

GOSPEL UNITY

RECOMMENDED TO THE

CHURCHES OF CHRIST.

A SERMON.

1 COR. i. 10.

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

WHEN I consider this healing and uniting text, and the scandalous divisions of the congregations to which I recommend it; I could chuse rather to comment thereon with tears than words; It is just matter of lamentation to think what feeble influences such divine and pathological exhortations have upon the minds and hearts of professed Christians. But it is not lamentations, but proper counsels, and convictions obeyed, must do the work.

The primitive and purest churches of Christ consisted of imperfect members, who, notwithstanding they were knit together by the same internal bond of the Spirit, and the same external bonds of common profession, and common danger, and enjoyed extraordinary helps for uniting, in the presence and doctrines of the apostles among them; yet quickly discovered a schismatical spirit, dividing both in judgment and affection, to the great injury of religion, and grief of the apostle's spirit. To check and heal this growing evil in the church at Corinth, the apostle addresses his pathological exhortation to them, and to all future churches of Christ, whom it equally concerns in the words of my text; *Now I beseech you, brethren, &c.* Where note,

1. The duty exhorted to,
2. The arguments enforcing the duty.

1. The duty exhorted to, namely, unity; the beauty, strength, and glory, as well as the duty of a church. This unity he describes two ways, 1. As it is exclusive of its opposite, schism, or division: all rents and rash separations are contrary to it, and destructive of it; *I beseech you, brethren, that there be no divisions [or schisms] among*

you. 2. As it is inclusive of all that belongs to it, namely, the harmony and agreement of their judgments, hearts, and language. (1.) That ye all speak the same thing. (2.) That ye be perfectly joined together in one mind. And, (3.) In the same judgment. This threefold union in judgment, affection, and language, includes all that belongs to Christian concord, makes the saints *Συμφύχοι*, men of one heart and soul, the loveliest sight this world affords, Acts ii. 46, 47.

2. The arguments enforcing this duty upon them, come next under consideration. And these are three; (1.) *I beseech you.* (2.) *I beseech you, brethren.* (3.) *I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* These arguments are not of equal force and efficacy; the first is great, the second greater; the last the most efficacious and irresistible of all the rest: but all together should come with such power, and irresistible efficacy upon the judgments, consciences, and hearts of Christians as should perfectly knit them together, and defeat all the designs of Satan, and his agents without them, or of their own corruptions within them, to rend asunder their affections or communion.

Argum. 1. And first, he enforces the duty of unity by a solemn, apostolical obsecration and adjuration, *I beseech you*, saith he; he had power to command them to this duty, and threaten them for the neglect of it: He had in readiness to revenge all disobedience, and might have shaken that rod over them; but he chuseth rather to intreat and beseech them: Now *I beseech you*, brethren; here you have, as it were, the great apostle upon his knees before them, meekly and pathetically intreating them to be at perfect unity among themselves. It is the intreaty of their spiritual Father that had begotten them to Christ. Now [I] beseech you, brethren: I who was the instrument in Christ's hands of your conversion to him; I, that have planted you a gospel-church, and assiduously watered you; I beseech you all, by the spiritual ties and endearments betwixt you and me, that there may be no divisions among you. This is the first argument, wrapt up in a solemn obsecration.

Next, he enforces the duty of unity by the nearness of their relation; *I beseech you, brethren*: Brotherhood is an endearing thing, and naturally draws affection and unity with it, 1 Pet. iii. 8. "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous; ye are the children of one Father, joint heirs of one and the same inheritance." To see an Egyptian smiting an Israelite, is no strange sight; but to see one Israelite quarrelling with another, is most unnatural and uncomely: The nearer the relation, the stronger the affection.

“ How good and how pleasant is it (saith the Psalmist) for brethren
 “ to dwell together in unity !” Psal. cxxxiii. 1.

But the greatest argument of all is the last, viz. *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In this name he beseeches and intreats them to be at perfect unity among themselves. In the former he sweetly insinuated the duty by a loving *compellation*, but here he sets it home by a solemn *adjuration*; I beseech you brethren, *by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. That is to say, 1. For Christ’s sake, or for the love of Christ; by all that Christ hath done, suffered, or purchased for you; and as Christ is dear and precious to you, let there be no divisions. If you have any love for Christ, do not grieve him, and obstruct his great design in the world by your scandalous schisms. Mr. John Fox never denied a beggar that asked alms of him for Christ Jesus’ sake.

