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CONCERNING
CLOSE COMMUNION
AN INVESTIGATION

BY

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WITH

A FOREWORD

BY

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"Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and
doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man,
which built his house upon a rock."

Our Lord Jesus.

FOREWORD

It is a sincere pleasure to me to write a brief prefatory note to Dr. McKnight's message to the young people of the Church on "Close Communion."

It is a great gift to be able to grasp fully and set forth convincingly the splendid truths of God's Word. This gift God has given to Dr. McKnight. His scholarly attainments have fitted him to go into the original languages and expound the true meaning of the Scriptures clearly and forcibly.

This booklet does not abound in popular illustrations. It is simply a Bible study of the subject in hand. Its only aim is to set forth the teachings of the Word on this interesting and important question.

The Covenanter young people of today desire nothing more heartily than to weed out all superficiality and get at the facts. This the author in the present instance has undertaken to do, in order to help his readers to clear thinking and obedient living.

I gladly therefore add this word of commendation.

J. D. EDGAR.

CONCERNING CLOSE COMMUNION

We are living in an age of science. The dominant spirit in our schools today is the spirit of research. Let it cost what it may, we want to know the truth. Also, if we are Christians, we feel impelled to accept the truth as soon as we discover what it is. Accordingly, what I should like to have my readers do in the present instance would be to come with me into the finest old Laboratory in the world, the Laboratory of the Revealed Will of God, that we may do a little investigating. We shall aim to be true to the scientific method, no matter to what conclusions it may happen to lead us. The Bible is always accurate on every subject with which it deals. To master what it has to say on any question is to know the truth on that question. In this spirit and with this conviction we propose to move forward in the study before us; whoever will may follow.

THE SUPPER AND THE GUESTS

To begin at once, then, let it be noted that the name which the Bible gives to this

holy sacrament is "the Lord's Supper" (I Cor. 11:20), and that it speaks of communicants as a band of Christians who gather at "the Lord's table" (I Cor. 10:21). In these verses the Holy Spirit, by the pen of Paul, teaches us that when we come to "the Lord's table" "to eat the Lord's Supper", we "cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils", nor "be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils". The Lord's table is not for everybody. Only Christians are to gather there; for while a person may sit at "the Lord's table" with "the cup of the Lord" in one hand and "the cup of devils" in the other, and be perfectly acceptable to Satan, he cannot do things in that way and be acceptable to Christ. The Holy Spirit makes it clear that the Lord is particular, very particular, about the kind of people who shall sit at His table.

But perhaps you are wondering what Paul meant by the "cup" and "table" of devils. A sentence or so will explain what he refers to. In that age social guilds and labor unions were very numerous — even more numerous, it would seem, than they are today. Each had its god, its sacrifices, its secrets which were called "mysteries",

and its festivals. At their festivals the members sacrificed to the divinity of which they had chosen to be the "patron saints", and drank to the god of their guild. From this you can see why Paul speaks of the "cup" and "table" of devils, and says that in such institutions the members sacrificed "to devils, and not to God".

With a practically similar situation before him David made virtually the same observation as Paul — "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips. The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup". "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord". "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the Lord's house" (Ps. 16:4-5; 116:13, 17-19).

Evidently there is a distance — morally an infinite distance — between the world and the church. Between the two, as we may say, there is a **great gulf FIXED**; so that the men of the world, so long as they

remain as they are, can never become acceptable guests at the Lord's table; and the members of the church, if they are true to their Saviour, can never become "partakers of the table of devils". This conclusion at least, no honest student of the Bible, one would think, would be disposed to deny.

A SUPPER FOR THE SEPARATED

We are ready then to proceed. The Lord's Supper, as the language cited above informs us, is to be served "in the courts of the Lord's house"; that is, in the church — not necessarily in a church building, but in the church as a divine institution. And the church, of course, is Christ's, for He speaks of it specifically as "my church" (Matt. 16:18). The word itself, in its origin, as everyone knows, means **called out from the world**. Paul compresses the whole thought into a single sentence, when he says, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6:17-18). And this again is but another way of saying what the Spirit of God had

said in Old Testament times, when the Lord commanded Moses to "speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). Thus the church has always been a body of people called out from the world, and its perpetual duty in all ages, has been to keep itself "separate" from the world, never allowing itself to "touch" the unclean things of the world, nor to drink of its cup or eat at its table.

Of the New Testament church, however, it will be necessary now to say a few things of a more particular kind. The Roman Catholics, you know, claim that their Church was the original church. The claim is not true. The Episcopal form of church government preceded the Roman Catholic form, and the Presbyterian form preceded them both.

PAUL THE PRESBYTERIAN

Paul, as every Bible reader is aware, directed Titus to "ordain elders in every city" in Crete (Titus 1:5), as he himself had been in the habit of doing "in every church" on his missionary tours (Acts 14:23). Notice that word "elders", if you

will, for in it the whole subject comes to a focus. The Greek word which lies behind it, if we turn it into English letters and Anglicize it, is **presbyter**, from which, of course, we have the noun and adjective **Presbyterian**. The elders or presbyters were the **teaching and ruling** officers of the New Testament church as it came from the hands of Christ and the Apostles. The **teaching** elders were also called "**ministers**" (I Cor. 3:5; 4:1), and "**preachers**" (I Tim. 2:7). Ordinarily, therefore, for brevity's sake, we drop the words "**teaching**" and "**ruling**", and designate these two classes of **presbyters** more simply as "**ministers and elders**". But since they were all of them "**elders**" or "**presbyters**", the whole Apostolic Church was Presbyterian, and nothing else than Presbyterian, in its original organization. Its government was a government by presbyters.

