

SERMON IV.

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WHAT MAY MOST HOPEFULLY BE ATTEMPTED TO ALLAY ANIMOSITIES AMONG PROTESTANTS, THAT OUR DIVISIONS MAY NOT BE OUR RUIN ?

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.—Colossians ii. 2.

THIS question is propounded to me : *What may most hopefully be attempted to allay animosities among Protestants, that our divisions may not be our ruin ?*

I must here, in the first place, tell you how I understand this question.

1. *As to the end*,—the preventing our ruin,—I take the meaning chiefly to be, not the ruin of our estates, trade, houses, families ; not our ruin in these respects *who* are Christians, but our ruin as we are Christians ; that is, the ruin of our Christianity itself, or of the truly Christian interest among us.

2. *As for the means* inquired after, I understand not the question to intend, What is to be done or attempted by laws and public constitutions ? as if our business were to teach our absent rulers, or prescribe to them what they should do, to whom we have no present call or opportunity to apply ourselves. Nor, again, can it be thought our business, to discuss the several questions that are controverted among us, and show in each what is the truth and right, wherewith every man's conscience ought to be satisfied, and in which we would all meet and unite ; as if we had the vanity to think of performing, by an hour's discourse, what the voluminous writings of some ages have not performed. Much less are we to attempt the persuading of any to go against an already-formed judgment in these points of difference, for the sake of union ; and to seek the peace of the church, by breaking their peace with God and their own consciences. But I take the question only to intend, What serious Christians may and ought to endeavour, in their private capacities, and agreeably with their own principles, toward the proposed end.

And so, I conceive, the words read to you contain the materials of a direct and full answer to the question. Which I reckon will appear, by opening *the case* [which] the apostle's words have reference to ;—that will be found a case like our own ;—and by opening *the words*,

whereby their suitableness to that case will be seen, and consequently to our case also.

I. *The case* which these words have reference to, (as indeed the general aspect of the epistle, and, in great part, of the other apostolical letters, looks much the same way,) was in short this: that a numerous sect was already sprung up, that began, so early, to corrupt the simplicity and purity of the Christian religion, and very much to disturb the peace of the Christian church. A sort they were of partly Judaizing, partly Paganizing, Christians; (the disciples, as they are reputed, of Simon Magus;) who joined with the name "Christian" the rites and ceremonies of the Jews, with the impurities, even in worship, of the Gentiles, denying the more principal doctrines, and hating the holy design, of Christianity itself; while they seemed to have assumed, or to retain, the name, as it were on purpose the more effectually to wound and injure the Christian cause and interest: men of high pretence to knowledge, (whence they had the title of "Gnostics,") filched partly from the Jewish Cabbalism, partly from the Pythagorean. By which pretence they insinuated the more plausibly with such as affected the knowledge of more hidden mysteries. Whereto the apostle seems to have reference, where he adds, immediately after the text, that in Christ were "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;" (verse 3;) and says, he did purposely add it, "lest any man should beguile" them "with enticing words:" intimating, there was no need to follow those vain pretenders, out of an affectation of sublimer knowledge, and forsake Christ, "in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hid."

Of the progress and genius of this sect, not only some of the fathers of the church give an account,* but even a noted philosopher among the Heathens;† who writes professedly against them, though not a word against Christians as such; both making it his business to refute their absurd doctrines,—that the world was in its nature evil, and not made by God, but by some evil angel, &c.; and representing them as men of most immoral principles and practices; worse, both in respect of their notions and morals, than Epicurus himself.

It appears, this sort of men did, in the apostle's days, not only set themselves with great art and industry, to pervert as many professors of Christianity as they could, but found means (as they might by their compliances with the Jews, who were then much spread, and numerous seated in sundry principal cities under the Roman power, and who were every where the bitterest enemies to Christianity) to raise persecution against them [whom] they could not pervert; which some passages seem to intimate in the epistle to the Galatians; (who, as that whole epistle shows, were much leavened by this sect, inasmuch that the apostle is put to travail as in birth again to have Christ formed in them, and to reduce them back to sincere Christianity;) namely, that some leaders of this sect so set the people's minds even against the apostle himself, that he began to be reputed by them as

* CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, IRENEUS, EPIPHANIUS, &c.

† PLOTINUS, *En-*

nead. ii. lib. 9.

an enemy, (Gal. iv. 16,) and was persecuted under that notion, because he would not comply with them in the matter of circumcision, urged as an engagement to the whole law of Moses: "If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased;" (Gal. v. 11;) and that they were as mischievous as they could be to fellow-Christians on the same account, biting and devouring them that received not their corrupting additions to Christianity, as the circumstances of the text show. (Gal. v. 15.)

How like a case this is to ours with our Popish enemies, I need not tell you. And now, in this case, when the faith of many was overthrown, so much hurt was already done, and the danger of greater was so manifest, partly by the most insinuating methods of seduction, partly by the terror of persecution; the great care was to secure the uncorrupted residue, and preserve unextinct the true Christian interest. The urgency of this case puts the solicitous, concerned spirit of this great apostle into an inexpressible agony, as his words do intimate: "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have;" and not for these Colossians only, but "for them of Laodicea," which was not very remote from Colosse, "and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." (Col. ii. 1.) For it was a common case; and upon him lay "the care of the churches." So that hence his musing, meditative mind could not but be revolving many thoughts, and casting about for expedients, how the threatening danger might be obviated and averted. And these in the text, which he fastens upon, and wherein his thoughts centre, how apt and proper they were to that case, and consequently to ours which so little differs, will be seen,

II. By our opening and viewing the import of *the text* itself: wherein he,

1. Proposes to himself *the end* which he apprehended was most desirable, and above all things to be coveted, for them: "That their hearts might be comforted." A word of much larger signification than in vulgar acceptance it is understood to be. Παρακαλεω signifies, with profane as well as the sacred writers, not only "to administer consolation to" a grieved mind, but "to exhort, quicken, excite, and animate, to plead and strive with," dull and stupid, wavering and unresolved minds. It was thought, indeed, comprehensive enough to express all the operations of the Divine Spirit upon the souls of men, when not only the Christian church, but the world, yet to be Christianized, was to be the subject of them; as we see, John xvi. 8: in respect whereof that Holy Spirit hath its name of office, "the Paraclete," from this word. And it being the passive that is here used, it signifies not only the endeavours themselves which are used to the purpose here intended, but the effect of them wherein they all terminate,—a lively, vigorous, confirmed state and habit of soul; and that not indefinite, but determined to one thing,—the Christian faith and profession, which the apostle's drift and scope plainly shows. It is not to be thought [that] he so earnestly coveted and strove that they might be jocund, cheerful, abounding with joy and courage, in any course, right or wrong; but that they might be encouraged, established,

confirmed in their Christianity. And if the word he here uses were large enough to signify, as was noted above, all that was necessary to make men Christians, it may as well [signify] all that is necessary to continue them such.

In short, the end which the apostle aims at, the *παρακλησις* intended to these Christians, was their establishment and confirmed state in their Christianity, as the effect of all apostolical or ministerial exhortations, persuasions, encouragements, or any whatsoever endeavours; made efficacious to that purpose by the powerful influence and operation of the Holy Ghost. And that it was no lower thing than this, we have sufficient evidence by comparing the close of the foregoing chapter with the beginning of this: where we find, (Col. i. 28,) [that] the avowed design of his "preaching, warning, and teaching in all wisdom," was, that he might "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:" that, whereas there were various arts and endeavours used, to adulterate the Christian religion, and pervert men from the simplicity of it, he might lose none, but to his very uttermost keep all in a possibility of being presented perfect in Christ Jesus at last; that is, that they might be all entire, complete, and persevering Christians to the end. And for this he adds, (verse 29,) [that] he did "labour, striving according to His working, which wrought in him mightily." All his labour and the strivings of his soul, acted by divine power and by a Spirit greater than his own, did aim at this end. And now hereupon he intimates how fervid these his strivings were: Col. ii. 1, 2: "I would you did but know," (what it is not for me to say,) *ἤλικον αγωνα*, "what an agony I endure! how great this my conflict is for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh!" And for what? "That their hearts might be comforted;" (as we read;) meaning manifestly the same thing he had expressed before,—that, notwithstanding all endeavours of others to the contrary, they might be complete and confirmed Christians to the last.

2. We have next to consider in the text *the means*, or what expedients the apostle conceives would be most effectually conducing to this blessed purpose. They are two:—*mutual love to one another*; and *a clear, certain, efficacious faith of the gospel*. The former is shortly and plainly expressed; the other by a copious and most emphatical periphrasis or circumlocution. He most earnestly covets to have them "knit together" by both, *συμβιβασθεντων*, "compacted," as the word imports, *in the one, εν αγαπη*, ["in love,"] and *unto or into the other*, as that particle signifies, *εις παντα*, &c., ["unto all," &c.]

