

OPEN OR STRICT COMMUNION?

JUDGMENT PRONOUNCED

ON

THE QUESTION,

BY THE

LORD JESUS HIMSELF.

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OPEN OR STRICT COMMUNION?

AMONG those who hold that baptism should be administered only to believers, and that its only legitimate mode is immersion, a controversy, as is well known, has long existed on the question, whether it is lawful to admit any not baptized as believers, to the Lord's table? The majority seem to have decided on rejecting such, and these take the name of Strict Communionists; while there are, on the other hand, not a few who esteem the opposite practice to be most agreeable to the spirit of our most holy religion.

Which then of these two opposing views is according to the mind of Christ—open or strict communion? This is the question to be discussed in the present tract: and may the spirit of the Lord Jesus guide the pen of the writer, and lead the heart of the reader! Amen!

This, being a controversy among Christians alone, demands, in a peculiar manner, the exercise of love, forbearance, and gentleness. Each party must consider the other as desirous to know the will of his Master, and resolved in his strength to put it in force. The writer therefore would desire with humility, and in the spirit of love to Christ's people, to bring forward what seem to him to be the views of his Lord upon this topic; especially since the question was one on which his own mind was once exercised, and on which he

was constrained to apply to Scripture, and to test by that the arguments alleged on both sides, in order to the discovery with whom the truth lay.

Now in order to the right investigation of the point, it is fitting that the grounds on which the matter is to rest, be first stated. He has then *three admissions* to make to the strict baptists.

1st. That those sprinkled in infancy are *unbaptized*.

2ndly. That none who were unbaptized were admitted into the churches as founded by apostles.

3rdly. That by a divinely appointed order, baptism is intended to precede the Lord's supper in the case of every believer; and that this order is traceable—1st., in the commission, Matt. xxviii, 19; 2ndly, in apostolic practice, Acts ii, 41, 42; and 3rdly, in the respective meaning of the two institutions: baptism representing the commencement of spiritual life, and so fitly preceding the Lord's supper, which sets forth the means of sustaining that life when imparted.

Now these admissions surrender the points contended for by most of the treatises written in favour of strict communion; for they in general occupy themselves in proving the points here granted. The first admission makes needless those arguments which would shew infant baptism invalid: and that the opinion of the pædobaptist* that he has complied with his Lord's command is ill-founded; as also the objection usually made to open communion, that it admits two baptisms, while scripture teaches us that there is but one. It is an answer likewise to the plea, that to receive pædobaptists would be to admit the soundness of infant baptism. We do not. We tell him, You are unbaptized, and as an individual Christian we receive you. The second admission renders unnecessary those arguments which are occupied in shewing, that apostolic

* Pædobaptist, one who holds the baptism or sprinkling of infants to be of Christ's ordaining.

churches demanded baptism as a term of communion. The third joins hands with the proofs that are frequently given of the divinely prescribed order of the two ordinances.

But correspondently with these admissions, two admissions are required from the strict communionist.

1st. That many unbaptized possess true faith. All such therefore are the sons of God ; as it is written, "*Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus:*" Gal. iii, 26. "To them gave he power to become *the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*" John i, 12.

It follows from this, that all who are sons of God must be accounted brethren by true Christians, for there is but one Father, and the members of the same family must be related to each other as brethren.

2ndly. That the refusal to be immersed as a believer is not incompatible with possessing a clear conscience before God.

Hence it follows that there may be persons unbaptized, and yet not *disobedient in heart*, for disobedience is resistance to the light of conscience and to God's word. By this admission those arguments are struck off which assume that the refusal to be baptized is inconsistent with obedience before God. The parties on behalf of whom this tract pleads, are assumed to be persons regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God, yet so blinded by education, prejudice, or perverted argument, as to believe themselves already baptized, and to be unwilling to be immersed as believers, thinking that this would be sinful. It must, I suppose, be evident at once to any, that a man may through blindness of understanding misinterpret the divine law, and yet his mind and heart be virtually in a state of entire obedience. He desires only to know the will of the Lord. He has the love of God, and this guarantees the keeping of all his known and acknowledged laws. Were Omnipotence only to clear away the scales from the eye of his understanding, he would at once, and without resistance, obey. Such an

one then stands accepted before God, and on an opposite footing to the *disobedient*: for they are under the wrath of God. Unto them that "*do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, (belong) indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*:" Rom. ii, 8. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, *taking vengeance* on them that know not God and that *obey not* the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:" 2 Thess. i, 7, 8. "Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and *unbelieving* is nothing pure: but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God: but in works they deny him; being *abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate*:" Tit. i, 15, 16.

This being allowed, that argument falls, which is intended to deter the open communionist from fellowship with them at the table of the Lord, on the ground that he is encouraging *disobedience*, and partaker in their sin. Since they are not disobedient in heart, but only erring in understanding, to hold communion with them is no encouragement of disobedience, nor any participation of sin.

On this admission also the argument is set aside which is urged from apostles admitting none to the Lord's table, but baptized believers alone. For any one in that day who refused to be baptized as a believer and by immersion could not have done so *with a clear conscience*; while it is assumed that he may now refuse, and with clear conscience. Since there are no apostles now gifted with the Holy Ghost infallibly to pronounce the mind of Christ, and evidenced by the exercise of miraculous powers to be God's fully commissioned authorities, there is now no just power to compel Christians to submit their judgements on any question relating to interpretation of Scripture. He who resisted an apostle's command and authoritative decision was at once disobedient in heart before God.—Luke x, 16. But a believer may not discern even *true* argument from

Scripture now, and yet be possessed of a clear conscience before God. This tract, then, is a plea for the admission to the Lord's supper of those who, though confessedly unbaptized, yet possess a true faith, and are not wilfully disobedient to the law of baptism, but are only intellectually in error with regard to it. And it is framed upon the supposition that a pædobaptist presents himself as a candidate for communion with a strict-communion baptist congregation.

