





A

LETTER

FROM

Mr. ALEXANDER SHIELDS,

TO

The Prisoners for CHRIST, in
*Dunnottar-Castle.**Edinburgh, June*

1685.

Welbelovèd and Honourèd in the Lord,

OD is Love, and he that dwelleth in God, dwelleth in Love, and he that dwelleth in Love delighteth in Union, the native Fruit and Effect of it; That Union, that hath most of God and Love in it, and hath a Tendency to lead to, and keep near God; That

Union, that hath Love for its Cement, and Christ for its Centre, and Truth for its Foundation: Therefore it follows, that the closer a People cleave to Christ and his Truths, the more inclinable they will be to Union, the sooner they will obtain it, and the surer they will keep it; That's both the best Means and the truest Measures I can conceive, either for attaining or enter-
taining Union, in a divided and declining Day, as this

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our Day of Blasphemy, Trouble and Rebuke is. It hath always been found, that Departing from God hath been both the Father, and Fosterer and Fomentor of Division; as our wretched Defections have been the unhappy Cause of all our woful Distractions among Professors in this Age: Therefore, except the Cause be removed by some Jointness in turning unto the Lord, and an unanimous Acknowledging and Disowning of these, the Effects can never cease: All other healing Methods of forgetting or forgiving, or forbearing to resent Things dishonourable to Christ, or destructive to his Cause, are but ill-tempered Plaisters, covering the Wound slightly; not curing Remedies, to take away the Malignity of the Hurt. This is always desirable, as absolutely necessary for the Well-being of a Church, especially while in the Furnace of Affliction; Then, if ever, it may be expected; Then, if ever, it ought to be studied: The Union of Enemies ought to be an upstirring Motive to it, and the Sense of our own Pressures should make us leave nothing unessay'd to accomplish it; especially there is nothing more suitable than for Prisoners to exhort and stir up one another to this, after the Example of the Apostle, *Eph. iv. 1, 2, 3.* It is one Way of walking worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called, to endeavour to *keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*: But, as this is an Unity of the Spirit's Working and Influencing, so it must be of the Spirit's Ordering and Directing; and not according to the Dictates of Man's Reason or Prudence, to the Prejudice of Truth. O if the Spirit of God, in Mercy to us, would exert his Power and gracious Conduct, in discovering and determining all of us to submit to the Means and Measures thereof, laid down in his Word! O if there were a Joining in praying for, and pursuing after this! Then all our Disjoinings would be soon jointed together.

Now the greatest Matter of our Divisions is about joining in Worship; for our Defections have been so disorderly, that the most Tender have thought they fall under that Command of withdrawing from disorderly

derly Walkers: And this is the Question we would enquire a little into.

I would not have you to expect a Decision of it from me, with any tolerable Accuracy; for the Question itself is so *difficult*, the Stating of it so *intricate*, the Cases so *various*, and my Unacquaintedness with Circumstances; and Insufficiency for solving Doubts so *palpable*; that, were it not that I would do all Things to testify my Respect to you, and contribute my poor Mite for your Help and Instruction, I should not have dared to meddle with it: And all that I can do is, to propose some Generals to your Consideration, and offer some Distinctions, to clear the State of the Question, not imposing upon you, but only telling you my Judgment.

I think then there may be considered several Sorts of JOINING in Worship.

First, There is a *Joining* which we call *Catholick*, amongst Christians, considered as such; and there is a *Joining* which (for Distinction's Sake) we call *Ecclesiastick*, among the Members of one Organical Church, considered as Church-members. The *First* is founded upon the *Communion of Saints*, obliging all the Members of the same mystical Body, to join in all Things that may evidence that Union: And this is capable of several *Sub-distinctions*; as, 1. There may be a *Joining* more *general* with all Christians, holding the same Fundamentals, being of the same one Body, under the Conduct of the same one Spirit, maintaining the same one Hope of their Calling, confessing the same one Lord, professing the same one Faith, and partaking of the same one Baptism, *Eph. iv. 3—6*. Holy devout Men out of every Nation under Heaven, may be capable of joint Acts of Worship with Edification; whether they be *Parthians*, or *Medes*, or *Elamites*, *Acts ii. 5, 9, &c.* Of a Truth it is, that God is no Respector of Persons; he that feareth God, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him, *Acts x. 34, 35*. And forasmuch as God is pleased to give any, of whatsoever Nation, the like Gift as he has given to us; we must

not withstand God, by our accounting of any unclean, or separating from them, as unclean; as *Peter* expounds his Vision, *Acts* xi. 9, 17. And so, wherever Providence casts our Lot, we may join even in Worship with all, in whom we find the same Spirit of Faith, tho' their Cause and the Word of their Testimony be not the same Way stated as ours is: And so we might join in Worship with any that we find serious among the *Abyssines*, if we were in *Ethiopia*, whose Testimony is stated against *Gentilism*; Or, if we were in *Armenia*, and some other Places, as in the lesser *Asia*, we might join in Worship with Christians there, whose Testimony is stated against *Turcism*, and that Abomination of *Mahomet*, suppose they were qualified, as is above mentioned.

2. There may be a Joining more *special* with all Protestants, concerted in one common Opposition to all the Enemies of Truth, and owning and designing the Advancement of Reformation; tho' their respective Oppositions, Contendings, and Wrestlings be not the same Way stated, nor against the same Enemies, and the Testimonies be not the same, for one and the same Truth that ours is; and even tho' their Sentiments about other Things, extraneous to their Testimony, be not the same: Providing always they hold by the Truth, and nothing but the Truth, and nothing contrair to any of the reformed Churches Testimonies. Hence, as we may pray for, so we may pray with *all that are sanctified in Christ Jesus*, and *all that in every Place call upon his Name*, who is our Lord and theirs both, *1 Cor. i. 2.* With all that hold the same Head Christ, and owning the same Allegiance to him and Dependence upon him; and are not carried about with every Wind of Doctrine; but speaking the Truth in Love, do grow up into him in all Things: from whom the whole Body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every Joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the Measure of every Part, maketh Increase of the Body, to the edifying of it self in Love, *Eph. iv. 14, 15, 16.* With all who seek and maintain the pure Doctrine

of the common Salvation, and do earnestly contend for the Faith once delivered to the Saints ; tho' their Contentions be not about the same Particulars with us, Jude, Verse 3. With all that hold fast the Form of sound Words, in Faith and Love, which is in Christ Jesus; tho' the Form in every Part and Respect be not the same, 2 Tim. i. 13. supposing it is not contradictory ; for that Rule must be observed, in 1 Tim. vi. 3. If any Man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome Words, even the Words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine that is according to Godliness ; ye must carry towards him, as he is there described, by withdrawing from him : And yet if we find Protestants found in the Main, and faithful to their own peculiar Testimony, even tho' they differ in some Things from us (and, may be, in such Things as were not so tolerable in those of our own Church, owning the same Testimony with our selves) yet that is not sufficient to fix a Disjoining from them upon : For saith the Apostle, If in any Thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall even reveal this unto you ; nevertheless whereunto we have already attained, let us walk by the same Rule, Phil. iii, 15, 16. And so, every Church and Party hath their peculiar Word of Christs patience to suffer and wrestle for ; so we may join in Worship with any of them, qualified as above said, without further Scruple or Inquiry, if they hold not some Corruptions inconsistent with their own Testimony : As if we were in France, we might join with Protestants there, contending against Popery, tho' they do not contend with us against Prelacy ; If we were in Holand, we might join with the Reformed there, witnessing against Socinian and Arminian Errors, tho' they do not witness with us against Erastianism ; If in Hungary and Germany, we might join with Calvinists there, wrestling against the Lutheran Divisions, tho' they do not wrestle against those Defections that are amongst us ; If in England, we might join with Dissenters there, testifying against Conformity with Liturgical Worship, and the Impositions, Snares and Sins they have among them

them, tho' they do not testify against our *Compliances*, or *Indulgences*, or *Test*, &c. or our other *Oaths* and *Bonds*; and even with *Independents* we might join *Occasionally*, for that *Difference* is not the *Matter* of our present *Testimony*. And this leads me to another *Sub-distinction*, *viz.*

