

A PREPARATIVE SERMON FOR RECEIVING THE SACRAMENT.

For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.—2 CHRON. xxx. 18-20.

THE analogy between the sacraments of the Old and New Testament is so common a theme, and so generally known, that I need not spend time to show you how near of kin, and what a great deal of affinity there is between circumcision and baptism, the two initial sacraments, and the passover and the Lord's supper, the other two ordinances that serve for our growth and strengthening when we are once admitted. So that you see my choice is suitable to the occasion. This text though it speaketh of the celebration of the passover, yet will well enough befit the solemnity of the Lord's supper; and therefore I shall handle them at present. The occasion of the words is this: Hezekiah, that good prince, is no sooner stepped into the royal seat of Judah, but he thinketh of reforming religion, and the abuses that throughout his father's time had crept into God's worship. And indeed the best way to settle a kingdom is to settle the religion of it, to begin reigning with reforming. Therefore it is said in 2 Chron. xxix. 3, that in the first year of his reign, the first month, he opened the door of the house of the Lord. 'He opened,' for his father Ahaz had shut it, and polluted it, chap. xxviii. 25. And indeed his reformation went on in a true step and pace, for it began first with the temple and ministry. The commonalty were likely to follow of their own accord when the doors of the house of the Lord were set open, and the Levites sanctified. It is but christian prudence to cleanse the spring if we would have the stream clear; to look to God's house, and those that should dispense his word and ordinances, if we would have the people brought in a way of conformity to him. Well, he meeteth with a rotten clergy, especially the first sort; the priests they proved tough burs and knotty pieces, they

do not come kindly off in the working, they would not easily be planed by the civil magistrate. The Levites and subordinate ministers were more ready, and pliable, and forward to advance the work, as you may see, 2 Chron. xxix. 34. I remember, when it was debated in the Council of Constance, as I take it, whence the reformation of the church should begin, answer was made, *A minoritis*—from the minorites, from the lower clergy. *Imo vero a majoritis*, saith the emperor—from the majorites, the chief, from the greatest of them, those that challenge a superiority over their brethren. And indeed it is but fit it should begin there, if that of Luther be true, *Religio nunquam periclitatur nisi inter reverendissimos*, that religion and reformation suffereth most of all from the right reverend, and is never at a stay but when it cometh to them. It is said here the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests. But this is by the by.

I shall not go over the several progresses of this glorious design; only tell you that this chapter is chiefly spent in setting forth the care of this good prince for the due celebration of the passover. And indeed that is kindly reformation that maketh the ordinances of God to speak a pure language, Zeph. iii. 9; and above all, ordinances that take care for the purity of the sacrament. Well, the priests are despatched to this purpose throughout all Israel and Judah, and are entertained with varied success. Some laugh and scoff at them; and indeed it is an usual thing for reformers to meet with a scoff; and all the welcome that a reformation finds is but a jeer, a frump. But it is said in ver. 11, however, 'divers humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.' Amongst those that came, all of them are not so clean as could be wished, for there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified, ver. 17; and therefore they are fain to make a virtue of necessity, to put the Levites upon another employment, which was not so properly theirs; for it belonged to the priests (as you may see, Lev. i. 5), only to kill the beasts appointed for the celebration of the passover; yet the Levites are fain to do it now. The reason of this unusual practice is more fully rendered in the text—'For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim,' &c.

And thus you see I have brought you home to the words, which are, for the general scope of them, a reason why the Levites did execute the priests' office. In them briefly you have—(1.) The state and condition of the people; (2.) The prayer of Hezekiah because of that state and condition; (3.) The gracious answer of God to that prayer.

1. The state and condition of the people, set forth in two things—(1.) By their indisposition—'Many of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Issachar had not cleansed themselves;' they were guilty of some legal pollution. (2.) By their practice, notwithstanding this indisposition—'Yet they did eat the passover otherwise than it was written;' that is, notwithstanding this indisposition, many did rush upon the ordinances.