But at this point, the strict baptist may break in upon the argument—'Your cause is given up. You have no footing for argument. From the admissions you have made, it follows that the admission of the unbaptized to the table of the Lord, since it runs counter to the law of Christ and the example of his apostles, is *unlawful*.' This does indeed seem the giving up of the cause as generally argued; and yet, as I judge, it throws the question into a form in which it has already been adjudged by the Savior in favor of the open communionist. The passage in which this judgement is recorded is, in consequence of its deep importance, narrated by the Holy Spirit in three of the evangelists. Let us take it as given by St. Matthew, xii, 1—8 :

"At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the Priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the Priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

Argument I. In order to see its bearing on the present question, let us state it so that it shall resemble as nearly as possible the case decided by our Lord. Then must the strict baptists take the plaintiffs' place,* and the Lord's supper succeeds to the place of the sabbath: for it is the law of the Lord's supper which is affirmed to be broken by the admission of the unbaptized. Open communionists then take the place of the disciples, and the question assumes the form of an appeal to our Lord Jesus. 'Why do thy disciples that which it is *not lawful to do in the Lord's supper?*' The bearing of the Lord's argument will now be evident—"Have ye never read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him, how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests?" The argument of our Lord Jesus in these words is clearly as follows:— 'Admitting that my disciples are doing that which is unlawful on the sabbath day, (that plucking the ears of corn is reaping, and that rubbing them in their hands is threshing, and therefore forbidden by the law as a servile work,) their conduct is yet justly to be defended, from the recorded conduct of David when in a like condition of hunger. He broke at least two solemn ritual laws. He entered into the tabernacle itself, whither priests alone might go. He took the shew-bread, which was permitted to none but priests: and not only ate thereof himself, but gave to those with him. Yet this was not accounted a sin, but rather received the approbation of God.

* Here let me protest against any misapprehension. I do not think the strict communionists to be in character resembling the Pharisees, though the argument demands that they take their place; nor do I look upon them so much as condemning their open communion brethren, as defending their own practice. Rather let us regard them with honor, as zealously and conscientiously upholding what they conceive to be the will of our common Lord, though in this case, as we are assured, they have mistaken his mind.

Here was a great and open infringement of the ritual law of Moses, yet the Savior defends both David and Ahimelech; the priest, in giving him hallowed bread, and David in partaking of it. But on what ground does the Lord Jesus defend it? On the plea of David's hunger. The ritual law was rightly made to give way to his need.

This forms then the first and sufficient plea on behalf of open communion. The ceremonial law of Moses gave way to the bodily need of David, and the Savior approves it. David's hunger was plea enough to justify both himself and Ahimelech. How much more then is it fitting that the ritual of our Lord Jesus Christ should give way, not to the *bodily*, but *spiritual* hunger of the believer? Ahimelech admitted David, where there was no precedent. So may we. Ahimelech broke the rites of Moses in favor of one who was not a priest. How much more may we, on certain occasions dispense with the ritual of the Lord Jesus, on behalf of one who is *a priest*. For every believer is a priest: as it is written, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and *priests* unto God and his Father: to him be glory:" Rev. i, 6. "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and *priests*:" Rev. v, 10. "Ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, *an holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ:" 1 Pet., ii, 5. "Ye are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*:" Ver. 9.

The instance therefore alleged by our Lord Jesus Christ gives ample room for the case pleaded for by the open communionist. His plea of necessity is as far superior, as spiritual need is to temporal; and he only infringes the law in favor of a priest; whereas Jesus pleads in favor of one who was neither priest nor Levite, but a soldier.

Objection. But this conclusion it is attempted to unsettle by affirming, that in David's case it was dire necessity, and that alone, which could make the act lawful : that there was no other place to which he could go for food : and that since the unbaptized can go elsewhere, and satisfy his spiritual appetite, the plea from this example is set aside.

Answer 1. But to this we may reply—First, as to the point of fact, that the statement of David's extreme necessity is not stated by Jesus, and so needs proof, and until proved is good for nothing.

2. Secondly, that the assertion is against evidence ; for David was to come to Nob, a " city of the priests : " 1 Sam. xxi., 1 ; xxii., 19. Was there no bread in all that city ? Had he begged from door to door through the city, and been refused by all ? Was the land of Israel become a wilderness, and must he have died, if the priest had bid him pursue his journey to the next village ? This is assertion without proof. The Savior thought it enough for his plea in favor of Ahimelech's conduct to say that David was *hungry*. The unsatisfied disciple would read—' David was *starving*, and could get bread nowhere else.'

3. Had Ahimelech said to David—' Go through the city, and if none will give you any bread, I will give you the shew-bread ; ' this would have afforded ground for us to give like advice, and a similar conditional promise, to the pædobaptist desiring communion. But as the Savior defends Ahimelech, solely on the ground of David's hunger, without any notice of the impossibility of procuring provisions in any other way, we are persuaded that we are justified in receiving the pædobaptist, without sending him abroad on a like search.

4. Again, may we admit a like unauthorized statement with regard to the disciples, whom, our Savior on this occasion defends no less than David ? Was there no village or city near at which they might have asked for bread, without plucking the ears of corn ? Or

would they have perished had they fasted the whole day? The plea of starvation then, and of no other means of supply, will not stand. The Savior rests his cause on his apostles' hunger, and be assured it needs not our addition—'that they were ready to die with hunger, and no other means within their reach.'

5. Moreover, (and this is a point to be especially noted,) while David might have gone to many houses and many cities, and have found in each and every house bread as well suited to allay his hunger as the hallowed bread of the tabernacle, *the spiritual hunger of the child of God*, on the contrary, *finds its appropriate food only in the sacred bread of Christ, and when seated at his Father's table*. If it is not lawful for him to partake of that bread, and to sit at the table of the Lord with you, he may not partake of it any where: nor can you direct him elsewhere: for the *table of the Lord is but one*, and all are partakers of that one bread; but if your's be the *only* table of the Lord, so much the more should you receive him, and give him the bread which alone can satisfy the spiritual appetite which the love of his Master, and the desire of remembering him, has created. He is fleeing from a greater than Saul, and through no friendly country. His Lord pities him. Do not you? The appeal made to you to receive him, is tenfold the strength of that which Ahimelech felt, and which Jesus approved.

Why do you bid him go elsewhere to satisfy his hunger? Is the table to which you would send him *the Lord's*? Why then may he not sit down to the part of it which is among you? Or is that to which you could beckon him *not the Lord's table*? Then why do you mock him with pointing him thither? Either deny his hunger, or give him its appropriate bread. Either forbid him the supper altogether, or else let him sit down with you. To point him to another part of the table, if he is not fit for your part, is as guilty as to admit him to sit by your side.

6. Lastly, the question before us is not one concerning *the degree* of necessity. The Savior's argument is not, that at the starvation point of hunger the positive law of Moses might be broken down: he alleges hunger as the simple and sufficient ground of his plea. For do not the objectors see, that exactly in proportion as they *overstate the case of David, they lay bare of defence the case of the disciples?* If the case of David were so desperate—if other means were all closed and barred, and his hunger at starvation point, the Savior's argument would have been uncovered to the attack of the Pharisees, and those acute enemies would have seized at once on so fit an opportunity. 'Ah,' they would have replied and with justice, 'David's was an extreme case, a matter of life and death; with your disciples it is not so: and the instance cited is no defence for them.'

Argument II. Let us pass now to the Redeemer's second plea.

"Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath and are blameless? But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple."

1. The Savior in these words states another exception to the law of the sabbath—and one of a different character. The positive command of rest from labor and the bearing of burdens on the sabbath day was rightly dispensed with in favor of *another part of the ritual law*. It was an exception stated and allowed for in the law itself. Where two ritual laws came into collision, the higher of the two, and the more important was to receive obedience before the other.

The sabbath-law said, 'Bear no burden; do no servile work.' The law of sacrifice, on the other hand, said—'Thou shalt offer "on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot and two tenth deals of flour for a meat-offering, mingled with oil, and the drink-offering thereof: this is the burnt-offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt-offer-

ing and its drink-offering :” Num. xxviii, 9, 10. Here then was the command to kill and flay, to cut up and to wash, to bear burdens of wood and of flour, to knead and to temper it with oil, with many other works of a like kind. What then was to be done? Must the law of sabbath-rest prevail, or the law of sacrifice? The law of sacrifice clearly, as being the more important of the two. Yet here was an open, flagrant violation of the sabbath. It was “profaned,” too, by “*the priests*,” who of all others should set to Israel the example of strict obedience to the law. It was violated in the very spot which of all others should be hallowed ground—“*in the temple*”—the very place where the eyes and heart of God were to be continually.

And the Savior uses the strong word “profane” to describe the act. He would have them see, that in many cases the observance of the ritual was a question in which two sides were to be looked at, and two questions were to be balanced one against the other. If you look only at the law of the sabbath, what greater profanation, than the work of the sacrifices? But you must not take that law alone: there is another to be weighed with it; and therefore, while the sabbath is broken by the law of sacrifice, even to profanation, the priests are still “*guiltless*.”

But the Pharisees might object to Jesus, against the defence here set up for his disciples, by alleging that it was nothing to the purpose. ‘The temple-service and its law do indeed excuse the priests in their breach of the sabbath, but what is that to your disciples? They are not engaged in any temple-service.’ To meet this objection, the Lord adds the following application, “I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple.” That is, in effect, ‘You are wholly mistaken in your objection. I am a temple; in me “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” This temple is far superior to yours of wood, and stone, and gold. “He spake of the temple of his body.” And these are

my priests in attendance on the temple. If then the law of the temple is superior to that of the sabbath, so is their law of attendance on a greater than the temple, superior to the same sabbath-law. Attendance on me, is better than sacrifice. If the temple-service and the necessities of the law of sacrifice may plead exemption, much more the necessities of these living temples of God ; and the need of those priests, on the support of whose lives hangs the proclamation of eternal life to a dying world.' And yet further, in these words a reproof of the Pharisees is implied. Had the work of sacrifice on the sabbath been displeasing to the Most High, he would long ago have rebuked it. His silence then was his approval. My silence, therefore, O ye Pharisees, on beholding this act of my disciples, ought to have been enough for you. I am the fit person to rebuke, if need be, not you. That I have found no fault, proves that I did not see it evil. Who are you, that in the presence of a master accuse his servant of what his master forbids not? Who are you, that in the presence of the judge rush to his chair, and pass sentence? Leave my disciples to me. To me they stand or fall. Any breach of my law is to be resisted and resented, not by you, but by me.'

2. We gain then another instance of exception to the positive laws of God. Not only is necessity to set aside the ritual law, but even one positive command may annul for the time another positive command. When one positive command is superior in force, either from its place or its importance, or from any other consideration, the weaker of the two is to give way ; and it surrenders its claim not only with Christ's sanction, but according to his own recorded pleading.

Let us apply this to the question before us. The present is, like the case stated by our Lord, a question as to the preference to be given to one of two rites. The question for the Jewish priest was—Which is to be obeyed, the law of the Sabbath, or the law of the sacrifices? The case of the pædobaptist is—Which is

he to obey, the law of baptism, or the law of the Lord's supper? The priest considered the ceremonial law of sacrifice superior, and hesitated not to break that of the sabbath. On the pædobaptist you urge the duty of baptism. It is unfelt by him. 'I have been baptized,' he replies; 'it is no longer a duty to me. To be baptized again were sin. There is but "one baptism."' Even the strict baptist must see that on this ground to be baptized would be sin. It would be without faith, and "whatever is not of faith is sin." Clearly then the law of baptism must give way to the law of the Lord's supper. The one is felt by him in all its force. "Do this," says the Savior, "in remembrance of me." His soul answers, 'Lord that is my desire.' The one duty then he can perform in faith and to the glory of God; the other duty he could not. To him it is, practically speaking, no duty, because unfelt. All the offence, ritually speaking, of which he is, even to a baptist's eye, guilty, is that he is receiving the Lord's supper out of its divinely appointed order. You cannot say that he is invading any positive prohibition, as the priests invaded the law of the sabbath. But you may state it at the strongest, if you will. The case presented by our Lord will still carry us through. Say even that he *profanes* the Lord's supper. He may profane it, and yet be blameless. "The priests in the temple *profane* the sabbath, and are *blameless*."

The question is *not*, What ought the pædobaptist to do *in regard to baptism*? On that we are agreed. The question is, rather What ought *we* to do in regard to *the Lord's supper*? He is under mistake on the subject of baptism, and we have not convinced him. He followeth not with us; and we follow with the Lord Jesus. Shall we forbid him, Lord? "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." Luke x, 50. His conscience and his love to Christ urge him to keep the supper of the Lord Jesus. There we must leave him to his Master.

It is the pædobaptist's *duty* then to receive the Lord's

supper. Felt duty, discerned and desired by faith, carries the palm against that which is unfelt and undiscerned. He is glorifying God by his desire to obey and to remember the Lord Jesus. Have you authority to hinder one in the way of his duty? Are you empowered to prevent all service to God in which any mistake lies couched? Can you discern all worship that is unacceptable to God; and discerning it, have you authority to interpose and restrain? Disobedience you may hinder. Error you may not. Unless infallible, you are liable to it yourself. Unless possessed of the miraculous seal of God, your infallibility were not binding on any.

In the case of Hezekiah's passover we learn that, in spite of many ritual defects, a service may be well pleasing to God. "The King had taken counsel, and his princes and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the *second* month, for they could not keep it at that time (in the *first* month) because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together at Jerusalem." "Then they killed the passover on the *fourteenth day of the second month*; and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves and brought in the burnt-offerings into the house of the Lord. And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites. For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified; therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passover for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the Lord. For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun *had not cleansed themselves, yet they did 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 cleans-

ed with the purification of the sanctuary.' And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."
"So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven." 2 Chron. xxx, 2, 3, 15—20, 26, 27.

