, men who had no right to the priestly office. The New Testament is so full of dismal accounts this way, that there is not almost an epistle written, wherein we have not something of church rents and divisions, exhortations to unity, or some one thing or another of that kind. See Rom. xvi. 17, 18, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." From the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, read our text, and downwards. See the x. xi. and xii. chapters of the 2d Epistle to the Corinthians, throughout, where Paul is put to defend himself against the slanders cast on him by false teachers, and to compare himself with them. As to the Epistle to the Galatians, I need not cite chapter and verse, the body of that epistle being against them that troubled the churches of Galatia. Eph. iv. ye have a pathetic exhortation to unity, from ver. 1 to 17. Phil. ii. 1, and downwards, "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy that ye be like-minded." Col. ii. 18, and downwards, "Let no man beguile you of your reward.—Wherefore are ye subject to ordinances? touch not, taste not, handle not; which things have indeed a shew of wisdom," &c. The Thessalonians are exhorted, 1 Thess. v. 14, to "warn them that are unruly." In the 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians

—chap. ii. 2, there are some troubling the church, and shaking them in their minds by their doctrine, 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, “If any man teach otherwise,—he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words,” &c., and chap. i. 6, 7, “From which some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.” 2 Tim. iii. 6, the apostle speaks of some “that creep into houses, and lead captive silly women:—and that resist the truth, as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses,” ver. 8. Tit. i. 11, he tells him, “he must stop the mouths of some that subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not.” The Epistle to Philemon, a single person, is to unite him and Onesimus. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the apostle taxeth some that forsook the church assemblies, Heb. x. 25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.” James iii. 14, and downwards, “But if ye have bitter envying” (in the Greek it is bitter zeal) “and strife in your hearts, glory not—This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.—But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable,” &c. “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” 1 Pet. iii. 8, “Finally, brethren, be ye all of one mind.” 2 Pet. ii. read throughout the whole, which treats altogether of false teachers. 1 John ii. 19, “They went out from us, but they were not of us.” In the second Epistle of John, 10, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.” In the 3d Epistle of John, 9th and 10th verses, we find a Diotrephes prating against the apostle “with malicious words.” Read the whole Epistle of Jude, for I need not cite a verse or two of it to our purpose. See also the 2d and 3d chapters of Revelation. The church of Ephesus had tried those that said they were apostles, and were not, Rev. ii. 2, Smyrna was troubled with those that said they were Jews, and were not, but were the synagogue of Satan, ver. 9; so was Philadelphia, chap. iii. 9. The church of Pergamus had them that held the doctrine of Balaam, Rev. ii. 14. In Thyatira was Jezebel, teaching and seducing, ver. 20.

Here is a cloud of witnesses from whom we may clearly learn two lessons,

1st, That though the apostles themselves were alive to guide and govern the churches, yet they would not be able to prevent schisms, divisions, and rending of churches.

A second lesson we may learn from them is, That those who had most of the Spirit of God, were of the most peaceable temper, most

tender of the peace of the church, most careful to preserve it where it was entire, and most careful to restore it where it was lost.

If we take a view of after-times, we shall find schism and division infecting the church. When the Pagan persecution was over, the fire of contention burnt up the church. Then was that in the Rev. viii. 5, accomplished, "Fire from the altar was cast into the earth." When Constantine the Great had restored peace unto the church, she was miserably defaced by the schism of the Donatists, who separated from the church, at first, to eschew the impurity of promiscuous communion. This schism lasted more than two hundred years. They held, that men were defiled with the corruptions of those with whom they kept church communion, and that there was no other true church but their own. That which led them to these extravagancies, was, that the church kept in ministerial communion with her one Cecilian, whom the Donatists would have had deposed; because, as they alleged, that when he was a deacon, he had hindered some people to assist some that were in prison for the cause of Christ, and that he had been ordained by those that were traitors, that is, who had delivered up the Bible to the persecutors: so, thinking the whole church polluted with the fellowship of this man and his fellows, they separated.

