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A Representation of the Nature of True Religion....

First American ... Edition.

Utica, Seward & Williams, 1807. 24 pp.

MWA copy.

A
REPRESENTATION
OF THE NATURE OF
TRUE RELIGION.

ADDRESSED TO A LADY.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE YEAR 1697.

TO WHICH IS ADDED A
SHORT EXPLANATION

OF THE END AND DESIGN OF THE

Lord's Supper.

TAKEN FROM A TREATISE ON THAT SUBJECT,
PRINTED AT LONDON, FOR W. JOHNSTON, 1760.

This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.

1 John v. 3.

*He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it
is that loveth me.*

John xiv. 21.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE LONDON EDITION OF 1793.

UTICA,

PRINTED BY SEWARD AND WILLIAMS.

1807.

TO THE READER.

WHEN the following small Tract first appeared, it was entitled, "A LADY'S RELIGION." It was originally drawn up by a Divine of the Church of England, for the use, it has been supposed, of the honorable Lady Howard, and has not only been reprinted more than once at home, but translated into several modern languages. The second edition of it came out in the year 1704, when another letter upon the same subject was added to it; and in the year 1748, a third edition of it was published by the Rev. Ferdinando Warner, who, besides a preface, in which some account is given of the design and merits of the performance, prefixed to it a large extract from the preface to the French translation, and annexed to it a letter of his own, to a lady under a very painful domestic affliction.

The first of the abovementioned letters, appearing to be the whole of what the author intended when he began to write upon this important subject, and having no necessary connection with any thing which has been since joined with it, is here published by itself, with a view to its being rendered more extensively useful.—The edition, from which it is copied, is that of 1748, which has been carefully adhered to, excepting in the title, which perhaps was not the most happily chosen, and an expression or two relating to devotion, of which some might have made an use which the author certainly never designed.

It is only needful to say, further, that the republication of this small Tract, and what is added to it, proceeds from no other principle than a desire to assist those, into whose hands it may come, to form just apprehensions of that Religion which is pure and undefiled before God; to set before them, in an easy view, the wisdom of the doctrine of our Savior, and to remove those groundless apprehensions concerning the nature of any of his institutions, by which persons are, either totally kept from them, or led to attend on them, with a terror, for which no upright mind can ever have the least occasion, and which, if they were able to view the services of the Gospel in a juster light, would be exchanged for satisfaction and joy.

A REPRESENTATION, &c.

MADAM,

SINCE God has been pleased to incline your heart to an early and serious enquiry after religion, so that you are sincerely desirous to know the will of God, in order to do it, I heartily wish you had laid your commands upon one more able to assist you than I am; who, being bred up in an age of speculation and controversy, have addicted myself to the study of divinity, more perhaps than to the practice of religion; and have been (I pray God forgive me) more desirous to furnish my head with notions, than my heart with good inclinations. I thought myself, by my profession, chiefly engaged in a study, how to defend the church, by law established; against all dissenters, rather than to promote the common cause of serious piety; and whilst by the strange unaccountable genius of this age, I have been led aside to mix the study of politics with that of religion, I have been busily assisting the office of a minister of state, rather than doing the good work of a minister of JESUS CHRIST.

Now altho it has pleased God to make me in some measure sensible of those bye paths, in which I have sometimes walked, to the hinderance of that duty unto which I ought entirely to have devoted myself; yet I am apt to fear lest those prejudices and undue prepossessions of mind may still remain within me, by which I shall be prevented from giving your ladyship such an idea of religion, as is short, plain, and pure, free from superstitious appendages, and separate from every bye interest.

But, without doubt, such as this is the true spirit of the christian religion; every line whereof directly tends to make us easy within ourselves, kind and comfortable to one another here, and happy with God hereafter.

That our holy religion is a wise institution, will be evident to any one who considers that God is its author, whose wisdom appears in all his works: Thus the frame of visible nature being agreeably set together, and having each part of it

suited to useful and proper ends, demonstrates it to be the work of divine wisdom : In like manner the whole plan of pure religion, having also its parts suitable to each other, and every one of them agreeably set to the same good and great design of the whole, does thereby prove itself to be the contrivance of an all wise God.

And hereby the wisdom of the christian religion will particularly appear, because every part of it tends to promote the universal good of mankind ; for which reason, the divine founder thereof was named *Jesus*, that is, *Savior* ; because his only design was to save us from the prevailing power of sin, and from those miseries which that evil power would involve us in.

Thus temperance promotes our health ; justice in our dealings, prevents us from sustaining the revenges of the injured, and gains us trust among men, with all the benefits which arise from thence. Charity, by promoting the common good of others, draws back their love and affection to ourselves ; while patience preserves quiet within our own breasts, and self denial, by restraining our extravagant appetites, establishes the just power of reason over us, thereby fitting us for all conditions of life. And thus the law of Christ answers to the character of wisdom, by its agreeableness to the best design of man ; and upon this account Solomon characterized the idea of religion, under the name of wisdom.