Here were abundance of transgressions of the ritual, yet the service was evidently most acceptable to God. Here was the celebration of that Old Testament rite which answers to the Lord's supper now; yet Hezekiah did not keep back the legally unclean, whose hearts were desirous to keep this law of their God. And shall the Christian, living under the full *grace of the Gospel*, be more rigorous than one living under the *strict and stern law of Moses*? Better to keep the passover even though encumbered with defects, than not at all. So thought Hezekiah, and the Most High accepted him and his people in their service. Better then that the pædobaptist believer should keep the Lord's supper, though with some ritual defect, than not at all. And if yours is the table of the Lord, he has a right, because it is his duty, to sit down at the table with you. The Master of the supper is the only judge and reprover of the defects of service at his board. Leave the erroneous to his judgment, or rather, like Hezekiah, pray that the good Lord would accept him though his purification be not that of the sanctuary. This is conduct that has the sanction and approval of our God.*

* The argument may be stated in another form. When two ritual laws stand in competition with one another, the positive prevails against the negative. In the case cited by our Lord, the sabbath-law was the negative, and the law of sacrifice the positive. Here the law of baptism, as rightly beheld by the baptist, carries an indirect negative, since it would have the believer to be first baptized. But the positive law must win the day in this case also.

The view of the temple-service carries with it one or two lessons of much importance in the question before us. For first, the Christian church is now the temple of God ; (Eph. ii, 21,) and it has sacrifices still, though they are the "spiritual sacrifices" of praise and thanksgiving. (Heb. xiii, 15. 1 Peter ii, 5.) Now many Christians seem to have looked upon baptism as being the entrance or door into the Christian temple ; and therefore that text has alarmed them, "*He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber ;*" as though it applied to their pædobaptist brethren. But this is to forget what the Lord Jesus goes on to say—"*I AM THE DOOR : by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved :*" John x, 9. And again, another Scripture proclaims that faith is the door, as it is written, "*He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles :*" Acts xiv, 27. That which answered to baptism in the tabernacle was *the laver*, and in Solomon's temple, was the *brassen sea*, which we are told "*was for the priests to wash (or bathe) in :*" 2 Chron. iv, 6. Every one therefore who has faith in Jesus has entered in by the door : his ritual offence is that he has not bathed in the laver. But he is a priest and within the temple : for the laver stands within, and none can rightly bathe who has not entered in at the door. If then he be a priest and within the temple, can you keep him back from the shew-bread ? Are you consistent in permitting what you do, and yet in keeping him back from the table of the Lord ? For what will the strict-communionist allow the pædobaptist to do ?

"Do this in remembrance of me," is the one to be preferred ; especially since the implied prohibition of the other is not perceived. Take another instance, the law of circumcision on the eighth day. This often came into conflict with the sabbath-law. The law of the sabbath forbade work, the law of circumcision declared that the penalty of non-performance of the law on the eighth day was excision from the people of Israel. The positive law therefore prevailed over the negative.

To lead the prayers and praises of the church, and to dispense the word of life. Now is this distinction capable of being borne out by the word of God? Might a priest offer sacrifice or offering by fire before the Lord, and yet be kept from eating of the most holy things? Nay. Of the sin-offering it is said, "*The priest that offereth for sin shall eat it; in the holy place shall it be eaten*, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation." "It is *most holy*:" Lev. vi, 25, 26, 29. Nay, more remarkably still, while he that had a blemish might not *offer sacrifices* he might "*eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy*:" Lev. xxi, 22. To be consistent, then, you must either refuse the pædobaptist to pray and minister among you at all, as unclean, and so to be kept out of the temple; or else you cannot forbid him to draw nigh to the table of the shew-bread. May he offer *prayer* through the blood of Jesus at the *brazen altar*, and *praise* at the *golden altar in the sanctuary*, and yet be kept from *the table of the shew-bread*? It cannot be. The golden altar is nearer to the Holy of Holies than the golden table. And if he that *may not offer sacrifice* may yet "*eat the bread of his God*," how much more may *he* eat who is thought worthy to offer sacrifice?

Argument III.—We pass to the third argument; which St. Matthew gives thus: "But if ye had known what this meaneth, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' ye would not have condemned the guiltless." This is the great central principle on which I would be content to stake the whole controversy. To one who doubts whether open communion be lawful, I would say, Prayerfully contemplate this principle. It can make plain every difficulty. It is the master-key to unlock the whole subject.

1. But let us contemplate it distinctly. What are meant by "sacrifice" and "mercy" respectively? It is easily perceived by one who thinks upon the subject of human duties, that they naturally divide themselves

into two great classes; those which are of perpetual obligation, and are the same in all ages and countries, being written more or less legibly on the conscience; and those, on the other hand, which are binding, only because of the command of God, by a legislation given at different times and occasionally altered. The first class we call *moral* duties or obligations; the second are called *positive, ritual, or ceremonial* commands. To the ritual belongs the command of sacrifice. God appointed, after the fall of man, the slaughter of certain animals, partly with a view to try the obedience of men, and partly to impress on his heart certain lessons of deep importance to his spiritual well-being. In this divine oracle, then, "*sacrifice*" stands as the representative of the *ritual* class of duties; and "*mercy*," on the other hand, as the representative of those *moral* obligations, which, even where revelation has not penetrated with its blessed light, are still binding. And the divine word before us gives the manifest superiority to the moral above the ritual, in any case of their being opposed to each other.

The observation of any ritual command, such as the sabbath and the Lord's supper, is nothing in itself. Without the inward temper of obedience and love in the worshipper, the rite itself is good for nought; and therefore the Most High by the prophets often strongly depreciates his own institutions, because rested on in themselves. "I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats." "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?" Isa. i, 10. "*Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it thee:*" Psa. li, 16. "*Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not; in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure:*" Heb. x, 5, 6. But mercy or love is a feeling blessed and holy in itself and acceptable to the Most High.

When then these two classes of duties stand in any given instance in opposition to one another, what are

we to do? Which are we to prefer? If, in any particular case the law of rite stands in opposition to the moral law, which of the two am I to choose?