3. There may be a *Joining* more particularly with all our *covenanted Brethren*, all our *Fellow-confederates* in the same *solemn League*, owning the same *Covenant*, and prosecuting the same *Ends* thereof, tho' there be *Difference* of *Judgment* about the *circumstantiate Duties* of it; and *Inequality* as to the *Attainment* of the *Ends* of it; and a *Disconformity* in some *Points* of *Practice*, that are *extraneous* to them, and not the *Matter* of our present *Testimony*; yet if there be an *unanimous Concurrence* for the *Establishment* of the *Things covenanted*, and for the *Extirpation* of the *Things abjured*, we may join in *Worship* with them upon *Occasion*, and in every *Thing* that may *strengthen* and *establish* them in that *Covenant*, see *Isa. ii. 3. Jer. l. 4, 5.* Especially I speak of *Fellow-covenanters* of several *Churches* and *Nations* in *League* together, and not of the *Members* of one *Church*, (I am not come to that yet:) As if we were in *England*, or *Ireland*, many *Things* might be allowed among our *Brethren*, both *Ministers* and *Professors* there, which cannot be so amongst our selves in our own *Land*, without *Scandal*: For, the *Constitution* of the *Nations Governments* is different, and the *Duties* that the same *Covenant* obliges to, with a *Reference* to these respective *Governments* are different, and they never attained to that *Pitch* of *Reformation* that we arrived at; and therefore there may be many *Things* in their *Practice* not *consentaneous* with ours, and yet we may join with them. There is not the same *Reason* for our *joining* with the like among our selves; they may take an *Indulgence*, for *Freedom* to their *Meetings*, on far other *Terms* than we can do; for it is not derived from the same *Supremacy*, nor pretended to be given by *Vertue* of the same; tho' I think theirs was not right neither; yet there was not the

the same Sufficiency of a Foundation to withdraw from it, as there was from ours : And theirs did not belong to our Testimony. They might acknowledge and plead for the Freedom of their *Parliaments*; it were scandalous to do so for *ours*, which are so corrupted, that they require *Perjury*, as the necessary Qualification of their Members : They may own and acknowledge a Magistracy without these Terms, that the Constitution of our Government, and the Obligation of our Covenants, to us make indispensable ; and so they may have several Transactions with their *Rulers*, that we cannot admit of with *ours* : They may take the Oath of Allegiance in *England*, as it is there conceived, and yet I think we may admit of a Catholick Joining in Acts of Worship with them. Not that I think these Things are not Faults ; but I judge, they are not such Things as may oblige us to break off from this that I call Catholick Christian Joining with them in Worship.

II. There is a Joining, which we call *Ecclesiastical*, amongst the Members of one Church, or formed Society of professing Believers, not only concerted together in the same Cause, and, may be, engaged in the same Covenant, for promoting and prosecuting the same covenanted Reformation ; but also owning an unanimous Subjection to the same reformed Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, enjoying the same pure Ordinances of Christ, dispensed according to his own Institution, by his own appointed Officers and Ministers, approved and chosen, or submitted unto, by all the Fellow-Members of that Society or Church : And this is a nearer Joining, and requires more strict Conditions, and more certain Qualifications than the other. Yet this also may be considered in several Cases : As,

First, There may be an Ecclesiastical Joining in a Church constituted, and in a beautiful Order, and in a settled Condition, with all the Fellow-Members of that Church, of a sound Faith, and blameless Profession ; and holding forth the Word of Life, with all that

own the common Principles, follow the common Duties, prosecute the common Interest, seek the common Peace, oppose the common Enemies of that Church, even tho' there be some Corruptions in it that we cannot help, some Infirmities that we must bemoan, and yet bear with what we cannot help; we cannot have so pure a Church, but it will have a Spot in it: It is only the Complement of the Love of Christ, when he shall present it a glorious Church, that can make it without Spot or Wrinkle, or any such Thing. All the Churches that *Paul* wrote to, had Faults, Errors and Corruptions taxed in them; and yet he enjoins the receiving one another, bearing with Infirmities, bearing one another's Burdens, forbearing one another, and calls for Love, Peace and Concord. The Churches of *Asia* had several Corruptions in them, and Steps of Defection charged upon them, in our Lord's *Epistles* to them; as entertaining them that held the Doctrine of *Balaam*, and the *Nicolaitans*, and suffering *Fezebel* to seduce; *Lukewarmness*, *Indifferency*, &c. and yet there was no Disjoining amongst them upon these Accounts, no *Schism* fixed thereon: There was, no Doubt, among the Faithful, a conscientious Withdrawing from them, that held these Doctrines, and maintained such Practices; for no Presence of Prudence, or Peace and Concord, can ever dispense with the Obligation of that: This should be at all Times, and in all Cases. But there was not a Disjoining from that Church, that was deficient in their Discipline against, and Correction of these Doctrines and Practices, for that would have been *Schism*: For I take the true Notion of *Schism* to be not every Debate, Dissention, or Contention about Truths, that's *Division*, not *Schism*; Nor every Falling away into Error, that's *Apostasy* not *Schism*; Nor every Withdrawing from the Communion of the Church, upon Grounds true or false, that may be *Separation*, not *Schism*: But I take *Schism* to be a factious and disorderly Disjoining and Breaking off from a constitute Church, into which Persons were formerly joined; and taking se-