When the Lord raised up Luther to reform the church from Popery, then came in the Anabaptists, who rebelled against the magistrate, and taught sedition: and withal pretended that Luther had made but a half reformation, that he had only cut off the branches of Popery, but they would strike at the root. Hence complained that holy man thus, "It cost us ten years' pains to erect a little church, and then comes one that knows nothing, but to rail on faithful ministers, and he in one moment overturns all." And elsewhere he says, "They that received the doctrine of the gospel from us, even they persecute us most bitterly." How our own church was thus troubled in the time of former Presbytery, is evident from the writings of worthy men of that time, against separation: so we find an Act of the Assembly, 1643, appointing to search for books tending to separation. I cannot but particularly remark an Act of the Assembly, 1641, sess. 10, against impiety and schism, wherein they charge "all ministers and members of this kirk, to endeavour to suppress all impiety, and mocking of religious exercises." And upon the other part, "That, in the fear of God, they be aware, that under the pretext of religious exercises, otherwise lawful and necessary, they fall not into error, heresy, schism, scandal, self-conceit, and despising of others, pressing above the common calling of Christians, and usurping that which is proper to the pastoral vocation,

contempt or disregard of the public means," &c. This I take plainly to be meant of what we call fellowship meetings, which have been so much mocked by wicked men on the one hand, and abused on the other hand to schism, &c. But the Assembly, 1647, sess. 19, in their directions for secret and private worship, and mutual edification, for cherishing piety, for maintaining unity, and avoiding schism and division, which are ordinarily bound in with the Confession of Faith, towards the latter end of the book, they discharge these meetings altogether, as you may see in the seventh direction, where they say, "Whatever hath been the fruits and effects of meetings of persons of divers families, in the times of corruption and trouble, yet such meetings of persons of divers families, (except in the cases mentioned in the directions), are to be disapproved, as tending to the prejudice of the public ministry, to the rending of the families of particular congregations, and (in progress of time) of the whole kirk." I bring not in this to shew my own judgment anent these meetings, but to let you see there was a spirit of separation going in these days as well as now: and how the fire of division left not this church till she was cast into the fire of persecution, is too well known. O that it had from that time left us!

II. I come now to the *second* thing proposed, to give you a few observations, as to the rise and way of carrying on this sad plague in churches. And,

1. I say, God has his own holy ends in these things. By these he tries his people, 1 Cor. xi. 18, 19; and thereby he punisheth men for the contempt of the gospel, and not receiving the truth in love, 2 Thess. ii.

2. We find schisms and divisions raised in the church, under the plausible pretext of strictness. This was the way how the churches of Galatia were rent in pieces. The corrupt teachers would needs add the observation of Moses' law to the gospel, as if that were a more perfect and strict way. Thus the corrupt teachers among the Colossians, pretending great strictness, cry, "Touch not, taste not, handle not," Col. ii. 21. This, in part, seems to have been the rise of the schism in Corinth, which the apostle points at in the matter of the Lord's supper, while he says, "Let a man examine himself," 1 Cor. xi. 28. This was the schism of the Novatians and Donatists brought in of old—that discipline was not exercised, as they would have had, against those that fell in time of persecution.

3. There are ordinarily some, (I hope I am not speaking to those with whom the very scripture text will be accounted treason); there are some, I say, who are at great pains going hither and thither to spread the flame, that compass sea and land to make proselytes,

Thus we find some travelling from Jerusalem to Antioch through Syria and Cilicia, to make disciples, and disturb the churches, Acts xv. 23, 24, "Unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls," &c.

4. We may always observe, that one main thing church renders aim at, is to discredit the ministers of the gospel, as if the word were, Fight neither with small nor great but the ministers; for Satan knows, if once the ministry be made contemptible, and their credit sunk, then they will be useless; and if once they were laid by as useless, his kingdom were in a fair way of thriving. These are the wolves, who, though they be in sheep's clothing, yet discover themselves by barking at the shepherds: so did Korah. Look the Epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians, and see how the renders of these churches railed upon and discredited the apostle Paul; they said he was no lawful apostle; hence he is so oft put to clear his call, 1 Cor. ix. 1, 2; Gal. i. and ii. chap.; they sought a proof of Christ speaking in him, 2 Cor. xiii. 3; they charged him with levity and inconstancy, as if his words were not to be regarded, 2 Cor. i. 17; they charged him with walking after the flesh, 2 Cor. xi. 2; they held him out to be a vain-glorious person, and a very contemptible man, 2 Cor. xi. 9, 10; see the four last chapters of 2 Cor.