(1.) *Mutual love to one another*.—As if he had said, The thing were done, or much were done toward it, if they were "knit together in love," compacted, made all of a piece; if by love they did firmly cohere and cleave to one another. For then it would be "one and all;" and it is scarce ever supposable they should all agree to quit their religion at once. But if that were to be supposed, he adds another thing that would put all out of doubt:

(2.) *A clear, certain, efficacious faith of the gospel*.—For the

several expressions that follow are but a description of such a faith. Where we are to note, *what he would have them apprehend, and the apprehensive principle.*

(i.) *What he would have them apprehend; namely, the sum and substance of the Christian doctrine.*—Which he calls a “mystery;” both because it was so in itself, and it is often spoken of under that name by our Lord himself, (Matt. xiii. 11,) and familiarly by this apostle; (Rom. xvi. 25; Eph. iii. 3, 9; Col. i. 26; and elsewhere;) and because of the high pretence of the Gnostics to the knowledge of mysteries; which sometimes he slights, especially being unaccompanied with love, as with them it most eminently was: “Though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and have not charity, I am nothing.” (1 Cor. xiii. 2.) “Knowledge puffeth up; but love edifieth.” (1 Cor. viii. 1.) Sometimes, as here, he makes the sincere doctrine of the gospel to outvie theirs herein, intimating that *such* as made profession of it could have no temptation to go over to them for the knowledge of mysteries, (unless a “mystery of iniquity” were more pleasing to them,) *whose* very religion was that “great mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” (1 Tim. iii. 16.)

Now this mystery he first more generally characterizes, by calling it “the mystery of God,” a divine mystery, not made one by merely human fiction; and then he very distinctly specifies it in the following words, “And of the Father, and of Christ.” Where the former “and” needs not be thought copulative, but exegetical, and might be read “even,” or “to wit;” or it may be read “both,” as it is usual with the Greeks as well as Latins, when the copulative is to be repeated, so to read the former. As if it were said, “By ‘the mystery of God,’ I mean, not of God alone and abstractly considered, as if it were enough to you to be mere deists, and that the whole super-added revelation concerning the Mediator might be looked upon with indifferency or neglect,” as by the Gnostics it was known then to be, and afterwards by some of their great leaders, in the substance of it, with downright hatred and opposition; “but that which I so earnestly covet for you, and wherein I would have you unite and be all one, is ‘the acknowledgment of the’ whole ‘mystery of God;’ that is, ‘both of the Father, and of Christ.’”

(ii.) *The apprehensive principle;* which we may, by a general name, call *faith*, and accommodately enough to the name here given us of its object,—a “mystery,” which is elsewhere called “the mystery of faith,” (1 Tim. iii. 9,) or a “mystery to be believed,” *faith* being the known principle of receiving the gospel-revelation. But he here expresses it by words that signify “knowledge,” *συνεσις* and *επιγνωσις*; thereby intimating that the faith of Christians is not to be a blind and unintelligent principle; but that, though there were contained in the gospel mysteries never to be understood, if God had not afforded a special revelation of them on purpose; yet, being revealed, we ought to have a clear and distinct, as well as lively and practical,

perception of them. By these two words, and the other expressions [which] he joins-in with the former, he seems to intimate two sorts of properties which belong to that faith of the gospel which he wishes to them:—

First. *The rectitude, clearness, and certainty of notion.*

Secondly. *The efficacy, impressiveness, and immediate aptitude to have influence upon practice, which he would have it carry with it.*—The latter properties supposing and depending on the former, he there highly exaggerates the matter, and heaps together expressions that might with most lively emphasis set forth the kind of that knowledge which he conceives would be of so great use to them. He wishes them a *συνεσις*, a “clear, perspicacious knowledge,” and an “assurance,” even to a “plerophory,” a “fulness of assurance,” in their knowledge of the truth of the gospel. Yea, he wishes them “the riches,” *πλουτον*, yea, and “all riches,” *παντα πλουτον της πληροφοριας*, “of that full assurance,” or “plerophory, of understanding,” and knowledge of that truth; apprehending that this would certainly fix them in their faith and profession, so as they would never recede from it. As when in Christ’s own days “many went back, and walked no more with him,” (John vi. 66.) that which retained others,—so that when Christ asks, “Will ye also go away?” (verse 67,) they presently answer, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” [they] could entertain no such thought,—was that, beside what they believed of him was of greatest importance to them, “Thou hast the words of eternal life:” (verse 68:) so their belief was with that assurance as to exclude all suspicion or doubt in the case: “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God;” (verse 69;) and therefore neither canst want power to confer eternal life, as all thy words do import thy design and promise to do, nor truth to make good thy own plain words. And then he also knew that such a *συνεσις*, or “knowledge,” would produce—what he further wishes them—an *επιγνωσις*, an “acknowledgment,” an inward, vital owning, a cordial embrace, a lively perception, of the same blessed truths; which must needs further most abundantly contribute to this their so-much-desired joint and unanimous stability.

And now these are the two expedients by which he reckons they would be so closely compacted together as that no subtilty or violence could endanger them,—mutual love, and a clear, certain, operative faith of the gospel. If by the one they did cohere with each other, and by the other adhere to God in Christ; if the one might have with them the place, power, and bindingness of a cement, the other of a continual inclination, yieldingness, and compliance to the magnetism of the centre; they would never so fall asunder as to give any enemies opportunity to be the successful authors, or the gratified spectators, of their ruin. Thus, therefore, I would sum up the sense of this scripture, and the answer to the question proposed: *That the maintaining of sincere love among Christians, and the improving of their faith to greater measures of clearness, certainty, and efficacy in reference to the substantial of Christianity, are to be endeavoured,*

as the best means to unite, establish, and preserve them against such as design the ruin of the truly Christian interest.

The case was at that time urging and important. A great and numerous party was formed of such as did nauseate the simplicity of the Christian religion, and hate the true design of it. All the care was, what course was most proper and suitable to preserve the rest : and you see what was then thought most proper.

Counsel was not taken to this effect, and therefore Christians in a private capacity should not covet to have it so : " Let us bind them by certain devised preter-evangelical canons to things never thought fit to be enjoined by Christ himself, severely urge the strict and uniform observance of them, make the terms of Christian communion straiter than he ever made them, add new rituals of our own to his institutions, and cut off from us all that, never so conscientiously, scruple them." No ; this was the practice of their common enemies, and it was to narrow and weaken the too-much-already-diminished Christian interest. The " order," mentioned verse 5, might be comely enough, without things that were both unnecessary and offensive.

Nor was it consulted and resolved to agitate the controversy about this power and practice in perpetual, endless disputations, and stigmatize them that should not be enlightened and satisfied in these matters, as schismatical and wilful, though they never so sincerely adhered to the doctrine and observed the laws of Christ. That is, it was neither thought fit to urge the unsatisfied upon doubtful things against their consciences, nor to take order that continual endeavours should be used from age to age to satisfy them, or that the church should be always vexed with a vain controversy about needless things, that, if they were never so lawful, might as well be let alone, without detriment to the Christian cause, and perhaps to its greater advantage. Yea, the attempt of imposing any thing upon the disciples but what was necessary, is judged a tempting of God, (Acts xv. 10,) a bringing the matter to a trial of skill with him, whether he could keep the church quiet, when they took so direct a course to distemper and trouble it.

But it was thought necessary and sufficient that all did unite and were " knit together " in the mutual love of one another, and in a joint adherence to the great mysteries of faith and salvation. In the same case, when there were so many antichrists abroad, and, it is likely, Ebion with his partakers made it their business to pervert the Christian doctrine, the same course is taken by the blessed apostle St. John,—only to endeavour the strengthening of these two vital principles,—faith in Christ, and love to fellow-Christians ; as may be seen at large in his epistles. These he presses as the great commandments, upon the observation whereof he seems to account [that] the safety and peace of the sincere did entirely depend : " This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." (1 John iii. 23.) He puts upon Christians no other distinguishing test, but,

“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.” (1 John v. 1.) [He] is only solicitous that they did practise the “commandment which they had from the beginning,” that is, that they “loved one another,” and that they did “abide in the doctrine of Christ.” (2 John 5, 9.)

The prudence and piety of those unerring guides of the church—themselves under the certain guidance of the Spirit of truth—directed them to bring the things wherein they would have Christians unite within as narrow a compass as was possible, neither multiplying articles of faith nor rites of worship. These two principles, as they were thought to answer the apostles’, would fully answer our design and present inquiry. And we may adventure to say of them, that they are both sufficient and necessary, the apt and the only means to heal and save us; such as would effect our cure, and without which nothing will. Nor shall I give other answer to the proposed question, than what may be deduced from these two, considered according to what they are in themselves, and what they naturally lead and tend unto.

I shall consider them in the order wherein the apostle here mentions them, who, you see, reserves the more important of them to the latter place.

