

COMMUNION

FAITH

Essential to the

COMMUNION

OF

CHURCHES.

A

LETTER.

Hæresibus Unitas Fidei scinditur.

PAREUS.

[By Jonathan Pareus]

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S A L E M

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A

L E T T E R.

Rev'd and Dear S I R,

YOU will easily remember the free and friendly conversation we lately had together upon the topic of the communion of churches. You seemed a little stumbled that we had no communion with such a particular minister and church, since you understood both they and we were agreed in the essential doctrines of religion. I told you that the minister of that congregation had not asked me to preach for him upon any occasion whatever—that I did not know the difficulty on his and his people's side—But I had a difficulty, I would be glad that you, or any other person could remove out of my way—I honestly told you my difficulty, but you offered me nothing that gave me any satisfaction, in that affair which very nearly concerns me, and every other honest man.

Therefore, according to the antient laudable custom, I now appeal to the common people ; and am determined

ed not to withdraw my appeal, if they will not poison their understandings before they hear me out. If they condemn me, I expect they will offer some persuasive arguments for my conviction: or, if they have not thoroughly considered the matter, I hope, in a short view, to give them evidence sufficient to satisfy them that I am right in my sentiments.

In the interview with my reverend and worthy friend, I told him my opinion, which I shall now assert to be an important truth, viz. that A COMMUNION OF FAITH IS ESSENTIAL TO THE COMMUNION OF CHURCHES.

By this assertion I do not mean that churches may not hold occasional communion in sealing ordinances, where they vary in some modes of administration and government. If I have not greatly mistaken the matter, it is the will of God that the unity of the church should not be laid upon such points; but that christians who differ in such things, should have inward charity, and outward communion with one another. To shut out others from our communion that differ from us only in those things, which we believe are not essential articles in religion, appears to me very dishonourable to Christ, and the design of his gospel. The Apostle *Paul* in Rom. 14th chap. expressly cautions against judging and condemning one another, on account of our different opinions and practices respecting non-essentials. "Who art thou," a poor, sinful, ignorant creature, "that judgest another man's servant," so as to pass sentence of condemnation upon him, for using his liberty in these matters. Tho' I may be persuaded that one sort of church government is nearer the original plan, than another, yet I apprehend there is no reason from thence for denying occasional communion to those that differ from me in that respect, provided they walk charitably. Setting up uniformity in all points, as essential to christianity and communion, directly leads to persecution

persecution and lording it over God's heritage: and also to undermine the great and weighty matters of the kingdom of God, which we pretend to favour. If we set up non-essentials as terms of christian communion, we teach others to turn all religion into empty show and formality. Whatever distracted the christian church more, either in former or later times, than such amazing conduct? But we need not go abroad, nor to former days for flagrant, plentiful evidence to our purpose. At this time the *Anabaptists* seem to place their ALL in a mere mode, and compass sea and land to proselite weak people over to it: And thus zeal for a party goes to make up their great deficiencies in christianity.

But, God be thanked, I hope the better part of our common people have better sentiments, and at present under better direction. Therefore, I can freely tell them what I mean by a communion of faith being essential to the communion of churches. Tho' I abhor a rigid enjoining uniformity in every *Punctilio*; yet I cannot see that communion with those ministers who are known to teach the doctrines which calvinistic divines do believe are subversive of christianity, or do not open and enforce what we call the peculiar doctrines of grace, may be admitted to ministerial communion, nor those that adhere to them be admitted to occasional communion in the Lord's supper. Hence you may easily see that I think those who ought to have communion in our churches must profess and teach, "the innate, universal and sinful depravity of the heart, derived from *Adam*, the first transgressor—that no man can recover himself to the favour and image of God—that Christ alone is Mediator in the covenant of grace—that his righteousness is the only moral ground of a sinner's justification—before God—that he is really God and man, in two distinct natures, and one person forever—that he is to be

“ be believed, trusted in, received and submitted to, as
 “ our teaching prophet, atoning and interceding priest,
 “ & governing king—that no man will receive him with
 “ an whole heart, in the whole of his character, but he
 “ only that is effectually called by the unfrustrable grace
 “ of God—that the spirit of God is appointed to call in
 “ the elect—and that all who are called according to the
 “ divine purpose shall certainly obtain eternal life.”