2. *In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, that is, in the authority of Christ; for so his name also signifies, 1 Cor. v. 4. and it is as if he had said, If you reverence the supreme authority and sovereignty of Christ, which is the fountain out of which so many solemn commands of unity do flow; then see, as you will answer him at the great day, that ye be perfectly joined together in one mind and in one judgment. The point will be this.

Doct. Unity amongst believers, especially in particular church-relation, is as desirable a mercy, as it is a necessary and indispensable duty.

How desirable a mercy it is, and how necessary a duty, let the same apostle, who presseth it upon the Corinthians in my text, be heard again, enforcing the same duty with the same warmth upon the church at Philippi, chap. ii. ver. 1, 2. “ If there be therefore
 “ any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellow-
 “ ship of the Spirit, if any bowels of mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that
 “ ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of
 “ one mind.” In handling this point, I will shew,

1. What unity among believers is.

2. How the necessity and desirableness of it may be evinced.

3. And then lay down the motives and directions about it.

(1.) What unity among believers is, and more particularly such believers as stand in particular church-relation to each other.

There is a twofold union, one *mystical*, betwixt Christ and believers; another *moral*, betwixt believers themselves: faith knits them all to Christ, and then love knits them one to another. Their common relation to Christ their head endears them to each other as fellow-members in the same body: hence they become

sanguine Christi conglutinati, glued together by the blood of Christ. Union with Christ is fundamental to all union among the saints. Perfect union would flow from this their common union with Christ their head, were they not here in an imperfect state, where their corruptions disturb and hinder it; and as soon as they shall attain unto complete sanctification, they shall also attain unto perfect unity. How their unity with one another comes, by way of necessary resultancy, from their union with Christ, and how this unity among themselves shall at last arise to its just perfection, that one text plainly discovers, John xvii. 23. "I in them, and thou in me; that they may be made perfect in one," &c.

Unity amongst those that hold not the head, is rather a conspiracy, than a gospel-unity. Believers and unbelievers may have a political or civil union; but there is no spiritual unity, but what flows from joint membership in Christ. I will not deny, but in particular churches, there may be, and still are, some hypocrites, who hold communion with the saints, and pretend to belong unto Christ, the same head with them; but as they have no real union with Christ, so neither have they any sincere affection to the saints; and these, for the most part, are they that raise tumults and divisions in the church, as disloyal subjects do in the commonwealth. Of these the apostle speaks, 1 John ii. 19. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be made manifest they were not all of us."

Sincere Christianity holds fast the soul by a firm bond of life to the truly Christian community, wherein they reap those spiritual pleasures and advantages, which assure their continuance therein to a great degree: but those that join with the church upon carnal and external inducements, make little conscience of rending from it; and God permits their schismatical spirits thus to act, for the discovering of their hypocrisy, or (as the text speaks) "that it might be made manifest they were not of us;" as also, that they which are approved, may by their constancy be also made manifest, 1 Cor. xi. 19.

It hath indeed been said, that it is never better with the church, than when there are most hypocrites in it; but then you must understand it only with respect to the external tranquillity and prosperity of the church: For as to its real spiritual advantage, they add nothing. And therefore it behoves church-officers and members to be exceeding careful (especially in times of liberty and prosperity) how they admit members, as the Jews in Solomon's time were of admitting proselytes. It is said, Amos iii. 3. "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" I deny not, but

persons that differ in some lesser points, as to their judgment, may, and ought to be one in affection; but of this I am sure, that when sanctified persons, agreed in judgments and principles, do walk together under pious and judicious church-officers, in tender affection, and the exercise of all duties tending to mutual edification, glorifying God with one mouth, Rom. xv. 6. and cleaving together with oneness of heart, Acts ii. 42. this is such a church-unity, as answers Christ's end in the institution of particular churches, and greatly tends to their own comfort, and the propagation of Christianity in the world. Tongue-unity flows from heart-unity; heart-unity in a great measure from head-unity; and all three from union with the Lord Jesus Christ. The divisions of our tongues come mostly from the divisions of our hearts; were hearts agreed, tongues would quickly be agreed; and then what blessed times might be expected? And so much briefly for the nature of unity. Next,

(2.) Let us evince, both the necessity and desirableness of this unity among believers, and this will appear in a threefold respect; viz.

1. With respect to the glory of God.
2. The comfort and benefit of our own souls.
3. The conversion and salvation of the world.