WHAT THE ELDERS ARE TO DO

Now the elders, of course, had their duties to perform. To them was committed the **oversight** of the flock. From Miletus, we are told, Paul "sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church", and when they had come together, he said, among

other things, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." They were to be on the alert all the time, they were to stand on guard continuously, because "**grievous wolves**" would enter in from the outside if they could, and even from among themselves on the inside men would "**arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them**". "**Watch therefore**", says Paul, and the tense he uses makes the exhortation as strong as it can be made — **give strict attention, be cautious, be active, UNREMITTINGLY** (Acts 20:17, 28-31).

Elders or **presbyters**, then, are the Lord's own officers, in the Lord's own house — that is, in the church, the **Presbyterian** church, the Lord's own institution, perfected by the Lord's own Apostles, for the salvation of men. Their work is to "**feed the church of God**", to keep "**wolves**" of every kind and description out of it, to **silence its own members** when they try to teach "**perverse things**" from their vantage ground on the inside — in a word, to make the church like Christ and keep it pure

even as He is pure (I John 3:1-3). And when a church fails to do this it is **censured** for its neglect. Christ held it "against" the Church of Pergamos, that it had not **expelled** those who had accepted "the doctrine of Balaam" (Rev. 2:14) — notice, the "**doctrine**" of Balaam; and "against" the Church of Thyatira, that it had suffered "that woman Jezebel" to "teach and seduce" His servants (Rev. 2:20) — notice, to "**teach**" them erroneous doctrine, and, as a consequence, **entice** them into immoral behavior. Plainly any doctrine or teaching that is fallacious or defective is subversive of the truth as it is in Jesus, and, according to the doctrine and teaching of Jesus Himself, is to be suppressed.

Elders, therefore, were never meant to be mere figureheads. They were not ordained solely for the purpose of handling the elements at communion seasons. They were to **take charge** of the church, to become responsible for its purity, its efficiency, its good name in the world; in short, they were to do their uttermost to see that it should always **measure up to Christ's own ideal in founding it.**

HOW THEY ARE TO DO IT

Nor are we without a specific example as to how their work is to be done. The Church of Corinth — see I Cor. 5:1-8 — was harboring members who were worse than heathen. It, of course, like all other New Testament Churches, was Presbyterian in its form of government. Naturally, therefore, in order to comply with the uniform teaching of the Apostles, it would have to act through its Session. Paul accordingly tells the officers what to do and how to do it. When the Session had come together, as a body, "in the name of the Lord Jesus", and "with His power" and authority had been constituted into a **court of God's house** — as the solemn formula, when used, as here, with judicial import, so happily sets forth and unfolds — it was to "deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh", with a view to the "saving of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus". In other words, it was to **exercise discipline.** It was to preserve the good name of the church of Jesus Christ in the city of Corinth by suspending from membership a man who was living in **open violation of the Seventh Commandment.**

THEIR WORK AT ITS ZENITH

Moreover, all this was to be done in connection with a **Communion Occasion**. And no wonder, for at these times it is, that the duties of the eldership are at white heat. Even the little children know that the Lord's Supper is the **New Testament Passover**. Into this mould, as it were, Paul pours his sentences in the present instance. He speaks of evil as "leaven". He calls Christ "our Passover". As they sit at His table they are to "keep the feast", the feast **in the New Testament sense**, "not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth". That is to say, that at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or at least with a view to celebrating the Lord's Supper properly, the Session at Corinth was to constitute itself into a court of God's house, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and "purge out the old leaven", so that they might partake of this holy sacrament in an acceptable manner. Every syllable in the passage is brimming over with evidence that Paul's eyes are resting, all the while, on the summit of the mount, the whole limit of which round about was

then and ever afterwards, as it had always been of old, to be "MOST HOLY".

THE LORD'S STANDARD

The Lord's officers, however, are not by any means left to their own fancies, let us bear in mind, in administering the Lord's Supper, but are to be guided solely by the **Lord's instructions**. And the instructions, as the case just considered serves to show, are explicit and absolute. They are summarily comprehended in the **MORAL LAW**. The church is to insist on the keeping of the **COMMANDMENTS**. The "whole limit" is to be **HOLY**, and the Commandments are "**HOLY, JUST and GOOD**", as Paul tells us (Rom. 7:12).

Did you ever notice how Christ Himself insists, and how the Holy Spirit through the writings of the Apostles insists, on this requirement? In fact, Christ made it one of the leading themes in His first **Table Address**. Part of that Address is recorded in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of John. How pointed and insistent our Lord was at that solemn moment! "If ye love me, keep my Commandments", He says. "He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and

he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him". "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings". "If ye keep my Commandments, ye shall abide in my love". "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you". (John 14: 15, 21, 24; 15:10, 14).

In this connection also, it should be noted in passing, the Lord Jesus made precisely the same demand on those who were **not** His followers. With Him there is no "respect of persons", that is to say, **no semblance of partiality**. What He demands of His own He demands of others, and what He demands of others He demands of His own. When the young man came to Him and inquired about the way to inherit eternal life, Jesus replied, "**Thou knowest the Commandments**", and followed it up by adding, "**KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS**" (Mark 10:19; Matt. 19: 17). At bottom, Jesus Christ, on such occasions, invariably made His hearers feel the awful majesty of the Moral Law, and that too in almost the identical way that Moses had done it long centuries before, when he said, "If a soul sin, and commit **any** of these things which are forbidden to

be done by the **Commandments of the Lord**; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity" (Lev. 5:17). The young man did not **know** that he was violating the law of God — he "wist it not"; yet he was "guilty" none the less. And what is more, the Lord Christ did not "hold him guiltless".