I. *The sincere love of Christians to one another* would be a happy means of preserving the truly Christian interest among us.—That this may be understood, we must rightly apprehend what kind of love it is that is here meant. It is specified by what we find in conjunction with it: “The understanding and acknowledgment of the mystery of” Christianity. Therefore it must be the love of Christians to one another as such. Whence we collect, lest we too much extend the object of it on the one hand, or contract it on the other,

1. *That it is not the love only which we owe to one another as men or human creatures merely, that is intended here.*—That were too much to enlarge it, as to our present consideration of it. For, under that common notion, we should be as much obliged to love the enemies [whom] we are to unite against, as the friends of religion [whom] we are to unite with; since all partake equally in human nature. It must be a more special love that shall have the desired influence in the present case. We cannot be peculiarly endeared and united to some more than to others, upon a reason that is common to them with others. We are to love them that are “born of God,” and are his “children,” otherwise than “the children of men,” or such of whom it may be said, “They are of their father the devil;” them that appear to have been “partakers of a divine nature,” at another rate than them who have received a mere human, or also the diabolical, nature. (1 John v. 1.) Yet this peculiar love is not to be exclusive of the other which is common, but must suppose it, and be superadded to it, as the reason of it is superadded. For Christianity supposes humanity; and divine grace, human nature.

2. *Nor is it a love to Christians of this or that party or denomina-*

tion only.—That were as much unduly to straiten and confine it. The love that is owing to Christians as such, as it belongs to them *only*, so it belongs to *all* them who in profession and practice do own sincere and incorrupt Christianity. To limit our Christian love to a party of Christians truly so called, is so far from serving the purpose now to be aimed at, that it resists and defeats it; and, instead of a preservative union, infers most destructive divisions. It scatters what it should collect and gather: it is to love factiously and with an unjust love, that refuses to give indifferently to every one his due; for is there no love due to a disciple of Christ “in the name of a disciple?” It is founded in falsehood and a lie,—denies *them* to be of the Christian community *who* really are so. It presumes to remove the ancient land-marks, not civil, but sacred, and draws-on not the people’s curse only, but that of God himself. It is true (and who doubts it?) that I may and ought upon special reasons to love some more than others; as relation, acquaintance, obligation by favours received from them, more eminent degrees of true worth and real goodness: but that signifies nothing to the withholding of that love which is due to a Christian as such, as that also ought not to prejudice the love I owe to a man as he is a man.

Nor am I so promiscuously to distribute this holy love, as to place it at random upon every one that thinks it convenient for him to call himself a Christian, though I ought to love the very profession, while I know not who sincerely make it, and do plainly see that Jews and Pagans were never worse enemies to Christ and his religion than a great part of the Christian world. But let my apprehensions be once set right concerning the true essentials of Christianity, whether consisting in doctrinal or vital principles, then will my love be duly carried to all in whom they are found under one common notion, which I come actually to apply to this or that person as particular occasions do occur; and so shall always be in a preparation of mind actually to unite in Christian love with every such person, whensoever such occasions do invite me to it.

And do we now need to be told what such an impartial, truly Christian love would do to our common preservation, and to prevent the ruin of the Christian interest?

1. *How greatly would it contribute to the vigour of the Christian life!* —For so we should all equally “hold the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.” (As afterwards in this chapter, verse 19.) Thus, (as it is in that other parallel text of scripture, Eph. iv. 15, 16,) “speaking the truth in love, we shall grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” Obstructions that hinder the free circulation of blood and spirits, do not more certainly infer languishings in the natural body, than the want of such a diffusive love shuts up and

shrivels the destitute parts, and hinders the diffusion of a nutritive, vital influence, in the body of Christ.

2. *It would inspire Christians generally with a sacred courage and fortitude, when they should know and even feel themselves "knit together in love."*—How doth the revolt of any considerable part of an army discourage the rest, or if they be not entire and of a piece! Mutual love animates them, as nothing more [can do,] when they are prepared to live and die together, and love hath before joined [them] whom now their common danger also joins. They otherwise signify but as so many single persons, each one but caring and contriving how to shift for himself: love makes them significant to one another, so as that every one understands himself to be the common care of all the rest. It makes Christians the more resolute in their adherence to truth and goodness, when, from their not-doubted love, they are sure of the help, the counsels, and prayers of the Christian community, and apprehend [that] by their declining they shall grieve those whom they love, and who, they know, love them. If any imagine themselves intended to be given up as sacrifices to the rage of the common enemy, their hearts are the apter to sink, they are most exposed to temptations to prevaricate; and the rest will be apt to expect the like usage from them, if themselves be reduced to the like exigency, and be liable to the same temptations.

3. *It would certainly, in our present case, extinguish or abate the so contrary unhallowed fire of our anger and wrath toward one another.*—As the celestial beams do the baser culinary fire, which burns more fervently when the sun hath less power. Then would debates, if there must be any, be managed without intemperate heat. We should be remote from being angry that we cannot convey our own sentiments into another's mind; which when we are, our business is the more remote; we make ourselves less capable of reasoning aptly to convince, and (because anger begets anger, as love doth love) render the other less susceptible of conviction. Why are we yet to learn that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God?" What is gained by it? So little doth angry contention about small matters avail, that even they that happen to have the better cause lose by it, and their advantage cannot recompense the damage and hurt that ensues to the church and to themselves. Our famous Davenant,* speaking of the noted controversy between Stephen bishop of Rome,— "who," he says, "as much as in him lay, did with a schismatical spirit tear the church,"—and Cyprian, who "with great lenity and Christian charity professes that he would not break the Lord's peace for diversity of opinion, nor remove any from the right of communion," concludes that "*erring* Cyprian deserved better of the church of Christ than *orthodox* Stephen." He thought *him* the schismatical *whom* he thought in the right, and that his orthodoxy, as it was accompanied, was more mischievous to the church than the other's error. Nor can a man do that hurt to others without suffering it more principally. The distemper of his own spirit, what can recom-

* *Sentent. ad Durcum.*

pense ! and how apt is it to grow in him, and, while it grows in himself, to propagate itself among others ! Whereupon, if the want of love hinders the nourishment of the body, much more do the things which, when it is wanting, are wont to fill up its place. For as naturally as love begets love, so do wrath, envy, malice, calumny, beget one another, and spread a poison and virulency through the body, which necessarily wastes and tends to destroy it. How soon did the Christian church cease to be itself, and the early vigour of primitive Christianity degenerate into insipid, spiritless formality, when once it became contentious ! It broke into parties, sects multiplied, animosities grew high, and the grieved Spirit of love retired from it, who is grieved by nothing more than by "bitterness, wrath, anger," &c.; as the connexion of these two verses intimates, Eph. iv. 30, 31 : "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." And to the same purpose is that, 1 Peter ii. 1, 2 : "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil-speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." By this means, religion, once dispirited, loses its majesty and awfulness, and even tempts and invites the assaults and insultation of enemies.

4. *It would oblige us to all acts of mutual kindness and friendship.*—If such a love did govern in us, we should be always ready to serve one another in love, to bear each other's burdens, to afford our mutual counsel and help to one another, even in our private affairs, if called thereto ; especially in that which is our common concern,—the preserving and promoting [of] the interest of religion ; and, to our uttermost, strengthen each other's hands herein. It would engage us to a free, amicable conversation with one another upon this account ; would not let us do so absurd a thing as to confine our friendship to those of our own party, which we might as reasonably [do] to men of our own stature, or to those whose voice and hair and look and mien were likest our own. It would make us not be ashamed to be seen in each other's company, or be shy of owning one another. We should not be to one another as Jews and Samaritans, that had no dealing with one another, or as the poet notes they were to other nations : *Non monstrare vias eadem nisi sacra colenti* : "Not so much as to show the way to one not of their religion." There would be no partition-wall through which love would not easily open a way of friendly commerce, by which we should insensibly slide, more and more, into one another's hearts. Whence also,

5. *Prejudices would cease, and jealousies concerning each other.*—A mutual confidence would be begotten. We should no more suspect one another of ill designs upon each other, than lest our right hand should wait an opportunity of cutting off the left. We should believe one another in our mutual professions, of whatsoever sort, both of kindness to one another, and that we really doubt and scruple the things which we say we do.