(1.) With respect to the glory of God. The manifestative glory of God (which is all the glory we are capable of giving him, is the very end of our being, and should be dearer to us than our lives) is exceedingly advanced by the unity of his people. Hence is the apostle's prayer, Rom. xv. 5, 6. "Now the God of patience, and consolation, grant you to be like minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind, and one mouth glorify God." It is highly remarkable, that the apostle, in this petition for the unity of the saints, doth not only describe that unity he prays for, one mouth and one mind, and shews how much God would be glorified by such an union; but he also addresses himself to God for it, under these two remarkable titles, the *God of patience, and consolation*; thereby intimating two things, (1.) How great need and exercise there is of patience in maintaining unity among the saints: They must bear one another's burthens; they must give allowance for mutual infirmities, for the church here is not an assembly of spirits of just men made perfect. The unity of the saints therefore greatly depends upon the exercise of patience one toward another; and this he begs *the God of patience* to give them. And to endear this grace of patience to them, He, (2.) joins with it another title of God, viz. the *God of consolation*, wherein he points them to that abundant comfort which would result unto themselves from such a blessed unity,

continued and maintained by the mutual exercises of patience and forbearance one towards another. And to set home all, he lays before them the pattern and example of Christ: *The God of patience and consolation, grant you to be like-minded, according to Christ.* How many thousand infirmities and failures in duty doth Christ find in all his people? notwithstanding which, he maintaineth union and communion with them; and if they, after his example, shall do so likewise with one another, God will be eminently glorified therein. This will evidence both the truth and excellency of the Christian religion, which so firmly knits the hearts of its professors together.

(2.) The necessity and desirableness of this unity farther appears, by the deep interest that the comfort and benefit of our souls have in it. A great example hereof we have in Acts ii. 46, 47. Oh! what cheerfulness, strength and pleasure, did the primitive Christians reap from the unity of their hearts in the ways and worship of God? Next unto the pleasure and delight of immediate communion with God himself, and the shedding abroad of his love into our hearts by the Holy Ghost; none like that which ariseth from the harmonious exercises of the graces of the saints, in their mutual duties and communion one with another. How are their spirits dilated and refreshed by it? What a lively emblem is here of heaven! the courts of princes affords no such delights. Whereas on the other side, when schisms have rent churches asunder, they go away from each other exasperated, grieved, and wounded, crying out, Oh, that I had a cottage in the wilderness! or, Oh, that I had the wings of a dove, that I might flee away, and be at rest.

(3.) *Lastly*, The necessity and desirableness of this union further appears with respect unto the world, who are allured unto Christ by it, and scared off from religion by the feuds and divisions of professors. To this the prayer of Christ hath respect, John xvii. 23. "That they may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that thou hast sent me," q. d. This, O Father, will be a convincing evidence to the world, of the Divinity both of my Person and doctrine, and a great ordinance for their conversion to me, when they shall see my people cleaving inseparably unto me by faith, and to one another by love. And on the other side, it will be a fatal stumbling block in the way of their conversion, to observe my followers biting and devouring, rending and tearing one another.

A learned and judicious divine *, commenting upon those words,

* Mr. J. Cotton.

Cant. ii. 7. "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the
 " roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor a-
 " wake my Love till he please;" gives the sense thus: By roes
 and hinds of the field (saith he) understand weak comers on to-
 wards Christ, persons under some preparatory work towards con-
 version, who are as shy and as timorous as roes and hinds of the
 field; and as they will be scared by the yelp of a dog, or the sound
 of a gun; so will these at any offensive miscarriages in the churches
 of Christ.

Alexander Severus, finding two Christians contending with one
 another, commanded them that they should not presume to take
 the name of Christ upon them any longer; for (saith he) you
 greatly dishonour your Master, whose disciples you profess your-
 selves to be. And thus briefly of the nature of church-unity, and
 the necessity and desirableness thereof, among all that stand in that
 relation.

Use. The only improvement I shall make of this point, shall be
 for,

1. Exhortation to unity.
2. Directions for the maintaining of it.

The first use, for exhortation.