Indeed, it is quite remarkable how the New Testament writers labor to impress this truth on the mind. Listen to the Apostle John: "He that keepeth His Commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him"; also, "He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His Commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (I John 3:24; 2:4). Equally positive is Paul: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the Commandments of God" (I Cor. 7:19). Obeying the Commandments was everything. And so he said to the Church at Corinth, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person" — that is, the man who had violated the **Seventh Commandment** (I Cor. 5:13).

TEN ITEMS YET BUT ONE LAW

Yet the Seventh Commandment — and this ought to be emphasized more than

it is — does not demand obedience any more than does the First or the Second or the Third or any of the rest of them. James settles this question once for all. "If ye have respect to persons", he says — that is, if ye show partiality in failing to deal with all alike — "ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law" (James 2:9-11). **The Word of God teaches unequivocally that the Commandments are equally binding.** Obviously James could have used any of the others, as well as the Sixth and Seventh, for his illustration. Each Commandment is "holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). Together they constitute the complete standard for the regulation of life. This, at bottom, is the radical and determining reason why our sinless Saviour, at the institution of the Lord's Supper, made **the keeping of the Commandments** one of the essential features in that first far-reaching and sublime Table Address,

which culminated in the Intercessory Prayer. And His prayer on that occasion was for such — and only for such (John 17:9) — as had set themselves to keep His Commandments.

Thus far, then, we have seen that the Lord's Supper is to be eaten at the Lord's table, in the Lord's house, by the Lord's people, under the direct supervision and watchful oversight of the Lord's officers, who in every instance are to apply the Lord's law, without "respect to persons".

THE LORD'S WORK

Here you are doubtless beginning to raise a question. You want to ask how any officer, even though he be the Lord's officer in the Lord's house, can read another man's heart. Well, that is precisely **what he can not do**, and what the Bible warns him from ever presuming to do. **"The LORD looketh on the heart"** (I Sam. 16:7); that responsibility He shares with no subordinates. When it comes to discerning thoughts and intentions, and weighing character, that must be left to Christ alone. There is no other way to look at that question.

THE SESSION'S WORK

But that is not the question at issue. The question now before us is — What does a person **profess to believe**, and what **course has he adopted in the matter of conduct?** These things are not like thoughts and motives and intentions, but are **open to the eye of everybody.** If a man says, "I believe that Jesus Christ was a good man, but that He was nothing more than a man, like other men", you know what he believes on that point, do you not? If he spends his Sabbaths playing golf, you know how his **conduct** measures up with the requirements of the Fourth Commandment, do you not? The Courts of God's house, whether General Assemblies, or Synods, or Presbyteries, or Sessions, are commissioned to take account of what a man **professes to believe**, and of **the kind of life he lives, outwardly and openly, in the sight of men.** What the man at Corinth **believed** about the Seventh Commandment was wrong, and the way he lived was wrong; his views were wrong, and the conduct which grew out of his views was wrong; and the Holy Spirit, by the hand of Paul, censured the Church — notice, not the man first of all,

but the Church first of all — for keeping the man in its fellowship and allowing him to come to the communion table. (I Cor. 5:2).

THE COMMUNICANT'S WORK

By all means, to be sure, the inner life, as well as the profession of faith and the outward conduct, is to be inspected on such occasions. This is so self-evident that it ought almost to go without saying. To "clean hands" must be added a "pure heart". It is sheer hypocrisy to lift up "the soul unto vanity" and to "swear deceitfully" (Ps. 24:4). But inspection with this end in view must be conducted by **each person for himself.** Not in any outer Court, such as a Session, but in the inner Court of the spirit, in the Court of Conscience, is where this kind of work has to be done. Consequently Paul is inspired to say, "Let a man **examine himself**, and so let him eat" (I Cor. 11:28). This is why we have what we call our **Debarring Service**, that final step of **Warning and Invitation**, without which the Lord's table can never be properly approached. Here, at "this gate of the Lord", through which only "the righteous shall enter" (Ps. 118:20), we are confronted by a list of

sins, and are asked to question ourselves with respect to them, to "see if there be any wicked way" in us, and are urged, on discovering the evil tendencies that still lurk in the soul, to forsake them, that we may be led "in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:24).

THE LAST REVIEW

Finally from the Court of Conscience we step at last into the **Supreme Court**, where the Lord Christ sits, the Judge whose "eyes behold", and whose "eyelids try", the silent communicants, to whom He either says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved", or else, "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" Here there can be no shifting, no equivocating, no evading the issue, "for there is no creature that is not manifest in His sight", and consequently "all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13 R. V.).

Three Courts, each with its own work to do; and no communion perfect unless each Court does do its own work! Our noble, scholarly, Scottish ancestors were clear in their thinking and masterful in

their interpretation of the Word of God, and nowhere do we see the effects of their labors more beautifully exhibited than in the dignity, solemnity and impressiveness with which our communions are surrounded when we follow their leading.

With the **Supreme Court** and the **Court of Conscience**, however, we, as we have previously intimated, are not now concerned. Our interest is in the **Lower Court**, the **Constituted Court** of God's house, called the Session; for its duties, if properly performed, **pave the way into the other two**. What these duties are, therefore, is the aspect of the question which shall engage our attention from this point to the close.