5. We often find they have great pretences to holiness, and attainments above ordinary; so they are said to go in sheep's clothing, and to transform themselves into apostles of Christ: and no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light, 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14. And it doth not a little favour their design, that men who have suffered for the cause of Christ, are sometimes engaged in it, which is clear from what the apostle says, comparing himself with the renders of the church of Corinth, 2 Cor. xi. 23, "Are they ministers of Christ? I am more: in prisons more frequent;" which clearly holds forth, that they had been sufferers and prisoners for the cause as well as he: yea, really godly persons may be engaged in it, Rev. ii. 20, where we find Jezebel seducing Christ's servants; for sometimes even good men may run the devil's errands, and yet be saved at last.

Lastly, We may observe what characters the scriptures give such, 2 Pet. ii. 10, "Presumptuous are they, self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities." 1 Tim. vi. 4, "Proud, (for only by pride cometh contention), knowing nothing, but doting about questions," &c. Rom. xvi. 17, 18, they are said to be "such as serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly," &c. They are en-

tertained by those “that have itching ears,” 2 Tim. iv. 3. See how the apostle strikes at the root of division, Phil. ii. 3, “Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.” Men that are irritated by a church, vain-glorious and conceity, esteeming themselves better than others, are dangerous men, and fit wedges to cleave the church of Christ asunder.

Now I shall name the second doctrine, and then apply.

Doctr. II. That professors ought to beware of schism and division, as they tender the authority and honour of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me apply it in the words of our text, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.” Dearly beloved, as ye tender the authority and honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, beware of this schism and division that is now troubling this church. I foresee it will be needless for me to offer to press this exhortation with motives, till I have removed three prejudices out of the way. The *first* is, that they are the strictest party: the *second* is, that the church has given them just ground to separate: the *third* is, that their principles are the principles of our covenanted reformation. Some, it may be, will be amazed to hear us offer to question these things; but I beseech you consider what I say.

The *first* prejudice then is, That those who dissent and separate from us are the strictest party. In answer to this, consider there is a two-fold strictness: a strictness in practice, and a strictness in opinion. As for strictness in the point of a holy practice, life and conversation; though they seem in a late printed paper to appropriate the name of the godly to their own party, yet God forbid I should appropriate it to ours. Only I shall say, that among those that conscientiously attend the ordinances this day in our church, there are people as eminent for holiness of life, and close walking with God, that have as much of the exercise of godliness upon their spirits, and acquaintance and communion with God, as any in the nation; so far as I can discern. I could say more to this purpose, but that I desire not to give offence. As for the ministry, whatever defects be among them; and though there are many of them with whom I have no acquaintance; yet there are among them, of whom I could say, (if it were lawful to say it of any man), O that my soul were in their soul’s stead! and at whose feet I would willingly sit down and learn the knowledge of Christ and practical godliness: this I declare to be my opinion of them, however low thoughts many have of them. As for strictness of opinions, as to government and church

communion, if we measure strictness according to the dictates of men's own spirits, we will yield to them for strictness; and so would our Lord to the Pharisees, and the apostles to the false teachers. But if we measure strictness according to the word of God, we deny they are strictest, but they are indeed widest from the rule. I will follow Christ to the synagogue of the Jews, (I hope some of you at least may understand what I say), and in so doing I will be more strict than those that scruple to follow Christ's example, for fear they be involved in the guilt of the corruptions among them; for the nearer I follow Christ, the more strict I am, if strictness be measured according to the word of God. However, this is but an assertion; but it brings me to the second thing, where I shall prove it.

