

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 4.

ON ARTICLE I: THE SCRIPTURES

THE first of these Terms respects the Scriptures of truth, as the alone infallible rule of faith and practice. Considering that we live in a land of gospel-light, and are addressing ourselves to Christians, it is hoped that our readers, in general, will readily admit the propriety of this article. And never, surely, could it be more seasonable than in this “day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy;” when Deistical opinions are making very alarming progress amongst mankind. Besides, it must ever be remembered, that the sacred institutions of the gospel-church are to be found no where else but in the Holy Scriptures; hence a proper knowledge and belief of these becomes indispensably necessary, in maintaining church-communion.

Believing the whole Bible to be given by inspiration of God, we take both the Old and New Testament into the account, as the great standard of human conduct in all periods of the church, and with regard to all duties, in every station and relation of life. We are sensible that the Jewish ritual is now abolished. It comprehended, in general, a system of bodily services, expressly denominated CARNAL ORDINANCES, PATTERNS OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS, AND SHADOWS OF GOOD THINGS TO COME, [Heb. 9.10,23; 10.1]: while the substance, or body, is declared to be of Christ. ► Accordingly, these patterns, or types, must all be considered as finding their corresponding anti-type in the Messiah’s gospel-kingdom. Excepting, then, whatever can be properly reduced to this description, and can be plainly shown to have been abolished by the coming of Christ, the rest must be viewed as of standing force to the end of the world. Whatever necessarily respects the gracious dispositions of the mind, and the inward exercises of the soul, or the moral conduct of men towards God, or towards one another, whether in civil or in ecclesiastic society, that must still, in the true scope and spirit of it, be understood as meant “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” [2 Tim. 3.16,17.] ► Nay, even from the ancient carnal ordinances, we may still draw many precious and instructive inferences, though these ordinances themselves are no longer to be observed. And we may also add, that it must remain still to be the indispensable duty of all Christians, diligently to search into the meaning of these ordinances; inasmuch as a competent knowledge of them is absolutely necessary to our right understanding of the great truths, concerning the Messiah, in the New Testament; many of which are delivered to us in typical language. ►

While, therefore, the gospel-church standeth upon the joint foundation of Apostles and gospel prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, [Eph. 2.20,] she never can be supposed to let drop out of her terms of communion a tenacious adherence to the Old Testament,¹ as a part of the rule of her faith and practice, or to treat it like a thing of inferior importance, as the manner of some is.

Convinced of the self-evidencing power, intrinsic worth, and divine excellencies of the Holy Scriptures, we ever wish them to be considered as a complete and sufficient rule in themselves, independent of oral law, tradition of the fathers, or any human invention whatever; and in opposition to the absurd notion, “That the true sense depends upon the church.” At the same time, in our practical application of the inspired Oracles, we consider them to be the rule, as consistently understood, and properly applied. For, though they be an absolutely perfect and sufficient rule in themselves, yet it is possible to mistake their true meaning; but thus we endeavour to guard against the conduct of those who, while they pretend to believe in the divine authority of the Scriptures, do, meanwhile, evidently wrest them, imposing glosses which make one part of the Sacred Volume to contradict another, and which lead us away from the true scope and design of the whole.

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On the Supreme and Ultimate Authority of the WORD OF GOD in the Church.

Q. Are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament the only rule of faith and manners?

A. Yes; Isa. 8.20, “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

Q. Are the Scriptures of the Old Testament *equally* with those of the New—a rule of faith and manners?

A. Yes.

Q. What is the first proof?

A. Christ exhorted the Jews to search the Old Testament Scriptures, declaring that they testified of him. John 5.39. “Search the Scriptures—they are they which testify of me.”

Q. What is the second?

A. Christ commends the Old Testament, and exhorts his disciples to attend reverently to Moses and the prophets. Luke 16.29. “They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” Also, verse 31. [... Total of Eight Proofs given.]

Q. Are the Scriptures to such an extent the rule of faith, that there is nothing left to the wisdom and discretion of the rulers and teachers of the church?

A. In matters essential to salvation, and what relates to the institutes of worship, government, and order, the Scriptures are an absolute rule; but in carrying out the principles and putting into operation the ordinances of religion, there are some things left to the wisdom and prudence of the officers of the church—but here there is no latitude allowed beyond what is

1 See also: https://www.truecovenanter.com/scripture/ref_presby_authority_of_old_testament_1855.html

the evident meaning and design of the Scriptures themselves in these matters. 1 Cor. 14.40, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