parate Courses at their own Hand, without any Respect to the Peace, or Order of the Church; or the Methods laid down by Christ, to take away that which scandalized; or to their own Sphere or Capacity in which they are, that is *Schism*. I cannot find it but once exprest in our Translation, that is, 1 *Cor.* xii. 25. Where the Way to cure and prevent it gives us some Understanding of the Nature of it, to wit, *That the Members should have the same Care one for another;* and where, without any Regard to this, we *turn aside by the Flocks of Christ's Companions*, and leave the Shepherds and the Flocks, and will feed by our selves, *Cant.* i. 7, 8. we commit Schism, a great Sin; but 'tis many Times charged on Practices which will not bear it, and in Seasons when it cannot readily be committed; for, in the broken State of a Church, keeping our selves free of Defections, tho' in a separate Way, withdrawing from Persons which we were never joined with, in a Time when the Church hath no Order to rectify or remove Offences, and Christ's Method cannot be obtained, that can be no *Schism*; but when the Church is rightly constitute, as the Causes of disjoining and withdrawing from Congregations, or Persons, may be orderly removed: So the Cases wherein it may be allowed, and the Methods of it, may be more easily stated; Christ's common Rule doth sufficiently order all Things in that Case, *Matth.* xviii. 15 ~ 20. I stay the longer upon this, to obviate the Cavils of some, against conscientious Withdrawers from, and Witnessers against Defections whom they call, upon that Account, *Schismatics*, and *Separatists*, because they break off from them at their own Hand, and will not join with Persons guilty of Defection or Scandals; and yet the Case is not determined by a Church-Judicatory. I grant indeed, from what is said, it will follow, that if our Church were *constitute as formerly*, if we should disjoin from Worship with the Indulged, or *Countenancers* of Prelacy, or *Banders*, or *Testers*, or *Alledgers*, &c. we might incur a Censure somewhat like that; but it cannot be so now, when this Method

cannot be followed; yet we are obliged to follow it as much as we can, and that is, by doing the Equivalent. Such as, 'tis manifest, would incur the Sentence of Excommunication, after Admonition rejected, we may withdraw our Communion from them; such as would be liable to a Suspension, we may withhold our Hearing and Joining with them; such as would be severely rebuked, we may shew some Discountenance, to testify our Dislike of their Ways; not taking upon us to inflict these Things as Censures (for we have no Power) but only signifying our Sense of the moral Obligation and Equity of these Censures, whether they be inflicted, or not. But, before I leave this, I would add a subordinate Distinction of this Joining in a twofold Case.

1st, When a constitute Church is advancing, and growing up gradually unto a Reformation, there may be a Joining with many Things, that otherwise we ought not to countenance: We may then wave and forbear some Debates about Things not so material, nor the Matter of the present Testimony; contending about which might retard and hinder the intended Reformation. Hereupon we find that the Apostles and Elders, in the first general Assembly at Jerusalem, condescended to some Things, to please the Jews, laying upon the Gentiles some Things (only ceremonial Burdens) as *abstaining from Meats* offered to Idols, and from *Blood*, and from *Things strangled*, Acts xv. 19, 29. which Decrees were afterward retracted, and were of no Force: In this Case the Apostle's Rule is to be observed, 1 Cor. ix. 19—24. and all Things are to be done by way of Condescendency, consistent with Duty and Edification, to avoid Offence to the Church of God, 1 Cor. x. 32, 33. Then special Regard is to be had to these excellent Gospel-commands, of *having Peace with one another*, Mark. ix. ult. 1 Thess. v. 13. *By Love serving one another*, without biting and devouring one another. Gal. v. 13, 15. *With all Lowliness, and Meekness, and Long-suffering, forbearing one another in Love*. Eph. iv. 2. *Bearing one another's Bur-*

Burdens Gal. vi. 2. and many others. And so we find that our Fathers suffered many Things, that are not so tolerable now, as hearing of Episcopal Men; bearing long with Lay-patronages; voluntary submitting to the Magistrates unjust Sentence of Confinement, &c. all which are exploded and expelled out of the Societies of the Faithful.

2dly, When the same constitute Church is declining and falling backward from a Degree of Reformation attained, tho' there may be Joining with the same Church (as was formerly proved from the Instance of some of the *Asian Churches*) yet there must not be a Joining in these Defections, nor with those that promote them; but an earnest Contending, and a zealous Witnessing and Wrestling against the first Motions of them; and a Contending for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, *Jude* verſe 3. Then we must with all Diligence and Faithfulness *bold faſt, what we have attained, Rev. ii. 25. Chap. iii. 11.* Then we must *ſtrengthen the Things that remain and are ready to die, v. 2. and ſtand faſt in the Liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made us free,* and not to be intangled with any Yoke of Bondage, *Gal. v. 1.* Theſe ſame Decrees of the Apoſtles, of abſtaining from Meats offered to Idols, were afterwards declared indifferent, *1 Cor. viii. 1 Cor. x.* and afterward both that and other indifferent Obſervances were condemned, as in the Caſe of *Peter's* doing the ſame, *Gai. ii. 11.* It was allowable that *Timothy* ſhould be circumciſed; but this would have been ſinful to do it to *Titus*. No, *Paul* would not ſubject to that for an Hour, nor condeſcend to the quitting the leaſt Hair-Breadth of Truth, or Chriſtian Liberty, to pleaſure them, whom yet he had pleaſured before, *Gal. ii. 3, 5.* no, the Caſe was now altered.

2. There may be a Joining in a Church broken and born down, and persecuted; then Union is moſt deſirable and neceſſary: The Sheep ſhould run together when the Wolves are ravening amongſt them: Chriſt's Doves ſhould flock together, to their Rocks, when the Storm is moſt boiſterous; Then

a gathering together, tho' as *a Nation not desired* with one Consent, *before the Decree bring forth*, and the Day pass, as the Chaff; and a seeking the Lord, and a seeking with *one Consent*; and a seeking *Meekness* as well as *Righteousness*, that it may be they be hid together: And 'tis very suitable, that the Furnace should make the Gold run together into a Lump, even tho' some Dross be inseparable from it. Then an Union in the Lord, and a Joining, as far as it can consist with Truth and Duty, is a Thing earnestly to be endeavoured, and I hope intently desired by all, who are sensible of the present *Breach* and woful *Defection*, and wretched *Division* of the Church of *Scotland*. But in this Case, as this Joining is most desirable; so it is most difficult, and the due Measures thereof hardest to be determined, and the true Methods thereof most warily to be fixed; for certain it is that it must not be unlimited and unrestricted, nor promiscuously to be sought and kept with all, with whom formerly in the Church's constitute and settled Condition we joined, and with whom we *took sweet Counsel together, and went into the House of God in Company*. We would indeed join with all that will declare themselves for our Lord, in this Day of the Heathen's raging, and the People's tumultuating against him, and his Interests; with all the faithful Friends of Christ, in a joint Opposition against all his Enemies; with all the Lovers of *Zion*, that *take Pleasure in the Stones, and favour the Dust thereof*; with all that own and espouse our Lord's Quarrel, and every Part of it, which the Enemy opposeth; in a Word, with all that keep their Ground and go forward, but will not go back one Step from the attain'd-unto Reformation: But we must not join with all, nor say, *A Confederacy* with all that say it, out of Fear, or a preposterous Desire of Peace, with Prejudice to Truth and Duty; even tho' we should be *for Signs and Wonders in Israel* Isa. viii. 12, 18. For that were a Combination against the Lord, rather than an Union in the Lord: Nay we must rather prefer to imbark our Lot with the

little Flock, that follows Christ, and refuses to hear the Voice of Strangers, and the few Names that have kept cleanest Garments; than the Multitude of those, who leave the right Way; even tho' reputed wiser and more prudent, and continuing still eminent in Piety: We would love Peace, but we must love the Truth first, and best, *Zech. viii. 19.* As I said, in a declining Time, even while the Church continues constitute, we must not give such a Latitude to our Joining with Persons and Things, as formerly we might, when Reformation was upon the Ascendant; so much more in a broken State ought it to be restricted yet more; for neither are we to join with all whom for the Preservation of the Church's Order, we might join with then: For now that is not, nor can that same Method and Order of suspending our withdrawing from Persons or Things, until the Church's Jurisdiction decide it, be observed; for then it would follow, That nothing, or no Person should be withdrawn from at all; for the Church now hath no juridical Power. In this Case,

Then the Question may be twofold (1.) What Ministers we may join with. (2.) What Professors may join with. For the

First, We need not insist on it; for neither do ye stand in need to be informed of that, nor is it the present Question that ye are inquisitive about; nor, alas! are ye in a Capacity to hear any, nor (which requires a more weighty Alas!) are there many to be heard by any, that long after Christ's pure Ordinances: But yet by Way, because it falls in here, I shall hint a short Word of my Thoughts of that too.