BELIEF — THE GROUNDWORK OF LIFE

We have already seen that it is the province of Church Courts, from the highest to the lowest, to take account of **faith and life** — of what man is to believe concerning God, and of the duties which God requires of man. Not of conduct merely, let it be observed, but also and equally of doctrine. "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine", says Paul to Timothy (I Tim. 4:16). What a person believes comes out in his life. As a man

"thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). "I am here for my belief", a man once said when asked why he was sentenced to the Penitentiary. "O nonsense", replied his questioner, "we never put a man in jail in this country for his beliefs". "But you see", said the prisoner, "I believed that the officer was not on duty at the time." Between thought and behavior, you see, the connection is vital. From the beginning to the end, therefore, salvation proceeds "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (II Thess. 2:13).

But truth properly stated, as everyone knows, is doctrine. Accordingly, on hearing Christ, men marvelled, always and everywhere. They **"were astonished at His doctrine"** (Matt. 7:28). And "my doctrine is not mine", says Jesus, "but His that sent me" (John 7:16). Scriptural doctrine is the opinion of God on the subject in question, if we may advance that word "opinion" to such a dignity. And God's opinion is right. It is life to adopt it; it is death not to. This is why Christ says, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John 7:17). When we get

down to the essence of things, **doing and doctrine are identical**. With this in mind Christ admonishes His disciples to beware of "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" — by which, as they discovered, He meant "the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6,13).

Bad doctrine works like leaven. In its effects it is disastrous. It permeates everything. If you want to know the company it keeps, turn to the first chapter of First Timothy, the tenth verse. What is "contrary to sound doctrine" is there put on an equality with lewdness and lying and kidnapping and perjury. No wonder then that John says, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son". (II John 9). Doctrine must always be according to "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ", and "according to godliness" (I Tim. 6:3); for the Holy Spirit requires men to live so that they shall **"adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things"** (Titus 2:10).

Also, if we turn once more to that first

and divinely comprehensive Table Address of our Lord Himself, we shall find this aspect of the truth emphasized from the beginning to the end, and in the Intercessory Prayer as well. Notice how often that word "believe" occurs, and how insistent Christ is on the necessity of "abiding in the vine", and how He teaches that men are lost because they "believe not" on Him (16:9), and how the disciples finally caught the full import of His Address when they said, "By this we believe that thou camest forth from God" (16:30), and how Christ took occasion to refer to this fact specifically in His Prayer, when He said that the disciples had finally received His words, and had "believed" that the Father had sent Him (17:8). Doctrine and conduct were the very things that Christ Himself dwelt upon at the first Communion Table.

THE CHURCH'S NECESSARY TASK

Church Courts, however, cannot take account of faith and life, or, if you prefer it, of doctrine and conduct, **without opening the way for the human element to come in.** Here therefore is where error may find an easy entrance and gain a lasting foothold. For no Church is infallible. Any

Church may be mistaken with regard to one or many of its doctrines. It may have come to its conclusions by misinterpreting the Bible. Where matters of faith are concerned, its beliefs and doctrines may be wrong; where the standard of conduct is in question, its manner of life may be defective. **Nevertheless to exist at all every Church must take the risk.** It is impossible to evade it. It must define what its members are to believe, and what constitutes a deliberate, overt and observable violation of the Commandments. Consequently every Church in existence is known by the system of belief it holds and the code of conduct it prescribes.

Our Church, accordingly, like others, has assumed the responsibility. In thirty years from the date of this writing the Reformed Presbyterian Church will be four centuries old. If we could drop the word "reform", and use the word "reformation", and then call ourselves the **Reformation** Presbyterian Church, the name would exactly describe what we are. We are the continuation of the original Presbyterian Church of Scotland, of which the whole family of Presbyterian Churches in our day is named. Behind us we have

a splendid history. For four hundred years we have maintained our integrity, and kept our banner from trailing in the dust. The world has known us for what we are and profess to be. We have always been zealous for the honor of Christ, and for the maintenance of a high and noble plane of living. In proclaiming and defending our cherished ideals we have often had to stand alone, but the outcome has always vindicated our fidelity, and the foundation upon which we have been building our edifice is being shown more and more conclusively, as the centuries roll by, to have been made of material taken first-hand from the Word of God "which liveth and abideth for ever". As yet, at least, we have never had reason to be ashamed.

THE QUESTION AT STAKE

In assuming our responsibility to interpret the Bible, however, we have arrived at certain conclusions which other Churches are not willing to accept. The question is—Are we right at these points of divergence, or are we wrong? Is our interpretation of the Word of God accurate, or inaccurate? Have we as a **Church** a right to exist, or ought we to disband? If our position is right for us, it is right for

everybody; if it is not right for us, it is not right for anybody. Is it grounded on the Word of God, or is it not? Should we hold it, or give it up? These, as we shall see, are the questions that lie at the root of the subject with which we are dealing.

THE NEED OF INTEGRITY

Moreover, these are questions, one would think, on which a person's mind ought to be clear before he professes to endorse the position of the Church with regard to them. Surely if a man should ever be sincere, he ought to be sincere in making a profession before the world of what he believes about the Christ whom he has accepted as his Saviour, and of what that profession requires him to do in order to lead a consistent life. There is no room for duplicity in any true believer, and least of all, one would think, in the hour and article of declaring publicly and solemnly what his belief in Christ is, and how he thinks he ought to live it out in daily conduct. And as every Church pledges itself anew to its professed beliefs at its communion seasons, it would appear that every communicant ought to know in what light he will place himself before the world by taking a seat at the Lord's

table in this or that particular Church, and ought to be sure that he is willing to be measured by that particular Church's standards and ideals. And surely no one ought to be untrue in life to that to which he commits himself in the most sacred moments of his earthly existence, on the "Holy Mount". Surely every one ought to know what he is doing and to what principles he is pledging his loyalty, when he joins a Church and swears allegiance to its views at the Lord's table.