Besides these moral duties, there are several threats of God's judgements, and promises of his favor, contained in Christ's institution ; the former were wisely designed to restrain us from immoralities, which are our greatest follies ; and the latter to engage us in the practice of virtue, which is our greatest wisdom ; The threatnings prepare the way for the promises, and qualify us to receive them ; inasmuch as they shake off our affections from ill objects, in order for the promises to fix them upon good ones. We must needs cease to do evil, before we can learn to do well.

Now altho a due consideration of the divine nature, will carry us on to the belief of a future state, in which he, who is in perfection the best of all beings, will distinguish the good from the bad by ample rewards and just punishments ; yet because every one's capacity may not be sufficient to make this wise reflection, therefore Jesus Christ was pleased (as the gospel phrases it) to bring life and immortality to light ; that is, to give the world full assurance of a future state, in which the just God will distinguish men hereafter, in such a manner as they shall

distinguish themselves here ; and it is the wisdom of every one to preserve this belief in his heart, and bear it always about him, because it is the most awful monitor against our committing folly, and yields the strongest encouragement to virtue.

From what has been said, your ladyship sees first, what is meant by saving a soul, viz. to deliver it from vicious habits & fearful punishments, the fatal consequents of such habits ; and by establishing virtue therein, to recommend it to the favor of God. And, secondly, that the gospel of Christ was designed to this very end ; and its tendency hereunto is its wisdom. And, thirdly, from hence you also perceive, in what respect faith in Jesus Christ, is said to save us, viz. because this faith is our receiving the christian religion for the rule of our lives, and the threats and promises contained in the gospel, for the motives of our practice.

And from these three considerations, summed up together, you may examine all the various pretences, which differing churches and communions make to the purity of christian faith, so as to form a right judgment of them ; for that communion which manifests itself to have no other design, than to assist its members in saving their souls from the power of sin, by the moral and motives aforementioned, is certainly the purest faith. So that if you form yourself upon this principle, you may pass by all nice speculations or profound mysteries, which have no direct tendency to improve your morals, without any hazard of salvation.

Secondly, as the christian institution is wisely practical, so it is plain : Or, in other words, we may say, that as the wisdom of the christian religion appears first by its being practical, so it appears, secondly, by being plain. The obscure answers, which were given out from the old heathen oracles, are now known to have proceeded from the indirectness of a designing priesthood : Who, to maintain their pretence of foretelling what shall come to pass, sent back all those, who came to enquire after future events, with doubtful and uncertain answers. And it has been the observation of wise men, that, when any one affects to be dark and mysterious in his conversation, either he has some indirect design in so doing, or, whilst he makes an ostentation of wisdom, he does in reality but discover his folly.

Now the wisdom of God cannot be conceived to aim at any other design in communicating itself to us, than the information of our minds in the nature of good and evil, and this in order to direct our choice ; and all instruction must of necessity

be plain ; since it is by things easy and familiar, such as at first sight we may apprehend, whereby we can be led on to the knowledge of matters more remote and difficult ; But obscure and unintelligible doctrines, can have no effect upon us beside unprofitable amusement ; and whatsoever is by the wisdom of God laid out of our reach, can be no part of our concern.

Farther, to what end did he give us intellectual faculties ? surely not to amuse, but to improve us, by enabling us thoroughly to understand each part of our holy religion, which directly tends to that end, viz. our moral improvement ; as you will soon perceive, if you reduce the christian institution to its general heads, which are these.

First, a narration of matters of fact.

Secondly, a declaration of moral laws.

Thirdly, a revelation of motives which are proper to enforce this law upon our minds. And,

Fourthly, serious exhortations to refresh our memories with our duty, and earnestly to recommend it to our practice.

First, your ladyship sees, that the matters of fact contained in the four gospels, and the Acts of the apostles (viz. the travels and transactions of Christ and his disciples) are so plainly related, that you understand the relation as easily as you read it. And, secondly, all laws must be plain, because they are directions. Now, obscure directions are but delusions ; and laws, which are dubious and difficult to be understood, are traps and snares. And, thirdly, it is as necessary that motives should be intelligible, because their design is to work strongly upon our wills, by convincing our understandings. Add to this, fourthly, that mystical and unintelligible exhortations, are ridiculous ; upon which account, St. Paul forbad religious exercises to be performed in an unknown tongue.