6. *This would hence make us earnestly covet an entire union in all the things wherein we differ, and contribute greatly to it.*—We are too prone many times to dislike things, for the disliked persons' sake who practise them; and a prevailing disaffection makes us unapt to understand one another, precludes our entrance into one another's mind and sense; which if love did once open, and inclined us more to consider the matters of difference themselves, than to imagine some reserved meaning and design of the persons that differ from us, it is likely we might find ourselves much nearer to one another than we did apprehend we were, and that it were a much easier step for the one side to go quite over to the other. But if that cannot be,

7. *It would make us much more apt to yield to one another, and abate all that ever we can, in order to as full an accommodation as is any way possible.*—That if we cannot agree upon either extreme, we might at least meet in the middle. It would cause an emulation, who should be larger in their grants to this purpose. As it was professed by Luther, when so much was done at Marpurgh toward an agreement between him and the Helvetians, that "he would not allow that praise to the other party, that they should be more desirous of peace and concord than he." Of which amicable conference, and of that afterwards at Wittenburg, and several other negotiations to that purpose, account is given by divers,* and insisted on by some of our own great divines as precedential to the concord [which] they endeavoured between the Saxon and the Helvetian churches of later time; as bishop Morton, bishop Hall, bishop Davenant, in their several Sentences or Judgments written to Mr. Dury upon that subject. And indeed when I have read the pacific writings of those eminent worthies, for the composing of those differences abroad, I could not but wonder that the same peaceable spirit did not endeavour with more effect the composing of our own much lesser differences at home. But "the things of our peace" were, as they still are, "hid from our eyes," with the more visibly just severity, by how much they have been nearer us, and more obvious to the easy view of any but an averse eye.

It is not for us to prescribe, as was said, to persons that are now in so eminent stations as these were at that time. But may we not hope to find with such (and where should we rather expect to find it?) that compassion and mercifulness in imitation of the blessed Jesus, their Lord and ours, as to consider and study the necessities of souls in these respects, and at least willingly to connive at and very heartily approve some indulgences and abatements in the administrations of the inferior clergy, as they may not think fit themselves positively to order and enjoin? Otherwise, I believe, it could not but give some trouble to a conscientious conforming minister, if a sober, pious person, sound in the faith, and of a regular life, should tell him [that] he is willing to use his ministry in some of the ordinances of Christ, if only he would abate or dispense with some annexed ceremony, which in conscience he dare not use or admit of. I believe, it would

* HOSPINIANI *Historia Sacramentaria*, THUANUS, &c.

trouble such a minister to deal with a person of this character as a Pagan, because of his scruple, and put him upon considering whether he ought not rather to dispense with man's rule, than with God's. I know what the same bishop Davenant hath expressly said,—that “he that believes the things contained in the Apostles' Creed, and endeavours to live a life agreeable to the precepts of Christ, ought not to be expunged from the roll of Christians, nor be driven from communion with the other members of any church whatsoever.”* However, truly Christian love would do herein all that it can, supplying the rest by grief that it can do no more.

8. *It would certainly make us abstain from mutual censures of one another as insincere for our remaining differences.*—“Charity that thinks no evil,” would make us not need the reproof, Rom. xiv. 4: “Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?” The common aptness hereunto among us shows how little that divine principle rules in our hearts, that, in defiance of our rule, and the authority of the great God and our blessed Redeemer, to whom all judgment is committed, and who hath so expressly forbidden us to “judge, lest we be judged,” (Matt. vii. 1,) we give ourselves so vast a liberty, and set no other bounds to our usurped licence of judging, than nature hath set to our power of thinking; that is, think all the mischievous thoughts of them that differ from us that we know how to devise or invent; as if we would say, “Our thoughts,” and then, by an easy advance, “Our tongues, are our own: who is lord over us?” I animadvert not on this as the fault of one party, but wheresoever it lies;—as God knows how diffused a poison this is!—among them that are satisfied with the public constitutions toward them that dissent from them, and with these back again toward *them*, and with the several parties of both these toward one another. *This* uniting, knitting love would make us refrain,—not merely from the restraint of God's laws in this case, but from a benign disposition,—as that which the temper of our spirits would abhor from; so that such as are well content with the public forms and rites of worship, would have no inclination to judge them that apprehend not things with their understandings, nor relish with their taste, as persons that therefore have cut themselves off from Christ and the body of Christ. They might learn better from the Cassandrian moderation, and from the avowed sentiments of that man, † (whose temper is better to be liked than his terms of union,) who, speaking of such as, “being formerly rejected,” meaning the Protestants, “for finding fault with abuses in the church, had by the urgency of their conscience altered somewhat in the way of their teaching and the form of their service, and are therefore said to have fallen off from the church, and are numbered among heretics and schismatics: it is,” saith he, “to be inquired how rightly and justly this is determined of them. For there is to be considered, as to the church, the head and the body. From the head there is no departure but by doctrine disagreeable to Christ the Head. From the body

* *Sentent. ad Duræum.*

† CASSANDER *De Officio pii ac publicæ Tranquillitatis verè amantis Viri.*

there is no departure by diversity of rites and opinions, but only by the defect of charity." So that this learned Romanist neither thinks them heretics that hold the Head, nor schismatics, for such differences as ours are, from the rest of the body, if love and charity toward them remain.

And, again : where this love remains and bears rule, it can as little be, that they who are unsatisfied with the way of worship that more generally obtains, should censure them that are satisfied as insincere, merely because of this difference. It cannot permit that we should think all the black thoughts we can invent of them ; as if, because they have not *our* consciences, they had none ; or, because they see not with *our* eyes, they were therefore both utterly and wilfully blind. To be here more particular : the most, you know, are for the public way of worship ; and, of these, some are for it as tolerable only, others as the best way, and think all other ways of worshipping God in assemblies (being forbidden as they think by a just law) sinful. Others, dissenting, are of several sorts. Some think the conformity required of ministers sinful, because of previous terms required of them which they judge to be so ; but not that which is required of the people. Of which sort, some that think it not simply unlawful, find it, however, less edifying to them ; and though they can therefore partake in it at some times, think themselves more ordinarily bound to attend such other means as they find more conducing to their spiritual profit and advantage ; judging they have an undoubted right from Christ, anciently allowed from age to age in the best times of the Christian church, and never justly taken from them, of choosing the pastors to whose ordinary care and conduct they shall commit their souls. Others judge the public way simply unlawful, and therefore judge themselves bound to decline it wholly ; and are the more averse to any participation in it, as apprehending it to have no suitableness or aptitude to profit their souls ; wherein they are the more confirmed, that they believe not [that] God will ever bless the means which he hath not appointed. Now, how apt all these are unto very severe censures of one another, *he* knows not the age *that* is ignorant : one sort censuring the other as humoursome, factious, schismatical ; the others, them back again as formal, popishly affected, destitute of any savour of spiritual things, having nothing of God in them, or of the life and power of godliness.

Now is this suitable to the love that should rule among Christians, or to the reverence we ought to have for that authority that forbids such judging ? It ought to be considered, both that all have not *the same understanding*, nor *the same gust and relish* of things.

(1.) *Not the same understanding.*—And therefore, where conscience hath the same rule, it cannot have with every one the same actual latitude, that rule being so very diversely understood ; which different estimate of consciences the apostle hath express reference to in that large and most healing discourse of his, Rom. xiv. : " One," saith he, " believeth that he may eat all things : another, who is weak, eateth herbs." (Verse 2.) Nor doth he, in reference to such doubted things,

determine what all should do or not do, by particular rules concerning every such case that was then depending,—which, it seems, he reckoned was not necessary,—or that might afterwards fall out, which was little to be expected. But he lays down one general rule against judging one another, which he presses with that authority and such awful reasons as might make a Christian heart tremble to be guilty of it.

And in reference to the mentioned differences among ourselves, as well as others no nearer to the substantial and vitals of our religion, there is somewhat else to be done than to conclude against a man's sincerity because of such differing sentiments and practices, and which certainly would be done, if truly Christian love or even justice itself did take place as they ought; that is, it would be considered what these several differing parties have to say for themselves, what reasons they may allege, and whether, though they be not sufficient to justify their several opinions and practices, (as all cannot be in the right,) they be not such as by which a conscientious man, a sincere fearer of God, may be swayed, so as to take the way which he is found in by the ducture of an upright, though misguided, conscience, and not as being under the government of depraved, vicious inclination.

As those that can and do yield the conformity that is required of ministers, though perhaps they wish some things altered,—why may it not be supposed they sincerely think, though it should be mistakingly, that the things more liable to exception are capable of a sense wherein they are not unlawful; and, not being so, they think themselves bound to take the opportunity which they this way obtain of doing good to the souls of men? Others, also, apprehending it lawful,—how possible is it to them from a certain reverence they have for antiquity, and for our own first Reformers, to think it best and fittest to be continued! Nor is it unsupposable that many of the laity may, upon the same grounds, have the same apprehensions. Again: divers in the ministry judging the terms unlawful upon which only they can have liberty for the public exercise of it,—is it not possible they may, with a sincere conscience, think themselves not therefore obliged wholly to renounce their calling and office, to which they were duly set apart, and had by their own solemn vow given up themselves; but to do so much of the work of it as they can have opportunity for?