Up to this point, then, we have seen that the Lord's Supper is to be observed at the Lord's table, in the Lord's house, by the Lord's people, under the supervision of the Lord's officers, who, to the limit of their ability, are to see that every communicant, without respect of persons, is to order his life according to the demands of the Lord's law. We have also seen that to this end the Church, through these appointed officers, must assume the responsibility of defining what the Bible teaches men to believe concerning God and His plan of salvation, and of defining, as well, what the law of God requires of men in the way of conduct; together, of course, with the correlative duty of de-

fining what constitutes a violation of that law in any given case.

OUR CHURCH AND OTHERS

Now we, as a Church, hold much, of course, in common with all other evangelical bodies. In particular, our relationship with other Churches of the Presbyterian persuasion is close and vital. Our system of doctrine, in the main, is the same. We agree with the forefathers of us all to a remarkably wide extent. Unfortunately, however, — at least we regard it as unfortunate, — the other Presbyterian Churches have severed themselves from our company at certain points where we think that loyalty to Jesus Christ and His law ought to have held them with us. We think that the original Presbyterian Church of the Reformation was right, and that to abandon its position was accordingly a sin in the sight of God — a sin, in fact, which is serious enough to justify us in maintaining a separate existence; in order that, by that existence, we may consistently testify against the sin.

Now at length, we may become specific. What is it that makes us distinct from our nearest neighbors? In a word, we may say that it is our insistence on the First

Table of the Decalogue. We agree, in general, with all other evangelical bodies in "rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's", but we insist on the other hand that we ought to be equally careful in "rendering unto God the things that are God's."

OUR INTERPRETATIONS AND WHAT THEY INVOLVE

Deeper than all, and higher than all, and comprehensive of all, is the truth that lies embedded in the **First Commandment**. There is one Triune God, who is Lord over all and blessed for ever. He is our Creator. Therefore every man, and nation of men, ought to acknowledge Him, fully, explicitly, and sincerely. Not to do this is at least an infinite impropriety. It is one of those "foul affronts", of which Milton speaks, offered by coarse, ungrateful men to the holy and beneficent God. When mortal man leaves his Maker unacknowledged, and declines to recognize His "unspeakable gift" to a fallen race, he touches bottom. In Emerson's words, he is guilty of "the one base thing in the universe — to receive favors, and to render none".

Of this sin our nation, in common with

all others, is guilty. Deliberately, after the matter had been discussed both in the assembly itself, and throughout the country, while the question of ratification was pending, the Constitutional Convention decided to make no acknowledgment or recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ in the fundamental law of the land. Indeed, so bald and brazen was the decision that the best men of the country and the ablest ministers of the Gospel, at the time, were amazed and humbled at the way in which the Lord Christ was thus dishonored, and often said among themselves, in effect, in public and in private, "Why, what evil hath He done?" In the coolest manner possible this nation, at its birth, violated both the letter and the spirit of the command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me".

That is to say, we, as we are obliged to do, in one way or another, interpret the First Commandment. In doing so, we also, in the very nature of the case, pass sentence upon that which, in our judgment, constitutes a violation of the Commandment in the way of conduct. Our question is — Is it right, according to the teaching of the First Commandment, for any na-

tion to leave God, Christ and the inspired Word of the Holy Spirit **unacknowledged in its supreme and fundamental law?** Our answer is that it is not. Not to acknowledge the Triune God in the suitable and appropriate place where His authority and law ought to be recognized is "the one base thing in the universe", **on the part of any nation.** It is a sin of the first order. Any man, therefore, who by voluntary act lends his support to any instrument of government which thus deliberately insults the "Majesty on high" is not living as he ought to live. His conduct — based on the view or doctrine he holds on the subject — is in this regard reprehensible, for it dishonors Christ, whom the Bible calls, the "Governor among the nations" (Ps. 22:28). Our verdict therefore is, that at this point any man who loves the Lord Jesus will have to "stand in awe, and sin not" (Ps. 4:4).

THE OUTSIDER'S SIDE OF IT

This is our interpretation of the Commandment, and of what constitutes a violation of it. We may be wrong. We are not claiming either infallibility or inerrancy. We have no thought of being dogmatic or self-assertive. But as for ourselves,

we have no misgivings. To our minds Scripture proves the position. Accordingly our convictions are firm — **are fixed,** in fact. We are aware that there are some who do not see as we see; otherwise, could they see as we see, we would be at one in the matter, and our attitude would be the same. But unless a man sees as we see he cannot, if he is honest, unite with us. For when such a one knows that we take our seat at the Lord's table for the specific purpose, among other things, of pledging ourselves anew, "with uplifted hands", "in the great and dreadful Name of the Lord our God", to stand, even to the point of martyrdom, for the infinite requirements of the First Commandment, as we see **them,** — when he realizes this, I say, he **will himself,** if he is straightforward and intelligent, take the matter out of our hands and **decline** to sit with us. A **keen conscientious outsider** would shut us up to **Close Communion OF HIS OWN ACCORD.** Why should he want to sit with us as **though** he were pledging himself to that to which we are pledging ourselves, when he knows, and we know, and the world knows, and **the Lord** knows, that **he does not believe it?** When a man declines to

unite with our Church because he does not believe its principles, why should he desire to sit with us when we are in the act of pledging our loyalty and our lives to those principles? Surely the communion table is no place for anything like trifling or double dealing. In this respect at least we ought all, it would seem, to be of one mind.

