

A PERSUASIVE TO UNITY IN THINGS INDIFFERENT.

As many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.—PHIL. III. 15.

I NOW come to the other part of the text:—

1. *As many as be perfect, be thus minded* : τοῦτο φρονεῖτε, think the same thing with me—that is, forsaking all other confidences, cleave to Christ alone, whatever it cost you. Mind this, take care of this, be thus affected; let us actually perform that to which circumcision was designed; let us worship God in a spiritual manner, trusting Christ as the substance of all these ceremonial shadows, depending upon him for his renewing and reconciling grace, and adhering to pure Christianity, without mingling with it the rudiments of Moses.

2. *If in anything ye be otherwise minded*, know not the abolition of the ceremonies through weakness of faith, or an affected ignorance; yet having knowledge of so many saving truths, we hope in time God will reclaim you from your error. Well then—

[1.] Here is a difference or dissent supposed: ‘thus minded,’ and ‘otherwise minded.’

[2.] Lenity expressed towards the dissenters: ‘If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this to you.’

Doct. That when God’s people are divided in opinion, all lenity and mutual forbearance should be used to prevent things from coming to an open rupture.

So sweet and mild was the discipline in the apostle’s days, that he would not compel men to do whatever he or others did conceive to be good, or to forbear what they did conceive to be evil, but, without force, leave them to God’s direction and illumination.

Here let me show you:—

1. What lenity and forbearance should be used.

2. The reasons why lenity and forbearance should be used.

1. What lenity and forbearance should be used. Let us state it in these considerations:—

[1.] There may be, and often are, differences of opinion about lesser things in the church; partly because of the different degrees of light.

All barks that sail to heaven draw not a like depth of water. And partly because of the remainders of corruption in all. Inordinate self-love is not in all alike broken and mortified, and so their particular interests have an influence upon their opinions. And partly because of the accidental prejudices of education and converse, &c.

[2.] When these differences arise, we should take care they come not to a rupture and open breach. This is the course the apostle taketh here ; he doth not by and by despair of the dissenters, and reject them as heretics, but beareth with them, hoping in charity God will at length reveal their error to them by the ministry of his servants, through the powerful operation of his Spirit, and not suffer them to run on in dividing courses from the rest of his people. So should we do in like cases. Partly because when these differences of opinion breed division and separations, the church is destroyed : Gal. v. 15, ' For if ye bite and devour one another, take heed ye be not consumed one of another.' Backbitings, revilings, and reproaches make way for a total vastation of the whole church, a ruin to both parties. Partly because the whole ¹ is scandalised : John xvii. 21, ' That they may all be one, that the world may believe that thou has sent me.' Divisions in the church breed atheism in the world. Partly because there are enemies which watch for our halting, and by our divisions we are laid open to them. Our Lord and Master hath told us with his own mouth, that ' a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand,' Mat. xii. 25. Never was it so well with the people of God, but besides their divisions among themselves, they had common enemies ; and Nazianzen calls them ' Common Reconcilers,' because they should engage God's people to a unanimous opposition to the kingdom of Satan in the world. And partly because then mutual means of edification are hindered. As long as charity and mutual forbearance remaineth, there is hope of doing good to one another ; but when men break out into opposite parties, they are prejudiced against all that light that they should receive one from another, suspecting every point as counsel from an enemy : Gal. iv. 16, ' Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth ?' When men are once engaged in a way of error, whosoever is an enemy to their error is counted an enemy to themselves ; yea, they can hardly bear that sound doctrine which doth directly cross their opinions, but are apt to cavil at all that is said by a dissenter. And partly because when men give themselves up to separating and narrow principles, the power of godliness is lost, and all their zeal is laid out upon their petty and private opinions, and so religion is turned into a disputacity. That is the reason why the apostle doth so often tell them, Gal. vi. 15, ' For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature ;' and Gal. v. 6, ' For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith that worketh by love ;' and 1 Cor. vii. 19, ' Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God.' Observe it where you will, and you shall find that separation and distance from the rest of believers, doth not befriend godliness, but undermine it. A regiment fighting apart from the rest of the army of

¹ Qu. ' the world ?'—ED.

Christ, is always lost through their own peevishness; at least, they lose great advantages of promoting the kingdom of Christ.