Now, as the four gospels, and Acts of the Apostles, contain matters of fact, laws, and motives ; so the Epistles, contain exhortations to seriousness and piety, arising from the laws, facts, and motives before mentioned ; and I take these books to be sufficiently comprehensive of the institutions and ordinances of Jesus Christ ; which ought indeed to be easily intelligible, because they concern the poor, weak, and unlettered people, as much as the learned.

Nor can I see that the doctrine of Christ was, by him or his Apostles, delivered first of all into the hands of the learned, to be by them conveyed into the minds of the ignorant ; but, on the contrary, it is manifest, that our Saviour directed both

his discourses and actions immediately to the common people, as to the scribes ; and, in like manner, did his disciples in their preachings and writings.

From all this discourse, concerning the clearness of Christ's institution, you may learn, that you may spare yourself the needless trouble of reading abstruse and mysterious points of divinity. Nor need you suffer yourself to be amused with the pretended deep speculations of profound men, when you have the plain directions of a wise and good God before you, in following whereof you shall meet with great reward.

Thirdly, the christian institution is short. True and genuine religion has always been summed up, and gathered together into a narrow compass, by those who best understood it. Thus Micah (vi. 8.) speaking of God, saith, "He hath shewn thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee ? but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." And our Savior sums up the whole law, in love to God, and our neighbor : And, in another place, he includes the whole scope of the law and the prophets, in this one rule, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them ;" hereby directing us to make a right use of that reason, which God established as his oracle in our breasts ; to which we may at all times resort, and from whence we may be resolved, in such cases as concern our duty to one another.

For, as by consulting your own reason, you know wherein you are justly dealt with, and wherein you receive wrong ; when you are kindly used, and when otherwise ; so, from the same principle of reason, you cannot but know when you deal justly or wrongfully, and when you do kind or ill offices to another. This one short comprehensive rule, taking for its foundation the equality of mankind, in respect of their common nature, renders religion itself a matter sensible unto us.

For I can feel the wound of a sharp slanderous tongue, as sensibly as that of a sword ; I can feel the wrongs done to myself and family ; and am as much sensible of the benefits I enjoy, from the just and kind dealings of those with whom I am concerned ; and hereby, I am in the shortest and plainest way, admonished of my duty to others : And if this one short rule were reduced to practice, the state of Paradise would be restored, and we should enjoy a heaven upon earth.

For hereby, first, all persecutions for conscience sake, which have occasioned such violent disorders and vast effusion of blood, would be at an end ; because every one, who has any conscience, would most willingly preserve it free from the impositions of men in the worship of God. To compel men, by fire and faggot, to partake even of a delicious entertainment, is a savage sort of hospitality.

Secondly, all factions in any state would be at an end, if every member thereof were contented, that every one of his fellow members, who is not an enemy to the government, might, having equal pretence of merit, enjoy equal privileges with himself.

Thirdly, the occasions of war and law suits would be taken away ; since nothing but manifest wrong can be the just cause of either.

And, fourthly, there would be no private quarrels and uneasiness among neighbors ; since by this rule of doing as we would be done unto, all rash censures, sharp reflections, and ungrounded suspicions and jealousies, which are the seeds of private animosities, are taken away. And hereby we may expect a plentiful store of God's blessings among us, who will measure out his kindness to us, in the same manner as we measure out ours to one another.

The reason why religion should be both a short and plain institution will appear, if you consider the common circumstances and conditions of men in this world. For tho your ladyship and many more, have leisure enough to read and digest whole volumes of useful knowledge (if there be any such) yet the greatest part of mankind, being necessarily employed in making daily provisions for themselves and families, and discharging the common offices of life, cannot obtain a competent knowledge of any religious institution, which is either difficult or tedious.

It is certain, that the whole life of man is not sufficient for him to read all the controversies, which have been written upon pretence of religion ; but it is as certain, that God never lays on us a greater task, than what he affords us both abilities and opportunities to perform ; wherefore we may conclude, since the duties of religion are laid in common upon all, that the poor day laborer must have ability and opportunity, sufficient to instruct himself therein, without hindering the constant work of his calling. And in all this the wisdom and goodness of God are made known by adapting our duties to our circumstances of life.

From hence you may see that you may save yourself the trouble of reading the long and tedious disputes, which, with such intemperate zeal, are always in agitation among the several parties of christians. Indeed, the true christian institution being short, it cannot admit of being spun out into long controversies: And, though I have read many books of controversial divinity, I do not remember, that I have met with any one controversy, about the matter of mere religion; as whether I should maintain in my heart, a high reverence and veneration for Almighty God; whether I ought to walk before him in sincerity and uprightness; whether or no I should be thankful to him, for all the benefits which I have received from him; whether I shall submit to his will with patience, and endeavor to govern my passions; to bring them to a due moderation and temper, by making them subject to the law of reason; whether I should be true to my promise, just in my dealings, charitable to the poor, and sincere in my devotions; whether I should be temperate and sober, modest and chaste, and demean myself in a humble, civil, and agreeable manner, towards those with whom I converse; whether I should be heartily sorry when I come short of my duty, and should be watchful in the denial of my irregular appetites, passions, and evil inclinations for the future; in short, it has not (that I know of) been disputed, whether justice, benignity, meekness, charity, moderation, patience, and sobriety, should be received into our affections; or whether we should love God, and our neighbor: Orthodoxy of *faith* is made the pretence of controversy, but the one thing necessary, is orthodoxy of *practice*.