Use 1. And first, having briefly discoursed of the nature, neces-
 sity, and desirableness of unity among all Christians, and especially
 of those in particular church-relation, I do in the bowels of Christ,
 and in the words of his apostle, Phil. ii. 1, 2. earnestly and humbly
 intreat all my brethren, "That if 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, of one mind." He
 speaketh not as one doubting, but as one disputing when he saith
If there be any consolation in Christ; And it is as if he had said,
 I passionately and earnestly intreat you by all that comfort and joy
 you have found in your mutual communion from Christ and his
 ordinances, wherein you have comfortably walked together, by all
 that comfort resulting from the mutual exercises and fruits of
 Christian love; by the unspeakable joys and delights the Spirit of
 God hath shed down upon you, whilst you walked in unity in the
 ways of your duty; by all the bowels of compassion and mercy you
 have for yourselves, for your brethren, or for the poor carnal
 world, who are in hazard of being destroyed by our divisions; or
 for me, your minister, whose joy and comfort is bound up in your
 unity and stability; "That ye be like-minded, having the same
 " love, being of one accord, of one mind." What heart that
 hath one spark of the love of Christ in it, yields not to such an ex-

hortation as this, enforced by “the consolation of Christ, comfort “of love, fellowship of the Spirit, and bowels of mercy?” More particularly, suffer ye this word of exhortation from the consideration of the following arguments or motives, what distances soever you are at from one another.

Motive 1. Reflect upon the late long and continued troubles you have been under, as the just rebukes of God for your former contentions and follies.

I need not tell you, you are but lately plucked as brands out of the burning, and that the smell of fire is yet upon you. The time lately was, when you got your bread with the peril of your lives; when God handed it to you behind your enemies backs; when your eyes did not, could not behold your former teachers, except in corners or prisons, when your souls were sorrowful for the solemn assemblies, when you mournfully confessed before the Lord, that these were the just and deserved punishments for your wantonness, barrenness, and provoking animosities. These things were not only the matter of your humble confessions, but the reformation of those evils was what you solemnly promised the Lord when he should again restore you to your liberty. What! and is the rod no sooner off your backs but you will to the old work again? Read Ezra ix. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. and view the face of this sin in that glass. Have we been so many years in the furnace, and our dross not purged? Such sharp and long-continued afflictions produce no better effects? It may be said of our troubles, as of the siege of Tyrus, Ezek. xxix. 18. “Every head was made bald, and every “shoulder peeled.” Some of us went young men into persecution and trouble, and are come forth old; and, which is worst of all we bring our old corruptions forth with us. Either we did confess and bewail these sins in the days of our affliction, or we did not. If we did not, we were incorrigible, and defeated the design of the rod. If we did, our confessions and sorrow were either sincere or hypocritical: If sincere, certainly they would effectually caution us, that we return not again to folly, Ezra ix. 13, 14. “After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our “great trespass, seeing that thou, our God, hast punished us less “than our iniquities deserve; and hast given us such a deliverance “as this; should we again break thy commandment?”

Motive 2. Consider the common, imminent danger that now threatens us, both from enemies upon our borders, and within our own bowels. The Canaanites are in the land, let there be no strife therefore betwixt brethren; our natural, civil, and spiritual comforts are all shaking and trembling about us. If wanton children fall out and quarrel at a full table, our enemies stand ready to take away the cloth. They are not so far from us and out of sight,

but God can call them in a few hours to end the strife amongst us. We act not only beneath the rules of religion, but of reason also. Brute creatures will depose their antipathies in a common danger. Mr. Thomas Fuller, in his *History of the worthies of England*, tells us, That when the Severn sea overflowed the lower grounds of Somersetshire, it was observed, that dogs, and hares, and cats, and rats, swimming to the burroughs and hills to preserve their lives, stood quiet during the flood: not offering the least injury one to another. It is pity that sense should do more with beasts than reason and religion with men.

Motive 3. Reflect upon the scandal your divisions give to the world; how it hardens and prejudices them against religion and reformation. And thus the souls of men are eternally hazarded by the follies of professors: They are ready enough to take occasions against religion, where none are given, and much more to improve them where occasions are given. "Woe unto the world" (saith Christ) because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh," Matth. xviii. 7. The woe is not only denounced against the taker, but the giver of the offence. It fixes such prejudices in the hearts of carnal men, that some of them will never have good thoughts of religion any more: but utterly distaste and nauseate those assemblies and ordinances from which their conversion might, with greatest probability be expected.