[3.] To prevent this open rupture, there must be all lenity used and mutual forbearance. We must not rigorously obtrude our conceits upon others, either by church-power, or private censure. It may be done either way; sometimes by church-power, especially when it is possessed or invaded by the more self-seeking sort of Christians; as we read in the Revelations of the beast that pushed with the horns of a lamb—that is, used church-power, and under a pretence of church-constitution destroyed them that were truly the church of Christ. And our Lord telleth us, John xvi. 2, ‘They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, shall think that he doth God good service.’ Putting them out of the synagogues was an abuse of ecclesiastical power: it may be so, the builders may refuse the corner-stone. On the other side, private censures may as much break the law of forbearance as public censures, when inferiors promote their differences with turbulency, heat, and animosity, and rend and tear all things, yea, themselves, from the body of Christ, and sober Christians, censuring all that dissent from them as no Christians. There is such a sin under the gospel as the gainsaying of Korah, Jude 11. The sin of Korah is and may be committed in the New Testament. The sin of Korah was invading an office that no way belonged to him, and censured his superiors, as if they took too much upon them, because all the Lord’s people were holy, and erected another ministry in their stead. He, being a Levite, would do the office of a priest as well as Aaron; and when summoned to appear before Moses, said, ‘We will not come,’ Num. xvi. 11, 12. Now the apostle saith, in the perishing of Korah their own doom was foretold. Again, ver. 19, ‘These are they that separate themselves, sensual, not having the Spirit.’ Whence it is clear that private men, in their sphere, may rend the church. And the factions at Corinth proved it: 1 Cor. i. 12. ‘I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ,’—as impailing and improprating the common salvation to themselves. Much milder was the apostle: 1 Cor. i. 2, ‘Jesus Christ, theirs and ours.’ Now what remedy is there but lenity and mutual forbearance? This I shall state:—

1. As to the matter of the strife. It must be considered that we must dispense this forbearance as the matter will bear. There are great disputes about toleration; only let me tell you now, that we speak not of the toleration of the magistrate, but of the church, what things are within the latitude of allowable differences within the church. The magistrate’s concessions may be larger; for in supernatural things, such as matters of religion are, he may bear with that which the church ought not to bear with in them that have submitted to a higher institution, or in its own members, or rather private Christians one with another. But in this limited forbearance there are extremes, and for want of right stating of things, men fight with their friends in the dark; some think all things should be suffered; some nothing wherein to bear with our brethren. The one sort of Christians is for imposing on their brethren all things that have gotten the vogue and the favour of authority, and that not only

on their practice, but their judgments too; and this in matters not fundamental or destructive to faith or worship, but in things controversial or doubtful among godly and peaceable men. But if it should not go so high, contending about every difference of opinion, and urging our brethren with everything we conceive to be right, is a breach of Christian love, and destroyeth the use of those differing gifts which Christ hath given to the church, and crosseth his mind in the frame of the scriptures, which are clear in soul-saving matters; in other things, especially matters of discipline and order, more dark and obscure. It is also contrary to the mild and gentle government of the apostles, who press in lesser matters a forbearance; as Paul, Rom. xiv. 1, 'The weak in faith receive, but not to doubtful disputations;' receive him, own him, but do not cast him out of the church, nor trouble him for doubtful things, but let him come to himself, for men will sooner be led than drawn.

The other extreme is of them that will have all things to be tolerated, even blasphemy and fundamental errors, as if the scriptures were uncertain in all things. No; in things absolutely necessary to salvation, it is clear, open, and plain: 'The law is a lamp, and a light,' Prov. vi. 23, and Ps. cxix. 105. And in such a case we are not to 'bid him God-speed,' 2 Epist. John 10. In such cases of damnable heresy, the law of Christian lenity holdeth not; but if we agree in the principal articles of faith, let us embrace one another with mutual love, though we differ from one another in variety of rites and ceremonies and discipline ecclesiastical. If we agree in the substantial of worship, let us go by the same rule, do the same thing: though in circumstantial there be a difference, these are matters of lesser moment than separation, or the other¹ division of the church.

2. As to the persons contending, there is a difference. The apostle, when he persuadeth this lenity and mutual forbearance, excepts those that raise troubles in the church, and distinguisheth between erring Christians and their factious guides: Phil. iii. 2, 'Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the concision.' The poor seduced Christians he would have to be pitied, but the renders and cutters of the church, he would have them beware of such.