2. Hezekiah's prayer—'But Hezekiah prayed for them saying, The Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek the Lord, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary; that is, he entreats the Lord, that though the people failed in some

legal and ceremonial preparation and the outward acts of purification, yet that the Lord would be pleased to pardon those whose hearts were right and fitted and prepared for them. As if he had said—Lord, these men have not purified themselves with outward purification, yet because their hearts are set towards thee, therefore, Lord, pardon the failing.

3. Here is the success—‘And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.’ He was pleased to dispense with them notwithstanding their indisposition.

There are three queries in all these three parts, and I must despatch them in a word.

1. Concerning the indisposition and practice of the people. A question may be raised, Whether those of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Zebulun, sinned or no in coming to the ordinance?

I answer, briefly and affirmatively, that they did; and that for two reasons drawn from the text.

[1.] They offended; because the text saith—‘They did otherwise than was written.’ God’s service is prescribed, and what he would have us to do is written. The apostle, speaking concerning the Lord’s supper, saith, 1 Cor. xi. 23, ‘For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you.’ God is the best appointer of his own worship. The essentials of a sacrament are set down in the institution, from which we must not swerve to the right nor to the left. Obedience must be adequate to the commandment. We must not do more nor less than is prescribed. To do more is will-worship and superstition; to do less is irreligion and profaneness. And this latter was the fault of these Israelites; they were not cleansed according to the law, and ‘therefore they did eat the passover otherwise than it was written.’ But—

[2.] It is probable they sinned, because Hezekiah prayed for them for the pardon of their offence. Where there is no sin there needs no pardon. If Hezekiah pray, it is a sign the people are guilty. We cannot imagine this good king would compliment with God, and make that a fault in the excuse which was none in the committing; as our gallants would fain be accounted faulty that they may handsomely crave a pardon. No doubt this good prince thought it a weighty business when he saith, ‘The good Lord pardon,’ &c.

2. Another query falleth in upon this concerning the second part, Hezekiah’s prayer. If the men sinned in coming, why did he merely pray for them? He should rather have kept them back, he being the chief governor; did he not offend in not keeping them off? I answer—No, for—

[1.] He took all the pains that possibly he might for the due celebration of the passover; he used all the means; he deferred it for a while, that the priests might be sanctified, and the people better prepared, ver. 3. He sends posts to give warning of it too, and doth what he can to cleanse and fit them; and therefore he could not be blamed.

[2.] The priests were faulty in not being sanctified themselves.

[3.] Something may be said too, if we consider the posture of the kingdom at that time. Hezekiah had but two tribes, Judah and

Benjamin; and probably they were all cleansed, and served the Lord with one heart, for it is said the multitude of those that were not purified were of Zebulun, and Ephraim, and Manasseh, and Issachar; that is, some scattered people of the ten tribes that were then in captivity, not under his dominion. He had given them license and passport to come to Jerusalem, and receive; therefore, if they came not after the due manner, the fault was their own. Hezekiah's care is showed in praying for them. And, indeed, it is christian patience to suffer, where we have not power to help it. When we do what we can to keep off unworthy receivers, if they come still, and we have no other authority over them, let us pray for them; especially if the defect be not in the heart and life of the service. But—

[4.] These had prepared their hearts towards the Lord. They were careful of the main business; therefore, because of a great inconvenience that would follow, it was but fit they should be dispensed with. It is true, a partaker should be fitted and fully accomplished. Preparation is due preparation when it cometh to the fulness of the precept; and a receiver is then purified when he is cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. Yet because the failing and unfitness was in a ceremonial pollution, and because they came from far, and for want of time, it was better for Hezekiah to sue for a dispensation than to turn them off; for they were mocked at their coming up; and they would have been more laughed at if their journey had been to no purpose, and they had returned *re infecta*, without receiving the pass-over. And therefore well might Hezekiah pray that the Lord would pass by their other wants and weaknesses, because the people we see set their hearts right.