How long and how anxiously have we prayed and waited for such a day of gospel-liberty as we now enjoy? It hath been one of the sorest afflictions we have grappled with in the days of our restraint, that we could not speak unto the carnal world. If we had an opportunity to speak at all, it was for the most part to such as stood in need of edification more than of conversion. God hath now, beyond the thoughts of most hearts, opened to us a door of liberty to preach, and for all that will, to hear. Some fruits we have already seen, and more we expect. The children are as it were coming to the birth, and will you obstruct it? Will you give the gospel a miscarrying womb? be instruments at once by your contentions, to destroy the souls of men, and break the very hearts of your ministers, whose greatest comfort is bound up in the success of their labours? Brethren, I beseech you read these words as if they were delivered to you upon my bended knees; I beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the hope's sake of saving the precious immortal souls of men; and for your poor ministers' sake, who have scarce any thing besides the fruits of their labours, to recompense their long-continued and grievous sufferings, depose your animosities, maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; help us, but do not hinder us in our hard labours.

What good will our lives do us if we must labour in vain, and spend our strength for nought? We find it difficult enough to persuade sinners to come unto Christ, when no such stumbling-blocks are laid in the way; the counter-pleas of Satan, the unbelief and sensuality of unsanctified nature, are difficulties too great for us to grapple with; but if to these must be added prejudices against religion, from your dividing lusts and scandalous breaches, what hope then remains? If you have no pity for yourselves, pity perishing souls, and pity your poor discouraged ministers; have a care you make us not to groan to God against you; or if that be a small thing in your eyes, have a care lest the blood of souls be charged to your account in the great day. Are there none in the towns or neighbourhoods where you live? Are you sure there are none that have hopeful inclinations towards religion? Desires and purposes to attend on the same means of grace you sit under, who will charge the occasion of their damnation upon you at the bar of Christ, and say, Lord, we had some weak convictions upon our consciences, that we needed a rousing and searching minister; we were convinced that the profane and carnal world, among whom we had our conversation, were not in the right path that leadeth to salvation! We felt in ourselves inclinations to cast off our old companions, and associate with those that professed more strictness and holiness, and place ourselves under the most fruitful and advantageous ministry, and accordingly improved opportunities to get acquaintance with them; but when we came nearer to them we found such wrath and envy, such wranglings and divisions, such undermining and supplanting each others reputations; such whisperings and tale-bearings, such malicious aggravations and improvements of common failings and infirmities, such covetousness and worldliness, such pride and vanity, as gave us such a disgust and offence at the ways of reformation, that we could never more be reconciled to them. Beware, I say, how you incur the guilt of such a dreadful charge as this, by giving liberty to such lusts and passions, under a profession of religion, and pretence to reformation.

Motive 4. Consider the contrariety of such practices to that solemn and fervent prayer of Jesus Christ, recorded in John xvii. It is highly remarkable, how in that prayer which he poured out a little before his death, with such a mighty *pathos* and fervency of spirit, he insists upon nothing more than unity among his people. He returns upon his Father again and again, for the obtaining of this one thing: Four times doth he beg for unity among them, and every time he seems to rise higher and higher, beseeching his Father, (1.) That they may be one. (2.) That they may be one in us. (3.) That they may be one, as thou and I are one. And, lastly, that

they may be made perfect in one. By all this shewing how intent his spirit was upon this one thing.

Brethren, if you would study how to frustrate the design, and grieve the heart of your Lord Jesus Christ (to whom you profess love and obedience) you cannot take a readier way to do it, than by breaking the bonds of unity among yourselves. I beseech you, therefore, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath so earnestly prayed for the unity of his people, *That ye be perfectly joined together in one heart, and in one mind*, as the text speaks.

Motive 5. Consider how directly your divisions cross, and frustrate the design and end of church-fellowship, which is instituted for the improvement of each other's graces, and helping on the mortification of each other's corruptions.