2. This is the turning point of the whole question of open or strict communion. The writers on behalf of strict communion do not seem to have observed that it is a question altogether of alternatives, a matter of *choice between two things—both good*—but of which we are required to choose that which is the better of the two. They generally state strongly the necessity of obedience, and the duty of keeping with exactness the positive commands of the Lord Jesus, of which baptism is one. Here we agree with them; baptism is in no degree to be defrauded of that just respect and exact attention, to which every command of the Savior has a claim. Far be it from me to decry that solemn rite, or to think lightly of the mode which he has commanded; far be it from me to uphold the traditions of men, against his divine institution. But such a statement sets before us only a *part of the case*. The question of open communion is a *choice between two things*: not the shutting us up to one ritual command. The question is simply this—When a choice must be made between observing a ritual law or a moral law, which are we to prefer? This is the real state of the question. Gladly would we if possible keep *both the ritual and the moral* in that harmony in which they were first observed by the apostolic churches. But the churches of Christ have fallen from their high standing both in knowledge and in grace; and in the case before us, an observance of both the ritual and the moral is impossible. An unbaptized believer desires to join us at the table of the Lord. We set before him the law of Jesus concerning baptism. He remains unconvinced, and still desires communion. ARE WE THEN TO ACCEPT HIM IN DEFERENCE TO THE LAW OF MERCY, OR TO REJECT HIM IN OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW OF RITE? *We must make a choice. If we reject him, mercy suffers. If we accept him, the ritual*

suffers. Which are we to choose? The Lord Jesus has decided for us. Our choice must be that of our Father, and that of our Redeemer. Mercy! Mercy before sacrifice: the moral before the ritual!

3. The law of love is the paramount and supreme law and mercy is a portion of it. It was supreme even in the Jewish law, and much more in the Christian. Love to God and man is by the Lord Jesus declared to comprehend the law and the prophets. Especial prominence is given to this, so that he states it by itself as if it were his only command. "*A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another:*" It is to be, above any outward token or rite, the proof of discipleship. "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another:*" John xiii, 34, 35. And again, "*This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.*" "These things I command you, *that ye love one another:*" John xv, 12, 17. Another Scripture calls the law of love "*the Royal Law:*" James ii, 8. And wherefore royal? if it be not that, as a king, it takes precedence of all others? And that it ought to do so, is clear from another Scripture, "*Owe no man anything, but to love one another, for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*" "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore *love is the fulfilling of the law:*" Rom. xiii, 8, 10. He then that keeps the law of baptism *fulfils a part of the law*, but he that observes the law of love, *fulfils the whole law*. "*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:*" Gal. v, 14. The fulfilment of the whole law must therefore always be preferred to the fulfilment of a part only.

But the preference of *mercy*, strictly so called, is peculiarly fitting here. The especial sphere of mercy is to "*have compassion on those who are ignorant and out of the way,*" and it comes recommended by the strong claim of our own need of compassion from our

great and merciful High Priest, for that we ourselves also "are compassed with infirmity : " Heb. v. 2. The pædobaptist is on this point, as we would say it with all humility, but with all firmness, " ignorant and out of the way." Here then is the especial sphere of mercy. And since we ourselves are doubtless before God ignorant also and out of the way, the mercy we need for ourselves we are to show to others. " Blessed are the *merciful*, for they shall *obtain mercy*." Towards wilful disobedience we must take one line of conduct, towards conscientious error another : as saith the Scripture, "*Of some have compassion, making a difference :*" Jude 22. And where is the line of difference so obviously to be drawn, as between an error of the understanding and a sin of the heart ?"

4. Again, the unbaptized believer has the thing signified, but not the sign. Now this, by the apostle Paul's argument, shows him to be a Christian ; and, as such possessing a right to all the privileges of that glorious standing. For even of the great ritual command of circumcision under the law, Paul could say, that it was as nothing, when set in comparison of the thing signified thereby. Nay, *if one uncircumcised had the thing signified, it should be reckoned as though he had the sign.* " If the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not *his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision ?*" Rom. ii, 26. Here therefore the like case holds. These have the righteousness of Christ Jesus ; therefore the power of the thing signified carries the point against their want of baptism. "*For he is not a Jew that is one outwardly ; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh : But he is a Jew which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter ;* whose praise is not of men but of God." If this be true of the thing signified in Judaism ; how much more in our more spiritual faith ; especially when the sign itself is refused, not through wilful disobedience, but unconscious error in the understanding !

To set this yet more clearly before the reader, let us take an illustration. Suppose the directors of a fire-office to make a law, that every one who effects an insurance in their office, shall have one of their plates containing the symbol and name of their office, attached to his house. A fire takes place, and a person appears at the office to demand compensation. Is he insured? Yes, and for the sum he names. 'But had he one of the office-plates affixed to the wall of the insured house?' No—he had one made after his own directions. What now would you think, if the insurance office should, on this ground, refuse to pay the sum demanded? *Rigor of justice to the letter* it might be, but would it contain any portion of *mercy*? It is even thus with the unbaptized believer. All the promises of God in Christ are his, all the spiritual privileges of the faith are his. But he lacks the sign on the outside. May we keep him back then from a privilege which he demands? On what principle can it be done? On that of *mercy*? Nay, only by the utmost *rigor of justice*. *And can those who put in force this rule against him, stand upon the same themselves? Are they willing that God should treat themselves with such exactness of justice as they deal out to their fellow-Christian? If not, and if it be true, that "with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again," and "with what judgement ye judge ye shall be judged," then must he who knows himself to stand by grace alone, tremble at so stern a proceeding.* If there be "judgement without mercy to him that showed no mercy," (Jas. ii, 13,) where can the Christian stand who repels his fellow-Christian for want of sufficient knowledge? Stern justice is the principle of the law: but is not the principle of the Gospel rather exhibited in this—"SHOULDST NOT THOU ALSO HAVE HAD COMPASSION ON THY FELLOW-SERVANT, EVEN AS I HAD PITY ON THEE?" Matt. xviii, 33. The debt of baptism is indeed justly

due, but *are you called or permitted to exact it?* May you throw your fellow-servant into prison, till the hundred pence are paid? *Dare you do it, remembering the ten thousand talents forgiven you?* Especially dare you do it, when the debt is owing *not to you*, but to the King that will take account of his servants? Did he who forgave *your moral debts*, authorize you to exact *his ceremonial* ones? Remember rather the grace of the Gospel and forbear. “Not by *works of righteousness which we have done*, but *according to his mercy* he saved us.” Choose that principle on which alone the saved sinner can stand—mercy. Choose mercy, that you may be blessed: “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*” Choose with God: “*I will have mercy and not sacrifice!*”

5. So important is this principle, that the Lord Jesus again took it for his shield of justification, when the Pharisees complained of his conduct in eating with publicans and sinners, as contrary to the law. “Go ye,” says the Wisdom of God, “and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” Matt. ix, 13. “Go ye and learn.” The meaning is not caught at a glance, and many that are disciples are ignorant of that most weighty principle, in its broad and gracious intent. It means, that in every case, the spirit of the law is above its letter, and the thing signified far superior to its form. And if this be true of *Moses’ law of shadow and of rigor*, how much more is true of the *Gospel in its reality and its grace?*