3. The third query is about an expression—'And God healed the people.' Why? Had God smitten them for so small a fault, for want of a ceremonial cleansing? especially since the fault could hardly be avoided, by reason of the straits of time, and a long journey. I answer—

[1.] It is true that God doth usually punish faults of this nature with smitings. You know what is said, I Cor. xi. 30, 'For this cause many are sick among you, and weak, and many sleep.' For this cause, for irreverent receiving. And indeed that which is little in man's account is not so many times in God's. God is chary of his ordinances, and jealous of his worship; failings are faults there, and therefore he is sensible of the least prevarication. Uzzah is smitten for looking into the ark. And these here may well need an healing for but coming without a due cleansing. For—

[2.] This ceremonial pollution was threatened with death; as Lev. vii. 20, it is said, 'The soul that eateth of the sacrifice, having his uncleanness upon him, that soul shall be cut off from his people.' Therefore the people were all under the penalty of this sentence. And though God smote none of them, for aught we know, yet he might well be said to heal them, because he freed them of this guilt, and delivered them from the power and curse of this law. And, indeed, where the heart is right, God is not hard to be entreated to pardon a failing which can plead necessity, especially since God does rather look to the heart than the offering, and the frame of

the soul more than to the outward order. *Nunquam in odoribus sacrificiorum*, &c.—A desire of being cleansed is often accepted for the cleansing itself.

Well, these are the parts, and you have heard them explained.

I shall insist on the first—The people's state and condition. And so—(1.) Of their indisposition; (2.) Of their practice.

First, Their indisposition—'A multitude of the people had not cleansed themselves.' I observe thence briefly, and by way of preface to the rest of the doctrines, that in those times in which there is much care had about the right celebration of a sacrament, there are many yet that are unworthy.

Hezekiah sends posts, breaketh down the idolatrous places, doth what he can for the due celebration of the passover; and yet you see here are many 'that had not cleansed themselves.' The point I prove by that, 1 Cor. xi., the whole context, from ver. 17 to the latter end. The apostle had but newly planted a church amongst them, and instructed them in the nature of ordinances; and yet, you see, ere they are warm in their religion, they had many unworthy communicants, unfit to partake of the ordinances. It is with institutions usually as it is with men; their vigour declineth with their age; ordinances lose much of their life and right observance when a people have been inured to them. And yet you see here, as soon as they began to be instructed what a sacrament meant, and who ought to be partakers, yet most of them were unworthy to receive; some were janglers, and some intemperate; divers faults amongst them.

The reasons of the point are these—

1. Because there is a great deal of laziness in people, and an unwillingness against such a soul-searching ordinance as the sacrament. Now the best governors and most pious reformers cannot reach so low as the people's hearts, and therefore, though they take never so much pains to provide for the due administration of the ordinances, yet, till their hearts be wrought upon by the word, there will be those that are not cleansed, some unworthy receivers that are 'not purified according to the purification of the sanctuary.' Some unwilling wretches there are that will submit no further than law requireth. The laws of men are terminated in the obedience of the outward man, but 'the law of God,' as the apostle speaketh, Heb. iv. 13, 'is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents.' If religion were only visible, and the strength of a duty did consist in the outward presence at it, it were possible to bring all into a prepared way of receiving; but because of heart-preparations, therefore still there may be some that are unworthy. If men were diligent and willing to prepare their souls upon every hint from the authority of the magistrate, we should see a worthier company of receivers. But when men will do no more than they are compelled to, it must needs be that, notwithstanding all the provisions for the better performance, yet some should remain unfit—namely, lazy, unwilling persons, that take no pains to trim up their lamps to meet the bridegroom, to furnish their soul with answerable affections and a becoming spirit, as being to meet with God in every part of this worship.

2. There is a great deal of hypocrisy in many men, and it is possible that they may carry their naughtiness so secretly that they may hide it from the most discerning eye. Now a hypocritical receiver is an unworthy receiver; and therefore, in the times of greatest care about the admission of worthy communicants, these may slide under covert of their mask and fair pretences. A gaudy show may go far, and indiscernible hypocrites do often press upon the ordinances. Judas, you know, eats the passover even in Christ's own company—'He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me,' Mat. xxvi. 23. The pharisees and sadducees submitted to John's baptism; it is said in Mat. iii. 6, *ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπὸ αὐτοῦ*, 'they were baptized under Johu;' they submitted to the ordinance, and his ministry; and yet they were a generation of vipers all the while—vipers not only in the general, as they were *οἱ κακαὶ τοῦ ὀφίου σπαραμνάδες*, as Ignatius calleth Menander and Basilides, two infamous heretics, the spawn of the old serpent the devil; but vipers they were and serpents in these three respects—