I know your ladyship will not be pleased with a discourse upon the subject of religion, unless devotion has its due place in it; nor ought it indeed to be left out; because thankfulness is a necessary part of religion, and prayer is the preservative of the whole. A frequent repetition of our thanks for all benefits we enjoy, preserves in our minds the consideration of God, as the greatest and best of beings; and thereby nourishes veneration and gratitude. In like manner prayer for pardon of sin, and for preservation of our persons, is a constant recognition of the mercy and bounty of God. But prayer against the power of sin, is the actual withdrawing of our inclinations from evil; and prayer for any grace, is an actual application of our minds, to attain the particular virtue for which we pray.

But together with these more direct and solemn exercises and seasons of devotion of which I have been speaking, I would earnestly recommend to you to accustom yourself to a sort of habitual and occasional devotion, as essential to preserve the strongest impressions of religion upon your mind.

It may be observed, that many, who are very punctual in keeping to their exact times and forms of devotion, have fallen short of any visible improvement in virtue. The same pride, forwardness, falshood, covetousness, and bitterness of spirit, have appeared in many who have been constant frequenters of the public, as well as closet forms of prayer; as if God had not been in all their thoughts; the reason whereof seems to be, because their formal petitions supercede their habitual endeavors. Men are apt to think, since they spend daily a certain portion of time in prayer, they have done all their part; and so they leave God Almighty to take care of the event.— And this is indeed all we can do, when we make our petitions to our benefactors upon earth, viz. offer up our requests to them, either by word or writing, and then only expect their answer.

But 'tis otherwise with relation to God. Our petitions to him, must not take off from our constant endeavors to perform that work, for which we pray his enablement. And this occasional devotion, which I would recommend, is in its own nature a constant endeavor after virtue, as well as a serious petition for it. For it ariseth from a frequent observation of ourselves, in our particular occuring circumstances; from which observations suitable desires will almost necessarily flow. As if at any time I find that I have done an ill thing, immediately upon the discovery I beg God's pardon and resolve to make recompence for the ill I have done: Or if I have designed any evil in my heart & presently beg pardon of him who knoweth the secrets thereof; in so doing I have given check to its progress. In like manner, if I have spoken slanderously, rashly, or injuriously concerning any one, and upon recollection thereof, I ask forgiveness of God, and desire that I may not do the like for the future, but on the contrary, that I may govern my tongue better; in all this, I am laboring to withdraw my soul from evil, and to form myself upon a principle of virtue.

Every night and morning, are proper times of leisure to call to mind the preservation, support and advantages, we have received the day, or night preceding. And this recollection,

being accompanied with thankfulness to our great Preserver, is the actual continuance and carrying on of our gratitude to God. If I perceive pride, or passion, to arise in my heart, so that I am apt to put a great value upon every thing I do, and despise others : or, if I find myself eagerly concerned for any little worldly advantage, or any small punctilio of honor ; and hereupon I beg of God for a humble spirit, and a heavenly mind ; I am herein endeavoring to expel the poison of sin, by its proper antidote.

We cannot but feel the disorder of our minds, as much as the diseases of our bodies. And the causes of a disordered mind are much more easily discerned, than the causes of a bodily distemper. For either my mind is troubled for want, or losses, or it may be for the prosperity of others, or I want a revenge, or because I cannot have my will in what I designed. Upon these, or such like occasions, the proper cure is devotional, in begging God's pardon for my discontent ; and being desirous that my will should be submitted to his, who has taught me that I should not return evil for evil, but that I should love my neighbor as myself. This sort of soliloquy, and occasional mental address to God, is a sure way to compose the disorders of our thoughts. For the growing power of any sin is most certainly suppressed, by introducing the opposite virtue into our desires.

The same method may be used as to sins of omission. A serious person will observe neglects of common duties, which respect either God or man. He cannot but take notice how much he has neglected his business or his health ; how little he has considered God as his owner, governor, and benefactor ; and how small a portion of what God has blessed him with, he has laid out upon the good of his fellow creatures. And if hereupon, a man is seriously desirous to become more dutiful to God, more useful to himself, and beneficial to others, he is therein actually bending his mind to supply his former omissions.