See again how wide a sphere of action the Lord Jesus gives to this principle. He was eating with publicans and sinners; and passages of the Old Testament condemned the practice. But the Savior shews that even in this infraction of the letter he was keeping its spirit. ‘Go not into the way of sinners,’ said the law. Why? Lest thou get hurt to thy soul. But why did Jesus go? Because, while they could not make him evil, he could make them holy, and save them. Here then the spirit of law prevails over its letter. He is found among sinners,

only with intent to bless them. Grace is seen triumphant. And the spirit of the law is, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." While then the law on which the Pharisees insisted was, 'They are unclean, go not near, lest thou become unclean'—the law which the Savior preferred was that of mercy, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

May we not therefore stand boldly on the footing which the Savior has here set us? The Master ate with sinners, may we not eat with saints? The letter of the law was objected as being against him: he replies by shewing that its spirit was in his favor. So we plead: that while these saints are unbaptized, and the letter of the statute is against us, yet the spirit of the gospel, which is confessedly love, is wholly on our side. And that which makes this incident the more powerful and the more fitted to convince those who will listen, is, that the Savior uttered this sentiment, as the *law of his table*. It was while Jesus was sitting at meat in his own house at Capernaum, that the event occurred, which drew forth the memorable answer of our Lord.* We have then, in the Savior's answer, THE RULE OF ADMISSION TO HIS OWN TABLE, and it is the very same with that general principle which has before engaged our attention. "I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE." This principle was his shield against the reproach of eating with *publicans and sinners* at his own table. It must be the disciple's triumphant plea for communing at the Lord's table with the *unbaptized believer*. 'They are unclean,' was the sentiment of the objectors, 'and you become so by sitting at table with them.' 'Mercy before sacrifice,' is the Savior's reply. Both in the days of David under the Old Testament, and in the days of our Lord Jesus under the

* If the house be supposed to be that of Levi, the argument is but somewhat modified; and the principle quoted by the Savior will then be *his rule in the admission of guests to eat with him*. But for a full discussion of the point, see Greswell, Diss. on the Gospels. Vol. ii, Diss. 25.

New Testament, the supreme law of the Lord's table, is, "I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND NOT SACRIFICE."

The strict communionist pleads the *letter of the law*. We confess it, but plead the *provided exception as superior to it*.

6. Nay, our blessed Lord acted on the same principle. He was sent as a Jew to the Jews alone; he was "a minister of the circumcision." Rom. xv, 8. As such, when he sent forth the twelve, he "commanded them, saying, *Go not into the way of the Gentiles*, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to *the lost sheep of the house of Israel*." Matt. x, 5, 6. What then was his conduct, when a Gentile, a Syrophenician by nation, besought a cure for her demoniac daughter? At first he stood upon the ceremonial law of his commission. "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*." But when he beheld her faith, he could no longer resist. The thing signified overruled and overbalanced in his eyes the want of the sign, and he at once uttered his gracious sentence of mercy—"O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt." He had at first stood upon the law of *the children's table*. "It is not meet to take *the children's bread* and to cast it to dogs." But her plea prevailed. "Truth Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from *their master's table*:" Matt. xv, 21—28. She obtained the favor she desired—"Her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Here is the Savior acting on the very same principle which he commends to us. The letter of his commission said, 'Give nothing to a Gentile. You as a Jew are sent only to Jews.' But mercy said, 'Give to faith, the crumb it asks.' And mercy prevailed. Is not this example ample room and sufficient precedent for open communion? Shall not mercy give a crumb to faith still? Jesus gave to one that owned herself a dog. Will not you give to one whom you confess a child of God? Shall not the thing signified win the victory against the deficient sign? Yes,

the Savior, the Master of his own table, has not only given us the command as our guide, but actual example. The principle now illustrating, here receives its crowning victory. The action of Jesus loudly proclaims—"I will have mercy and not sacrifice." Before manifested faith, the ceremonial opposition of Jesus gave way; so will yours before like precious faith, if you have the spirit of your Lord.

7. We are now in a condition to compare with the rules and principles of the New Testament and our ever blessed Savior, the strict communionist's argument, which, whatever its form, is in the main but one; and is here given, as far as the writer can, in its most imposing form, and most concentrated energy. It runs thus. 'The risen Savior commanded immersion to all his believing followers, and his inspired apostles enforced it. They required it as the necessary condition of every candidate for the Lord's supper. Sustained by authority such as this, the law is divine, and no exigencies, no moral considerations can permit the Christian to dispense with any jot or tittle of it. To receive an unbaptized believer to the table of the Lord, were to violate the law of Christ, which defines the necessary qualifications of the candidate. It would bespeak a contempt of the authority of the great lawgiver and our Judge; and the Lord's supper, in place of being the scene of faith, obedience, or worship, would be only the field of rebellion. The church is bound to require strict obedience to the law of Christ; it must require entire conformity to the law of baptism, or be rebellious. It has not liberty to relax one iota of what Christ requires. It is a servant permitted only to carry into execution his orders; and, whatever be its apology, it is faithless and disobedient to its Master, if it swerve but a hair's breadth from his express revelation and recorded instructions.'

Such is the argument; and I trust its fallacy is now evident to the reader. It treats the question as if the only possible aspect of it were—What says the

direct law of Christ on the matter?—forgetting that the law of Christ, like the law of Moses, is of a *twofold* character: of which one portion is greatly superior to the other. The strict communionists forget that to the moral and spiritual part the Lord Jesus has given not only a designed prominence, as the great feature of his religion, but that he has invested it with supreme authority, whenever the claim of the ritual comes into competition with it. Hence their only inquiry is—What says the law of Christ?—dropping the word '*ritual*,' on which the whole question turns. But we have seen that the question properly is *a choice between alternatives*, not an iron-bound shutting up to one. We grant them all they require, and are able then to enter upon the question aright. They represent open communion as an infraction of the law, that is, of the *ritual* law, of Jesus. *We grant it*, as the Savior grants the disciples' infraction of the Sabbath to the Pharisees. But then on this very footing we rest our plea. True the ritual is broken, but the moral and spiritual law of the Redeemer, which is broken by you, is fulfilled by us. The law of love and mercy is paramount over every claim that can be made on behalf of ceremony or rite.

Their implied challenge, therefore, of rebellion, faithlessness, and disobedience, against the open communionist, falls to the ground. He is more perfectly obedient than they. He is acting in accordance with a *higher law than they*. He is fulfilling the whole law: he is keeping close to its *spirit*; while they are fettered by its *letter*, and are wounding mercy in an unadvised zeal for sacrifice. In thus throwing open the table to the believer, though unbaptized, they are not *lawlessly following the bent of their own will, but keeping strictly to the line traced for them both by the principles and example of their only Master and Lawgiver*.