[1.] The viper, they say, when she hath bitten a man, runneth to the water, and if she misseth of it, she dies; so these, after they had devoured widows' houses, they ran to the water of baptism. Hypocrites will come to ordinances to justify their extortion, their biting and griping of the faces of the poor. Sacraments are made stales to their base ends, to pacify their own consciences, or satisfy other men's opinions, concerning their other unjust dealings.

[2.] Vipers, too, as all other serpents, lay aside their poison while they are drinking, but resume and take it up again after their draught. And such hypocrites can lay aside their superfluity of naughtiness while they are at the ordinance, but it is with a promise to take it up again, saying to their sins, as Abraham to his servants, Gen. xxii. 3, 'Abide you here; I must go yonder and worship, and come again to you.'

[3.] Vipers, because this beast is speckled, full of curious spots without, but fuller of poison within. So these have a gaudy painted outside, a form of godliness, but within there is the root of bitterness. Now what course is there to keep off such wretches, such glorious hypocrites and close moralists, that come not within the compass of the law, that look so like saints? To the ordinances venture they will; they must, to still their consciences and to insinuate with other men. And how shall we do to turn such off? for certainly they are unworthy. Therefore, in these times, in which much care is had, many are unworthy still; the viper's teeth not seen till felt. Other reasons might be added; but I come to application.

Use. Is it so, that, when much care is taken about the ordinances, many are unworthy to come? It serveth—

1. To show what need we in this land have to humble ourselves, as for other sins, so especially for our sacrament sins, for the profane mixture and the promiscuous riff-raff that was admitted to the Lord's table without any distinction of persons. For if it be so, that many are unworthy in times when greatest care was had, how much more was it so when no care was had at all! When encroaching governors did let loose the reins of church government to all licentiousness, and

none felt the severity of ecclesiastical discipline but conscientious ministers, those that stood in the gap to keep out the drivelling swine and hogs that would have come in there where the hedge was broken down; when every surly drunkard could crow over his pastor, and even dare him to turn him off from the communion; nay, when entangling articles did make it alike punishable to turn off or admit common scandalous sinners to these holy mysteries, what think you, was there not a great deal of profaneness then, and many unworthy receivers? Oh, then, consider it, and labour to remember this sin in your humiliation, for fear lest the land mourn for it, because it was so general. Oh, think upon it, what it is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and to crucify Christ Jesus so often as it hath been done in our assemblies. And would to God that you and I could so think upon it as seriously to be affected with it, and to bless God for the hopes we have that the ordinances shall be more duly administered, and that we would join in effectual prayers to God to bless the designs afoot to that purpose; for, indeed, as the apostle speaketh, 1 Cor. xvi. 9, 'A great and effectual door is opened, but there are many adversaries.' But I come to another use.

2. Is it so, that when much care is taken, yet many are unworthy, &c. It serveth, then, for a double exhortation, both to pastor and people. (1.) To us of the ministry: (2.) To you.

[1.] To us, that we should use all diligent care and circumspection to prevent this unworthiness. Then give me leave to speak a little to myself and my brethren. You see the people are unworthy and un-sanctified, do what we can, though there be never so much care and pains taken. It therefore lieth upon us to double our diligence, that though we may fail of our expectations, yet to discharge our duties in striving to fit you for this great mystery. Were I speaking to a congregation where this part of the exhortation would be seasonable, I should strive to press upon myself and others a twofold duty. (1.) To instruct the people in the nature of the ordinances; (2.) To admonish them of the danger of this their unprepared coming. But in this place let it be enough to name these things.