I judge then they may come under a twofold Consideration. Either, as they are Ministers of a national Church, devoted to the Service of that Consociation of Churches in one Nation, united under one Kind of Government, and subject to the Constitutions of that collective Church; for so, next to this their Relation to the Church universal visible, they are to be considered, as having a primary Relation unto, and Dependence upon, and Incorporation with that Church,

as the Object of their Ministry: Or, they may be considered, as the particular Pastors of a Congregational Church, ordained for and chosen by the Members of that particular Congregation. This last, as to the Exercise of it, may be hindered by Mens Violence, tho' the Relation it self can never be taken away, but by them that gave it and consented unto it; so that we ought to have a particular Tenderne's of Respect to them, who were our Pastors by and according to Christ's Appointment, when we cannot enjoy their fixed Ministry, and we should be loather to discountenance them, than any: And if we could do it either in Conscience or Safety, if he will abide with us, we ought to adhere to him; but so, as not to confine him, or monopolize the Gospel to our selves, with Prejudice of the publick Good of the National Church. Yet I think every Parish, as it is called, that had a faithful Minister, who continues so still, should maintain and entertain him, as much as they can, without wronging others. But suppose a Minister could have a fixed Station amongst a People, even in this disturbed State of the Church, and turned either insufficient, or scandalous, or unfaithful, and so deserved a Suspension, I conceive the People have Power from Christ (when a Presbytery cannot be had) to do the Equivalent of it. But now, when this is not practicable, we must look upon all our Ministers under the first Consideration, and carry towards them, by joining with them, or withdrawing from them, as the faithful, or else, as the unfaithful Ministers of the Church of *Scotland*, according as they carry towards the common Cause for which they are consecrated, and the common Testimony for the Word of Christ's Patience, which they are called to bear. And hence, because they are our own Ministers by the nearest Ties, that we can have in this disordered Time; therefore, being Faithful, we owe to them all the Duties that we can discharge to them in this National Capacity, which we would owe to them in a Congregational, if we were in that Capacity; as to *know them that labour amongst us, and admonish us,*
and

and to esteem them very highly for their Work's Sake, 1 Thefl. v. 12, 13. and to obey them that have Rule over us, and submit our selves; seeing they watch for our Souls, as they that must give an Account; that they may do it with Joy, and not with Grief; for that is unprofitable for us, Heb. xiii. 17. And it follows also, because they are our own, therefore, being unfaithful, we should take the greater faithful Freedom to tell them, when they offend us; and discountenance them, when they deserve it, more than is incumbent on us, or pertinent for us to do with others: We would not take upon us to judge them, but we would have a Judgment of our own Duty, how to carry towards them: And this cannot be offensive to conscientious Ministers, who, as they should be, are more tender of their Master's Honour, than of their own personal Credit: And I judge there are none such in Scotland this Day, whom the Zeal of their God, and of his House is eating up, and on whom the Reproaches of them that reproached him are fallen, and who are conscientiously tender also of the Church's Peace consistent with Truth; but they are so conscious of their own Short-comings, Faintings and Failings, in the Duty of this Day, that they will be content, the best of them, to be reprov'd, by the poorest Plowman in the Nation, that hath the Cause of God rightly stated in his Heart; and will take it as Oil to his Head: And I am sure, if more of this Gospel Spirit were amongst us, our Difficulties and Divisions might soon be overcome: But alas! it is not so; and therefore many poor Mourners are in the Mist what to do, and with whom to join.

I would only propose in the general, who I think we should have a Care of Joining with: It is difficult to determine Particulars, and I think it a great Defect that hitherto (notwithstanding of the Heat of this Debate and of the Hurt of our Darknes about it; yet) this *Question* hath not been Determined about *Hearing*, and *not Hearing*; we would be tender of Ministers, and think it dangerous, upon light Grounds, to break

break or deny a Minister's Commission ; It cannot be every Difference of Judgment, or personal Failing of Infir-
mity, or some discovered Hypocrisy, Self-seeking, or E-
mulation, that may be a sufficient Ground' of our With-
drawing from a Minister ; some may *preach Christ out of
Envy and Strife, of Contention, not sincerely ; notwith-
standing every Way, whether in Pretence or in Truth,
Christ is preached,* and therein we ought to rejoice :
If he be preached by them that have a Call to it, *Phil.*
i. 15—18. Yet upon several Grounds we may warrant-
ably withdraw, and refuse to join with many.

As first, we cannot join with such as Christ's Amba-
sadors, who never had a Commission from him, in his
orderly appointed Way, but either took it up at their
own Hand, or else from them that have none themselves
to give : As, the Prelatick Curates, ordained by the
Bishops, these are such as run, and are not sent, *Jer.*
xxiii. 21, 22. and *how shall they preach, except they be
sent ? Rom. x. 15.* these are Strangers, that the Sheep
should not hear, *John x. 15,* &c.

2. We cannot join with such, as, it may be, had a
Commission, but they have wholly subjected it to the
Disposal of strange Lords ; either to lay it aside, or
to take a new One from them : As, such old Presby-
ters, as conformed to Prelacy ; and such as submitted
by the Act of *Glasgow*, to their Deposition, and ne-
ver avouched publickly their ministerial Exercise since ;
but privatly would preach now and then : And such
likewise who have consented to the giving a Bond,
not to exercise their Ministry for such a Time, upon
the Council's Order ; these are light and treacherous
Persons, polluting the Sanctuary, who have done, and
suffered Violence to be done to the Law of their Ma-
ster, *Zeph. iii. 4.*

3. We cannot join with such, who pretend to keep
their old Commission, but they have changed the Hol-
ding of it, and taken a new Grant from the Usurper of
their Master's Prerogatives, with such Instructions as
are dishonourable to him, and destructive to his King-
dom's Liberties ; which, tho' they did not keep, nor
pos-

possibly did not mind to keep them, yet they did not disown and reject them with a Testimony: These have become Servants of Men, and have not kept their Master's Command *without Spot, unrebukable, until his Appearing*; such are the Indulged, and their Brethren, the connived-at Clergy, who tacitely, tho' not so expressly, did officiate by Vertue of the same new Grant. I could never find a solid Argument against hearing of the Curates, which did not as forcibly militate against the Indulged.