On this principle turns the whole controversy. There are but two things to choose; and the choice must be

either according to the mind of God and of Christ, or against it. The question is in brief, Which are we to prefer? Mercy or sacrifice? The ceremonial or the moral? The law of baptism or the law of mercy? The letter or the spirit? *The strict communionist chooses "sacrifice."* We choose, with the choice of Christ and of God, "*mercy.*" To choose with the Savior must be the highest obedience; to choose with God, the truest holiness.

Mercy should have led the Pharisees rather to pity the hunger of the disciple, and to give him from their stores the needful provision, than to blame them. The ear of corn was but poor food after all. They need not have envied their poor brethren of Israel that slender repast. Even thus it is unbecoming the Christian to refuse to his unbaptized brother the fragment of bread and the sip of wine which the Lord has provided for his weary pilgrims. The supper of the Lord is a little sustenance for the hungry, that he may not faint by the way. Grudge him not that little. We have not too much of spiritual comfort on our way to glory. Deprive him not of the repast which God hath, in mercy, provided for his journey. Be not like the Pharisees, that reprovéd, but pitied not; that accused, but gave not. For you are not as the Pharisee, but born again of that divine Spirit, the first of whose fruits is love. Gal. v, 22.

Argument IV. Pass we then to the next plea of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is given by St. Mark alone—"And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:" Mark ii, 27.

The argument now before us insists on the essential difference between *means* and *end*: and rests upon the essential and necessary superiority of the end, above the means used in procuring that end. That which is sought for its own sake, must be greater than that which is desired only in order to something beyond itself. The Savior applies this to the present question. Which is the greatest, the ceremonial law or the moral

law? And the answer follows as a consequence of the principle. The moral law most evidently; for the ceremonial is only commanded as a means to the attainment of the moral. The sabbath was only one of a number of means commanded by God with a view to the benefit and edification of his people Israel. Evidently then the benefit of his people is superior to the command of the sabbath. In ordinary cases, the means and the end move on harmoniously together. But there are exceptions, and the varying circumstances of men at times bring the two into collision.

Therefore, says the Savior in effect, consider the *purpose* of God in ordaining these rites and ceremonies. Then you will steadily co-operate with God and retain a hold of his mind under all circumstances. For what purpose was the sabbath ordained? For the rest and refreshment of man—"That thy manservant and thy maidservant may *rest* as well as thou:" Deut. v, 14. How contrary then to the mind of God so to construe the law of sabbath rest, as to make it a day of enforced fasting, and faintness, and starvation to his people!

So with the rites of our holy religion. If possible, observe both the ceremonial and the moral laws of our Redeemer. But if it once comes to a choice between the ceremonial and the moral law of Christ, the ceremonial must give way. It derives all its value from its adaptation, through the mercy of God, to edify his people. So long as it is compatible with this, exactly obey it. But whenever, through the frailty of man or other circumstances, the *means* stand opposed to the *end*, and the believer is cast down, or stumbled, or made weak by the exaction of it, there consult the glory of God, by remembering that the end which in the mind of your heavenly Father, was the edification and advantage of his people—"The sabbath *was made for man*." The Lord's supper was ordained for the edification of the believer. Even thus is it true both of baptism and the Lord's supper. Both were

intended for the benefit and advancement of believers. He then sins against his Master's design, who so construes the ordinances delivered by him as to make the letter contradict the spirit, and the means baffle the end intended by them.

2. Or, to put it in another form, the ceremonial law of Christ is to be regarded rather as a *privilege and grant to his believing people*, than as a *debt* to be exacted to its last farthing, or a *law* to be enforced with rigor upon the unwilling. He who through error neglects or refuses baptism, *has lost a great privilege*. Shall I therefore, as far as I can or dare, deprive him of another privilege as great? It is a principle of law, that a sovereign's grants to a subject are to take the most favourable construction possible, towards him for whose benefit they are framed. So then in the case before us. The spirit of Christ's ritual is in one word, the edification of the believer; and *he* urges the ceremonies of Christ's institution against their spirit, who construes them to the disadvantage of the believer, or who presses them rigorously as *matters of justice*, whereas, they are in fact *the dictates of mercy, to be expounded by the law of mercy*. He is not an impious man, resisting the law; but an erring child, losing a privilege. The supper of the Lord was designed to unite the believer to the Church of Christ; he then abuses it who employs it to repel him from it. The same God whose mercy ordained common bread for the support of the natural frame, ordained sacred bread to strengthen the believer's soul, and, in furtherance of this end, the ritual must be set aside, if it interfere with God's design of mercy.

3. One design of the Lord Jesus in appointing the Lord's supper was to manifest the oneness of believers in himself. Hence, on the memorable evening of the supper, and in the room that witnessed that solemn scene, he five times expressed, in fervent prayer, his desire for his people's oneness. "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given

me, *that they may be one as we are.*" "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; *that they all may be one*; as thou Father art in me and I in thee, *that they also may be one in us.* The glory which thou hast given me I have given them, *that they may be one even as we are one.* I in them and thou in me, *that they may be made perfect in one:*" John xvii, 11, 21, 22, 23. So in the Epistles, where the Lord's supper is spoken of, its design of manifesting the unity of believers is also set forth. "The bread (loaf) which we break, is it not the communion (a joint partaking) of the body of Christ? *For we being many are one bread (loaf) and one body*; *for we are all partakers of that one bread:*" (loaf:) 1 Cor. x, 16, 17: And this is the more striking, as standing in contrast to the law of the table of God under the old dispensation. "Thou shalt take fine flour and bake *twelve cakes* thereof; two tenth deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row upon the pure table before the Lord:" Lev. xxiv, 5, 6. Moreover what is the *kind of oneness* which Jesus seeks? Unity of *form*, or unity of *spirit*? "Endeavouring to keep the *unity of the spirit* in the bond of peace:" Eph. iv, 3. Before the requirements of this, the claims of unity of form, even though divinely appointed, must retire.