[2.] Here is an exhortation, too, for the people—to stir them up every one to look unto himself whether he be not one of the number. A gracious heart is apt to suspect itself; and when it heareth such a doctrine as this is, that when the greatest care is had there are many that are unworthy, it beginneth to think that itself is principally spoken to. You know when Christ had foretold his passion, and said to his disciples that one of them should betray him, it is said in Mat. xxvi. 22, that 'they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one to say unto him, Lord, is it I?' Why, unworthy receiving is a sin of the same nature. The apostle saith, 1 Cor. xi. 27, 'Whosoever receiveth unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.' Therefore, when I say that when most care is had some come unworthily, many poor trembling souls are ready to groan out such a question, 'Lord, is it I?' and to fear that it is them indeed; whereas, those that are truly guilty will come in last and for fashion's sake, like Judas there; for it is said, ver. 25, 'Then Judas, which betrayed him, said, Master, is it I?' When all had done, then cometh he. Guilt is most backward to put

the question ; and indeed it is a sign we are unworthy when we do not know ourselves to be so. If we are sensible that we are unfit, and desire to be cleansed, that is the ready way to make us worthy. Ay ! but you will say, who is worthy for these things ?

I answer briefly—A man is worthy two manner of ways—

(1.) *Dignitate aequalitatis*, by an exact worthiness—as the labourer is worthy of his hire. And thus we are not worthy to approach into God's presence, or to meet him in this holy ordinance of his. In this sense humble Jacob acknowledgeth, Gen. xxxii. 10, 'I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies.' And John Baptist, Mat. iii. 11, saith he was not worthy to bear Christ's shoes after him. And thus none is worthy to feed upon his Saviour. And, indeed, when we compare the high privileges that we enjoy by being admitted partakers with our unworthiness this way, it cannot but ravish the soul with thoughts of God's infinite love and the riches of his goodness. But—

(2.) There is *dignitas convenientie*, which consists, though not in a perfect and exact proportion, yet in some fitness and meetness unto that which is required. Thus, in scripture, are we commanded 'to walk worthy of the Lord,' worthy of our profession, worthy of the gospel ; that is, suitable to all these. And thus must we come worthily ; that is, so fitted and prepared as may bear some resemblance and agreement to the solemnity of the work that we go about. And in this sense, this worthiness followeth that worthiness which is called by divines *dignitas dignationis*—a worth of acceptance, or a desiring of God to take our actions in good part for Christ's sake, and to pardon the many failings that accompany them.

So that briefly now, the unprepared unworthy receiver is he that doth not come with answerable meet affections, and so holy and reverent a frame of spirit as God doth require we should bring into his presence. And those are not cleansed with the purification of the sanctuary that do not take pains with their hearts to fit and furnish them with such a meetness and holy temper. If you ask me more particularly what these are, I shall follow the apostle's method in describing and taking notice of such as are pointed at, 1 Cor. xi. They are—

(1st.) All ignorant persons that cannot discern the Lord's body : 1 Cor. xi. 29, 'He eateth and drinketh unworthily, not discerning,' *μη διακρίνων*, not differencing, 'the Lord's body,' so the original signifieth. Persons that have not a competent measure of knowledge, and think there is no difference between the elements of the bread and wine that they see before them, and common bread and wine. They are not acquainted with this mystery, for they know as much as they know only by hearsay, and not by experience. They are not able to put a difference, and do not know the nature, use, and end of the sacrament, and cannot tell what the elements signify, but only by rote and custom. They come not with that reverence to it as if it were Christ's body, nor do consider it as a matter of such weight. They say that by the bread is meant the body, and by the wine the blood of Christ. They say, but they do not know it ; they have learned in a notion, but do not spiritually know it to be so, and therefore irreverently come to it as if it were a matter of nothing. They do not

come to it as if it were to eat Christ's flesh indeed; men of a sottish heart, that cannot have an intimate knowledge of the things that are of God, and of such an high mystery. And, indeed, it is impossible to know it as we ought but by faith.