The *second* prejudice is, That the church has given them just ground to separate; and therefore they cry out on the Commission of the General Assembly, for representing them to the world as schismatics. To this I answer, That it is plain they have made a total separation from us, and refuse communion with us in ordinances, unless it be at some times to serve a turn. If this their separation from us be a sin, then their separation is a schism: but so it is, that their separation from us is sinful, which I shall prove by one argument, not to multiply words. The argument is this, Those who reject communion in the ordinances of Christ with a true church, and separate from her, because of corruptions in her, while in the meantime they might keep communion with her without sin, are guilty of schism and sinful separation: this I think will not be denied, for if our thus keeping communion be not our sin, it must be our duty; surely it is not left indifferent. But so it is, that our dissenters do thus reject communion with us, and separate from us, while, in the meantime, they might keep communion with this church without sin: therefore their separation is schism, and they are schismatics. That they might keep communion with us without sin, that is, without involving themselves in the guilt of the corruptions of the church, will appear, if ye consider, that there are no corruptions amongst us, whether real or pretended, which the church obligeth them to approve or join in the practice of, as terms of communion with her: nor is there any real or pretended truth which they own, that the church obligeth them to renounce, as a term of communion with her. This holdeth absolutely as to the people for laick-communion, as they call it; and I am sure it has been offered to some of them, that they should be allowed to exonerate their own consciences, by protesting against these things which they look upon as corruptions amongst us, if they would but come and join with us. As for ministerial communion, it must be remembered

that the ministers of this Church are obliged to own the Confession of Faith, as the confession of their faith, which is very just; and if we will believe the leaders of that party, they own it as well as we; so that herein they will move no debate. It remains then that they may keep communion with us without sin, unless mere joining in communion with a church, wherein there are many corruptions, be a sin, and defile a man. To this narrow point, I think, the controversy betwixt them and us is brought: this I take to be the very foundation of the separation, which if it fall, all falls together with it: and that this is a gross untruth, I shall evince by two arguments. The *first* argument is from Rev. ii. 24, 25, "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, As many as have not this doctrine,—I will put upon you none other burden; but that which ye have already, hold fast till I come." In the church of Thyatira, Jezebel was suffered to teach and seduce Christ's servants; for suffering of her the angel is reprov'd, and consequently called to amend this fault. The party that kept themselves pure are not required to separate; nay, in effect, are commanded to continue in the communion of that church; while the Lord expressly tells them, "He will lay no other burden upon them," but commands them "to hold fast," and yet there is not one word anent their separating to keep themselves pure. This could not have been, if their keeping communion with the church of Thyatira, in which there were such gross corruptions, and corrupt members, had been a sin.

The *second* argument is from our Lord's example, Luke iv. 16, "And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read." What corruptions were in the Jewish church in Christ's day, ye may find by reading the Gospels, as great, I daresay, as can in any measure of modesty be pretended to be in the Church of Scotland; and ye would remember they were a covenanted land as well as we; yet our Lord keeps church communion with them in the ordinances of God; though he joined not with them in their corruptions, he joined with them in the ordinances, and consequently it was no sin; and people may keep themselves from the guilt of corruptions in a church, and yet keep communion with a church wherein these corruptions are. Mark, that it was his custom to go to the synagogue in the place where he was brought up, for it plainly relates to his custom which he had while he lived a private man in Nazareth, seeing it appears from the context that this was the first time he was in Nazareth, after he had entered upon the public exercise of his ministry; which cuts off that exception, that Christ went thither only to preach to them. Nay, afterwards,

did he not go to their solemn feasts? This he did also before, and we have plain scripture for his hearing their teachers, Luke ii. 42, "And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast;" and in the verse immediately preceding, it is said of holy Joseph and Mary, "they went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover," so far were they from separating. And in the 46th verse of that chapter, "They found him in the temple, in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." They that would find this point more largely proved, let them consult Rutherford's "Peaceable Plea for Presbytery," and Durham on Scandal, and on the Revelation, both proving this point against the separatists of their time.