And whereas, of the people, some may think the public forms and ways of worship not simply unlawful, but find them less edifying to them than other means which the providence of God affords them; and therefore do more ordinarily attend those, though sometimes also the other; why should it be thought, on the one hand or the other, that it is so little possible they should be guided by reasonable and conscientious considerations herein, that nothing but corrupt inclination must be understood to govern them? Is it not supposable that, accounting the public worship substantially agreeable to divine institution, though in some accidentals too disagreeable, they may think there is more to incline them at some times to attend it, than

totally to disown it? For what worship is there on earth that is in all things incorrupt? And they may apprehend it fit to testify their union with the sincere Christians that may be stately under that form, and especially in a time when the contest is so high in the world between them that profess the substance of Reformed Christianity, and them that have so much deformed it; and may conceive it becoming them at any time to express their own unconfinedness to a party, and to use that liberty which, they think, should not be judged by another man's conscience, which yet they would have regard to, where there are not greater reasons to preponderate. They are, indeed, under a disadvantage with them that are apt to use a greater liberty in their censures than they do in their practice in these matters, when it falls out that their partial compliance is the means of their security from penalties; and *their* disadvantage is greater, *whose* judgment to this purpose hath not been formerly declared and made known. But *they* for shame ought to be silent *whose* total compliance gains them not only immunity, but great emoluments; and that, perhaps, yielded, not according to a former, but, at that time when the opportunity occurred, a new and altered, judgment. They may, however, know themselves to be moved by greater ends than secular interest; and so may these [whom] we now speak of; and yet may think the preservation of their earthly portion, where-with they are to glorify God in this world, not too little an end to be designed and endeavoured by lawful means. It were a very uncouth and sinful thing to do a spiritual action for a carnal end: but if the thing sincerely and supremely designed be the glory of God, that is the most spiritual end. If it be not, that ought to be changed which is wrong, not that which is right; the unlawful end, not the lawful action, if it be lawful. If it be not, their good end will not justify their action, but it will their sincerity, which is all that this discourse intends.

And then, for such as decline the public worship totally, as judging it simply unlawful: is it not possible they may be led to that practice by somewhat else than humour and factious inclination? Have they not that to say, which may at least *seem* solid and strong to a conscientious man?—"How jealous God did heretofore show himself in all the affairs of his worship! how particular in the appointment even of the smallest things [that] he would have appertain to it! How unsuitable multiplied ceremonies are to the mature state of the church! and how sensibly burdensome they were to the disciples of the first age, as 'a yoke' not to be borne! and that therefore God himself, when the season of maturity and the fulness of time came, thought fit to abrogate those of his own former appointment, with no (probable) design to allow men the liberty of substituting others in their room." Why is it not to be thought that the fear of the great God withholds them from doing what they judge would offend him? and that, if they err, it is for fear of erring? Why can nothing be thought-on whereto to impute their practice, but peevish humour?

Especially if that be considered, which is common to these two last-mentioned sorts of men,—that they sensibly find other means more edifying to them, or expect them only to be so, if the other be thought unlawful. If they be thought merely lawful, and such as may therefore be used upon weighty reasons at some times, but are found less edifying, who can doubt but I ought to use for my soul, at least in an ordinary course, the aptest means that I can ordinarily have for the promoting [of] its edification and salvation? Do we not reckon ourselves to owe so much even to our bodies? And what is another man's opinion to signify against my sense and constant experience? Is there not such a thing as a mental idiosyncrasy, or "peculiarity of temper," as well as a bodily; and whereto what is most agreeable, any man that is not destitute of ordinary understanding is the fittest judge himself? as every one, that is not a mere fool, is so much a physician as to know what diet suits him best.

And if it be said against the former of these two sorts, "Are they not at all times obliged to use the means which are most edifying?" they may say, At all times when they have nothing to outweigh their own present edification. But it is not impossible that a conscientious judgment may esteem all the fore-mentioned considerations, concurring, to be of more weight than the greater advantage hoped to be gained in that one hour. Nor need any man be ashamed professedly to avow that which may seem the least of them,—the saving of himself from temporal ruin; for he is to be accountable to God for what portion he hath intrusted him with of the good things of this life, and is not to throw it away without sufficient cause. Who sees not, that more is allowed and ordinarily done without scruple or censure upon the like account? as, to omit the hearing of a sermon, if at that time one's house be on fire, yea, or if it be to save my neighbour's, or the plucking of an ox or sheep out of a ditch on the Lord's day, when I might have been employed at that time in the solemn worship of God to my spiritual advantage. A mere commutation unto less advantage, upon an equally or more urgent necessity, is less than omission; and they that shall have learned, as our Saviour directs, "what that means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice," will "not condemn the guiltless." (Matt. xii. 7.)

Only, such are concerned first to search well and be satisfied concerning the lawfulness of their action in itself, that they do it not with a self-condemning conscience, nor with a groundlessly self-justifying one; and then especially to see to it that their end be right,—God's interest, not their own, otherwise than in a due, entire subordination to His. We can never act innocently or comfortably in any thing, till He be in every thing more absolutely our "all in all;" and have much more reason to be scrupulous, and, if others knew our hearts, were much more liable to censure, that, in our common affairs, He is so much forgotten, that we live not more entirely to Him; which we little animadvert upon, and are very officious to cast notes out of our brother's eye, when this beam is in our own.

The design of mentioning these hints of reasons for so different judgments and practices, is not to show which are strongest and ought to prevail, which cannot be the business of so short a discourse as this and so much of another nature; but to show that while there is any thing colourable to be alleged for this or that way, true Christian love, compassion of *common human* frailty, and a duly humble sense of a man's *own*, would oblige him to think that conscience toward God may have a greater hand (though, with some, misguided itself) in guiding men the different ways they take, than is commonly thought; and to consider, "Though such and such reasons seem not weighty to me, they may to some others, who are as much afraid of sinning against God as I; and, perhaps, their understandings [are] as good in other matters as mine." It would be considered, how really difficult the controversy is about the ceremonies, and some other parts of conformity. Perhaps, few metaphysical questions are disputed with more subtily than that controversy is managed with, by archbishop Whitgift, bishop Morton, Dr. Burgess, Dr. Ames, Cartwright, Calverwood, and others; and how very easily possible and pardonable is it to unlearned persons, or of weaker intellectuals, being obliged in order to their practice to give a judgment in reference to these things one way or other, to judge amiss! Why should we expect every sincerely pious man to be able to hit the very point of truth and right in matters that belong, as bishop Davenant once said in another case, *non ad filem fundamentalem, sed ad peritiam theologicam; et fortassè ne ad hanc quidem, sed aliquando ad curiositatem theologorum*,—"not to the foundation of our faith, but to the skill of divines; and perhaps not to this neither, but sometimes only to their curiosity?" What were to be done in reference to so nicely disputable things, made part of the terms of Christian communion, is more the matter of our wish than hope, till, by a gracious influence, God better men's minds, or, by a more deeply-felt necessity, bring us to understand what is to be done. Our case is ill when only *vesatio dat intellectum*, when "nothing but sorrow and suffering will make us wise," which is very likely, from the righteous hand of God, to be our common lot. In the mean time, it is hard to think that *he* cannot be a sincerely pious man whose understanding is not capable of so difficult things, as to make a certainly right judgment about them. *In absoluto et facili stat æternitas*;* and why should not the communion of persons going into a blessed eternity have the same measure?

And beside the different size and capacity of men's understandings, and consequently of their conscientious determinations,

(2.) There are also as *differing relishes* of these things, which Christian love would oblige a man to consider with equanimity, so as thereupon to refrain hard censures. All good men have not the same relish of the various forms and modes of dispensing the truths and ordinances of Christ. Some of our suffering brethren in queen Mary's days are said to have found great spiritual refreshing by the Common

* "Eternity consists of that which is completely free and devoid of difficulty."—EDIT.

Prayer; and in our own days some may profess to have their hearts warmed, their affections raised and elevated, by it. They are no rule to us; but it would less become us hereupon to suspect *their* sincerity, than *our own*. Others, again, cannot relish such modes of worship, when, in the ministry of such as use them not, they find a very sensible delight and savour.

And this, by the way, shows the great difference between such things as have their evidence and goodness from God himself, and those that borrow their recommendableness only from human device. All good men, in all the times and ages of the Christian church, have a constant value and love for the great substantials of religion, which have in them that inward evidence and excellency as commands and captivates a rectified mind and heart; whereas the mere external forms of it, the outward dress and garb, are variously esteemed and despised, liked and disliked, by the same sort of men, that is, by very sincere lovers of God, not only in divers times and ages, but even in the same time. How different hath the esteem been of the liturgic forms with them who bear the same mind, full of reverence and love, toward religion itself! As that habit is thought decent at one time, which in another is despicably ridiculous; whereas a person in himself comely and graceful, is always accounted so by all and at all times.

