

AN EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE  
OF THE TERMS OF COMMUNION,  
ADOPTED BY THE  
COMMUNITY OF DISSENTERS.

*By the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, 1801.*  
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 3.

EXPLANATION, &c.

INTRODUCTION:

CONTAINING SOME REMARKS ON THE PROPRIETY  
OF TERMS OF COMMUNION IN GENERAL.

[Continued]

To the above we shall only at present add, the divinely authorized practice of the apostolic church:... [The Great Commission directed them to have regard to “all things” which had been commanded by Christ.] To this rule, prescribed by their adored Master, the Apostles were ever careful to conform their public administrations.

On the memorable day of Pentecost, when their hearers “were pricked in their heart, and said unto them, What shall we do?” the term of admission, to the privilege of baptism was, “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” [Acts 2.38.] As much as to say, in faith’s dependence upon Him who is exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins, and, with holy contrition of soul, renounce your former errors, and abominable practices. ► Change your former sentiments and conduct. Receive Christ, as made of God unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Embrace the Christian religion in all its peculiar doctrines. On this footing you shall receive the privileges of the Church. Accordingly, it is added, “They that gladly received his word were baptized.” From the preceding part of the chapter we learn that this word, which they received, was a plain sermon concerning Christ in his mediatorial capacity and work; clearly exhibiting him as the once crucified, but now exalted Lord of his Church—the Saviour, who was delivered for our offences; and raised again for our justification. [See Acts 2.]

After the Ethiopian eunuch had heard an important and very instructive passage of the Old Testament, concerning the true Messiah, properly explained unto him, and had given suitable attention to a precious gospel-sermon, delivered from it, he expressed his wish to receive the ordinance of baptism. The reply was, “If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” After this open profession,

“They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.” [Acts 8.37,38]

Cornelius and his company, solemnly and openly, professed, “Now we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” In this day of the Redeemer’s power, they were a willing people, professing themselves ready to receive and obey every law of the God of heaven so soon as it was made known to them by the mouth of his servant. “The Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word;” namely, the affecting sermon concerning Christ and him crucified. “Then answered Peter, can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?—And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” [Acts 10.] Still, we see, the greatest care is taken to have the subjects of the ordinance properly instructed in the mysteries of the Christian religion; and to obtain from them an open profession of their faith in Christ, and of their ready subjection to the laws of his kingdom.

With regard to the ordinance of the Lord’s supper, the Apostles, in their terms of admission, were no less pointed and explicit. “Continuing steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine,” was, by them, inseparably connected with church “fellowship in breaking of bread;” *i.e.*, as the best expositors ordinarily understand the passage, in partaking of the Lord’s supper. [Acts 2.42] They were ever anxious that this holy ordinance should be guarded against abuses, occasioned by divisions, heresies, or gross profanity. They admitted none to their Redeemer’s love-feast but such as professed their ready subjection to the comely order of his house, and were careful to examine themselves, before they should eat of that bread and drink of that cup. They were abundantly sensible, that he who eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. But none can truly be said to discern the Lord’s body unless they properly understand, as well as seriously believe, the gospel-scheme of salvation, through the complete satisfaction of Christ, in his people’s room.

Fully consistent with this is the Apostle’s holy zeal, that none should be introduced into the church, nor suffered to embody [unite] with her, who are erroneous in their opinions, and wish to mix their own inventions with the institutions of Christ. Speaking of such “false brethren, unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out their liberty, which they had in Christ Jesus, that they might bring them into bondage,” says he, “to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” [Gal. 2.4,5.] It cannot, therefore, we presume, be refused, that soundness in the faith, then delivered to the saints; professed submission to the divinely appointed ordinances of the gospel; approbation of that church-order which Christ himself instituted, and authorized his ministers to observe; together with holiness of conversation, were positive terms of communion in the primitive Christian church.

We shall be told, “the principal term was, believing in Christ, which is certainly much more simple than the very complex and intricate terms of later times.” But however specious this objection may, at first sight, appear, if closely examined, it will be found to be the fruit of inattention. While we speak of believing in Christ, the glorious object of faith must be considered in the same light in which the Sacred Scriptures reveal him; and not as every