(2d.) Those that do not judge and condemn themselves, 1 Cor. xi. 31, 32. It is implied there they did not condemn themselves. A gracious prepared heart is a self-judging heart—*Iniqua lex est quæ se examinari non patitur*; a wicked heart is loath to come to trial. Where the soul is sensible of some guilt, there it will not easily be called to an account. And that is the reason why vain frothy men are so averse to this duty, and to ask themselves what they have done before they come to the sacrament. The strength of sin lies much in this, in that it hindereth all that it can the discovery of itself. Now the deceitfulness of sin can never be better discovered than by self-judging; therefore corruption doth what it can to keep us from this severe duty. Men are not willing to judge themselves; and yet until they do they are unworthy. It would require a great conquest over many spiritual wickednesses to be able to look back into our ways; and it is an hard matter to keep our soul from roving that it may be searched. And therefore natural men cannot exercise a restraint over their hearts till they be searched and winnowed. Hence they mislike this preparation most of all, to look into their ways, and the state of their souls. This self-judging is unpleasant, partly because of natural pride, and partly because of our laziness. It is an humbling, and it is a difficult duty. It maketh the soul to take pains to be out of love with itself; and they would fain be excused here, and desire the good Lord to pardon them if they do not thus prepare their hearts, crying out, as Naaman to the prophet, 2 Kings v. 18, 'The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.'

(3d.) Those that come in uncharitableness and malice are not cleansed, as appeareth by the apostle's finding fault with the Corinthians for this thing: 1 Cor. xi. 17-20, 'They came together, not for the better, but for the worse, because there were divisions among them.' And indeed malice rendereth the ordinance ineffectual. There are two things which we seek in it, union with God, and communion with the members. Uncharitableness in respect of both, is a very unsuitable disposition for a sacrament. As to communion with others, where the hearts are not united, communion is but complementary. And for union with God, God communicates himself there where he findeth answerable dispositions in his servants to receive him. Likeness is the ground of love, and love the ground of union. Then are we united to God when we are like him, as God reasoneth from his truth in Isa. lxxviii. 8, 'Surely they are my people, children that will not lie.' So we may reason here, surely they are my people, they love one another; they are gentle and long-suffering, apt to forget wrongs, and pass by injuries, as I do; they are mine, for they resemble me in this. Likeness of desires is the speediest way to beget union of minds. It was an observation of historians, *Eadem velle et nolle demum firma est amicitia*.—Love is kindled by sympathy and suitable disposition. If we would be one with God we must be as God is, full of love, and lay aside all malice and superfluity of naughti-

ness. If we would meet God in the sacrament, we must be sure to have such affections about us, as God will own and acknowledge; if John's reasoning is strong and pithy, how shall we love God whom we have not seen, if we do not love our brother whom we have seen? Besides: 1 John iv. 18, 'God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' Our soul is fitted for God to possess, when it is seasoned with love and holy affections toward the brotherhood. Therefore it is good to come thither with special love towards God's people, and as much as in us lieth with charity to all men. The two gospel commandments are 'faith and love,' 1 John iii. 23. And therefore we must strive to quicken both for this evangelical ordinance. Especially we should take care before we approach there, that we forego all our turbulency, all malicious discontented thoughts. In the ordinary sacrifices under the law this was required, that if their brother had aught against them, they should go first and be reconciled. How much more, under the grand sacrifice of the gospel, should we bring our hearts to such an holy pitch of self-denial, that we may forgive the greatest injuries that are done unto us. Well now, you see who are unworthy. I shall name one use more, and so conclude this point.

3. If it be so that when much care is taken, yet many still are unworthy; it serves then to show there is no cause why men should abstain from the use of ordinances, for fear of communicating with wicked and profane men. Thus it hath been when the greatest care hath been taken of preventing these: and thus it may be still until the church do leave off to be a mixt company, and there be no unclean thing within the pale of it.

Ay! but you will say, My comfort is hindered by it. I answer briefly—

[1.] It cannot choose but be matter of grief to God's people to see Christ's flesh torn by the teeth of wicked men, and their Saviour crucified afresh by their profane and irreverent receiving, and to see carnal wretches to snatch at these privileges which they know were purchased only for them. I say, this cannot choose but be matter of grief. But if we will not partake but there where there is no cause of grief and sorrow, if we expect such a perfect communion, we must wait for that till we enjoy the society of just men made perfect, and are admitted into the everlasting fellowship of the godly in the heavens. This first; but—

[2.] We shall find that there are many that partake with much joy with unprepared persons, as those of Judah with the Israelites in the text. It is said in ver. 21, 'That they kept together with great gladness.' But—