Now this various gust and relish cannot but have influence, more remotely, upon the conscientious determination of our choice, concerning our usual way of worshipping God. For how should I edify by what is disgustful to me? Though it be true that our spiritual edification lies more in the informing of our judgments and confirming our resolutions, than in the gusts and relishes of affection; yet who sees not that these are of great use even to the other? and that it is necessary that at least there be not a disgust or antipathy? What is constantly less grateful, will certainly be less nutritive: *that* is usually necessary to nourishment; though, alone, it be not sufficient. As it is in the matter of bodily repasts: who can without great prejudice be bound to eat always of a food that he disrelishes, though he may without much inconvenience, for a valuable reason, do it at some time?

And they that think [that] all this alleged difference is but fancy, show [that] they understand little of human nature, and less of religion: though they may have that in themselves, too, which they do not so distinctly reflect upon, even that peculiar gust and relish which they make so little account of. For have they not as great a disgust of the others' way, as *they* have of theirs? Would they not as much regret to be tied to *theirs*? Have they not as great a liking of their own? And doth not common experience show, that there are as different mental relishes as bodily? How comes one man in the matters of literature to favour metaphysics, another mathematics, another history, and the like? and no man's genius can be forced in these things. Why may there not be the like difference in the matters of religion? And I would fain know what that religion is worth that is without a gust and savour, that is insipid and unpleasant,

much more that would, being used in a constant course, this or that way, be nauseous and offensive.

If, indeed, men nauseate that which is necessary for them,—the gospel, for instance, or religion itself,—that is certainly such a distemper as, if the grace of God overcome it not, will be mortal to them; and we are not to think of relieving them by withdrawing the offending object, which itself must be the means of their cure. But is there any parity between the substance of religion, which is of God's appointing, and the superadded modes of it, that are of our own?

Upon the whole, nothing is more agreeable, either to this divine principle of love, nothing (within our compass) more conducive to our end,—the ceasing of our differences, (which are most likely to die and vanish by neglect,) or their ceasing to be inconvenient to us,—than to bear calm and placid minds toward one another under them, to banish all hard thoughts because of them. If I can contribute no way else to union, from this holy dictate and law of the Spirit of love, I can at least abstain from censuring my fellow-Christians. It is the easiest thing in the world, one would think, not to do; especially not to do a thing of itself ungrateful to a well-tempered mind; and a great privilege not to be obliged to judge another man's conscience and practice, when it is so easy to misjudge and do wrong; most of all, when the matter wherein I presume to sit in judgment upon another, is of so high a nature as the posture of his heart God-ward, —a matter peculiarly belonging to another tribunal, of divine cognizance, and which we all confess to be only known to God himself. And if I would take upon me to conclude a man insincere and a hypocrite, only because he is not of my mind in these smaller things that are controverted among us, how would I form my argument? "No one can with sincerity differ from that man whose understanding is so good and clear, as to apprehend all things with absolute certainty just as they are." And then go on to assume: (and a strange assuming it must be!) "But *my* understanding is so good and clear as," &c. It is hard to say whether the uncharitableness of the one assertion, or the arrogance of the other, is greater; and whether both be more immoral or absurd. But the impiety is worst of all; for how insolently doth such a man take upon him to make a new gospel, and other terms of salvation than God hath made, when his sentiments and determinations of things which God hath never made necessary, must be the measure and rule of life and death to men! How is the throne and judicial power of the Redeemer usurped, which he hath founded in his blood! "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Rom. xiv. 4, 9—11.) One would think, they that lay no

restraint upon themselves in this matter of judging their brethren upon every light occasion; reckon [that] this chapter came by chance into the Bible; and that our Lord spake himself, at random, words that had no meaning, when he said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," &c. (Matt. vii. 1.) What man, that fears God, would not dread to be the framer of a new gospel and of new terms of salvation? It is a great solace, indeed, to a sincere mind, but implies a severe rebuke in the mean time to such a self-assuming, censorious spirit, that it may in such a case be so truly said, "It is a much easier thing to please God than man."

They that find this measure, will have the better of it, if they can abstain from retaliating, whenas the reason of it is the same on both sides. For they may say, "You are to remember, I differ no more from you in this matter than you do from me; and if I judge not you about it, what greater reason have you to judge me?" And they have little reason to value such a man's judgment concerning their duty in a doubtful matter, who cannot see his own in so plain a case. The matter for which they judge me may be very doubtful; but nothing can be plainer than that they ought not so to judge.

9. *A due Christian love would oblige us, after competent endeavours of mutual satisfaction about the matters wherein we differ, to forbear further urging of one another concerning them.*—Which urging may be two ways: either by application to our *affections*, or to our *reason and judgment*.

Some, perhaps, find it more suitable to their own temper and measure of understanding and conscience, to go the former way; and only *vehemently persuade* to do the thing wherein the other shall comply with them, and in some sort justify the course which they have taken; without regard to the others' conscience, press them, right or wrong, to fall-in with them; sometimes labouring to work upon their kindness by flattery, sometimes upon their fear by threats and menaces. Sincere love would certainly abhor to do thus. Would it let me violate another's conscience any way? The love I bear to a fellow-Christian, if it be true, having for its measure that wherewith I love myself, would no more let me do it than hurt the apple of mine own eye. An inspirited, waking conscience is as tender a thing, and capable of a worse sort of hurt.

If some have *more latitude* than I, and think [that] what they *may* do in present circumstances, so far as they may, they *must*; would it not be the dictate of love patiently to admit it, especially when it comes to suffering? For, let me put my own soul in his soul's stead, and would I be willing to suffer upon another man's conscience, and not upon my own, and forfeit the consolations which in a suffering condition belong to them who "for conscience toward God endure grief?" Would I, if I loved them, be content [that] they had the grief, and did want the consolation? There will be still found in a state of suffering somewhat that will prove a common cause to good men, wherein they will most entirely agree, whatsoever smaller things they may differ in: as the pious bishops, Ridley and Hooper, well

agreed upon a martyrdom at the stake in the same important cause, who before had differed somewhat angrily about some ceremonies. Concerning which difference, how pathetic is the letter of the former of these to the other, when both were prisoners,—the one at Oxford, the other at London,—on the same account!—"But now, my dear brother," saith he, "forasmuch as we thoroughly agree and wholly consent together in those things which are the grounds and substantial points of our religion, against the which the world so furiously rageth in these our days; howsoever in time past, by certain by-matters and circumstances of religion, your wisdom and my simplicity, I grant, have a little jarred, each of us following the abundance of his own sense and judgment; now, I say, be you assured, that even with my whole heart, God is my witness, in the bowels of Christ, I love you in the truth and for the truth's sake, which abideth in us, and, as I am persuaded, shall by the grace of God abide in us for evermore." *

Again: if others have *less latitude*, it would be far from us to add to the affliction [which] they are liable to upon that very account, by a vexatious urging and importuning them; especially to do it with insulting threats and menaces, and labour to overawe their brethren, against their consciences, into the embracing of their sentiments and way. Is it possible a Christian should not understand how necessary it is to every one's duty and peace, that he exactly follow that direction of the apostle's, and esteem it most sacred: "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind;" (Rom. xiv. 5;) and that we firmly resolve never to do any thing with regret or a misgiving heart? At least, not against a prevailing doubt; for in very doubtful cases to be rid of all *formido oppositi*, or "suspicion that the matter may be otherwise," is perhaps impossible to me; but, to do any thing against the preponderating inclination of my judgment and conscience, were great wickedness, and such as, if it were known, would make me unfit for any communion whatsoever. And I do here appeal to you who most severely blame any of us for our dissent from you, whether if we should thus declare to you,—that "it is truly against our consciences to communicate with you upon your terms; we believe we should greatly offend God in it, and draw upon us his displeasure: but yet, to please you, and prevent our temporal inconvenience or ruin, we will do it:" I appeal to you, I say, whether we should not hereby make ourselves incapable of any Christian communion with you or any others? This is, then, the plain state of the case, and you do even put these words into our mouths: "If we follow the dictate of our consciences, we must decline you; if we go against it, you must decline us, supposing we declare it; if we declare it not, we have nothing to qualify us for your communion but hypocrisy and dissimulation. And what do you gain by such an accession to the church? You have gained, in any such case, not half the man,—the outside, the carcass only or the shadow of the man; that is, when you have debauched our consciences, when you have spoiled us, and made us

* Fox's "Acts and Monuments."

worth nothing, then we are yours ; wherein you show nothing of love either to us or to yourselves."