I come now to the third prejudice; and I beseech you bear with me, for if I were to handle this point in an ordinary, ye should not hear so much of it at once. Our great business is to preach Christ, if we could get leave to do it for our divisions. The *third* prejudice, I say, is, That their principles wherein they differ from us, are the principles of our covenanted reformation, and that their practices, in the points of difference, are agreeable thereto: and so they give out that they adhere to our National, and solemn League and Covenants, Confession of Faith, Directory, &c. But we will examine their pretensions in these matters.

First, then, As to the National Covenant, I shall take notice of two things. 1. I find these words in the National Covenant, "This true reformed kirk, to the which we join ourselves willingly, in doctrine, faith, religion, discipline, and use of the holy sacraments, as lively members of the same, in Christ our Head, promising and swearing by the great name of the Lord our God, that we shall continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline of this kirk." Let any compare with this, the Assembly 1638, their explanation of the National Covenant, as ye have it sess. 16, of that Assembly, where, repeating these foresaid words of the National Covenant, they subjoin, "But so it is, that Episcopal government is abhorred and detested, and the government by ministers and elders, in assemblies general and provincial, and presbyteries, was sworn to, and subscribed, in subscribing that Confession, and ought to be holden by us, if we adhere to the meaning of the kirk, when that Confession was framed, sworn to, and subscribed, unto which we are obliged by the national oath and subscription of this kirk, as is evident by," &c. Now, I would appeal to the conscience of any separatist who hath knowledge to discern things that differ, whether or not we have the same doctrine and discipline that they had, when that covenant was first taken; and the same doctrine and dis-

cipline which the Assembly 1638 declares to be the doctrine and discipline meant in that covenant, unto which we are obliged by the national oath. Seeing then we have the same doctrine and discipline, they are, by the National Covenant, obliged to join themselves to this kirk, and to continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline thereof; and, by their separating, they make themselves plainly guilty of the breach of this substantial part of the covenant. And hence, by the bye, appears the unreasonableness of speaking so slightly of these days, the doctrine and discipline of that time being that which the National Covenant still binds to.

2. I find, that at the first taking of the covenant, they swear to maintain the king's authority: as also, when, with additions, it was renewed in the year 1638, they swear to stand to the defence of his majesty's person and authority. How agrees our dissenters' principle, rejecting the authority of the queen, with this part of the covenant? O, say they, "she is not a covenanted queen, and therefore cannot be queen of a covenanted land." Strange prejudices! Was not Scotland a covenanted land long ere the solemn League and Covenant was heard tell of? Was not king Charles I. king of a covenanted land at that time when the covenant was renewed, and his authority sworn to be defended? But was he a covenanted king? Did he own their covenant? No, no; upon the contrary; he obliged some of their nobles at London* to abjure it, declared the covenanters rebels, and brought down an army against them to force them from it.

As for the solemn League and Covenant, we find them guilty the same way. It binds us expressly against schism, as well as Prelacy, superstition, and heresy. And that they are guilty of schism has been proven before. It also bound to the maintaining of the king's authority, it being far from the mind of the covenanters to cast off the authority of the magistrate, though it was entered into without the king's consent. Was it over the mind of the covenanters that they would own no king, but one that had taken this covenant? I am sure the Parliament of Scotland thought not so, when in the year 1649 they proclaimed and declared to all the world, That Charles II. was king of Great Britain, &c., their sovereign lord and king; and this was a full year before he took the covenant: for which see the Apologetical Relation, pp. 64, 65. Nor did the General Assembly 1649 think so, when in their letter to the king's majesty, (to be found amongst the printed Acts of the Assembly, in their last session), before he was come home, or had

* Apol. Rel., p. 53.

taken the covenant, they call him most gracious sovereign; and subscribe the letter thus, Your majesty's most loyal subjects, and humble servants, the ministers and elders convened in this national Assembly of the kirk of Scotland: while in the meantime they tell him, in the same letter, That he had settled a peace with the Irish Papists, the murderers of so many thousands of his Protestant subjects, and granted to them (contrary to the standing laws of his royal progenitors) a full liberty of their abominable idolatry; which, say they, cannot be otherwise judged, but a giving of your royal power to the Beast; and they exhort him to lay aside the service-book. And several other things may be there found, that may make men blush to talk of their agreeing with the Church of Scotland in her principles in these times, and yet rejecting the authority of the present queen. And, which is most lamentable, even those worthies that laid down their lives for the covenants, whose testimonies are recorded in Naphtali,* having owned the king's authority, and prayed for him on the scaffolds, must by this new doctrine be reputed to die as fools, who understood not the covenants they were laying down their precious lives for. As to the Confession of Faith,