This casual devotion, arising from the observation of ourselves under the common circumstances of life, (although it can have no set times and forms prescribed to it,) will be very effectual to produce, preserve, and increase a true sense of religion within us. And if you are pleased to apply your thoughts hereunto, as occasion shall direct you, this devotion will soon become habitual, customary and easy. And its returns, which will be frequent and short, will be a continual restraint from evil doing, and an actual exercise of virtue.

This exercise, which I have been prescribing, is commonly reserved to be performed all at once, in an actual preparation before receiving the Lord's Supper ; which is usually performed, by help of an artificial catalogue of sins, methodically collected out of the ten commandments ; according to which catalogue, set forms of confessions are drawn up, which the preparant is to take upon content ; and without any sort of judgement or discretion of his own, he confesses himself guilty of the sins therein mentioned together, with all their aggravations, tho it may be, many of them were of such a hainous nature, as never entered into his heart to commit. And if these catalogues and confessional forms, are read over once in a quarter of a year, or, it may be, once a month, against the usual sacrament day, the work of preparation is thought to be well passed over.*

Yet I cannot but think it better to keep a constant, customary watch over ourselves, and, upon the first discovery of any evil design or action, immediately to retract it within our own hearts, as in the presence of God ; and by mental prayer proper to the occasion, arm ourselves against committing the like for the future. Hereby you discharge a duty in its proper season, which is better than to delay it to a prefixed distance of time : for what is most fresh in memory will make the most lively impression upon us, but may in a little time be forgotten. Besides, we are apt to turn forms into formalities ; and a natural discharge of religious duties must be more improving, than an artificial one.

And by this your ladyship sees the reason, why I have written a discourse of religion in general, in answer to your letter, wherein you wrote only concerning the Lord's Supper, viz. because I esteem a serious well inclined temper of mind to be the best preparation, either for that, or any other of the ordinances of Jesus Christ, that we may partake of them with advantage and delight.

David advises us to delight ourselves in the Lord ; that is, in all his ways and ordinances. And I cannot see why our preparation for the Lord's table, and participation at it, should be accompanied with greater anxieties of mind, than our communicating in any other holy office ; such as public prayer, or

* The author here refers to the forms of the Episcopalian church, to which he belonged.

preaching. We expect the same blessing of God, in the improvement of our virtues, from all these ordinances alike. And why we should use any of those means, which God has ordained for our good, with terror upon our minds, I do not understand. A man indeed ought to perform every religious office, seriously and soberly; but fear, by amusing and distracting the mind, is apt to render the ordinance unprofitable.

Men ought likewise to be discouraged from coming to prayer, preaching, or communicating at the Lord's table, with a careless or profane temper of mind; because such unpreparedness does harden men's hearts, and renders the ordinance unprofitable. Such as this was the case of the Corinthians, who, in celebrating the Lord's Supper, were so inconsiderate of what they came to do, that some of them were drunk* at the Lord's table, as you read, 1 Cor. xi. 21. and to this their profane behavior, those texts of scripture do particularly relate, which affright some men from, and others in receiving the sacrament: On this account it was said, by St. Paul, That they were guilty of the body and blood of Christ: and did eat and drink damnation to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body, ver. 27, 29, that is, by such a profane and unworthy communicating; they called down God's judgements upon themselves; for so the word *damnation* ought to be understood, because it refers to the *judgements* specified in the following verse, where it is said, that "For this cause," (viz. of drunken communicating) "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep," that is, die, ver. 30. Now to avoid these judgements, he exhorts them to examine themselves, that is, to consider with themselves, what was the meaning of that duty, which they were to perform at the Lord's table: which duty was this, viz. to call to mind the death of Jesus Christ. And this commemoration is by St Paul, stiled, "Discerning the Lord's body."

The visible signs of our Savior's death, which we discern on the Lord's table, do prepare our minds to contemplate a divine person, who for his great charity to the stupid world, suffered the highest injustice with such an invincible patience

* The original word, in the greek, does not signify absolute drunkenness, but *taking a full supply*. The crime of the Corinthians consisted in celebrating the Lord's Supper, as they formerly did their heathen feasts; the rich being full fed, and the poor allowed to be hungry.

and heroic fortitude, as was superior to the sharpest malice of his enemies ; thereby setting before us the brightest example of an unshaken resolution to do good, in spite of all discouragements.

You will perceive, madam, by this discourse, that the christian religion is a wise, a plain, and a short institution ; the belief whereof was designed to save our souls from the power of sin, by ingrafting virtuous habits in our minds. You will likewise perceive, that I hold it necessary to keep a constant watch over ourselves, to repent as often as we perceive ourselves to transgress, and, by occasional mental devotion, incline our hearts to observe the law of Christ ; and all this in order to build up a habit of virtue within us. You will also perceive, that the contemplation of the death of Christ, with all its circumstances, tends to the same admirable end.