3. The forbearance itself. It is not a forbearance out of necessity, because we dare do no otherwise, but voluntary choice out of Christian pity and compassion, knowing that we need as much forbearance from God and others, for we all have our mistakes and failings; not a forbearance out of policy, till we get opportunity to suppress others: the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for us. God often layeth that restraint upon us by his providence; and it is well he doth: but it should be the restraint of grace, not a respect to our own ease, lest we create trouble to ourselves, but upon Christian reasons. No; the apostle sheweth you whence this forbearance should come: Eph. iv. 2, 3, 'With all lowliness and meekness and long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'

There are four graces enforce it:—

[1.] Lowliness, which is a grace and virtue, whereby a man, from

¹ Qu. 'utter'?—ED.

the sense of his own infirmities, doth esteem but meanly and soberly of himself, and all that is his.

[2.] Meekness, whereby we are rendered tractable, gentle, affable, and easy to be entreated and conversed withal, James iii. 17.

[3.] Long-suffering, which is nothing but meekness extended or continued, and not interrupted by length of time, or multiplication of offences.

[4.] Love to our Christian brother or neighbour, whereby our hearts are inclined or well-disposed towards them for their good. 'Love covereth a multitude of sins,' 1 Peter iv. 8. Maketh us bear with many things in the person loved, 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 'Charity suffereth long, and is kind;' and ver. 7, 'Beareth all things, hopeth all things.' This is the forbearance we press, a forbearance out of meekness and humility and love for Christ's sake.

4. In this forbearance, both strong and weak have their part, and are much concerned, as having either of them much to do herein. Which, that we may clear to you, let us consider:—

First, What they are not to do.

1. Not to leave the truth, or to do anything against it. No; the apostle saith, 'Let as many as be perfect be thus minded;' not change truth for error. Strings in tune must not be brought down to strings out of tune, but they brought up to them.

2. Not to connive at their sin or error, for that is not love but hatred: Lev. xix. 17, 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.' To let him go unconvinced is to harden him: 2 Thes. iii. 15, 'Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.' The sins of others must not be let alone under the pretence of forbearance; and there must be no neglect of means to reclaim them from their sin, but meekly we are to hold our light to them, and use all holy means of convincing and satisfying their judgments.

Secondly, What they are to do.

1. The strong are not to deal rigorously with the weak, nor insult over them, nor pursue them with censures, but wait till God declare the truth unto them, and must promote their conviction with all gentleness and condescension. We are to feed Christ's lambs as well as his sheep, and for both we need love, John xxi. 15, 16. Among the flock of Christ there are variety of tempers and degrees of strength, both lambs and sheep. We must imitate our Lord: Isa. xl. 11, 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.' We should condescend to the weak and feeble ones, as well as consider what the strong and confirmed can bear. Though we cannot love their weakness, yet we must love the weak, and bear with the infirmities of the weak, not break the bruised reed. Infants must not be turned out of the family because they cry, and are unquiet and troublesome; though they be peevish and froward, yet we must bear it with gentleness and patience, as we do the frowardness of the sick; if they revile, we must not revile again, but must seek gently to reduce them, notwithstanding all their censures; to entertain them with contempt is to prejudice them quite against

all instruction. Job would not despise the cause of his man-servant or maid-servant when they contended with him, Job xxxi. 13.

2. The weak. But who will own this title and appellation? Because in controversies of religion, all seem to stand upon the same level, and another differeth from me as much as I do from him; their opinion is as far from mine, as mine from theirs; who then shall be accounted weak?

I answer:—

1. Our rule is plain; and as it distinguisheth error from truth, so weakness and partial Christianity from that which is more perfect and thorough. Besides, it is clear some have not the gifts of knowledge and experience that others have, nor such advantages of education and study, and helps of knowing the truth; and though they are not to captivate their understandings to the dictates of others, yet they should search and search again and again, and have double light, when they are by the seeming evidence of truth forced to differ.

2. Christianity teacheth us to think meanly of ourselves, and not to be wise in our own conceits: Phil. ii. 3, 'In lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves;' at least, we should have such a sense of our imperfections as to make us tractable and teachable.