4. We cannot join with such as have perverted their Commission, or corrupted it; either by preaching false Doctrine, or making false Application of true Doctrine; condemning the Generation of the Righteous, perverting People from the right Ways of the Lord, condemning Duty, and approving Sin, and leading into Snares, and defending and pleading for Defection. We must *cease to hear the Instruction that causeth to err from the Words of Knowledge*, Prov. xix. 27. And such *Leaders cause the People to err, and they that are led of them are destroyed*, Isa. ix. 16. Such are many of our Time-serving *Daubers with untempered Mortar*, in Ezek. xxii. 28.

5. We cannot join with such as thereupon *cause Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which we have learned*; either by maintaining the Causes of these Divisions, or casting Fewel on that Fire, by reproaching the Faithful; or by good Words and fair Speeches deceiving the Hearts of the Simple, Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

6. We cannot join with such as have forfeited their Commission, either by gross Scandals and disorderly Walking, either in their Personal or Ministerial Capacity; Or by lying-by, and doing nothing in such a Day, wherein there is so much to do, not lifting up their Voice like a Trumpet, &c. but are sinfully silent, as to the Sins and Snares of the Time; *have not discovered our Iniquities; but have seen for us false Burdens, and Causes of Banishment*, Lam. ii. 14. We see the Sentence and Censure of such *Levites* from the Lord, Ezek. xlv. 9-15. These would deserve the

Censure of the Church, if ever they recovered their orderly Jurisdiction: But all that Christians can do in Recognition of that, is to withdraw from them, there is no other Remedy without approving of their Sin: But I do not think this should be done hastily at first, but in the Gospel Method, after Admonition, and telling them to take heed to their Ministry, again and again repeated and rejected; and then it must needs follow, ay and while the Offence be taken away by some Acknowledgment, or Amendment.

The *second* Inquiry is more of your Concernment, What Professors may be joined with in such a Day? And alas, that there should be such Occasion given for that Question by the scandalous Stumblings of many, and Jumblings of others: But it is a Day wherein the Joining that is desired cannot be in and upon the same Centre Christ, and so cannot be steadfast; a Day wherein he that is for a Sanctuary to some, is a Stone of Stumbling and a Rock of Offence to others; and so there cannot be a good Agreement amongst such, and *many* even the greatest Part *have stumbled, and are fallen, and broken, and snared, and taken*, Isa. viii. 14, 15. and this makes it a Day of Trouble, and of treading down, and of Perplexity in the Valley of Vision, Isa. xxii. 5. This makes it difficult to determine; and this Difficulty is so much the greater Misery, that there are so few that retain any Profession; and yet amongst these few, there cannot be a Joining in the Lord, without Jarrs and Janglings: This is sad, and ought to be mourned over, and all Endeavours ought to be used to have it removed: We would desire to study Tenderness, to strengthen that much decayed brotherly Love, so much commended and strictly commanded in the Gospel: It is the new Commandment of our Lord, in the New Testament, whereby we shall be known to be his Disciples, *John* xiii. 34, 35. *The Followers of God, as dear Children, should walk in Love, as Christ also loved them*, *Eph.* v. 1, 2. It is the Desire of my Soul to be at that *Conflict* (that the Apostle had) for all the Professors in *Scotland*, that their Hearts might be comforted, being knit together in Love, and unto all Riches of the full *As*.

Assurance of Understanding, Col. ii. 1, 2. But as for you Brethren, As touching brotherly Love, I hope ye need not that I should write unto you; for your selves are taught of God to love one another, 1 Thess. iv. 9. Division is always a great Mischief; but never so miserable, as in a declining, destroying Time, and a desolating Day, as this is. See how much the holy Apostle is concerned about it, and what Account the Spirit of God makes of it, 1 Cor. i. 10. 1 Cor. iii. 3. 1 Cor. xi. 18, 33. And there would be less Division, if Love to Christ and the Brethren were in Vigour; and I am confident, that where it is sincere, Differences in Judgment will not alienate mutual Affection, nor any different Practice or Fault which the Mantle of Love can cover, will be a sufficient Ground of Disjoining amongst Friends to the Cause of Christ. We would fain join with all that are faithful to the Interest of Christ, as in their Understanding it is stated, that are forward in expressing their Love to Christ, that are faithful in a Gospel Conversation, that will join with us in a free and full Confession, forsaking and mourning over the Iniquities of the Time; even tho' they and we cannot say the same Thing in every Respect; yet if we can agree in the Matter of the present Testimony, and Word of Christ's Patience, in this Hour of Temptation, we desire to join with *them*, as far as may be: But it is undeniable, that we cannot join with all that have a Profession, or a Name; for, *Some do walk, of whom we may say, and tell it with Weeping, that they are Enemies to the Cross of Christ,* both to the Doctrine, and Matter, and Reproaches, and Bearing of the Cross of Christ; many so disorderly in their Walk, that both for the Honour of the Gospel, for our own Peace, and for their Edification and Conviction, we must withdraw, both from their Way and their Worship; many so whorish in their Gading from the Lord, and so treacherous in their Departings from his right Way, to the Compliances of the Time, that we must not join with them in their Sacrifices, because displeasing to the Lord, *their Offerings are as the Bread of Mourners; all that eat thereof shall be polluted,*

ted, for their Bread, for their Soul shall not come into the House of the Lord; and should not, by our Consent, Hof. ix. 4. And so much the rather we should note them, and be cautious in our Joining with them, because they are Brethren; if they were looked upon only as Christians in a common Relation, we could allow many of them a Catholick Joining; if they were only respected under the Notion of Protestants, we could allow many of them a general Joining; if only as our covenanted Confederates or Presbyterians, we could allow them a more particular Joining: But being Brethren of the same National Church, we must take a more narrow and particular Cognizance of their Carriage to us, and of ours to them. We grant, if the Church were in its established Strength or Order, we needed not be so pinched, nor so precise in our Withdrawings in Christian Fellowship; for then, Congregational, or Presbyterial, or Provincial Discipline, would, by their Censures, preclude all such Scruplings, by putting a Note upon such, in an orderly Way: But now, all that's left us to do in the Case, is to testify our disapproving their Enormities, by our Withdrawing from, and Non-Communion with them. But here also, several Cases are to be distinguished.

First, There may be an occasional Joining, with Professors, whom Providence may cast in our Company, or us into theirs; and in this, I think we need not be so critick, but we may very cordially join with such, who in their Discourses and Carriage favour the Things of God, and the Concerns of his Kingdom; with all who seem to have the Image of Christ stamped on them, with all who seem to be Fellow-Heirs of the Grace of Life, with all who in the Judgment of Charity cannot be charged, or suspected to be scandalous, or Dividers, or Patrons of Defection: For, as on the one Hand, Christians (tho' unknown to one another, yet) have a secret Sense and Feeling of others, their Fellow-Partakers of the like precious Faith, and the same divine Nature; as these that have the Mason-word, are said to know Brethren of the Trade by their common Signs: So they have a common Inclination of Love one

to another, and constant Liking of that Message we heard from the Beginning, that we should love one another, 1 *John* iii. 11. And this is the Property of Love, that it is not suspicious, Love beaveth not itself unseemly, thinketh no Evil, it beareth all Things, believeth all Things, hopeth all Things, endureth all Things, 1 *Cor.* xiii. 5, 7. Therefore, we ought not to withdraw from our Brethren, whom we discover to be such, before we discover them also to be false Brethren, or such as we cannot join with; except in discouraging of the Courses of the Times, they evidence themselves to be guilty of such Things, as we cannot join with.