And if these, or any other means, shall work upon you to be generously just, to bear a good will to all men, to do what good you can, and to be unconcerned for the events of things which are not within your power ; you will be easy within yourself, and satisfied in your own conscience ; which is the dawn of heaven upon earth, and you may cheerfully communicate at any time.

**A FURTHER
EXPLANATION
OF THE END AND DESIGN OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER.**

PUBLISHED, LONDON, 1760.

THIS ordinance, which is comonly called the Lord's Supper, or the Holy Communion, and sometimes the Eucharist, is not an invention of men, or a ceremony devised by christians out of their own heads, or instituted by the clergy of their own authority: but is an express institution and command of our Lord himself, who hath appointed it to be observed and celebrated, in a devout and religious manner, by all his disciples, to the end of the world.

This is abundantly evident from the history of our Savior's passion, as it is recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and from what the apostle Paul says to the church of Corinth, in the 11th chapter of his first epistle to them; where reproving them for some abuses they had been guilty of in the celebration of this ordinance, contrary to the design for which it was appointed, he acquaints them, that he had received it from the Lord as an institution of his religion, which he was to teach as suitable to the churches he should plant, to be observed by them and by all the churches of Christ, till his second coming; and he tells them that he had accordingly delivered it unto them as he had received it from the Lord; and then he proceeds to give them an account of its first institution, and of the end and design for which it was appointed, and exhorts them to observe it for the future according to that, and not suffer it to be any longer perverted and abused, as it had been among them of late.

The action itself consists in taking bread, giving thanks over it, breaking it, and eating of it ; then in taking a cup into which wine had been poured, giving thanks over it, and drinking of it.

This is the external action : and the design of it, as a religious rite or ceremony, is to represent, shew forth, or make an open public commemoration of our Savior's death, and the manner of it ; the bread which is broken being a symbol or representation of his body which was broken on the tree ; and the wine, a symbol or representation of his blood shed upon the cross, for the remission of the sins of many ;* that is, for the confirmation of that covenant wherein God hath promised the remission of sins to all, whether Jews or Gentiles, who sincerely embrace the gospel of his Son, who truly repent of their sins and forsake them, and carefully endeavor for the future to obey his holy laws, and improve themselves daily in piety and virtue.

Whether the bread used in the celebration of this ordinance, be leavened or unleavened ; whether the wine be pure or mixed with water ; whether the thanksgiving be used only once for all, or repeated before the giving of the cup, which seems indeed to have been the practice at the beginning ; whether this institution be celebrated in the evening, or any other time of day ; whether fasting, or after a temperate meal ; whether in an upper room, or in any other place ; whether sitting, or leaning, or standing, or kneeling ; these and the like circumstances being no parts of the action itself, nor having any relation to, or connection with the design of it, are matters of indifference, and left to the liberty of christians : there is nothing determined about them in the New Testament, and therefore none should take upon them to make any fixed regulations or canons about such matters ; but in these or the like indifferent things, which are not necessary to be determined, every christian should be left to his own discretion ; for the institution may be duly and rightly administered, and christians may partake of it worthily and acceptably, either in the one or the other of these ways that have been mentioned ; yea, even tho in the same congregation, and at the same time, some should receive one way, and some another. Christians should not be superstitiously scrupulous about these little

* Many nations, in distinction from the former covenant, which embraced the Jews only.

things ; nor should christian churches take upon them to exercise authority in matters of this nature, which are not determined in the word of God, which do not belong to the action itself nor affect any of the ends and purposes for which it was appointed, and which are chiefly to be regarded in our celebration of it.

From the accounts we have of the institution of this ordinance, both by the evangelists and the apostle Paul, we plainly see for what end it was appointed, and consequently with what views, with what dispositions and affections we ought to partake of it ; for the efficacy of it, or the good to be obtained by the receiving of it, doth not depend upon the mere external action of eating and drinking ; but upon the doing it with meditations and affections suitable to the design for which it was instituted.