God hath distributed variety of gifts and graces, in different degrees amongst his people; the improvement of these gifts and graces to the glory of God and our mutual edification, is the very scope and end of particular church-fellowship and communion: Every man hath his proper gift of God, and (as a late * worthy notes) the gifts and graces of all are this way made useful and beneficial. Job was exemplary for plainness and patience; Moses for faithfulness and meekness; Josiah for tenderness and a melting spirit; Athanasius was prudent and active; Basil heavenly, and of a sweet spirit; Chrysostom laborious and without affectation; Ambrose resolved and grave: One hath quickness of parts, but not so solid a judgment; another is solid, but not ready and presential; one hath a good wit, another a better memory, a third excels them both in utterance; one is zealous, but ungrounded; another well principled, but timorous; one is wary and prudent, another open and plain-hearted; one is trembling and melting, another cheerful and full of comfort. Now the end and use of church-fellowship is to make a rich improvement unto all by a regular use and exercise of the gifts and graces found in every one. One must impart his light, and another his warmth; the eye, (viz. the knowing man) cannot say to the hand (viz. the active man) I have no need of thee: Unspeakable are the benefits resulting from spiritual and orderly communion; but whatever the benefits be, they are all cut off by schisms and dissensions; for as faith is the grace by which we receive all from God, so love is the grace by which we share and divide the comfort of all among ourselves. The excellent things of the Spirit are lodged in earthen vessels, which death will shortly break, and then we can have no more benefit by them; but these jars and divisions render saints as it were dead one to another whilst they are alive. Ah, how lovely, how sweet, and

* Torshell's Help to Christian Fellowship, p. 6, 7.

desirable it is, to live in the communion of such saints as are described, Mal. iii. 16. to hear them freely, and humbly to open their hearts and experiences to one another! After this manner some say the art of medicine was found; as any one met with an herb, and discovered the virtue of it by an accident, he was to post it up, and so the physician's skill was perfected, by a collection of those posted experiments. But woe to us! we are ready to post up each other's failings and infirmities, to the shame and reproach of religion, and to furnish our common enemies with matter of contempt and scorn against us all.

Motive 6. In a word, These schisms and dissensions, in the churches of Christ, are ominous presages, and foreboding signs of some sweeping judgment, and common calamity near approaching us. It is a common observation with shepherds, that when the sheep push one another, a storm speedily ensues. I am sure it is so here; if God turn not our hearts one towards another, he will come and smite the earth with a curse, Mal. iv. 6. I believe it, sirs, you will have other work to do shortly; there be those coming (if God prevent not) that will part the fray.

Use second, for direction.

Use 2. In the last place, therefore, give me leave to lay before you some necessary and proper directions and counsels, for the prevention and healing of schisms and divisions amongst the churches of Christ; For it is not complaints and lamentations, but proper counsels and directions, and those not only prescribed, but obeyed that must do the work. When Joshua lay upon his face before the Lord, Josh. vii. 8, 9, 10. bewailing the sins and miseries of Israel; *Up* (saith God) *sanctify the people: wherefore liest thou upon thy face?* As if he should say, thy moans and lamentations are good and necessary in their place; but speedy action, and vigorous endeavours, must be also used, or Israel will perish. So say I, *Up, up, fall speedily to your duties, as men in earnest; and for your guidance in the paths of duty, I will lay before you the following plain and necessary directions.*

Direction 1. The orderly gathering, and filling particular churches, is of great influence to the peace and tranquillity of those churches; and therefore it greatly concerns all that are interested therein, especially such as are vested with office-power, to beware whom they receive into their communion.

The scriptures do plainly discover to us, that church-members ought to be visible saints, 1 Cor. i. 2. 2 Cor. i. 1, 2. Acts ii. 41. to the end; Eph. ii. 7. 1 Thess. i. 2, 3. Rom. i. 7. Col. i. 2. Hence particular churches are called the churches of the saints, 1 Cor. xiv. 33. If admissions be lax, and negligent, so much heterogeneous

matter fills the church, that it can never be quiet. Christians, and Christians, may live together harmoniously, and coalesce in one orderly and comfortable society, as having one and the same Head, one Spirit, the same general design and end: But godly and ungodly, spiritual and carnal, are acted by contrary principles, pursue opposite designs, and can never heartily coalesce. There is a spirit of discerning, a judgment of discretion in the saints, and it is especially desirable in a more eminent degree, in those that have office-power in the church, to judge of men's fit qualifications for church communion. We all allow, that gross ignorance and profaneness are just bars to men's admission; and to deny this, were to take all power from the church to preserve the purity of God's ordinances, or to cast out notorious offenders. None ought to be admitted into church communion, but such as do appear to the judgment of charity (comparing their professions and conversations) to be Christians indeed, that is, men fearing God, and working righteousness.