1. How does their refusing to pray for the queen, to pay her cess, and to own her authority, because she is not a covenanted queen, agree with the Confession of Faith, chap. 23, § 4, "It is the duty of people to pray for magistrates, to pay them tribute and other dues, and to be subject to their authority for conscience sake: infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority?" I know they will say, that article is meant of lands not covenanted: there had been some shadow of force in this perhaps, if this Confession of Faith had been framed before the covenant: but upon the contrary it was long after, and was the product of the solemn League and Covenant, as appears from the first article of the Covenant, in these words, "And shall endeavour to bring the churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith," &c. The solemn League and Covenant was sworn in the year 1643, the Confession of Faith was sent hither and approved by the Assembly not till the year 1647, for which see the Act of Assembly, printed before the Confession. And can we think, that those who, in pursuance of the covenant, framed this Confession of Faith, to declare to the world the faith of covenanters, would so juggle, as to put in articles of faith which would bind others, but not themselves?

* See the testimonies of the Marquis of Argyle, Warriston, the Ten. These, with T. Paterson, R. Shields, Mr. Robinson, G. Crawford, Mr. M'Kait.

2. How does their reckoning the taking the oath of allegiance to the queen, one of the steps of the Church's defection, consist with Confession, chap. 22, § 2, "A lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters ought to be taken;" and § 3, of the same chapter, "Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath, touching any thing that is good and just, being imposed by lawful authority?" It is true, they reckon her no lawful queen; but one error will not atone for another. The famous author of the Apologetical Relation was not of our dissenters' mind, (nay, he thought there had been no Christian of their mind, and for ought I know there were none in these days), for, speaking of the reasons why the oath of supremacy, called then, though falsely, the oath of allegiance, should be refused, and answering this objection, viz. such as refuse this oath of allegiance, declare that they are not dutiful and loyal subjects, he saith, It hath been shown what difference there is betwixt this oath and the oath of allegiance; and there is no minister or Christian should scruple at the taking the pure oath of allegiance, *Apol. Rel.* p. 259. If it was this author's mind, that no minister or Christian should have scrupled the oath of allegiance to king Charles II. when he had taken the covenant, broken it, and overturned the work of reformation, sure, he would far less have thought it a sin to take the oath of allegiance to the present queen.

3. How doth their separating from this Church, lest they be involved in the guilt of the corruptions amongst us, by keeping communion with us, agree with Conf. chap. 26, § 2, "Saints, by profession, are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God;—which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended to all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus?"

4. How doth that principle of theirs, sometime at least owned by them, though left out in their last paper, against the power of the magistrate to call assemblies, agree with Conf. chap. 31, § 2, "As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons to consult and advise with about matters of religion?" and with Act of Assembly 1638, sess. 26, concerning yearly General Assemblies, where they say, "If, in the meantime, it shall please the king's majesty to indite a General Assembly, ordaineth all presbyteries, universities, and burghs, to send their commissioners, for keeping the time and place which shall be appointed by his majesty's proclamation?" They cry out on the encroachment of the magistrates in dissolving Assemblies; but as our Assemblies are constituted in the name of Christ, so are they dissolved in his name. What dissolution the magistrate makes, is looked upon as the dis-

missing of the members. There have indeed been encroachments made by the magistrate in dissolving Assemblies before they had done their business, and there have been protestations made against this. And though, in the late paper, they charge the Church for not protesting against the encroachments, and recording the same; yet that protestations have not been made against them, is an untruth: but where the magistrate's deed is not recorded, neither are the protestations recorded. I was eye and ear-witness to the magistrate's dissolving the Assembly in the midst of business; and protestations were made against it, and for the Church's intrinsic power; and, from every corner of the house, members adhering thereto. And this protesting is recorded in the Acts of Assembly; so that, from my certain knowledge, I can say they speak an untruth in that charge in the declination; yea, I have the Acts of the Assembly by me, where they, or any that question the truth of what I say, may read it with their own eyes.