Now the chief and principal end for which this rite was appointed by our Lord, was to be a standing memorial of his sufferings and death, and a solemn public commemoration of them, with praise and thanksgiving : " This (saith he) is my body, which is broken for you ;" as much as to say, this bread which is broken and distributed among you, is the symbol, or the sign and representation of my body crucified and broken for you : " Do this," that is, take it, and eat of it, " in remembrance of me," or, for a commemoration of my love in dying for you. And of the cup he says, " This cup is the New Testament," or, as it should rather have been rendered, ' the new covenant in my blood, shed for the remission of the sins of many, drink ye all of it ; for as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth, or shew ye forth the Lord's death till he come.' The meaning is, the wine contained in this cup is the symbol, the sign and representation of my blood, shed for the confirmation of the new covenant, wherein the remission of sins is promised and assured to all, who, becoming my disciples and members of my church, shall truly repent of their sins and forsake them, and shall endeavor for the future to yield a sincere obedience to the laws and precepts of my gospel, and persevere therein to the end : drink ye all of this cup in remembrance of me ; for by this action of eating of this bread, and drinking of this cup, as the symbols and representations of my body broken, and blood shed, ye do shew forth and publicly declare my death, and your own thankful remembrance of it ; and it is my will

you should do so to the end of the world, even till I shall come again the second time, to confer on all my sincere and faithful followers that salvation and happiness which I have promised to them ; which promise is sealed with my blood, and farther confirmed by my resurrection from the dead, and ascension into the heavens. This ordinance then is a standing and perpetual memorial, an open and public commemoration of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ ; and this is the first and principal end for which it was appointed.

But there is another, or rather two others, which naturally arise out of this first one, and are closely connected with it ; and which are plainly taught as such by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. x. 16. 17. They are these, to wit, to be a token and testimony of our communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ, and with all our christian brethren ; the apostle's words are these, " The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ? for, because there is one bread,* we, being many, are one body, for we are all partakers of that bread." As if he had said, The cup of thanksgiving, over which we give thanks, and of which we drink, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, is it not a token, a public testimony and declaration, of our communion and fellowship with the Lord Jesus, whose blood was shed for the remission of sins ? and the bread which we break, and eat of in that ordinance, is it not a token, a public testimony and declaration of our communion and fellowship with that blessed Lord, whose body was broken for us upon the tree ? is not this action which we perform in obedience to his command, a public and solemn acknowledgement of our religious regard to him, as our Savior and Redeemer, our Lord, our Lawgiver, and our Judge ; is it not an open profession in the face of the world, that we are his disciples and followers, that we embrace his doctrine and religion, and are not ashamed of his gospel ; that we approve of, and agree to the terms of that most gracious covenant which was sealed with his blood, and sincerely consent to be governed by his laws ? undoubtedly it is ; and our partaking of this feast in memory of his death, is an open declaration and solemn testimony of all this.

And farther, by our coming together into one place, to partake of this one bread, and drink of this one cup, as a religious

** So this verse would have been better rendered.*

commemoration of the death of Christ ; we, all of us, who join in the celebration of this ordinance, tho many in number, and dwelling perhaps, some of us in far distant places, do hereby declare that we are all one body, and acknowledge ourselves, with all our christian brethren, wherever they dwell on the face of the earth, to be one society or community, united to the Lord by a lively faith and sincere obedience, and to one another by the bond of a fervent charity and a brotherly love ; and so by the joint partaking of this ordinance we acknowledge ourselves the fellow disciples of Christ, the one Lord and Mediator, and the joint worshipers of the one God and Father of all, the temples of the same holy spirit, and the heirs of the same heavenly inheritance.

We do not by this action profess our communion merely and only with that particular church or congregation, with whom we are worshipping at the time, or with that particular party or denomination of christians, with whom we are associated, and statedly join in worship ; or with this or the other national church ; but we acknowledge ourselves to be in union and fellowship with all, who make a public profession of christianity, and that together with them, we are all one body, united under Christ, our common head ; we are all one religious community, one spiritual kingdom under the government of that king whom God hath set over us, even Jesus Christ his son, whom he hath made Lord of all, by whose laws we all profess to be ruled and governed, to whose authority and dominion we are all subject, and to whom we are all of us accountable for our conduct.

These being the ends for which this ordinance was appointed, it becomes us, as often as we partake of it, to keep them in our minds, to fix our meditations upon them, and to exercise our affections, and form our purposes and resolutions according to them ; if we do so, it will be a means of strengthening our faith and hope, of increasing our love to God, and our love to Jesus Christ our blessed Redeemer, and to all the saints and household of God ; and it will help us forward in the way of holiness, and engage us more effectually to a patient continuance in well doing, and to the constant and zealous practice of every thing that is truly pious, virtuous and good ; in a word, it will dispose us for farther usefulness in this world, and to a greater progress in moral and spiritual perfection, and consequently prepare and qualify us for higher degrees of happiness in the world that is to come.