- Q. Is everything pertaining to faith and manners revealed in the Scriptures directly and distinctly in so many words? or are many things to be learned from them *inferentially* or by legitimate consequence?
- A. The Scriptures are a full and complete revelation, and great principles are directly and plainly taught; yet many things of importance both of faith and manners are learned by legitimate consequence, from other truths distinctly revealed, and from approved scriptural examples, and such truths are equally a part of the Word of God with those principles, which are taught by explicit revelation.
- Q. Can you give an example of the *inferential* mode of reasoning, or by implication, from the Scripture?
- A. Yes. The highest example—that of Christ himself; who proved the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead by a legitimate consequence, from a fact revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. Matt. 22.31, 32, "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*"
- Q. Are not the Scriptures a complete and adequate rule of faith and manners? or is there a deficiency to be supplied from a treasury of unwritten traditions, intrusted to the alleged successors of the apostles?
- A. The Scriptures are a complete and adequate rule of faith and manners, and the alleged deposit [or *depositum*] of traditions is an invention of "The Man of Sin," in support of his "lying wonders," and "doctrines of devils." [... Questions relating to "traditions."]
- Q. Is it true that the Roman apostasy makes tradition a chief part of the rule of faith?
- A. It is undoubtedly true. 1. Thus speak the writers of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, p. 17: "All the doctrines of Christianity are derived from the word of God, *which includes scripture and tradition!*" 2. Thus speaks the Roman Catholic authorised version: Note on 2 Tim. 3.16, "If we would have this whole rule of Christian faith and practice, we must not be content with those scriptures which Timothy *knew from his infancy*, that is with the Old Testament alone; nor yet with the New Testament, without taking along with it the traditions of the apostles, and the interpretation of the church, to which the apostles delivered both the book *and the true meaning of it.*" 3. And the creed of Pope Pius makes Holy Mother church the only judge of the true sense of the scripture. "I also admit the sacred scriptures, *according to the sense* which the holy mother church has held, and does hold, to whom it belongs *to judge of the true sense and interpretation* of the holy scriptures; nor will I ever take or interpret otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers."
- Q. Does not the Roman church in this matter of *traditions* follow the example of the apostate Jews, (before and at the time of our Saviour,) who made void the law by their traditions?

- A. Yes. The Jews divided the law into two parts, written and oral. The latter, they taught, was received by Moses on Mount Sinai, and delivered by him to the care of Joshua, who deposited it with the 70 elders, by whom it was communicated to the prophets, and these intrusted it to the greater synagogue, and from them it was transmitted to future generations, until it was collected and treasured up in the Talmud. In like manner the Roman Pontiffs have invented a twofold revelation, the one *written* and the other *unwritten*, the substance of the latter being, as they allege, those things which Christ and his apostles taught and transacted, but of which they have transmitted no *written record*, but which are now exhibited in a tangible form in the peculiar doctrines and ceremonies of the Roman church. [... More about “Traditions.”]
- Q. Are not the Scriptures, (or God speaking in the scriptures,) the supreme judge in all matters of controversy, and in the interpretation of scripture? or is this the prerogative of the church or Roman Pontiff?
- A. The former is the truth. The holy scriptures, (or God speaking in them,) is the supreme and infallible judge in religious controversies.
- Q. What is the first proof?
- A. God directs us to this tribunal only. Isa. 8.20, “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Also Luke 16.29. [... Eight Proofs given.]
- Q. Does not Christ constitute the church the Supreme Judge in controversies? Matt. 18.17. “Tell it to the church.”
- A. By no means: because the injunction does not relate to matters of faith but to private offences, matters of scandal according to the Jewish discipline, who were accustomed to excommunicate the contumacious.
- Q. Do not all Protestants hold the doctrine of the supreme and ultimate supremacy of the Word of God in religious controversy?
- A. It is a Protestant doctrine, and, whilst it is held in theory, it is often violated in practice by the adoption of many principles and practices, for which there cannot be given a—thus saith the Lord—and which are met by the challenge—who hath required this at thy hand?

Discussion Questions

1. Which opinions were making an alarming progress when this explanation was published?

A. Deistical opinions, which tended to diminish the authority of Scripture among those who professed to believe in the being and authority of God. Their influence served to bring society to depend on “the light of nature” rather than the word of God.
2. What fact does the Presbytery contemplate as a mistaken reason for churches to consider the Old Testament as having an expired or lesser authority compared to the New Testament?

A. Some err in this because of erroneous conclusions from the fact that the Jewish ritual is now abolished: the carnal ordinances, etc.
3. What evident uses of the Old Testament scriptures show that we ought to respect their authority now?

A. All those named in 2 Thess. 3.16.

4. Why should Christians also be instructed in those Old Testament scriptures which relate to Jewish Ritual or carnal ordinances?

A. Because “even from the ancient carnal ordinances, we may still draw many precious and instructive inferences, though these ordinances themselves are no longer to be observed.” [Heb. 9.22.]

5. What additions to Scripture authority found among Jews, Papists, and others, does the Presbytery reject as conflicting with the sufficiency of Holy Scripture.

A. The Presbytery rejects “oral law, tradition of the fathers, or any human invention whatever;” and also the notion, “That the true sense depends upon the church.”