Others, again, that are themselves men of more reason and conscience, take the somewhat more manly and Christian course ; and bend themselves by argument to *convince the reason* and satisfy the consciences of such as differ from them. But herein also there may be an excess, that is unprofitable and grievous to those they would work upon by this course, and from which, therefore, Christian love, studying the peace and quiet of their brethren, would restrain them. I say, from the ungrateful excess of such an endeavour : for I would fain know, can there not herein be an excess ? Is it not supposable that they who differ from me in such lesser things, may be some time arrived to a settlement and fixedness of judgment in them, as well as I ? Is it not possible, they have weighed the moments of things as much as I have done ? Is such a cause infinite ? Is it not possible that all may have been said in it which is to be said, and the matter have been sifted to the very bran ? so that all my further arguings may serve but to argue my vain self-confidence, or aboundingness in my own sense, as if all wisdom were to die with me. Or what, if they serve at length but to show the incapacity of the subject to be wrought upon, and the different complexion of *his* mind [whom] I am treating with ? All cannot receive all things : we cannot make our sentiments enter with every one. Perhaps they show the weakness of his understanding ; and then hath that direction of the apostle no authority with us ?—"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." (Rom. xiv. 1.) He whom we account our weaker brother and of slower understanding, must be received, (not cast out of our communion,) and because "God himself hath received him," as verse 3. As if he had said, "Is he thought fit for God's communion, notwithstanding his unsatisfied scruple ? and is he unfit for yours ?" And he is not to be vexed and importuned with continual disputation, if that apostolical precept be of any value with us. Sometimes, at least, we should think, "We have tried in such a case as far as is fit, and driven the nail as far as it will go." Is it not possible [that] such a matter may be agitated beyond the value of it, and that more time and pains may be spent upon it than it is worth ? The obscurity and perplexity of the controversy show the less necessity : things most necessary are most plain. Must we always, in matters of confessedly little moment, be inculcating the same thing, rolling endlessly the returning stone, and obtruding our offensive *crambe* ?

Perhaps, as no good is done, we do much hurt. When is the saw of disputation long drawn about one thing without ill effects ? Reason, having at length spent its strength, grows (as weak people are) peevish and froward, degenerates into anger and clamour. In greater differences than our present ones, between the Protestant churches abroad, some of more prudent and peaceable minds have earnestly pressed the laying aside of disputes, and putting a period by consent to their theological wars. *Solitarum disputationum labyrinthos no*

ingredi quidem conentur, said a great divine in his days in reference to those controversies that he would have had composed by an amicable, brotherly conference.* And that king of Navarre, who, at that time, seemed highly concerned for the peace and welfare of the Reformed churches, (afterwards Henry IV. of France,) in his negotiations with divers princes to that purpose, gave special instructions to his ambassador much to insist upon this: "That (till other remedies could be used) an end might be put to bitter contentions and disputations; that Christian love and a brotherly union might be restored."† And who sees not how much this would conduce to peace and union in our case too? who sees it not that is a hearty lover of peace, and that is not intent upon continuing and keeping a-foot a controversy, not so much as a means to that, but as an end, contending for contention's sake, and as a thing which he loves and delights in for itself? I am sure, love to our brethren would not let us continually molest and importune them to no purpose. And it is fit, they that urge to us, "These are little things," which they importune us about, should know [that] we have great things to mind, of eternal concernment to us; and that we cannot be always at leisure to mind little things, beyond the proportion of our little time on earth, and the little value of the things themselves.

10. *Sincere love, restored and exercised more among us, would certainly make us forbear reviling and exposing one another, and the industrious seeking one another's ruin.*—For such as can allow themselves to do any thing that hath this tendency,—not to preserve public order, but to gratify their private ill-will,—not in a sudden heat and passion, but deliberately, and so as to pursue a formed design to this purpose; if such men were capable of being reasoned with, (though it were to as good purpose to talk to a storm, or reason with a whirlwind or a flame of fire,) I would ask them: "What! are you altogether unatonable? Will nothing divert you from this pursuit? If any thing, what will? What more gentle thing than our destruction do you seek, or will content you? Is it our communion? And do you so recommend yourselves? Do you not know, Cain is said to have been 'of that wicked one, who slew his brother?' and that 'whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him?' (1 John iii. 12, 15.) Is it not said, that such 'are of their father the devil, and the lusts of their father they will do, who was a murderer from the beginning?' (John viii. 44.) And in the fore-mentioned 1 John iii. 10: 'In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not is brother.' If all were like you, under what notion were we to unite with them? The apostle tells us: 'I would not that ye should

* DAVENANTICUS, *Sentent. ad Duram*. "Let them not even attempt to enter the labyrinths of their accustomed disputes."—EDIT. † *Ut acerbis illis contentionibus, quibus et verbis rixati sunt inter se theologi et scriptis, et ejusmodi disputationibus, silentio tandem finis imponatur: ut Christiana charitas et animorum fraternam conjunctionem revoletur.*—Mandata HENRICI REGIS NAVAR. *Jacobo Sigurio, Legato suo, &c., apud GOLDASTICUM.*

have fellowship with devils: ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.' (1 Cor. x. 20, 21.) And in good earnest, incarnate devils (though that text do not directly speak of such) have too much of devil in them to be participants in a communion that can seem desirable, or is likely to be grateful, to serious Christians." I must avow it to all the world,—it is not this or that external form [which] I so much consider in the matter of Christian union and communion, as what spirit reigns in them with whom I would associate myself. How can I endure to approach those holy mysteries, wherein all are to "drink into one Spirit," and declare their union with the God of love, with the Emmanuel, God most nearly approaching us, "God with us," collecting and gathering us in unto Him as our common centre, whence the blessed Spirit of holy love is to diffuse itself through the whole body, all enlivened by that Spirit, and formed by it unto all kindness, benignity, goodness, and sweetness? With what significancy can I do so, (though I were never so well satisfied with the external forms and modes myself,) if it be apparent, I say, if apparent, [that] I must cast-in my lot and join myself with them (were they generally such) whose souls are under the dominion of the quite contrary spirit, that fills them with malignity, with mischievous dispositions and purposes, toward many a sincere lover of God that cannot be satisfied with those forms and modes, and who decline them only from a sense of duty to God, and a fear of offending against the high authority of their blessed, glorious Redeemer?

I know, many are apt to justify themselves in their animosity and bitterness of spirit toward others, upon a pretence that *they* bear the same disaffected mind toward them. But beside that it is the most manifest and indefensible injustice, if they charge the innocent or such as they are not sure are guilty, if their own wrath and enmity be so potent in them as to enable their tainted, vicious imagination to create its object, or so to disguise and falsely clothe it as to render it such to themselves, as whereupon they may more plausibly pour out their fury; I say, beside that, how contrary is this vindictive spirit to the rules and spirit of the Christian religion! Is this to "love our enemies, to bless them that curse us and despitefully use us," &c.? How unlike the example of our blessed Lord, when, even in dying agonies, he breathed forth these words and his soul almost at once: "Father, forgive them," &c.; or of the holy martyr Stephen: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" How unlike is that aptness to the retaliating of injuries, to the Christian temper which the renowned Calvin discovers in an epistle to Bullinger, speaking of Luther's severity toward him!—"If Luther a thousand times," saith he, "call me devil, I will acknowledge him for a famous servant of God:" which passage both bishop Morton and bishop Davenant magnify him for; and the former saith, He herein spake "so calmly, so placidly, so indulgently, as if it were not a man, but humanity itself, that uttered the words."

Yea, and such retaliation is what Paganism itself hath declaimed against. A noted philosopher urges *that* against it that one would think should not need to be suggested to Christians; somewhat so prudential as might not only work upon the principle of love to others, but even that of self-love:—that then “the evil must perpetually circulate, and so must again and again return upon ourselves;”* as indeed if that must be the measure,—to revile them that revile us, and “render evil for evil, railing for railing;” (1 Peter ii. 23; iii. 9.)—we should never have done. It were a course which, once begun, could by that rule never find an end.

This, then, is the first part of the answer to the proposed question, *What may be most hopefully done, &c.?* The endeavour of having our hearts knit together in love would surely do much toward it. And this is agreeable to any the most private capacity. No man can pretend his sphere is too narrow, if his soul be not, for the exercise of love toward fellow-Christians. And I hope it is agreeable to all our principles: sure, no man will say it is against his conscience to love his brother.

And the same must be said of,

II. That other expedient, *the endeavour to have our souls possessed with a more clear, efficacious, practical faith of the gospel*; which was to make the other part of the answer to our question. And though this is the more important part, it is also so very evident, that we do not need to make this discourse swell to a bulk too unproportionable to the rest [which] it is to be joined with, by speaking largely to it.

Although we have not the name of faith in this text, we have the thing. It is not named, but it is described, so as that it may easily be understood, both *what it is*, and *how necessary to our purpose*.

1. *What it is*, or what measure and degree of it, that would be of so great use in such a case, we are told with great emphasis:—the “riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” Such as whereby,

(1.) *Our understandings are duly enlightened*, so as mentally to entertain aright the doctrine of the gospel; that is, (i.) *Distinctly to apprehend the meaning and design* of this mysterious revelation of God in Christ; (ii.) *And to be fully assured of the truth of it*.

(2.) Such, again, as whereby *our hearts are overcome*, so as practically and vitally to receive it; that is, to acknowledge, receive, resign, intrust, and subject ourselves unto God in Christ, revealed in it.

