

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 14.

ON ARTICLE VI: A HOLY AND
BLAMELESS LIFE.

The last article of our Terms respects a holy and blameless conversation, before men. On this, we apprehend, there is no need to make any remarks. Even those, who seek but for the form of godliness, must admit its propriety. And certainly those who seriously study to reach the life and power of true religion will, at once, approve of giving this qualification a place amongst the conditions of admission to sacred privileges, in the sanctuary of that divine Lord, whose name is THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL; who hath taught his church to sing, “Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, for ever;” and who hath solemnly declared, “that without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” [Heb. 12.14.]

[CONCLUSION]

In proposing the above Terms of communion, we wish a difference to be made between persons holding, proclaiming, and propagating sentiments in religion, opposite to those which are recognized by our Terms, and persons who may be, comparatively, ignorant, or have private views of their own, but are willing to be farther instructed. The former must be positively debarred from church fellowship; whereas milder treatment is due to the latter.¹

Let it also be remembered, that there is a material difference between church-communion, properly so called, and private occasional communion, with those who may agree in the great essentials of salvation, through a crucified Saviour. Church-communion, among the professing members of Christ’s mystical body, we consider as lying chiefly in their conscientiously walking together, and enjoying mutual comfort in the regular observation of all public Gospel ordinances, in general, and joint participation of the solemn seals of the new covenant, in particular; as these are dispensed by the ministers of religion, who are vested with office, according to the laws of Christ. ► This, necessarily, requires unanimity in all those things which belong to the constitution of the church in her organized capacity; such as, doctrines to be believed — a certain mode of worship to be observed — a form of government to be exercised — and discipline to be administered. As it doth not appear that the church, in her complete and organized capacity, can exist without any of these articles; so neither is it easy to

¹ Jude 22, 23. Rom. 14.1.

conceive how persons holding jarring sentiments on these important subjects can consistently enjoy church-fellowship with each other.—► Private Christian communion, we apprehend, consists in the joint discharge of those religious duties which are not peculiar to official characters as such, but are common to them, and all Christians at large, in their individual capacity. Of this kind we may reckon reading the Scriptures; religious conversation, as opportunity offers, in the course of providence; occasional prayer with the sick, when desired; praising God in the family, when providentially lodged together; joint craving of Heaven's blessing on the provision of our table, and such like. From private and occasional communion, with Christians of other denominations, in things like these, we never thought of debarring our people; though we cannot help being of opinion, that church-fellowship should ever be regulated by some such scriptural terms as those which we have endeavoured to exhibit and explain.

Upon the whole, after taking a review of our principles, as founded upon the Word of God, and summarily comprehended in the subordinate standards of the church, we are still persuaded that it is our duty to stand upon the same footing on which we have always hitherto stood, as a distinct body of professing Christians; endeavouring to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. [Jude 3.] ► Amidst all the revolutions in sentiment, whereby the present age is distinguished, we can find no reason for considering our avowed principles in any other light than that, in which we have ever viewed them. Notwithstanding, for the satisfaction of those who have repeatedly desired some farther information, we have exhibited the above Explanation and Defence. It is humbly apprehended, that no greater concessions or allowances than those which we have made, can be reasonably expected of men, professing, as we do, to adhere unto the whole of our covenanted reformation, both in church and state.

It only remains, that we all, unanimously and seriously, supplicate the throne of God, for grace, "to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." [1 Cor. 15.58.]

THE END.

===== SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL =====

The Relation Between the Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and Personal Religion — By John Lynd, Belfast. — Excerpts.

That personal religion is necessary in order to bearing a public testimony for Christ Jesus the Lord as Head of the Church and Governor among the nations. It was a service that, ere His Ascension, the Lord laid upon His disciples that they should bear witness of Him—a service in which they were joined with the Comforter. "He shall testify of Me; and ye also shall bear witness." Witnessing for Christ in any of His offices, or any of His claims, is a co-operating with the Holy Ghost, who glorifies the Son. And such co-operation is possible only to those in whom the Spirit dwells. ► It is a service to Christ, and can be rightly rendered only by those who are His servants indeed. Others may be used. Wicked men, and their selfish and wicked

plans and doings have been used of God to work out His will. But He who would not accept the testimony of evil spirits, neither needs nor desires the testimony of evil men. “To the wicked God saith: What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?” [Psalm 50.16.] He who serves before the Lord must himself be “Holiness to the Lord.”