3. If you will not own yourselves weak, do the part of the strong meekly, hold forth your light, produce your reasons to convince others; but if you have nothing to produce but your obstinacy and ignorance, surely you are not only a weak, but a perverse brother. But what are the weak to do? Not to rend and cut off themselves from the rest of Christians, or be strange to them upon every lesser dissent, nor to raise troubles by your censures, but to be humble, teachable, diligent in the use of means, to lay aside obstinate prejudices, to examine how it cometh to pass that the rest of the godly and you differ; to leave room still for the discovery of God's mind where your grounds are not clear and certain, and to count it no shame to retract that former practice which a future conviction disproveth.

II. The reasons.

1. From the necessity, excellency, and utility of union. What more clear in the scriptures than that Christians should endeavour to be united? Christ prayed for it: John xvii. 21–23, 'That they all may be one, that they may be one as we are one, that they may be perfect in one.' And the apostle enforceth it by the most vehement intreaties that can be used: Phil. ii. 1, 2, 'If therefore there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercy, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind.' Who can withstand such an adjuration and powerful beseechings as these, that if ever they found any comfort by his ministry, and ever had any hope by Christ, ever any influence of the Spirit, ever any pity and compassion over souls, that they would look after unity in judgment, love, and affection, and lay aside their differences, and carnal emulations? Again, they caution us against those that cause divisions: Rom. xvi. 17, 18, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and

avoid them ; for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.' They press unity upon us by very cogent arguments, that carry the highest reason with them : Eph. iv. 4-6, ' There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.'

Seven uniting considerations are there heaped up together :—

[1.] There is one body of Christ, whereof all are members. The whole church maketh but one body, knit by faith to Christ, their head, and by the bond of love among themselves ; and the meanest Christian is a member in this body. Now it is unnatural if the members of the same body should tear and destroy one another, and that the body of Christ should be rent and torn ; and woe be to them by whom it is so !

[2.] This body is animated by one Spirit ; that if any be a member of this body, it is necessary that he have the Spirit of God abiding in him, to renew and quicken him. Now, this one and the self-same Spirit, as the apostle calleth him, 1 Cor. xii. 11, worketh in all the saints. If his gifts be various, they proceed from the same author, and they are variously dispensed, to preserve society and communion, that one may not say to another, ' I have no need of thee.' However, there is but one new nature in all the sanctified.

[3.] One hope of glory. We are all joint-heirs of the same kingdom, we all expect one end and happiness, where we shall meet and live together for ever. Now those that shall meet and live together in glory hereafter, should live together in peace and concord here.

[4.] There is 'one Lord,' one Mediator and blessed Saviour. Now, shall the servants of one Master fall at odds with themselves, neglect their Master's work committed to them, beat their fellow-servants, and eat and drink with the drunken ?

[5.] 'One faith,' *fides quæ creditur* : he meaneth the doctrine of faith in the gospel. We agree in the same fundamental truths of the gospel as the only object of saving faith, and shall we strive about things of less importance and moment ? There is but one gospel, which is the seed of our new birth, the rule of our faith and lives, the foundation of our hope, the food of our souls.

[6.] 'One baptism,' that is, the same new covenant sealed and confirmed by baptism ; and when our Father's testament is clear, do we quarrel about petty and mean things ?

[7.] 'One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.' We have one common God and Father, whose eminency is above all creatures, whose presence and powerful providence runneth through all creatures ; but his special presence, by the gracious operations of his Holy Spirit, is in the regenerate. Surely this is a strong bond of union, to be one in God. He is the common Father of all believers, through Jesus Christ. Some are weak, some strong, some rich, some poor, but they have all an equal interest in God. Now, for us, who are so many ways one, to be rent in pieces, how sad is that ! All these places, and many more, show how every Christian should, as far as it is possible, be an esteemer and promoter

of unity among brethren, and not only make conscience of purity, but of unity also, which, next to purity, is the great badge of Christianity.

2. From the consideration of our mutual frailties, who have all in part a corrupt will, guided by a blind mind. Now, as the apostle saith of the high priest, who is taken from men, Heb. v. 2, that he is 'one that can have compassion of the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, for that he is compassed about with infirmities;' this should be verified in every one of us. One sinner ought to have compassion of another. The word is *μετριοπαθεῖν δυνάμενος*, can reasonably bear with the ignorance of brethren, because of the common relation: Gal. vi. 1, 'Ye which are spiritual, restore him with meekness;' so 'him that is weak, receive,' Rom. xiv. 1. The apostles, being immediately inspired, were more infallible than we are.