5. How doth their rejecting and despising the testimony of the Commission of the General Assembly against the Union, and reproaching them for it, because it was given into the Parliament by way of humble address, and not by way of protestation, agree with Confession, chap. 31, § 5, "Synods and councils are to handle and conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical, and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs, which concern the commonwealth, unless, by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary, or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate?"

Lastly, How does their crying out on the magistrate's occasionally appointing fasts and thanksgivings, agree with the Confession of Faith, allowing the magistrate to call Assemblies? This I spoke to formerly in another sermon. And further, how agrees it with the last paragraph of the Directory concerning public solemn fasting, where we have these words, "Besides solemn and general fasts enjoined by authority, we judge," &c. It may be observed how frequently the apostles enjoin obedience to magistrates, and honouring of them, as 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2, "I exhort therefore, that prayers be made for kings, and for all that are in authority." Rom. xiii. 1, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers," &c. Tit. iii. 1, "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates." 1 Pet. ii. 13, and downwards. All which may shew us, that we have no more right to take away the fifth command out of the decalogue, that requires obedience to magistrates, than the Papists have to take away the second, which condemns their idolatry. I think there is a strange inclination amongst some

that profess religion, not only amongst dissenters, but others, to speak evil of dignities, and to embrace every thing that may make against the magistrate; so that the murdering of king Charles I., wherewith Presbyterians are slandered by Papists and malignants, is owned and adopted by some, as if it had been a laudable action. Wo's me! that ignorance, and an inclination to vilify magistrates, should give such an handle to the enemy against us. If it was such a glorious action, the sectaries must have the glory of it; for it was they, and not Presbyterians, that did the deed, and it was protested against by the commissioners both from the Church and state of Scotland, for which they were hardly used at London; for which see Apol. Rel. p. 64. Yea, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1649, gave their testimony against it in their seasonable warning, sess. 27, they say, "That prevailing party of sectaries in England, who have broken the covenant—and taken away the king's life, look upon us with an evil eye." And in their exhortation to their brethren in England, "We have obtained this mercy, to be stedfast to our old principles, in bearing free and faithful testimony against their proceedings, both in reference to the toleration and government, and the taking away the king's life." And in their letter to the king, "We do from our hearts abominate and detest that horrid fact of the sectaries, against the life of your royal father our sovereign." Both which are to be found in the last session of that Assembly.

Let me now renew my exhortation and press it. "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you." Beware of division yourselves, and give your help to recover, in all tenderness, those that have withdrawn, and encourage them not in their way. I am persuaded, that if they were not so much countenanced and encouraged by those that are the hearers, the number of such would not be so great as it is. Let not that itching ear get place with you, so as to run away to their meetings, whenever ye have opportunity, and so to cast yourselves into a snare, and to do what in you lies to strengthen the division, and trample on the grave authority of the church, whereby one of their preachers is deposed from the ministry, and the other, who never was a minister, his license to preach is declared null and void; and both are certified, that if they repent not, and amend their ways, they shall be excommunicated. I know it is said, that it is thought strange, the Commission threateneth to censure these men with the highest censures of the Church, while yet they declare them to be none of their communion. But I think it more strange to find men amused with this,

who though some curates, and others who have been censured by this Church, who were as little of our communion as these men, yet are dissatisfied that the Church does not censure more of them, and that more severely. Beware then of this division, I beseech you,

1. For their sakes that have withdrawn, that ye may not confirm them in their course, tending so much to the disadvantage of their souls, in withdrawing from the means of grace and knowledge, which they stand in need of, as well as others. O Sirs, be concerned this way ; the Lord's people are of an uniting and gathering spirit, Isa. lxvi. 20, "And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters,—to my holy mountain." They shall bring them not by force, but by gospel-motives. But some of them are far off ; what then ? yet they shall bring them ; may be they cannot walk, then shall they bring them on horses ; may be they are so weak they cannot ride on horses, then they shall get chariots ; some may be so sickly they cannot come in chariots, then they shall come in litters that are for carrying of sick folk : But by all means they will endeavour to bring them to the mountain of the Lord. Some will not concern themselves this way, but let every one do as they please in these matters. But O for this gathering spirit !