Secondly, There may be a fixed, stated Joining with professing Brethren in Societies and Fellowships, formed and appointed for Prayer and Conference, which is the best Model we can have now, instead of, and in Imitation of our old broken Congregations; and most necessary to be kept up, as being often blessed Seminaries of Religion, Nurseries of Zeal, and of the Life of Godliness; blessed often with the Presence and Countenance of God, and not wanting his Institution, as well as Approbation. It was the approved Practice of the Fearers of the Lord, under the Old Testament; to *speak often one to another, and the Lord hearkned and heard it: And a Book of Remembrance was written before him for them; They shall be mine, saith he, in that Day that I make up my Jewels: If any be spared, in a Day of Destruction, it shall be they, Mal.* iii. 16, 17. This was in their private Societies. So we find in the New Testament, both the Places, where they were, and their Work they were employed about; that was one of them at *Philippi*, where *Paul* went out *by the River Side, where Prayer was wont to be made*, where some Women resorted, *Acts* xvi. 13. And some also, who were not baptized, among whom was *Lydia*; And therefore I think, some ignorant Creatures, that desire to be instructed, should be admitted to your Christian Fellowships to hear, where Conveniency will allow, tho' not to be employed. So I think, such private Societies as these are intimated, when we read of a Church in such

a Family or Household, as in *Rom.* xvi. The Church in *Prescilla* and *Aquila's* House, them which are of *Aristobulus's* Household; These of the Household of *Narcissus*; and the like, they were only Families: These cannot be called Churches, nor were they Congregations, having their own elected Elders and Ministers; there could not be so many of them in the Church of *Rome* at that Time: Therefore they must have been only Christian Fellowships. Their Work was, to *comfort* themselves together, and *edify* one another, and *warn* the Unruly, *confirm* the feeble Minded, and *support* the Weak; to consider one another, and to provoke one another to Love, and to good Works, and *exhort* one another: For this Cause, they were *not to forsake the Assembling of themselves together, as the Manner of some was*, *Heb.* x. 25. And it is to be remarked, that it is reckoned a wilful Sinning, the Danger of which is there held forth, to forsake such Meetings. But there is not such Question made about their Institution as their Constitution, or who they are, that may be admitted to be Members of such Societies, and who ought not to be admitted? It is difficult to prescribe particular Rules in this Matter; only in the general, I think it is undeniable, that there must not be a promiscuous Admission of all that may desire it; nor of all that might be continued Members in a particular Congregation; for Persons may be admitted to that, who are ignorant, or Children; here that were very unsuitable, for there is a great Difference betwixt the Two. They differ in the Terms of the Entry, as we may perceive; for either, if they be Children of Church-Members, or Persons of a blameless Walk, they may be admitted there: This requires more Qualifications: They differ in the Order of Exclusion; there they have the Advantage of an authoritative Decision, and potestative Sentence; here only can be a brotherly and charitable Discountenancing, and Note of Non-Communion: They differ in the Nature and End of their Constitutions; the one is for gathering, and converting of Souls to the Grace of the Gospel by the Ordinances, dispensed by Officers, as well as for edifying; the other only for confirming,

comforting, admonishing, exhorting professing Believers, and praying together, for their mutual Help in the Duties of Christianity; so that it is supposed, that they are qualified Christians, at least visibly called and professing Saints, that are to join together in such a Society; and therefore, as they ought to be Persons of unstained Profession, and unrebukable Integrity, and some Experience in the Way of God, who are by Turns to be employed as the Mouth of the rest in Prayer, or Conference; tho' it be not requisite that they give a distinct Account of their being in a State of Grace, or evidence much Knowledge (yet the more of that the better, and the more comfortable) at least they ought to give Discoveries of their Seriousness, in minding Religion as their Business; so there must be some Kind of Trial and Knowledge of the Persons prerequisite; and albeit it be not so necessary, and is not attainable, that the Persons be all of one Mind in every Thing, yet there must be an Agreement in the chief Controversies of the Time, and in the Matters of the present Testimony, and in the Things that that Community have stated their Witnessing and Suffering upon; otherwise they cannot avoid Debates in their Conference, and Jarrs and Justlings in their Prayers, and so can have no comfortable Communion together, which is very inconvenient; and therefore, there may be somewhat like Articles condescended upon: But these should be as few and general as may be, to avoid the Censure and Scandal of Singularity, or Separation. I shall therefore give a Hint, what I think, ought not to debar Persons from our Societies, and what ought and may be sufficient Grounds of Non-admission, or Exclusion.

First, I conceive, That Ignorance in Matters of Fact, or of Duty in some Things, through Want of Information, should not debar a Man; or that which follows upon the former, a *Scrupling* or *Doubting* to approve or condemn some Things, that they had no Opportunity to be instructed in before, need not hinder a Joining; for so we find *Aquila* and *Priscilla* took unto them *Apollos*, knowing only the *Baptism* of *John*,

John, and expounded to him the Way of God more perfectly, *Acts xviii. 26.*

2: *Difference of Judgment*, ought not to hinder Joining, if it be either in Things *indifferent* or *not material*, or not the present Word of *Patience* and *Matter of Testimony*; for in these Things, if we account our selves stronger and more knowing, we ought to receive him that is weak, but not to doubtful *Disputations*, *Rom. xiv. 1.* Nor, that which follows upon the former, *Every Difference in Practice* according to *Light* and the judgment of *Conscience*; in Things that are not formally disorderly, (tho' we could not allow it in our selves) ought not to demur us in our Joining with the Man, that did it with *Regard to the Lord*, *Rom. xiv. 6. &c.* *Judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord come, who will bring to Light the hidden Things of Darkness, and manifest the Counsels of the Hearts; and then shall every Man have Praise of God,* *1 Cor. iv. 5.* See also *Phil. iii. 15, 16.* a Passage much to be pondered.

3. *Weakness, or Infirmities* ought not to hinder our Joining: We then that are strong, ought to bear with the *Infirmities of the Weak*, and not to please our selves, *Rom. xv. 1.* This Weakness may be consider'd as threefold, (1.) *Natural Weakness*, as *Infirmity of Parts, of Knowledge, or Courage, &c.* These are *Infirmities*, and very disadvantageous to those that labour under them: But we must bear one another's Burdens, and so fulfil the *Law of Christ*, *Gal. vi. 2.* (2.) *Spiritual Weakness*, as of the *Grace of Faith or Love, Zeal or Patience*; when we perceive some *Evidences of Hypocrisy, or Unbelief, or Security, or Coldness, or some Risings of Passion, &c.* We must not cast at them for such Things; but bear with them, and forbear, with all *Lowliness and Meekness*, *Eph. iv. 2.* (3.) *Moral Weakness*, that is, *Sins of Infirmity*; I call *Sins of Infirmity*, either *Sins of Ignorance, or personal Escapes not allowed, or such as the Person hath been hurried into by a surprising Temptation, out of Fear, or in Desertion, &c.* which we durst not do, nor would he have done, if he had been himself: Tho' we ought to reprove our Brother
for

for these Things, and not suffer Sin upon him; yet we must not disjoin from him, but receive him for all that, *Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the Glory of God, Rom. xv. 7.* Now ye know Christ received us with many Faults: So likewise, if a Man be overtaken in a Fault, we which are spiritual should restore such a one in the Spirit of Meekness, considering our selves, lest we also be tempted, *Gal. vi. 1.* These, and the like, are not sufficient Grounds of demurring, or refusing to join with our Professing Brethren.