[1.] Oh, do but consider what we were, and what we are: 'For we ourselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient,' Titus iii. 3. Did not we all sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death? Were we not all ignorant of the ways of God, and the things which belong to our peace? Hath God merely by his grace brought us to the knowledge of his truth? and shall we contemn and disdain our weak brother, or insult over him, and determine and judge rashly of him? 'Who maketh thee to differ?' 1 Cor. iv. 7.

[2.] What we are—weak creatures, not infallible. Now after we are light in the Lord, we have our errors in knowledge and practice, some more, some less, according to the degree of our growth, Ps. xix. 12. God revealeth to his saints all necessary truth, but not every particular truth, out of wise dispensation.

3. From the consideration of the probability of divine illumination.

[1.] This illumination cometh from God only. It is he that powerfully revealeth it, and setteth the heart in the belief of it: Acts xvi. 4, and 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7, 'I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.' The best means may be disappointed, till God cooperate with them. Let us, then, with patience, use the means, and refer the issue to God: 2 Tim. ii. 25, 'In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if, peradventure, God will give them repentance unto life.' If we seek to force men to our opinion, before men are convinced, that is a tyranny which will do little good; it may make hypocrites, but it will never make real converts.

[2.] This illumination is given by God by degrees. The apostle prayeth for the converted Ephesians, that 'God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation,' Eph. i. 17. They had it before, but he meaneth a greater measure. Therefore, weak Christians are not to be discouraged though they see not as far as others. Some see more, some less, according to the state and condition wherein God will employ them. Some need more light than others, as ministers more than people, governors more than inferiors; but all have sufficient. Some at first see men walking like trees, Mark viii. 24, 25, but afterwards the light groweth more clear and more distinct. In short, he doth not reveal his mind to his children all alike, nor all at once, but here a little and there a little, as narrow-mouthed vessels can take it in.

[3.] Those who are not for the present, may be afterwards instructed in the truth. The apostle proceedeth in the hopes of that:—

(1.) Upon the supposition that they were already converted to the Christian faith, and were sincere in the belief and profession of it. Those that belong to God will one time or other be enlightened in the knowledge of all necessary truths: 'For God that hath begun a good work, will perfect it,' Phil. i. 6. If the saints at first conversion, when they were called from darkness to light, did not hinder illumination then, and the knowledge of those many soul-saving truths which God revealed to them then, so as to recover them from a partial error, we may presume that God will give them a further understanding of the way of salvation, though now under some error; as Aquila and Priscilla expounded to Apollos the way of God more perfectly, Acts xviii. 26.

(2.) Upon the supposition that they were humble and tractable: Ps. xxv. 9, 'The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way.' They lie open to information; but if men be puffed up with self-conceits, there is more hopes of a carnal fool than of them, that is, a sensual and brutish man.

(3.) That they will not neglect any means of study and prayer. Study—for we must dig for knowledge as for silver (Prov. ii. 4)—not only cry for it, but dig for it in the mines of knowledge; common and obvious apprehensions lead us into error. And then prayer: Ps. cxix. 18, 'Lord open mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law.' God must take away the veil. Now, then, upon prayer to God, and applying themselves to the use of holy means, God will show them they are deceived. If you study and not pray, it is just with God to leave you to your prejudices; if you pray and neglect means, you must not think that God will extraordinarily inspire you, for he revealeth truth by his blessing on ordinary means.

(4.) Upon suspicion that they continue in the communion of the church: Eph. iv. 15, 'Speaking the truth in love.' While we keep unity and keep love, others have greater hopes to convince, they to be convinced; and so both, while they divide not, by this mutual condescension, may the better wait for this illumination; but in their separation, their errors are confirmed while they hear but one side, nothing to undeceive them, but all to root them in their errors.

(5.) He supposeth that they walked orderly according to their light. Now if God hath begun to enlighten them in other things, he will discover more truths to them, John vii. 17; upon the whole, deal tenderly with them and tolerate them, till they be taught of God.

(6.) As to the nature of his confidence, 'God shall reveal.' There is a twofold confidence, a confidence of faith grounded on a promise, and a confidence of charity grounded on appearance and probability, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. We hope the best, though the event doth not always follow; the former is on the forementioned grounds, the latter on appearance. The appearance of them; so Gal. v. 10, 'I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be no otherwise minded; for he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment whoever he be.' This confidence was grounded on charity, that through the Lord's grace they should be reclaimed from their error, and brought to embrace the truth. We are not to despair of the recovery of any, but

in charity to hope the best of all men, as long as they are curable. Thus for the third reason.