THE INSIDER'S SIDE

Thus, it would appear, the outsider, from his angle, ought to see the matter. But how about us on the inside? Are we, as a Church, in earnest? Are we sincere and conscientious in our profession? Do we believe before God that we are right? If we do, we are bound to say to the man on the outside not only that it would be **inconsistent** for him to sit down with us at the Lord's table when we are pledging ourselves to what he cannot accept as true, but also and more pointedly, that his conduct, as we see it in the light of the First Commandment, is a **violation of the Moral Law**. Then, of course, if we are honest and faithful, we are bound to say to him further, that to vote, since in this instance it is a violation of the Moral Law, **is a sin**, and that, **being a sin**, it ought to keep him from the communion table,

whether in our Church or in any other. Our officers are to administer "**the law of the house**", and the first precept of the law is the First Commandment. And by **our very right to exist** we say that **the other Churches ought to do the same as we do**. That is, we say that they too ought to honor the First Commandment by forbidding their members to support an unchristian Constitution of civil government. If it is a sin for us, it is a sin for everybody; for a sin is a sin no matter who commits it. This, I say, is what we hold, if we think the subject through, and believe with our hearts what we profess with our lips.

IMPARTIALITY IN APPLICATION

Furthermore, as **Christ Jesus** is no respecter of persons, we ought not to be, either; for, to be a Christian, if it means anything, means to be like Christ. This, that passage from James, already quoted, settles in so many words. And this our Church has always recognized. When one of **our own members** violates this commandment in the way referred to, he lays himself open to discipline. A faithful Session will prohibit him from coming to the Lord's table until he has confessed his sin,

given evidence of repentance, and promised not to be guilty of it again. If, then, the Church prevents its own members from communing if they commit this sin, why should it not prevent outsiders from communing when they commit the same sin? Why should the Session practice "respect of persons"? It is the violation of the law of God that is in question, and surely it is as bad for one man to transgress a divine command as it is for another. Believing this we apply "the law of the house", as Ezekiel calls it, to prospective communicants, no matter who they may be. In reality we go below the question of the Church to which a person belongs to the question as to whether or not he is obeying the Ten Commandments.

ADDITIONAL INTERPRETATIONS

The same line of reasoning lies at the basis of our position on Psalmody, and on Instrumental Music in divine worship, and on Secret Societies. And here again we are at one, fundamentally, with the whole Presbyterian body. We all accept the Westminster Standards. These declare that the Second Commandment forbids "all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious wor-

ship not instituted by God Himself", and anything and everything that would tend toward the corrupting of "the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it", whether such devices are "invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever". As for the Third Commandment, they declare that it forbids "the not using God's name as is required; and the abuse of it in an ignorant, vain, irreverent, profane, superstitious, or wicked mentioning or otherwise using His titles, attributes, ordinances, or works". It would be difficult to make language stronger or more explicit.

Now our Church holds that this interpretation of those Commandments binds the people of God to the exclusive use of the Psalms in divine worship, and puts them under solemn obligation to sing praises, as in apostolical times, without the use of musical instruments, and requires them to renounce the system of secretism as a system of darkness altogether unworthy of such as are called of God to be "the light of the world".

Thus it is our interpretation of the first three Commandments — reinforced, of course, from the rest of the Bible — that gives us our distinctive position as a Church. If our interpretation is not right, we ought to disband. If it is right, our Sessions ought to see that it is honored in every particular by every person who proposes to come to the Lord's table under their jurisdiction. The "whole limit" is to be "most holy". To the officers has been committed the charge, by the Lord Jesus Himself, of keeping it so. If they are faithful, they will do it — and that, too, as the Word of God requires, "without respect of persons". This is one place where sentiment has no right to intrude; obedience to orders is what the occasion demands, and the demand is absolute.

All denominations have to reckon with the Ten Commandments. All alike have to assume some attitude toward the Moral Law. Some treat the matter very loosely and unsatisfactorily; some are more rigid, some are less. We, in common with all others are under the necessity of taking a stand. We have done it. We have interpreted the Law, and what constitutes its violation, to the very best of our ability.

We have published our findings. The world knows our position. We pledge ourselves to be true to those findings and to that position every time we go to the communion table. We aim to be strictly impartial. We are no firmer with outsiders than we are with our own members. "Here is the law of the house", we say; "Christ requires us to see that the law is observed; we have no option but to obey orders".

BY WAY OF SUMMARIZING

What our findings are — I mean those findings which keep us distinct from other Churches — may be fairly, yet succinctly, set forth in four brief statements.

We hold, whether rightly or wrongly, — yet as a matter of fact we do hold, — that to support an unchristian Constitution in its unchristian condition is a sin, and such a sin as, unrepented of, should prevent a person from sitting down at the Lord's table, either in our Church or in any other.

We hold, whether rightly or wrongly, that to undertake to praise God with songs other than those which the Holy Spirit has inspired for that purpose is a sin, and

such a sin as, unrepented of, should prevent a person from sitting down at the Lord's table, either in our Church or in any other.