There are some instances of scripture doctrine, which we profess to believe ; and those other doctrines which are connected with them, we look upon fundamental articles of christianity. I do not pretend to reckon them all ; but they are all found in those protestant confessions of faith that I have some acquaintance with. And, in general, they appear to be necessary to be preached by ministers, and professed by all christians as essential to salvation ; and for that reason necessary to the communion of churches.

Now, as long as we profess to believe such like articles to be fundamental to christianity, how absurd is it for us to hold ministerial or sacramental communion with those that deny them ? I am far from being alone in my sentiments upon this subject. Dr. Owen, Dr. Watts, Mr. Burgess, Mr. Baxter, and many other renowned divines in the christian church, have asserted that a communion of faith is essential to the communion of churches. And indeed, if we hold ministerial or sacramental communion with those that maintain doctrines contrary to godliness, we introduce confusion into the church, and make the body of Christ a monster. This was one method that *Julian* the apostate took to overthrow and root out the christian religion from his empire ; and it was a method so much the more dangerous, the less it appeared so.—What more effectual way could any man take, to bring christianity into contempt, than to mix light and darkness,

Christ and Belial, orthodoxy and heresy, in one communion ?

But, to prevent such an overthrow by communing with those who, under the profession of christianity, introduce principles subversive of it, or despise its essential doctrines, we have the bright example of the ministers of the seven *Asian* churches set before us, for our imitation. They are highly commended (Rev. ii. and iii. chap.) for their zeal in opposing error, and refusing church-communion with those who embraced corrupt doctrines, and their adherents. Their zeal against corrupters of the word of God, appears to be according to knowledge, by their diligent search into the principles of those, who “ said they were apostles, and were not.” They found them out to be impostors, and not the true ministers of Christ. They bravely bore up under the opposition they met with from the false apostles, and would not permit them nor their followers to continue in their holy fellowship, but stood their ground against all contradiction.

And it is manifest, if I mistake not, that the apostles of our Lord, in their epistles, are, to the full, as zealously engaged against false doctrines and their supporters, as I pretend to be. Let us attend to two or three evidences of it, when *Hymeneus* and *Alexander* had “ made shipwreck concerning faith,” or fallen from the great truths of the gospel, and broached essential errors, they were cast out of the communion of the church, to secure the honor of Christ and his gospel, to humble their pride and bring them to repentance, & for a warning to others : See 1 Tim. i. 20. And the same apostle (Tit. iii. 10.) expressly commands us to *reject*, instead of holding communion with those that embrace dangerous errors, which tend to overthrow the christian religion ; reject communion with them ; avoid their company ; caution others against them, and have nothing to do with sectaries & their

their stamp. Surely then, the boundless exercise of the communion of churches which some have unhappily fallen into, is not in obedience to the command of Christ, but in contradiction to it. 'Tis not the way to reclaim offenders, nor to preserve or restore unity, but to widen breaches and create new ones : for it opens a wide door, to despise the pure gospel of Christ, to grieve the generation of God's children, and encourage men of corrupt minds to domineer. Besides, *Paul*, in his epistle to the Romans, (Chap. xvi.) in order to cultivate and maintain christian love, does earnestly intreat and exhort his christian brethren to observe with diligence and attention the first approaches of false teachers, and their adherents. Verse 17th, " I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, *contrary to the doctrine* which ye have learned ; and avoid them." This seems to be a seasonable exhortation, after the apostle had been opening, proving and enforcing the main doctrines of the christian religion, and vindicating of them from the cavils of false teachers. The epistle contains a summary of those doctrines which he had more fully explained and cleared up to the church at *Rome*, whilst he was with them. Now he tells them, those that would innovate and teach any other doctrine are to be discredited and marked out, as enemies to the church of Christ. The like council is given in 2 Thess. iii. 14. But more fully enjoined, 1 Tim. vi. 3. " If any man teach otherwise," or different from the doctrine that I have preached, " and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness : " i. e. if he don't give his assent and consent to the fundamental articles of christian doctrine : " from such withdraw thyself," i. e. have nothing to do with such men ; reject their principles, practices and conversation ; withdraw as far from them, as they have withdrawn from the