And I make no doubt, but some opinions, as well as practices, render men unmeet for church communion, Tit. iii. 10. 2 John 10. All opinions which overthrow doctrines necessary to be believed, which the apostle comprehends under the name of faith; and all such opinions as are inconsistent with an holy life, and overthrow the power of godliness, which the apostle comprehends under the name of a good conscience, 1 Tim. i. 19, 20. whosoever shall hold or maintain any such opinions as these, he is either to be kept out, if not admitted; or cast out, if he be in church-fellowship. In receiving such, you receive but spies, and incendiaries, among you. What a firebrand did Arius prove, not only in the church of Constantinople, but even to the whole world? Men of graceless hearts, and erroneous heads, will give a continual exercise to the patience of sober Christians. I deny not, but out of the purest Churches, men may arise, speaking perverse things, and yet the officers and members of those churches be blameless in their admission; but if they can be discerned before they be admitted, a little preventive care would be of singular and seasonable use, to the tranquillity of church-societies.

Direction 2. Let all officers and members of the church, study their duties, and keep themselves within the bounds of their proper places; ordinate motions are quiet motions. 1 Thess. iv. 11. "Study to be quiet and do your own business, and work with your own hands, as we commanded you." In which words he condemns two vices, which disturb, and distract the church of Christ, *viz.* curiosity in matters which pertain not to us, and idleness in the duties of our particular callings. Two things I shall drop, by way of caution:

(1.) Let it be for a caution to ministers, that they mind their proper work, study the peace of the church, impartially dispense their respects to the saints committed to their charge, not siding with a party. There be few schisms in churches, in which ministers have not some hand. Jerome upon those words, Hosea ix. 8. hath this memorable note; *Veteres scrutans historias, invenire non possum scidisse ecclesiam, præter eos qui sacerdotes a Deo positi fuerunt.* Searching the ancient histories (saith he) I can find none that hath more rent the church of God, than those that sustain the office of ministers. This is a sad charge, and it is too justly laid upon many of that order. O what a blessing is a prudent, patient, peaceable minister, to the flock over which he watches! *

(2.) Let the people keep their places, and study their proper duties. There be in most congregations, some idle people, who having little to do at home, are employed upon Satan's errands, to run from house to house, carrying tales to exasperate one Christian against another. These the apostle particularly marks and warns the churches of, 1 Tim. v. 13. "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tatlers also, and busy bodies, speaking things which they ought not." If that one rule of Christ, Matth. xviii. 15, 16. were conscientiously and strictly attended to, to tell a trespassing brother his fault privately, then with one or two more, if obstinacy make it necessary, and not to expose him to the whole church, and much less to the whole world, without a plain necessity; how many thousand ruptures would be prevented in Christian societies? But instead of regularly admonishing and reproving those irregular and idle tatlers, (as the apostle calls them) who make it their business to sow jealousies, to make and widen breaches amongst brethren.

Direction 3. Let all Christians govern their tongues, and keep them under the command of the law of kindness in their mutual converses with one another. "A soft answer (saith Solomon) Prov. xv. 1. turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger." Hard to hard will never do well. How easily did Abigail disarm angry David by a gentle apology? What more boisterous than the wind? yet a gentle rain will allay it. It may be strongly presumed, that a meek and gentle answer will more easily allay the passions of a godly man, than of one that is both ungodly, and full of enmity towards us; and yet sometimes it hath done the latter. A company of vain, wicked men, having inflamed

* From vain-glorious doctors, contentious pastors, and unprofitable questions, the good Lord deliver us. *Luther's prayer.*

their blood in a tavern at Boston in New-England, and seeing that reverend, meek and holy minister of Christ, Mr. Cotton, coming along the street, one of them tells his companions, "I will go (saith he) and put a trick upon the old Cotton." Down he goes, and crossing his way, whispers these words into his ear, "Cotton (said he) thou art an old fool." Mr. Cotton replied, "I confess I am so; the Lord make both me and thee wiser than we are, even wise to salvation." He relates this passage to his wicked companions, which cast a great damp upon their spirits, in the midst of a frolic. What peaceful societies should we have, if our lips transgressed not the laws of love and kindness.

Direction 4. Respectful deportments to those that are beneath us in gifts, or estates, is an excellent conservative of church-peace; lofty and contemptuous carriages towards those that are beneath us in either respect, is a frequent occasion of bitter jars and animosities. The apostle chargeth it upon the Corinthians, "That no one be puffed up for one against another; for who maketh thee to differ from another?" 1 Cor. vi. 7. What respectful language did holy Mr. Brewen give to his own godly servants? Remember, Christians, that there is neither rich nor poor, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus. This indeed, destroys not the civil differences God hath made between one and another; grace will teach the godly servant to give double honour to a religious master or mistress, the private Christian to a godly magistrate, or minister. It will teach the people to know them which labour among them, and are over them in the Lord, and admonish them, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake, and to be at peace among themselves, 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. and it will also teach superiors to condescend to men of low degree, and not to think of themselves above what they ought, but "with all lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering, to forbear one another in love, keeping (this way) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Eph. iv. 2, 3.