We hold, whether rightly or wrongly, that to introduce instrumental music into the New Testament worship, when the Apostles organized that worship without it, is a sin, and such a sin as, unrepented of, should prevent a person from sitting down at the Lord's table, either in our Church or in any other.

We hold, whether rightly or wrongly, that union with secret societies is a sin, and such a sin as, unrepented of, should prevent a person from sitting down at the Lord's table, either in our Church or in any other.

The fact is that we find ourselves under obligation, in these respects, to bear a faithful testimony not only to the world, but to such other Churches also as differ with us on these intrinsically important questions. At the communion table our testimony comes to its climax. Shall we weaken where we should be firmest? Shall we waver where we should be immovable? Shall we make it apparent on the Holy Mount that we are sincere in our

conclusions and mean to maintain them to the end, or shall we choose the Holy Mount to make it apparent to other Churches and to the world, that we only half believe what we profess? Here, of all places, it would seem, we ought to aim to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

Evidently this is not the place to defend our position as a Church, as it comes to light in our distinctive principles. All we needed to do here was to state the principles fully enough to bring the situation clearly into mind. And this, we assume, has been done.

A CASE IN POINT

An incident that happened a few years ago in my ministry might be cited in this connection, it seems to me, as an apt illustration. One of the ablest men I ever knew — the pastor of a neighboring congregation — accosted me on the street one day and said, "One thing about your Church I could never understand, that is, your position on Close Communion". In reply I said, "In point of principle our views on that question are the same as yours". "How is that?" he said. "Suppose", said

I, "that one of your members should strike a child down with an ax and kill it, would your Session allow him to go to the Lord's table at the next communion?" "Well", said he, "I should hope not". "Why?" I asked. "Why, because he violated the Sixth Commandment", he said. "But", I protested, "he might hold that what he did was not murder". "Oh", said my friend, "we would not leave that to him; we would take that matter into our own hands". "You mean to say", I said, "that your Session would assume the responsibility of interpreting the Sixth Commandment and also of passing judgment on the man's conduct, as to whether it was a violation of the Commandment thus interpreted". "Precisely", he said. "Well, then," said I, "why should you object to our Sessions when they do the same thing with respect to the First Commandment, and the Second, and the Third?" "Oh, I see", he said, "and what is more I believe you are right; it never occurred to me in that light; with you Close Communion means that the Reformed Presbyterian Church intends to honor the Moral Law as the Church apprehends it, before anyone shall be per-

mitted to take a seat at the Lord's table under its jurisdiction and oversight". "Yes", said I, "that is the exact situation as we see it"; and the man was satisfied. After all, to any person who really stops to consider, it is only a question of clear thinking and a sincere purpose to follow orders.

NO THOUGHT OF SUPERIORITY

One thing further must be said, for at this point it is that so many stumble. There are those who feel that by the practice of Close Communion we are claiming to be better than other Christians. Such a view is based on a total misconception of the entire subject. As we have already seen, the question of character is not at issue. Christ takes care of that. We have nothing at all to do with this aspect of the case, except perhaps indirectly by implication. That matter is handled in the Supreme Court, to which reference has been made, and in no other. As to whether those whom we exclude from the Lord's table are better or worse at heart than we are, we have no means of forming a final judgment. God alone knows that. As Christians they may be far superior to us who are sitting in judgment on their public

profession and their conduct; oftentimes, no doubt, they are; at all events, let us hope that they are never worse. But that question, as we have said repeatedly, is **not in the balance**. What we have to do with is the **profession** the communicant makes, and the **way he lives**. Christ does **His part by looking into the heart**; He expects us to do ours, and He tells us that the way to do it is by **taking account of faith and conduct**. What He entrusts to **our care we ought to do**. We ought to do it in the spirit of meekness and humility, but we ought to do it. For having done, or not done, what we ought to have done, the King, when He comes in to view His guests, will hold us responsible. The work of the Lower Court will be reviewed in the Court of last appeal, where the test is, and always has been, that a man "be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2).

ALLIED CONSIDERATIONS

Since this little treatise is directed more particularly to the young men and women of the Church, it may not be out of place to mention a method or so of **assailing our position** — and usually at this, its very citadel — when even the appearance of logic and sound reasoning has to be aban-

doned. We are told, for example, that "if we want to hold our young people, we will have to give up this or that custom, principle, doctrine or requirement." For my part, however, I have never known any defection to start with the young people. They are naturally uncompromising. It is a rare thing to find a timeserver in their ranks. What they are anxious for, with few exceptions, is to **know the truth**. Emerson seems to me to sound the keynote of all beginners in the Christian life, when he says,

"So near is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When duty whispers low, 'Thou must',
The youth replies, 'I can'."

But the most deadly opponent of the truth is the person who never feels at home unless he is talking about what he likes to call **non-essentials**. Whether this tendency arises from a shallow mind, or from a more serious source, namely, a lack of integrity, it is sometimes hard to say. But that it is subtle and far-reaching in its effects, no one, if he has ever acquainted himself with the agonies through which the Reformed Presbyterian Church has had to pass in its gardens of Gethsemane

every now and then along the path of history, will think of questioning.