individual may think proper to paint him in his own imagination. Who, then, is the Scripture-Christ, in whom we are to profess our faith; in order to our being admitted into the fellowship of his church? He is in his Father's equal: "I and my Father are one."—The eternal Son of God: "God sent forth his Son"—Immanuel, *i.e.* having the two distinct natures of God and man, closely united in his own divine person: "Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all God blessed for ever"—Set up from everlasting; and, voluntarily, undertaking the great work of redemption, as the covenant-Head and Surety of his people: "According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world." ► Jesus was "made a surety of a better testament." "Lo, I come," Destined, in the eternal purposes of heaven to undergo all these sufferings which he actually underwent, and in the very same manner, too: "For of a truth, against thy holy child, Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."—Actually manifested in the flesh, at the time appointed; made under the law, and suffering, substantially, the same punishment which his people's sin deserved, though himself without sin, in order that he might redeem them from the curse. "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed."—The author and finisher of that law-magnifying righteousness, which is imputed to the believer, for his justification: "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous;"—► In a word, the Prophet, Priest, and King of his church: "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you. Thou art a Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedeck. Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. He is given to be head over all things to the church, which is his body." Strip the glorious object of our faith of any one of the above precious characters, and you present unto us another Christ than the Scriptures reveal; and, therefore, one with whom Christians have nothing to do. Suppose, then, any should come unto us, denying the proper divinity of Christ; his eternal sonship; incarnation; substitution in the room of his people, or any other of his peculiar properties; we could not, consistently, receive them. Even the Apostolic term of admission, "If thou believest with all thine heart," when taken in the true spirit and scope of it, would oblige us to insert, in our terms of communion, the precious articles opposed; or to exhibit, and require assent unto, some plain summary of divine truth; evidently comprehending these, and whatever other things may, in a special manner, be called "the word of Christ's patience." [Rev. 3.10.]

Considering, then, their consistency with the great and general principle, on which all societies in the world find it necessary to act; the express injunctions of the Holy Spirit, concerning unity of sentiment and profession; the doctrine of our Saviour, in his Epistles to the Asiatic churches; and the divinely authorized practice of the Apostolic church; we cannot well refuse the propriety of having explicit terms of admission to the privileges of the gospel-church, in the times wherein we live.

Having said thus much, with respect to terms of communion in general, it will now be necessary to turn our attention unto our own terms, in particular, and to offer a few remarks upon them as they lie in order.

## EXPLANATION

AND

## D E F E N C E.

### TERMS OF MINISTERIAL AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNION, AGREED UPON BY THE REFORMED PRESBYTERY:

I. THE acknowledgment of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and the alone infallible rule of faith and practice.

II. The acknowledgment of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, Larger and Shorter, to be founded upon, and agreeable to the Word of God.

III. The owning of divine right, and original, of Presbyterian church-government.

IV. The acknowledgment of the perpetual obligation of our Covenants, National, and Solemn League. And, in consistency with this, acknowledging the Renovation of these Covenants, at Auchensaugh, 1712, to be agreeable unto the Word of God.

V. The owning of all the Scriptural Testimonies, and earnest contendings of Christ's faithful witnesses; whether martyrs, under the late persecution, or such as have succeeded them, in maintaining the same cause; and especially of the Judicial Act, Declaration and Testimony, emitted by the Reformed Presbytery.

VI. Practically adorning the doctrine of God, our Saviour, by walking in all his commandments, and ordinances, blamelessly.

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### Discussion Questions

1. What directions from the day of Pentecost show that beliefs and life were not, by the apostles, regarded as optional features of the Christian religion?
  - A. They give emphatic direction about what "all the house of Israel" must "know assuredly," and command repentance, as well as use of Christ's ordinances. [Acts 2.36,38.]
2. After the day of Pentecost, what character was found among those who participated in the observation of the Lord's Supper in the Christian Church?
  - A. We find that those who had fellowship in "the breaking of bread" also "continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship," [Acts 2.42.]
3. What evidence do we have from the epistles of Paul that soundness in the faith and a due respect for Christ's church-order, etc. were "terms of communion" in the primitive Christian Church?
  - A. In Paul's epistle to the Galatians, as he sets before them a proper zeal and policy in favor of preserving gospel-truth, he explains to them how he would not "give place" to "false brethren" but rather withstood them and refused to be subject to them, Gal. 2.4,5.

4. When men urge that the extensiveness of our terms of communion must give way to the fact that believing in Christ was the principal term of communion in the early Church, what mistake is commonly at work in their assumptions?
  - A. Often they have presumed that there is no substantial difference between “believing in Christ” in a generic sense, and “believing in Christ” “in the same light in which the Sacred Scriptures reveal him.” He must be believed in as Immanuel, the divine Son of God, and received as Prophet, Priest, and King. His salvation as a substitute in our place must be embraced, or else he is rejected.
5. Given the wording of the 1801 RP terms of communion, and the connection of their order, what rule is to be followed if it truly happens that the church’s confession, catechisms, covenants, testimonies, ministry, etc. ever conflict with the word of God.
  - A. The Scriptures are to be followed, because these are the “alone infallible rule of faith and practice.”
6. Are these Terms of Communion sufficiently kept by way of a professed agreement in the terms themselves, or the swearing of membership vows?
  - A. No. These terms presume the particular obligations of real covenants, and explicitly require, not the promise of a walk, but an actual walk in God’s commandments which adorns the doctrine of God.