Direction 5. This gentle language and respectful deportment would naturally and constantly flow from the uniting graces of wisdom, humility, and love, were they more exalted in the hearts of Christians.

Wisdom would allay those unchristian heats, Prov. xvii. 27. a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit, so we render it; but the Hebrew signifies a cool spirit; "the wisdom that is from above is gentle and easy to be intreated," James iii. 17.

Humility takes away the fuel from the fire of contention; only from pride cometh contention, Prov. xiii. 10. How dearly hath pride, especially spiritual pride, cost the churches of Christ!

Love is the very cement of societies, the fountain of peace and unity; it thinketh no evil, 1 Cor. xiii. puts the fairest sense upon

doubtful words and actions, it beareth all things. "Love me (saith "Austin) and reprove me as thou pleasest:" It is a radical grace, bearing the fruits of peace and unity upon it.

Direction 6. Be of a Christ-like forgiving spirit one towards another, Eph. iv. 31, 32. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, "and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all "malice, and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving "one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Hath thy brother offended thee? How apt art thou also to offend thy brother? And, which is infinitely more, how often dost thou every day grieve and offend Jesus Christ, who yet freely forgives all thy offences? Remember friend, that an unforgiving is a bad sign of an unforgiven person. They that have found mercy, pity, and forgiveness, should of all men in the world be most ready to shew it.

Direction 7. Be deeply affected with the mischievous effects and consequents of schisms and divisions in the societies of the saints, and let nothing beneath a plain necessity divide you from communion one with another; hold it fast till you can hold it no longer without sin. At the fire of your contentions your enemies warm their hands, and say, Aha, so would we have it; Your prayers are obstructed, Matth. v. 24. "First be reconciled to thy brother, and "then come and offer thy gift." Edification is hindered; Feverish bodies thrive not, Eph. iv. 15. *God is provoked* to remove his gracious presence from among you. "Be of one mind (saith the "apostle) live in peace, and the God of peace shall be with you," 1 Cor. xiii. 11. implying that their contentions would deprive them of his blessed company with them. The glory of your society is clouded: "If ye have bitter envyings and strife in your "heart, glory not," James iii. 14. Glory not in your church privileges, personal gifts and attainments; whatever you think of yourselves, you are not such Christians as you vogue yourselves for, living in sin so directly contrary to Christianity. The name of Christ is dishonoured. You are taken out of the world, to be a people for his name, that is, for his honour: but there is little credit to the name of Christ from a dividing, wrangling people. The alluring beauty of Christianity, by which the church gains upon the world, Acts ii. 46, 47. is sullied and defaced, and thereby (as I noted before) conversion hindered, and a new stone, as it were, rolled over the graves of poor sinners, to keep them down in their impenitency: Tremble therefore at the thoughts of divisions and separations. St. Augustine notes three sins severely punished in scripture. The golden calf, with the sword; Jehoiakim's cutting the sacred roll, with a dreadful captivity; but the schism of Korah

and his accomplices, with the earth's opening her mouth and swallowing them up quick.

Direction 8. Let all church-members see that they have union with Christ, evidencing itself in daily sweet communion with him. Lines drawn from a circumference come the nearest to one another in the center. When God intends to make the hearts of men one, he first makes them new, Ezek. xi. 19. "I will give them "one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you." And the more any renewed heart tastes the sweetness of communion with God, by so much it is disposed for unity and peace with his people. Our forwardness and peevishness plainly discovers all is not well betwixt God and us. Nothing so opposite to, or abhorred by a soul that enjoys sweet peace and communion with Christ, than to live in sinful jars and contentions with his people. Return therefore to the primitive spirit of love and unity; forbear one another; forgive one another; mortify your dividing lusts; cherish your uniting graces; "mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the "doctrine ye have learned, and avoid them," Rom. xvi. 17. In a word, and that the word of the apostle in the text, "I beseech you, "brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak "the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but "that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the "same judgment."

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.