2. I beseech you for the sake of those, both amongst them and us, that have no religion. O Sirs, what should come of the many perishing souls up and down Scotland, that are strangers to Christ and their own soul's state, if, as these men would have it, all should leave us, and we be left to preach to the empty walls, or hold our tongues ? Will they be able for the whole kingdom ?

3. I beseech you, for your own sakes, have pity on your souls, cast not away your spiritual food ; yield not so to Satan, who, if he could, would set you at variance with the ordinances, because he well knows that men in that case may get greater ease in their lusts, for it will be long ere a reproof be reached from the pulpit to the fields, or their firesides. I am very apprehensive, that the preaching of the word, as being levelled at peoples' state, and case of their souls before the Lord, has been over hot for some, that has made them withdraw from ministers, as men that tormented them that dwell upon the earth.

4. I beseech you for the Church's sake, whose beauty is marred with division, Cant. i. 6, "Look not upon me, because I am black :—my mother's children were angry with me." There is no danger from enemies without, like that from divisions within. The unity of the Church would be the stability of it, Isa. xxxiii. 20, "Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall

not be taken down, not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken." Though the kingdoms of the world be built on mountains, yet they shall fall; but the Church, when she is a quiet habitation, though but a tent, she shall stand; and though that tent be but fixed with stakes, yet they shall not be removed: though it be fixed but with cords, not with great ropes, yet none of them shall be broken. Division mars reformation in a church. It is very remarkable how discipline was weakened in the church of Corinth; divisions were so hot there, the incestuous man was tolerated amongst them, they could not get that work minded or plied for the contentions among them. Zeph. iii. 9, "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent." There is a reforming time, and then they will serve the Lord with one consent, so we read it; but in the first language, it is one shoulder; they shall, as it were, all set one shoulder to the Lord's work, and then the work cannot but prosper.

5. I beseech you for ministers' sakes. Ministers are made very odious this day by the dividers of the Church; but we hope they have not made such impressions on you, but that you, at least some of you, will do something for our sake. Our request then is, that ye would not burden our spirits with division, that ye would not mar the Lord's work in our hands, and make our work a burden to us; ye see that in other things we are not mere ignorants more than yourselves; that in other things we are not men of prostitute consciences more than yourselves; must a man then be accounted quite ignorant of his duty, or one that will go over the belly of his own light, in things properly belonging to his office, just because he is a member of this Church at this day? Be astonished at this, O ye heavens, be horribly afraid, O earth! I am sure it is a changed world with some, to whom it may be said in the words of the apostle, Gal. iv. 14—17, "And my temptation which was in my flesh, ye despised not;—but received me as an angel of God.—Where is then the blessedness you spake of? For I bear you record, that if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that you might affect them."

Lastly, I beseech you, for Christ's sake, that ye beware of division. I beseech you for the sake of the Prince of peace, who in his solemn prayer prayed for the uniting of his people, and lays an astonishing weight on it, John xvii. 21, "That they all may be one;—that the world may believe that thou hast sent me:" for his sake

who, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his supper, to seal our union and communion with God, and with one another : for his sake who laid down his life to procure our peace with God, and shed his precious blood to unite his elect, Eph. ii. 14, " For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us." As ye tender the authority, as ye tender the honour of our Lord Jesus Christ, beware of division. As ye would have his presence with, and blessing upon the Church, and upon the parish, beware of division : Psalm cxxxiii. 1, 3, " Behold, how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity. For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." And so I close with the apostle, 2 Cor. xiii. 11, " Finally, brethren, farewell : be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Now to the God of peace, even to the Father, the fountain of peace ; to the Son, the purchaser of peace ; to the Holy Ghost the worker of peace, be glory and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.