[3.] There is a double communion. (1.) Direct and immediate with Christ; and this they may fully have if they be not wanting to themselves. (2.) There is a spiritual communion with the members which proceeds from the union with the head: and we should not deprive ourselves of our union with Christ and the inward communion of the saints, for the outward intrusion of some few that have no share nor portion in the things administered. But this, as matter of debate, I leave, and come to another point drawn from the second branch of

the first part, namely, the practice of the people. Notwithstanding their indisposition it doth not keep them off; but they partake notwithstanding: 'Yet they did eat the passover otherwise than was written.' From hence—

Obs. That many rush upon the ordinances notwithstanding their unpreparedness. Their not being cleansed, I told you before, was a fault, yet they did eat. The reasons are—

1. The remissness or abuse of the censures of the church that do not restrain such persons from coming, but let them alone to continue in their sins, as 1 Cor. v, 'throughout the whole.' They had not cast out the incestuous person, and disabled him for communion.

2. It proceedeth from ourselves, because—

[1.] There is a great deal of ignorance and unbelief in the hearts of most men. They do not know, and will not believe the danger of unworthy receiving; they think it is nothing, and therefore sottishly put themselves upon the ordinance without any fear at all. They hear us thunder out vengeance against such a sin, but their hearts are hard and their ears made fat; they cannot conceive that we speak to them all the while, and therefore securely go on as if they were in a safe case. Infidelity besotteth the heart and casts a veil upon the soul; so that seeing, they do not see; they know the danger, and yet rush upon it; we show them the pike, and yet they run their own bowels upon it. It is said, Heb. iv. 2, 'That the word preached did not profit them, because they did not mix it with faith in the hearing.' And indeed that is the reason why people do so sottishly. Tell them of their own destruction, they do not believe; when we tell them of the danger, while we declare that all ignorant persons, and all persons that do not judge themselves, and uncharitable wretches, are those that come unworthily to the Lord's table. Yet a man would wonder to see how many that lie under the guilt of these sins, do come there, and sit it out as boldly as the best. Truly these men give us the hearing, but they are full of infidelity, they do not mix the word with faith, and stir up the applicative crediting faculty of their souls, so as to say, Surely this will fall upon me if I receive unworthily. Their infidelity will not suffer them to bring their souls and the word together, and therefore they have a kind of confused knowledge of the danger, but they do not think how they cast themselves upon it. Infidelity besotteth them so that they cannot look to their ways and consider what they are doing.

[2.] Custom prevaileth with most rather than conscience; they will receive because they have used to do it. The people are ready to ask us concerning this holy feast, as the Jews did the prophet, in Zech. vii. 3, concerning their fast: 'Should I not weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these many years?' So these, Should I not receive now, having received so long? Custom is the main principle that puts them upon an ordinance; and custom usually eateth out the strength of any performance, and dissolves it into a mere formality: 'When ye fasted, ye fasted not to me, saith the Lord.' When people receive they receive not for the Lord, but for custom's sake: 'Ye eat, for yourselves, and drink for yourselves, not for the Lord.' No wonder then if many rush upon the ordinances when

custom driveth them. Many would be beaten off from coming unprepared, if use had not hardened them in it. Where people come to duty for fashion's sake, no wonder if they be without life and motion in it. Customary services are cold services. The main reason why people rush so unworthily upon the ordinances, is because they have been at them heretofore, and felt no sensible hurt by the disorderly approach; and therefore why should they not venture again? Those that have but the least experience in the ministry, can say that it is the hardest work of all to fetch the people off from their old customs, especially in matters of religion; and more especially there where they have a command for their warrant, and a precept to justify their practice. Where custom meets with a duty it altereth it; our actions are as they are principled. Receiving is not receiving when it is done for fashion's sake, because we have done so these many years. And indeed profaneness may kill its thousands, but custom its ten thousands in this kind, most unworthy receivers are but customary receivers; and therefore did they come unpreparedly, because they came not for conscience. These are the grounds.