But if we attend upon this institution of our religion, in a careless unthinking manner, only as an empty ceremony, as a matter of form and custom ; or to please men, and gain or preserve a reputation of sanctity ; or, if we substitute our attendance upon it in the place of real righteousness ; and use it as a kind of commutation, and by way of atonement for some immoral practices we are guilty of ; or for any other base and sinister end ; we quite pervert it from the purpose for which it was appointed ; *we eat and drink unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body ; we use it in effect as if it were a common meal, and are guilty of profaning a religious institution of divine appointment.*

When the apostle Paul in the place already quoted, (1 Cor. xi. 23, &c.) reproves the Corinthians for certain abuses, which had crept in among them in the administration of the Lord's Supper ; in order to rectify these abuses, he lays before them a plain and true account of the institution itself, and of the end and design of it, as he had received it from the Lord, who had communicated the whole gospel to him by revelation : after which he adds this advice, "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*" So our translators have rendered the words which should have been translated in this manner, *But let a man prove himself, and thus, that is, according to what I have now told you is the design of this institution, thus let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.* As if he had said, I have given you an account of this institution, as I received it from the Lord, and of the chief and principal end for which he appointed it ; by that let every one examine and try himself, his temper of mind, his views and intentions, his carriage and conduct, and thus, according to the end and design of the institution, as a memorial of the death of Christ, and a token of communion with him, and with the whole christian church, *let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.*

There is no reason to suppose that the apostle by his direction, intended to bind christians to enter into a particular examination of the whole past course of their lives, every time that they design to partake of the Lord's Supper : this indeed is a useful exercise, and very proper to be observed sometimes, on some special occasions, and for some persons ; but it does not seem to be necessary for all christians every time they may have an intention to join with their brethren in celebrating the memory of their Savior's passion by this

institution; there is nothing in this discourse of the apostle, or the occasion upon which he gave these directions to the Corinthian church concerning the Lord's Supper, to lead us to understand the words in that sense; nor is such a particular examination necessary, every time that a serious well disposed christian would chuse to receive the communion; tho it is proper here to be observed, that frequent self examination is a very useful and important duty; for it serves to shew us, or bring to mind, what is or has been amiss, and needs to be corrected, in our temper or conduct; it helps us to know ourselves, what manner of persons we are, and what is our true and real character, and this will dispose us to modesty and humility; it will make us sensible what need we have of God's grace and forgiveness; it will dispose us also to the exercise of charity, forbearance, and forgiveness towards others; and give us occasion of praise and thanksgiving to God for his sparing mercies, and his gracious promises of acceptance upon the most reasonable and condescending terms: beside many other advantages which cannot be mentioned or insisted upon at present.

But the examination which the apostle recommends, as previously necessary to the Lord's Supper, so far as may be judged from the context, seems to be this; that any christian intending to go to the Lord's table, should, in order to partake of that ordinance in a religious manner; and so as to profit by it, and not incur the guilt of profaning a sacred and solemn institution of religion, appointed by Christ himself; he should, I say, seriously consider the end and design for which it was appointed, and reflect whether the temper of his mind, and frame of his spirit be such as is suitable to that end, and having, upon such serious reflection, found that it is so; let him accordingly, with a view to that end, and with meditations and affections suitable to it, eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.

We should, therefore, before we go to the Lord's table, reflect a little, and think with ourselves, what it is we are going about? what are we going to do? are we only going to eat and drink as at a common meal for the refreshment and support of our bodies? no, this is not the design of the institution; we have houses to eat and drink in for that end, and are not called to assemble together in the church for our common meals; but we are going to celebrate a religious rite appointed by our Lord Jesus Christ, as a memorial of his dying love,

and a public acknowledgment of our being his disciples, who have communion and fellowship with him, and with all our christian brethren, and who purpose, by the help of God's grace, to please and obey him in all things, and to walk in his ways all the days of our lives.

It becomes us then to enquire again, whether we feel in our minds a just sense of the advantages we enjoy by the gospel revelation, and a thankful remembrance of what our blessed ~~Saviour~~ hath done and suffered for us, to deliver us from the power and dominion of sin, and the miseries consequent upon it? whether we do really approve of the terms of that covenant which he hath sealed with his blood, and heartily consent to them? and are truly willing to forsake all sin, all impiety, all vice, wickedness and immorality, and to conform ourselves in our hearts and lives to the laws of godliness, righteousness, charity and sobriety, as being most excellent in themselves; and naturally conducive to promote the proper perfection and true happiness of our nature? and whether we have a sincere love to all our christian brethren, and a communion in heart and affection with all the saints and household of God? If this be truly and indeed the temper and disposition of our minds, and the frame of our hearts towards God, towards Jesus Christ his son, towards all our fellow christians, and towards true religion, goodness, and virtue, we are suitably disposed, and duly prepared to go to the Lord's table: let every one therefore try himself by this test, and having found his heart to correspond to it, let him, according to the ends for which this sacred feast was appointed, and with a serious view to them, "eat of the bread, and drink of the cup;" humbly hoping for God's blessing upon him in his religious attendance upon this ordinance; and for his favorable acceptance of him in this action, done in obedience to the command of his dying Lord, to shew forth his death till he come.

P I N I S.