4. Fourth reason, from the temper of those that are perfect. A grounded Christian beareth with the infirmities he seeth in others, and pitieth and helpeth them, and prayeth for them more than the weak, who are usually most censorious and addicted to the interest of their party and faction in the world, and make a bustle about opinions rather than solid godliness; but the grown Christian is most under the power of love and a heavenly mind, and so loveth God and his neighbour, is most sensible of his own frailty, hath a greater zeal for the welfare of his church and interest in the world, and seeth farther than others do.

Use is to press us to this lenity and forbearance to one another.

To this end take these considerations:—

1. Consider in how many things we agree, and in how few we differ. There is a threefold unity; in mind, and heart, and scope.

In mind: Rom. xv. 5, 6, 'Now the God of patience and consolation grant that you be like-minded one towards another, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.'

In heart: Acts iv. 32, 'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.'

As to the scope, Rom. xv. 5-7. Now as to the way, it is either the general way of faith and holiness, for all that shall be saved are of one mind as to the substantials of faith and worship: Jer. xxxii. 39, 'I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever.' But there may be a different practice as to some lesser things; should we for these break with one another?

2. Take more notice of their graces than of their infirmities. Is there no good thing found in them? Rev. ii. 6, 'But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans.' See also ver. 2 and 5. He beginneth and endeth with their commendation, though in the middle of the epistle he reproveth them for their decay; he taketh more notice of what is right than what is wrong. We reflect upon the evil of every party, but do not consider the good.

3. Remember how open the enforcements to love and unity are, and how much the grounds of separation lie in the dark, and are in a doubtful case, but union is the safest part.

4. Think of God's love and forbearance towards us before we received the light of his truth, and were brought to the obedience of his will; as God dealt with the Israelites, so with every one of us: Acts xiii. 18, 'He suffered their manners in the wilderness.' If we had been dealt with rigorously, we had been cut off from the number of God's people, had such stumbling-blocks and prejudices laid in our way, that we should never have been converted to God.

5. This forbearance cannot in reason be expected from others to ourselves, if we be not ready to repay it to others. There is no man which hath not infirmities of his own which call for forbearance, James iii. 2. In the general, every man is obliged to do as he would be done unto, Mat. vii. 12. So in particular, he is reproveth when he had his own debt forgiven him, yet took his fellow-servant by the throat and showed him no mercy, Mat. xviii. 28. We have all our failings and mistakes; usually God punisheth censures with censures,

Mat. vii. 1, injuries with injuries. Paul, that stoned Stephen, was himself stoned at Lystra. So he punisheth separations with separations; they are endless, as circles in the water beget one another.

6. Consider how dangerous it is to reject any whom Christ will own for his. Will Christ admit him to heaven, and will you think him unfit for your communion here upon earth? Despise not the weak brother, for God hath received him, Rom. xiv. 3. The Gentile believer must not despise the scrupulous Jewish believer, and cast out of his communion the Gentile Christian; if God hath admitted him into his family, shall we exclude him? So Mat. xviii. 6, 'Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea.' Now what greater offence than to cast them off from the privileges of the Christian church, either by public or private censures which are causeless or unwarrantable, at least no way grounded on necessary things?

7. As we must not on our part give offence or occasion the divisions, so we must not take offence when it is given by others; for charity, as it provoketh not, so it 'is not easily provoked,' 1 Cor. xiii. 5. So likewise if a rent be made by others, we must do what we can to heal it. If an angry brother call us bastard, yet let us own him as a brother and a child of the family: for 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' Mat. v. 9. The world censureth us for compliers and daubers, but God counteth us his genuine and true children.

8. Our endeavours after unity among the professors of Christianity ought to be earnest and constant: Eph. iv. 3, '*Endeavouring* to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' I add this partly because many make fair pretences of peace and union, which their practice contradicteth; all cry out of the divisions, but every one keepeth them up; and partly, because when it is endeavoured we shall find difficulties and disappointments, but we must not rest in some careless endeavours, nor grow weary though we meet not with present success; and partly because the instruments of so great a good are usually sacrificed to the wrath of both parties. We must be content to digest affronts, reproaches, censures, and injuries, and love them that hate us: 2 Cor. xii. 15, 'Though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am beloved of you.'