The Lord's supper was intended to satisfy in some measure the longing of the renewed heart for communion. It was to be refreshment to him on his way, a manifestation of his adoption into the family of God through his admitted participation at his Father's table. It was designed in remembrance of the death of Christ, a service of thankfulness for the great ransom paid, and a looking forward to his return. And the death of Jesus is the gathering centre. "Jesus should die that he should *gather together in one the people of God that were scattered abroad:*" John xi, 52. In all this the unbaptized believer is able to join: and the service is adapted to invigorate his

love, and hope, and faith, and to edify him in every Christian attainment. May we then make the table of Christ, which was intended to be the meeting-place of those united by the Spirit to the Lord Jesus, a field from which any of the children of God are fenced out? May the table of intended unity be a perpetual memorial of schism and division? May we use what was intended to comfort the child of God to his discomfort? Dare we make the place of remembering the Savior's death the spot where any member of Christ shall most keenly feel his separation from the body of Christ? May we turn that which was designed to be the place of privilege for the believer, into a stumbling-block and a hindrance in his course? So to do were to resist the Saviour's argument. 'The Lord's supper was made for the believer; and not the believer for the Lord's supper.' Would you bring upon the disciples of Christ the curse levelled against the enemies of God? "*Let their table be made a snare and a trap and a stumbling-block.*"

4. The application of this argument of the Lord Jesus is direct, and it needs little consideration to discover its conclusiveness. Which is greater, the means or the end? The rite, or the edification designed by it? If baptism or the supper of the Lord be the *great end for which man was made*, stiffly uphold them, compel him to keep every jot and tittle of them. But if they be, however valuable as instituted by the Redeemer, nothing more than means to an end, then the end in view must take precedence of them, whenever they stand opposed to each other, as in this case they do. The Pharisees preferred the means to the end, and were careless how rigorously and disadvantageously to man they construed the rite. To preserve the boat, they would capsize the rower. 'Perish the man, rather than the sabbath should be broken!' The Savior rebukes their want, alike of mercy and of reasonableness. But is it not akin to this, if any uphold the integrity of the ritual of Christ to the wounding of the peace and com-

fort of any that are Christ's? Which is greater, the rite, or the believer for whose edification it was ordained? Is it lawful for the handmaiden to smite her mistress?

5. Neither of the parties in this question can rid themselves of deep responsibility. Yet it seems to be thought by the strict communionist, that he at least is secure. He is keeping the statute in its exactness. Aye, but the letter of the instruction may be, and often is, through force of circumstances, against the spirit of it. Nay, we claim, that to uphold the letter in this case, is to run counter to the expressly recorded judgments and decisions of our Master. It is to keep the inferior law, and to violate the superior. The two last arguments show, that both the great principles of the moral law, the love of God and of our neighbor, are united against the ritual. The dictate of the love of God is—Choose in this case, as your Father chooses, “Mercy and not sacrifice.” The love of man gives counsel to choose that which is most edifying to your brother: and you are thereby consulting God’s end and design when he instituted the rite. The supreme law must sit on the throne and sway the sceptre. The soldier must obey the sergeant in the field; but if the sergeant’s orders oppose those of the sovereign, it is obedience and faithfulness to refuse them. The ritual in its place is holy, just, and good, deserving of all compliance. Then only is it noxious when it would assume superiority to the moral law. Now strict communion inquires only, ‘What says the ritual?’ as though there were no other and loftier authority. We take a step onward and inquire, ‘What saith the law of mercy?’

Argument V. In conclusion, I would make a special application of the first argument of our Lord, and endeavor to show the extreme closeness of its bearing on the present controversy. The table of the Lord is not an absolute novelty, peculiar to this dispensation: both the Lord’s supper and baptism had their counterparts under the

law of Moses. In the tabernacle, as Paul observes, was "the table and the shew-bread:" Heb. ix, 2. It was named then the "table of the Lord:" Mal. i, 7, as it is called the "table of the Lord" now: 1 Cor. x, 21. What then was required in order to partake of that table and that holy bread? Ex. xxix, 33. A peculiar *birth*—to be of the family of Aaron. A peculiar *baptism*—"Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt *wash* (bathe*) *them with* (in) *water*:" Ex. xxix, 4. The letter of the law then, would have kept back from the table of the Lord under the Old Dispensation even a priest of the sons of Aaron, however complete he might be in other respects, *who was unbathed or unbaptized*. But Jesus points us, not only to *one unbaptized* who partook of the Lord's table with his approbation; but to one *who was not even a priest*. This blessed example then gives us, not only the general rule, but the very special exception we require. Do you ask for the example of any unbaptized person partaking of the table of the Lord with his acceptance and permission? While we might refuse the demand, by showing that the Redeemer's principles fairly include the case, we can comply even with this request. BEHOLD IN DAVID EATING THE SHEW-BREAD, AN UNBAPTIZED BELIEVER PARTAKING OF THE BREAD OF THE LORD'S TABLE, AND THE TRANSACTION APPROVED BY THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF!

Thus then it has been shown that the Savior has pleaded four classes of exceptions to the general rule of strict obedience to the ritual commands of God. From the instance of David's hunger, we learn that the law of need or necessity is superior to it: from the example of the priests sacrificing in the temple on the sabbath, we

* 'Bathe' is the proper meaning of the word, and it is so rendered frequently by the translators: Lev. xv, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 21, 22, 27, &c.

see that even another ceremonial law may, under certain circumstances, justly take the precedence: from the general principle that mercy is by God chosen before sacrifice, we learn that in every case of choice between the ceremonial and the moral, the moral is to have our ready preference: we find fourthly, that the ritual is always to be construed in accordance with its intention, which is the edification of the believer, and that this is superior to its letter; and lastly, we are able to show, the Savior's approval of the special point under discussion, the admission of one unbaptized to the table of the Lord.

Do any say then, that our first duty is to obey the will of Christ? Most true, we reply, and his recorded will is, that the moral law shall take precedence of the ceremonial whenever their claims stand in competition. The spirit of the law before its letter! The end of the law before its means! Mercy before sacrifice! We know what the spirit of the law is; we are sure that "the end of the commandment" and its "fulfilling" is love. This is the *power* of godliness, and must bear away the victory against its *form*. Especially are we of the latter days, to watch against the insidious creeping on of this predicted disorder—the preference of the form to the power. And O! may we ever guard against the introduction of the *rigor of law* into the *dispensation of grace*!

Vain is it to say, that if we yield any thing to the errors of the partially enlightened, that we are seeing with other men's eyes and making the infirmities of the weak our standard of truth. No, indeed we are not. Our law and standard still is the rule of our Master—who has taught us to prefer mercy to sacrifice, and the edification of his disciples before the exactitude of any ceremony whatever. We make the Savior judge in all things, and sit down at his feet. Harken then to his decision. It is solemn and decisive. Ye "have condemned the guiltless!" is his counter-charge to the accusers of his disciples. Their sentence is reversed: their choice is convicted of ignorance and

folly. Even while he admits in part their challenge of his disciples, he gives judgement against them. His judgement concerning his disciples' act is—**RITUALLY WRONG; MORALLY RIGHT!** We take up reverently the decision of our Judge, and, assured that in his sentence concerning their cause, open communion is established as the law of his table, we rest fully satisfied with his words of gracious authority; and while we confess it, **RITUALLY WRONG**, we proclaim it—**MORALLY RIGHT!**

THE END.