But, 2dly, I think these following are sufficient.

First, *Heresy, or dangerous Errors*, ought to debar Men from our Fellowship, and us from theirs, *Titus iii. 10. A Man that is an Heretick, after the first and second Admonition, reject*: Which Command must have Place, even when ordinary Jurisdiction, and orderly Procedure of Church-Discipline cannot be had; for the Reason subjoined cleareth it, *Knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself*: And therefore, where the Error is such, that the Person owning it is subverted, and it is of a subverting Nature, and others like to be in Danger of the Leaven of it, he is condemned of himself, there is no Need of our Suspending of our Withdrawing from him till he be legally condemned. I do not think that this is to be restricted to these Errors that are called *fundamental*, overturning the Doctrine of Salvation; but to be extended even to those that are contradictory to our common Confession of all Orthodox Truths, as received by all of our Communion; either by maintaining Errors condemned thereby, or condemning Truths maintained thereby: We mean, if such Errors be owned by such as were, or are, looked upon as our Brethren; for otherwise we may allow them a catholick or occasional Communion.

2dly, *Apostasy, or Falling from the Truth formerly professed by our Brother, and now stated by us as the Matter of our Witness and Testimony*: That as *John* defines it, and prescribes our Carriage in that Case, *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the Doctrine of Christ, and whosoever shall come unto you, and*

brings not this Doctrine, receive him not into your Houses, neither bid him God speed: For, he that biddeth him God speed, is Partaker of his evil Deeds. 2 John 9, 10, 11. This is no Breach of brotherly Love; For this is Love, that we walk after his Commandments; and this is the Commandment, that as ye heard from the Beginning, ye should walk in it, ver. 5. and 6. of that Epistle.

3. Such as do not, in their own Judgment and Practice, fall from the Truth, yet maintain, defend and patronize Defection, and strengthen it, and harden them that are engaged in it; so that none doth return from his Wickedness; such must not be joined with: Which was that horrible Thing the Lord law in the Prophets of Jerusalem, Jer. xxiii. 14. It is also horrible in Professors. Some will not actually join in building the Wall themselves, but they will daub it with untempered Morter, and by their Countenance and Concurrence, strengthen the Builders, Ezek. xiii. 10, &c. A WO is there pronounced against such as *sew Pillows under Arm-holes, and make Kerchiefs upon the Head of every Stature; and upon such as make the Heart of the Righteous sad, whom the Lord hath not made sad; and strengthen the Hands of the Wicked, v. 18--22.* We should have a Care to avoid that Wo, which we cannot do, if we be Partakers with them, Eph. v. 7. We make our selves Partakers with them, when we countenance them: We must have a Care of such Leaven in our Societies; for *a little Leaven leaveneth the whole Lump*: So we must not be *unequally yoked* in our Joinings in Fellowship. *What Fellowship hath Righteousness with Unrighteousness? Light with Darkness? Christ with Belial? Wherefore come ye out from amongst them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean Thing, &c.* 2 Cor. vi. 14. to the End. The Place is not only meant of Affinity in Marriage, but of Christian Church-fellowship; and is spoken of such as did not make Conscience of separating from Idolatry and Uncleanness altogether, but thought that they might join with both. The Apostle calls that an *unequal Yoking*. If then we must separate from all these Things

Things that are unsuitable to Christian Communion; then we must leave these that will not separate, but will maintain their own, or others Way of lax Compliances, which do provoke God to separate from them. I do not say, that we must separate from all, that have not the same Clearness of separating from every Thing that we separate from; for that may proceed, either from *Ignorance*, or *Want of Information*, or *Difference of Judgment*, or *Weakness*; which, I was shewing before, could not be sufficient to found a *Withdrawing upon*: But I speak now of obstinate Defenders of palpable Defections; I judge these are not to be joined with.

4. More especially and undeniably, Such as are *guilty of Defections* in their Practice, unruly and disorderly in their Way, walking contrary to the received Rule, and in a Way inconsistent with the present Testimony of the Godly, are not to be joined with; especially if they have the Repute and come under the Notion of Brethren: For so much may the Apostle's Disswasive bear in the General, when he wrote unto the *Corinthians*, in an *Epistle*, *Not to keep Company with Fornicators, Covetous, Extortiners*; Not so much with others in the World (for, if common Converse must be denied with these, then must we go out of the World) as especially, if any that is called a Brother be such, with such an One, no not to eat, nor communicate with him in any Christian Fellowship, 1 *Cor.* v. 9, 10, 11. *Much more* must we avoid them, if they be *Deniers*, or *Deserters of the Cause and Truths of Christ*: If *Compliers* with wicked Courses and Snares of the Time; If *Conformers* with the Gayse of this World, in opposing our Testimony, the Argument will hold good *a fortiori*: You have the Apostle's indispensable Command, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *That ye withdraw your selves from every Brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the Tradition he hath received of us*: And, *If any Man obey not the Word*, (especially if it be the *Word of Christ's Patience*) *note that Man, and have no Company with him, that he may be ashamed*; *Yet to account him, not as an Ene-*

my, but to admonish him as a Brother, 2 Theff. iil. 6, 14, 15.

5. I think also, somewhat of that enjoined Order of Christ's must not be baulked, and wholly laid aside, even when the Church cannot have its Exercise of Jurisdiction and legal Censure, in the Case of a Brother's personal Trespass, or Offence, or Scandal, even in lesser Matters, if he be obstinate and contumacious, after many repeated Admonitions; then, when we cannot get a Church to tell it to, we may put a Note upon him (at least when we cannot pass a Sentence) that he may be ashamed; that is, by withdrawing from him, and not to admit him to join, as before, in our Fellowships. I doubt not but our Lord did leave something of this Order to be observed in all Times, even when in his Wisdom he did foresee, that his People might be in such a Condition, as that they could not have a Church-judicatory; and this he seems to insinuate, when he allows something of this Power and Promise also to Two or Three, met together in his Name, *Matth xviii. 15—20.* There is certainly much Need of Caution here, to beware of Prejudice, or Presumption, or Precipitancy: But as far as can consist with our own Peace of Conscience, or our Brother's Edification, all Place would be given to bearing with, and forbearing, and forgiving all Trespases against our selves; as *Peter's Question, How often he must forgive his Brother,* and our Lord's Parable in explaining the Answer to that Question, makes apparent, *Matth. xviii. 21.* to the Close. But this should not hinder that these and other scandalous Offences, tho' not simply very hainous in themselves, attended with Obstinacy, should be thus noted, as I have said.