the Truth. So the apostle *John*, having given a caution against deceivers, says, in his second Epist. v. 10. " If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine ; " i. e. the pure doctrine of Christ, " receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." For he that goes so far as to countenance him in his pernicious errors, is accessory to, and by just construction a partner with him in his errors : He helps him forward, and encourages others to fall in with him.

I could easily adduce more witnesses to the truth of what I have asserted, and enlarge upon those already offered : but it is apprehended, that people of common understandings and careful attention, will think enough has been said already for the conviction of all the impartial, who are sincerely willing to obey God, that a communion of faith, in the explained sense, is essentially necessary to the communion of churches.

Hence, I think, it follows, that those churches, which profess calvinistic principles, as essential doctrines of salvation, ought to be deemed highly to blame, if they should hold communion with *arian*, *pelagian*, or *arminian* churches, because their principles are subversive of the christian faith ; and such a practice would naturally tend to overthrow the christian religion. 'Tis no difficult thing to see who they are that hinder union and communion among those that profess the orthodox faith. If it were possible for an angel to come down from heaven ; be he who he may, or his pretensions what they will, if he deliver any system of doctrine contrary to the fundamental principles of christianity, he must be rejected.— Who are they then, that hinder the holy communion of churches that are agreed in fundamentals ? 'Tis granted that circumstantial are no bars in the way : methinks the impartial would be willing to agree to any thing that is reasonable ; but I don't see how it is possible to hold communion with those that grasp at communion with the

the most heterodox churches in the land. Instead of communion, such offenders ought to be cut off : and if, instead of pastoral associations, scriptural confociations were agreed upon and complied with by the orthodox in this province, it would be a good means to root out heresy, at least to weaken its power. But if professors of calvinism will open their arms and embrace those that adhere to the most corrupt doctrines, breaches, it may be expected, will grow wider and wider, and many congregations, that have a measure of peace, will be filled with distractions.

But what shall be done to remedy this great and growing evil ? Answer, Having refused communion with those that deny what we look upon fundamental articles in the christian religion, let those who are agreed in calvinistic doctrines, heartily embrace each other, tho' they should think and act differently in lesser matters. Let not different modes of administration or government be any hindrance to ministerial or sacramental communion. It is being united in doctrines and their efficacy, that are the closing principles. I look upon it a great favour, that the difference, with regard to many, is not in the essential doctrines of christianity, tho' they may differ in small matters. Now seeing there are essential doctrines, wherein the godly do agree, let unity and communion be nourished among them, and that will tend to produce the fruits of peace and love. If we should happen to disagree in some things of less consequence, the apostle *Paul* says, (Phil. iii. 16.) " Nevertheless, whereto we " have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, " let us mind the same thing ;" in opposition to those that are enemies to the great doctrines of christianity, or that trifle with them.

If ministers and people would observe these things, and maintain brotherly love in their hearts, and express it in their

their visible conduct ; if they would strive together, in promoting the kingdom and glory of Christ ; if they would all agree in one end, which is to set forward the work of God ; if people would esteem and cheerfully submit to their church officers, and officers would watch for souls as those that must give an account to God ; if these things were strictly attended to, and conscientiously put in practice, we have reason to hope that our breaches would soon be healed, communion and peace restored, and that God will bless, and cause us to see good days. But if, on the other hand, we lose the sentiments of humanity, and bite and devour one another, there is great reason to fear, lest the God of love and peace forsake us, and our church-state be brought to utter ruin.

Your's, &c.

Massachusetts-Bay, Aug. 28, 1770.