Face that method for a moment, if you will. And remember, to begin with, that in all these things we are dealing with **THE REVEALED WILL OF GOD**. Now, when the only wise God reveals His will to poor sinful mortals such as we are, how much of what He says is "non-essential"? Test the argument intelligently for just a minute. Why, the sacraments themselves are "non-essential". Infants by the thousands, dying in infancy, unbaptized, are saved. Many a man has accepted Jesus Christ as his Saviour, and yet has never had an opportunity to sit at the Lord's table. Well, if persons can be saved without the sacraments, are the sacraments essential? Do you want to reason in that way? That is logic, unerring logic. The conclusion, however, is a fallacy. Why? Why, because the premise on which it is built is rotten. To be essential a thing must be essential in its place and for its purpose. The sacraments are NOT essential to salvation, but they ARE essential to the revealed, and therefore to the perfect, means of grace. So also this or that about the sacraments may not be essential, in the

sense that these institutions would lose their entire significance in case the item in question should be omitted, and yet at the same time the item may be **absolutely** essential in order to comply with the revealed, and consequently the proper, method of observing the institution. The question ought never to be — How much of the divine instruction may we venture to sidetrack, and still get by with it? but rather — How completely can we align ourselves, in every particular, with the revealed will of God?

One of Paul's distinguishing characteristics was his **instinct of gentility**. "Let all things be done decently and in order", he says. In the Greek the exhortation is surpassingly delicate — **Let all things be done in good form and in file** (I Cor. 14:40). With the mind's eye one can almost see the communicants going forward quietly, one by one, to take a seat at the Lord's table. To a man like Paul the whole arrangement was unique and sublime. He had "received" it in its minutest appointments from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself (I Cor. 11:23). Every particular was essential in its place and for its purpose. Paul took no liberties. Any touch

of his own would have been unhallowed. In his judgment it would not have been "good form" to meddle with what he had "received of the Lord".

Refinement, you see, counts for much if the soul is refined. It is not safe to lay the hand on the Ark, even to steady it. In spiritual things **nothing** is insignificant. Everything demands obedient and delicate recognition. Nothing that God instructs us about is non-essential. Otherwise, why should He have given the instruction? And concerning the Lord's Supper, and how to observe it, His instructions are singularly specific, comprehensive and painstaking. What a pity it is that they should ever be meddled with by triflers!

Oftentimes, as a matter of fact, the dignity, the solemnity, and the inner and profound significance of the Lord's Supper are all but lost. Contrast, if you will, the two following methods of observing this holy sacrament. "Methods" — bear in mind; for the other aspects of the question have already been dealt with in the body of the discussion. Here we have to do with "the forms thereof", as Ezekiel would say; or with the way in which to administer

the Supper "in good form", as Paul would phrase it.

In a Ministerial Meeting in Greater Boston some time ago a pastor took occasion to tell us how he dispensed the Lord's Supper. He was describing the exhibition which, as he said, he had "put over" at the preceding Easter. "I took two loaves of bread", he informed us, "shaved off the crusts, broke the remainder into small fragments, and placed the broken morsels on two large platters" — a method, it occurred to me, which should at least be fitted to suggest the predicament of Lazarus "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table". The bread, thus manhandled, was passed back and forth among the pews, in much the same manner, he assured us, as the ushers pass the collection baskets. Afterward the trays of wine were distributed in the same way. On being asked whom he permitted to partake of the elements, he answered, "Everybody". "You mean", said his questioner, "that none are admitted to that part of the Church except such as have made a profession of faith in Christ". "O no", he said, "I mean that the Lord's Supper is served to all who are in the

Church at the time, regardless of whether they have ever made a profession of faith in Christ or not". Thus he was at least consistent. When he broke away in one point, he broke away in all. He evidently believed in making his substitute for the divine institution complete. His description had the suggestiveness, if not the aroma, of the cafeteria or one-armed restaurant. His method saved time and trouble, and put Paul in the pantry. Whether the communicants were professed friends of Christ or not was a matter of indifference. One would have thought that he was trying rather to imitate Christ in feeding the "five thousand", and had never either seen or heard of a communion table. When men begin to trifle the sublimity of the institution is gone.

Now note the other method referred to. During my Seminary years I went one Sabbath morning to the old First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh. As I entered the door I was asked whether I was a member of that Church, and was directed accordingly to the gallery. Being early I walked down to the front row, where I could see and hear everything. It was their Communion Sabbath. Dr. Purves

was the pastor. Up the long centre aisle and extending out to the two sides of the building in front of the pulpit was a magnificent Communion Table, covered with fine linen pure and white. At the head of the table, or rather of the three tables, stood the smaller one with the elements. The appearance presented was of a great white cross stretching its arms invitingly to the whole human race. At length the Action Sermon, uniquely appropriate, was ended. Then the Words of Institution were explained, and the members were invited "to come forward to the Table of the Lord". Slowly and "in good form" they "filed" into those tables, and after the elements were dispensed Dr. Purves stood with hands clasped and eyes closed for what seemed to be ten or fifteen minutes—until the elements were distributed and the elders had returned and were seated—and then began his Table Address with this ever-memorable remark, "This solemn silent rite, instituted by the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed, has come down to us through the centuries to remind us of the love of God for a lost and ruined race". And so he went on to the end, thrilling

my heart with every sentence. When he had finished, the communicants, "in good form and in file", left the table. There was no haste and no delay. They had come together to celebrate the dying love of the Lord Jesus, and they had time to do it. Seated in that gallery I "watched them there", and as I sat every fibre of my being quivered with ecstasy. I was in the house of God. I was at the gate of heaven. As for their method of observing the sacrament, they were careful to "keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them" (Ez. 43:11); and no outside observer could by any possibility fail to realize that they were showing "the Lord's death till He come". How I wished during those hallowed moments that they had been standing shoulder to shoulder with us on the other matters also!