2. *And of how vast importance* this is toward our establishment, the confirming, fortifying, and uniting of our hearts, and our joint preservation in our Christian state,—the main thing we are to design, and be solicitous for,—we may see in these particulars:—

(1.) *Hereby we should apprehend the things to be truly great wherein we are to unite*.—That union is not like to be firm and lasting, the centre whereof is a trifle; it must be somewhat that is of

* MAXIMUS TYRIUS, *Dissert.* ii.

itself apt to attract and hold our hearts strongly to it. To attempt with excessive earnestness an union in external formalities, that have not a value and goodness in themselves, when the labour and difficulty is so great, and the advantage so little; how hopeless and insignificant would it be! "The mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ," how potently and constantly attractive would it be, if aright understood and acknowledged! Here, we should understand, is our life and our all.

(2.) *Hereby we should, in comparison, apprehend all things else to be little.*—And so our differences about little things would languish and vanish. We should not only know, but consider and feelingly apprehend, that we agree in far greater things than we differ in; and thence be more strongly inclined to hold together by the things wherein we agree, than to contend with one another about the things wherein we differ.

(3.) *Hereby our religion would revive, and become a vital, powerful thing, and consequently more grateful to God and awful to men.*

(i.) *More grateful to God:* who is not pleased with the stench of carcasses, or with the dead shows of religion, instead of the living substance. We should hereupon not be deserted of the Divine Presence, which, we cannot but reckon, will retire when we entertain him but with insipid formalities. What became of the Christian interest in the world, when Christians had so sensibly diverted from minding the great things of religion to little minute circumstances, about which they affected to busy themselves, or to the pursuit of worldly advantages and delights?

(ii.) *More awful to men:* They who are tempted to despise the faint, languid appearances of an impotent, inefficacious, spiritless religion, discern a majesty in that which is visibly living, powerful, and productive of suitable fruits. Who that shall consider the state of the Christian church, and the gradual declining of religion for that three hundred years from Constantine's time to that of Phocas, but shall see cause at once to lament the sin and folly of men, and adore the righteous severity of God? For as Christians grew gradually to be loose, wanton, sensual; and their leaders, contentious, luxurious, covetous, proud, ambitious, affectors of domination; so was the Christian church gradually forsaken of the Divine Presence. Inasmuch as that at the same time when Boniface obtained from Phocas the title of "universal bishop," in defiance of the severe sentence of his predecessor Gregory the Great, sprang up the dreadful delusion of Mahomet;* and so spread itself to this day, through Asia, Africa, and too considerable a part of Europe, that where Christians were twenty or thirty to one, there was now scarce one Christian to twenty or thirty Mahometans or grosser Pagans. And what between the Mahometan infatuation and the Popish tyranny,—good Lord, what is Christendom become! when, by the one, the very name is lost; and, by the other, little else left but the name.

(4.) *Hereby we shall be enabled most resolvedly to suffer, being called*

* BRERWOOD'S "Inquiries."

to it.—When it is for the great things of the gospel, “the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,” clearly and with assurance understood and acknowledged. Such a faith will not be without its pleasant relishes. It is an uncomfortable thing to suffer either for the mere spiritless, uncertain, inoperative notions and opinions, or for the unenlivened outward forms of religion, that we never felt to do us good, in which we never tasted sweetness or felt power, that we were really nothing ever the better for. But who will hesitate at suffering for so great things as the substantial of the gospel, which he hath clearly understood, whereof he is fully assured, and which he hath practically acknowledged and embraced, so as to feel the energy and power of them, and relish their delicious sweetness in his soul? And though by such suffering he himself perish from off this earth, his religion lives, is spread the more in the present age, and propagated to after-ages: so seminal and fruitful a thing is the blood of martyrs, as hath always been observed.

And as such a faith of the mystery of the gospel appears to have this tendency to the best, firmest, and most lasting union among Christians, and the consequent preservation of the Christian interest, this mystery being more *generally* considered only; so this tendency of it would be more distinctly seen, if we should consider the more eminent and remarkable *parts* of it. *The mystery of the Redeemer's person*: the Emmanuel, God uniting himself with the nature of man. *His office*: a reconciler of God and man to each other. *His death*: as a propitiatory sacrifice to “slay all enmity.” *His victory and conquest over it*: wherein is founded his universal empire over all. *His triumphant entrance into heaven*: whither he is to collect all that ever loved, trusted, and obeyed him; to dwell and be conversant together in his eternal love and praises. How directly do all these tend to endear and bind the hearts and souls of Christians to God, and Him, and one another, in everlasting bonds!

Thus, then, we have the answer to our question in the two parts of the text: the former pointing out to us the subjects of our union, with the uniting principle by which they are to be combined with one another; the other, the centre of it, with the uniting principle whereby they are all to be united in that centre.

USE.

And what now remains but that we lament the decay of these two principles, and, to our uttermost, endeavour the revival of them?

1. *We have great cause to lament their decay.*—For how visible is it, and how destructive to the common truly Christian interest! It was once the usual cognizance of those of this holy profession, “See how these Christians *love* one another, and even refuse not to die for each other!” Now it may be, “How do they hate, and are like to die and perish by the hands of, one another!” Our Lord himself gave it them to be their distinguishing character: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Good Lord, what are they now to be known by?

And what a cloudy, wavering, uncertain, lank, spiritless thing is the *faith* of Christians in this age become! How little are the ascertaining grounds of it understood, or endeavoured to be understood! Most content themselves to profess it only as the religion of their country, and which was delivered to them by their forefathers; and so are Christians but upon the same terms as other nations are Mahometans or more gross Pagans, as a worthy writer some time since took notice.* How few make it their business to see things with their own eyes, to "believe and be sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!" How far are we from "the riches of the full assurance of understanding!" How little practical and governing is the faith of the most! How little doth it import of an "acknowledgment of the mystery of God," namely, "of the Father, and of Christ!" How little effectual is it! which it can be but in proportion to the grounds upon which it rests. When the gospel is "received, not as the word of man, but of God, it works effectually in" them that so believe it. (1 Thess. ii. 13.)

2. *Let us endeavour the revival of these principles.*—This is that in reference whereto we need no human laws. We need not edicts of princes to be our warrant for this practice, loving one another, and cleaving with a more grounded, lively faith to God and his Christ. Here is no place for scruple of conscience in this matter. And as to this *mutual* love: what, if others will not do their parts to make it so? What! shall we only love them that love us, and be fair to them that are fair to us, salute them that salute us? "Do not even the publicans the same? What then do we more than others?" as was the just expostulation of our Saviour upon this supposition. (Matt. v. 47.)

And let us endeavour the more thorough, deep radication of our faith, that it may be more lively and fruitful; which this apostle, you see, not forgetting his scope and aim, further presses in the following verses, testifying his joy for what he understood there was of it among these Christians: "Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ;" (Col. ii. 5;) and exhorting them to pursue the same course: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." (Verses 6, 7.)

And what, also, must we suspend the exercise and improvement of our faith in the great mysteries of the gospel, till all others will agree upon the same thing? Let us do our own part, so as we may be able to say, *Per me non stetit*, "It was not my fault but Christians had been combined and entirely one with each other, but they had been more thoroughly Christian and more entirely united with God in Christ, that Christianity had been a more lively, powerful, awful, amiable thing. If the Christian community moulder, decay, be

* PINK'S "Trial of a Christian's Love to Christ."

enfeebled, broken, dispirited, ruined in great part, this ruin shall not rest under my hand." We shall have abundant consolation in our own souls, if we can acquit ourselves that, as to these two things, we lamented the decay and loss, and endeavoured the restitution of them, and therein, as much as in us was, of the Christian interest.

SERMON V.

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HOW OUGHT WE TO BEWAIL THE SINS OF THE PLACES WHERE WE LIVE?

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.)—2 Peter ii. 7, 8.

SECTION I. The apostle (verse 6) recollects the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrhah, as the ensamples of the punishment that should befall those impure seducers against whom he wrote. By occasion whereof, he mentions God's delivering care of Lot; whose holy carriage being so contrary to the unholy practices of the Sodomites, God made his condition happily different from theirs also; for so saith the text: "He delivered just Lot, vexed," &c.

SECT. II. In the words there are these two distinct parts:—

1. *God's happy delivering of Lot*: He "delivered just Lot."

2. *Lot's holy severity to himself*: for he *was* not only vexed, but he vexed himself; he "vexed his righteous soul with their unlawful deeds."

The second part is the subject of my ensuing discourse, which presents us with this doctrinal observation:—

DOCTRINE.

It is the disposition and duty of the righteous, to be deeply afflicted with the sins of the places where they live.

In the discussing of which divine and seasonable truth, I shall,

I. Produce those obvious *scripture-examples* that clearly agree with it.

II. Principally show *after what manner* the righteous ought to mourn for the sins of others.

III. Show the *reasons* why it is the disposition and duty of the righteous to be so afflicted and mournful for the sins of others.