Briefly to apply the point. Is it so that many rush upon the ordinances notwithstanding their unpreparedness? It serveth then—

(1.) To teach us in the ministry how careful we should be to put people in mind of the danger of unworthy receiving; that we may, if possible, snatch them out of the fire, as the apostle speaks; and be like the angels that guarded paradise with their flaming swords, keep men out of that place which will prove their destruction. And would to God I could sufficiently press the point upon your considerations, and possess you of the danger of rushing upon the ordinance in a state of unpreparedness, whilst you are in your unfitness and uncleanness, and live under the power of your reigning sins. O brethren! consider God is somewhat chary over his ordinances; he will not have them unhallowed by profane and rude hands. Uzzah's touch struck him dead in the place. Duties are tender things, and therefore it is not good to be too busy with them. A drachm of poison is enough to make you stone dead; and one poisoned ordinance may kill you. Unpreparedness, indisposedness, poisoneth duty. The sacrifices of the wicked, continuing in their wickedness, are an abomination to the Lord. The want of cleansing of the heart infects the ordinance; and when that is poisoned once, farewell the performer. God will be sanctified in all that come near him, either by obedience from them or vengeance upon them. Nadab and Abihu were struck dead in the place for offering strange fire; and God may strike you dead in the place for bringing strange affections into his presence. I remember what Jonathan said in 1 Sam. iv. 4, 'I did but taste a little honey with the end of my rod, and lo, I must die.' And so it is here; the tasting of a little bread, and the sipping of a cup of wine, may kill thee.

But because men are not easily persuaded of the heinousness of this sin, I shall briefly display it—(1.) In the greatness of the guilt; (2.) In the grievousness of the punishment.

1st, The greatness of the fault. It is no less than blood-guiltiness, even being guilty of the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

The apostle saith just so much, 1 Cor. xi. 27, 'Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.' O! there are many of us whose hearts rise against these Jews, that were the cause of so innocent a person's death as our Saviour's; we could even pluck out their eyes if they were present; whereas all the while we carry the same malice in our hearts, and at every sacrament do crucify the Lord of life afresh. You would take it ill of a man to unchristian you, and call you a Jew; and yet such you are; for you have also imbrued your hands in the blood of your Saviour. See the difference between a worthy communicant and an unprepared receiver; the one hath all his guilt taken away by partaking, the other hath his increased, and hath a crying sin added to the score, which indeed maketh ail the rest full weight; they have killed their Saviour. It was a close one of Peter to the Jews: Acts ii. 23, 'This is he whom ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.' And it must be mine to all unworthy receivers, for they are the very men.

2dly, Look upon the grievousness of the punishment.

[1st.] You venture your temporal life in every unprepared receiving. You know what the apostle saith, 1 Cor. xi. 30, 'For this cause many are sick and weak among you, and many sleep;' that is, are dead. It is no good playing with edge tools and dallying with duty. God's judgment may kill you in the place for your irreverent coming into his presence. The sacrament is to some as the water of jealousy; if the party were unclean it made her thigh rot and her belly swell, Num. v. 18; so, if you come hither before you have cleansed yourself according to the purification of the sanctuary, every drop of wine that you drink will make your heart rot, and prove a curse to you. Therefore, as you tender your life, and a blessing upon all that you have, either be clean or forbear.

[2dly.] Irreverent receivers are often punished with spiritual deadness and stupidity. Oh! it is a fearful judgment to be given over to hardness of heart, and to be infatuated by our performances. The ordinances, when they are not for the better, they prove the worse, and become the savour of death unto death. None so insensible and so hard to work upon as unworthy communicants; partly because natural pride is mightily strengthened with a slight performance of duty, whereas it is abated if it were thoroughly done; and besides, the just judgment of God shuts up such men in unbelief. We know this by experience. The best way to make some men sensible, that are past all other cure, is to deprive them of the ordinances. But—

[3dly.] The grand judgment of all provoketh God eternally to cast you off without repentance. The apostle saith so much, 1 Cor. xi. 29, 'He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.' You would think this were a harsh word if we ourselves should speak it, therefore you see it is very scripture words. The Lord give you grace to hear, to fear it, to consider thoroughly! The God of heaven give you understanding in all things!