Owing to the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart, there is a strong and a constant tendency to make religion a matter of externals. And because of this tendency we need to watch and pray lest we make a public testimony a substitute for personal godliness, a sedative to conscience, a palliation for injustice to men. It is an easier thing, it requires less keenness of spiritual discernment, and it is a more flattering thing to see and to denounce a nation’s sins than it is to know the depths of Satan in our own souls, and to cultivate with all watchfulness and prayer love to God and men. ► But a public testimony, in order to be with demonstration of the Spirit and power, must have behind it in the life the Spirit of God and the power He imparts. Of all who were called to be prophets or teachers in Israel, whether to instruct or warn or rebuke the Church, there was not one who, whatever his failings or sins, was not at heart a fearer of God. The men whom our Lord called to be witnesses to Him were men who had been with Him in His tribulation, and each of them, if questioned, might have said, as did one of them, “Thou knowest that I love Thee.”

The men who were prominent in the Covenanting struggle in Scotland were men of deep personal piety. Samuel Rutherford is perhaps better known to-day as a man whose love for Christ was a veritable passion than as one of the ablest defenders of the Church’s liberties and the citizens’ rights. Donald Cargill was the author of the Queensferry Paper. It was he who at Torwood pronounced sentence of excommunication against the King and the Dukes of York, Monmouth, and others associated with them, for their contempt of God and persecution of His saints. And this is part of his dying testimony:—“I have followed holiness; I have taught truth; and I have been most in the main things; not that I thought the things concerning our times little, but that I thought none could do anything to purpose in God’s great and public matters till they were right in their own conditions. And,” he proceeds to say, “O that all had taken this method, for then there had been fewer apostasies.” ► That they were “right in their own conditions” was the secret of the power of Rutherford and Cargill and Cameron and Renwick. And reading the sermons of the ministers who, at the peril of their lives declared God’s message to the people in the fields, one cannot but be struck with the personal, heart-searching nature of their preaching, and how anxious they were that those who heard the word at their lips should first of all and above all “be right in their own conditions.” ► And the humble men and women who, through sore peril and bitter persecution and often death itself, bore their testimony for Christ, His Crown and Covenant, were fearers of God, lovers of His Word, and followers of peace and righteousness. This their history impresses upon us, that personal religion is a pre-requisite to bearing a public testimony for Christ the King. It has ever been the men of faith, of personal devotion and obedience to God, who have subdued kingdoms, and wrought righteousness, and obtained promises. [Heb. 11.33.]

II. Personal religion tends to grow out into a public testimony for Christ the King & Lord of all.

It may be checked and hindered in its growth by imperfect knowledge or by false theories, and it may not rise to such a testimony as that borne in the distinctive principles of our Church; but when fed upon the truth given in the Scriptures and nurtured by the Spirit of God who uses the truth, its natural tendency is to expand into a testimony for the Lord the Redeemer, and to seek that all homage and honour due should be rendered to Him. Personal religion, in its inception, may be the cry of the sin-burdened soul—"What must I do to be saved?" But from that it passes on to ask—"What shall I render to the Lord for all His gifts to me?" [Acts 16.30; Psalm 116.12.] &c. &c.

III. The maintenance of the Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church makes for the increase of personal religion.

The personal knowledge and faith and devotion which are requisite to a consistent testimony for Christ as Head of the Church and Ruler over the nations gain new strength from that testimony intelligently and faithfully borne. There is a circle here, but it is not a vicious one. "Out of His fulness do we receive, and grace for grace." [John 1.16.] In the Church's public testimony we are called to look upon the Lion of the royal tribe of Judah, and, behold! before our vision more distinctly than ever stands a Lamb as it had been slain. And as we see Him open the book and loose the seals, we are moved to join in the song: "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." ... ► Who that has held the truth of Christ's Headship of the Church and over the nations has ever minimized the Atonement? All such have seen in the death of Jesus Christ God's appointed propitiation for sin. And that view of His death works ever, under the Divine Spirit, godly sorrow for sin, and inspires with faith and love, and moves to consecration and new obedience. And the clearer the view of the honour to which, because of the suffering of death, He is exalted, the deeper the penitence, the stronger the faith and holy affection, and the fuller the consecration. If nothing more were accomplished by our testimony than keeping a complete view of the glorious person and work of Jesus Christ the Lord before the Church, and so of building men up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation, that testimony were not borne in vain. &c. &c.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some places of Scripture urging upon us the necessity of a holy life for Church members?
2. What distinction must be observed respecting those who do not assent to all our principles?
3. What other distinction should be noticed with regard to the communion of the saints?
4. Is it wise or useful for faithful bible-believing Christians, embracing the Covenanter testimony, to read the Scriptures with other Christians or pray a common prayer together at a meal?
5. If men are disposed to take up a public testimony for Christ Jesus according to Covenanter principles, what must they first remember to be necessary for themselves?
6. What concerns were the chief focus of the martyr Donald Cargill in his religious endeavours?