Lastly, I find the Apostle gives Direction, and by way of earnest Intreaty, to *Mark them that cause Divisions and Offences, contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them,* *Rom. xvi. 17.* If, therefore, any of our Brethren will needs take dividing Courses from, and contrary to that which we have learned to be Truth and Duty, and which we have stated as the Matter of our present Witnessing and Suffering;

fering, and will oppose our Way, and will maintain and propagate his own, and go to profelyte us into his Way, by involving us into Debates, not for Information, but for Division; I can see no other Way, but to refuse to join with him, as the *Mark* we should put upon him.

Possibly some other Grounds of warrantable Withdrawing you may think upon; but none other occur to me at present: These in the *General* to me are clear, and may be to many more than will subscribe to *Particulars*, when condescended upon, as the *Grounds* of our Disowning and Withdrawing from our *professing Brethren* in *Scotland*. But to give my Thoughts of these also, I shall distinguish betwixt a *voluntary* and a *forced* Joining.

First, There may be a *voluntary* Joining in and with fixed Societies, in admitting others, and accepting of Admittance of our selves into the Fellowship of all that love and adhere to the Lord's righteous Cause, as it is stated this Day against his Enemies; with all that own, and wrestle, and witness, and suffer for the covenanted Work of Reformation from *Popery*, *Prelacy*, and *Eraastianism* in *Scotland*; With all that are serious, in mourning over all the Evidences and Effects of the Lord's Anger against us, and are impartial in searching into all the procuring Causes of it; tho' perhaps, we may find out more Steps and Degrees of both, than they find: Finally, With all that are willing to concur with us, and embark their Lot with the persecuted Remnant, in the Prosecution of the Duties of the Day: And from others we must withdraw. But who these are, and how to rank them, you, who are more experimentally acquainted with Cases incident, know better than I; so that I need not to insist to specify Particulars. Only I think, that upon the former *general Grounds*, (1.) All that conform and submit to *Prelacy*, by hearing Curats, &c. are to be noted, and Fellowship to be refused with them: That being an Error long since exploded and abjured by the Church of *Scotland*, and engaged against by Covenant: All who decline, or disown that Covenant, ought to be withdrawn

drawn from. (2.) All *Sectarians*, who do not own our *covenanted Reformation*, nor the *Government* of our Church, by *Presbyteries, Synods* and *General Assemblies*, ought not to be owned, nor adjoined with in our Societies. (3.) Such as do actually countenance, or concur to the upholding of the wretched *Indulgence*, the Bane of our Church, by hearing the indulged, or pleading for, or taking the Pains of their woe-ful, *Christ-dishonouring*, and *Church-rending* *Dejection*; for which they deserve to be noted, as the *Betrayers of the Rights of the Church of Scotland*, by all who do concert that Cause and Testimony thereof; These are not to be joined with.

(4.) Such as practically and intentionally, *contradict and condemn the present stated Testimony of the suffering and witnessing Remnant*, owned of God, sealed by their Blood, and for which others suffer great Afflictions; either by virulent and viporous *Reproaching, Slandering* and *calumniating* them; Or by *renouncing and abjuring* (especially before the Enemy) their *Declarations, Apologies* and *Vindications* of themselves, and the Truths they adhere to: Such as disown their avowed *Opposition* to the *Tyranny* of the Times, and their *rejecting* the present *Tyrants Usurpations*, and their *necessitate Endeavours* to defend themselves from, or to *avenge* themselves on their *Murderers*, or to bring them to *condign Punishment*, as the Lord shall give them a *Call, Opportunity* and *Capacity*: Such, I say, are to be withdrawn from, as being not only *Offenders* but *Condemners* of the Generation of the *Righteous*, and *Consenters* to, and *Justifiers* of the *Effusion* of their Blood. Therefore, I think, that the *Takers* of the late *Oath of Abjuration*, do deserve this *Kind of Note*: I say, these that did it practically before the Enemies; for, I do not think, that all that cannot own that *Declaration*, there *abjured*, are forthwith for that to be separated from; for they may have *Scruples* out of *Ignorance*, or *Misconstructions* against some Things in the *Form*, or some *Expressions* of it; yet will not condemn the *Matter* of it *absolutely*, nor any *Part* of it practically before the
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Enemy : Some again may quarrel at the *Unseasonableness* of it ; Others, through Misinformation, may have condemned it *practically*, but not *intentionally*, conceiving that that *Apogetical Declaration* did assert the Lawfulness of Murder, and Assassination : These are not to be withdrawn from, meerly because they have done so ; If so be, after better information and Admonition, they do not obstinately defend their own Deed, and condemn the said Declaration intentionally.

(5.) All such *Compliers*, as do not only own the Authority of the present Party now in Power, but transact and bargain with them, by *subscribing* their Oaths, Tenders, Bonds and Impositions whatsoever ; as for Instance, the *Takers* of that detestable *Test*, the *Bond of Peace, Regulation, Conformity, &c.* the *Subscribers* of their *Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy* ; such as engaged never to rise in Arms against the present Government upon *no Pretence whatsoever* ; and all *Strengtheners* of the present *Opposition* of Christ's Kingdom, by paying *Cess* or the like, are to be withdrawn from.

(6.) All such, as are deprehended in any *Scandal*, or *offensive Practice*, dishonourable to the Profession, such as Drunkenness, or Lying, &c. are to be separated from.

2dly, There is a *forced Joining*, in a forced Society ; that is in your Case, that are by the unjust Violence of Men shut up in a Prison, in one Room with locked Doors, wherein ye cannot, nor must not omit publick Worship ; In which Case, now having enlarged so much in the general, I need not insist : Your own Discretion will direct you to apply Particulars ; for it will not admit any Matter of Doubt, or Question, but that ye may join with all, from whom ye would not withdraw in your voluntary stated Societies ; and if it may consist with Truth and Duty, or your present Testimony and State of your Suffering, you would rather take in more, for your own Peace and comfortable Converse, for holding up the Worship of God without Discord, for avoiding the odious Censures and malicious Observations of your com-

mon Enemies, who are glad and greedy to see and
 espy your Breaches: But you must prefer Duty and
 Truth to all Conveniences and Advantages whatsom-
 ever, and hold fast your Testimony, and what you
 learned of Christ, let who will be offended. Only
 there would be some Difference allowed in your Car-
 riage to these who *desire* to be *admitted*, and those
 who desire to *admit* you to their Communion. The
 first require more Tenderness and Condescendency;
 The other more Caution and Peremptoriness. I mean,
 when you are the greater Number in a Room; when
 you are to give Proposals to these that would join
 with you, and if they will not acquiesce, yet I think,
 ye cannot hinder them from the Privilege of publick
 Worship, amongst themselves at convenient Turns, if
 they demand it; for that were altogether unbrotherly,
 and favouring too much of Supremacy: But if you be the
 lesser Number there, and cannot join with them, then
 I think, you should plead for your Privilege of keep-
 ing up publick Worship amongst your selves; and as
 ye would hear theirs without joining, yet in an in-
 offensive Posture, and a Place separate by your selves:
 So they cannot deny, and you cannot well refuse, to
 take either one Day and they another, or rather, one
 Time of the Day of your own choosing, and let them
 take the rest for going about their Duty; for this is
 not joining with them by Turns, but a separate Fel-
 lowship of your own, taking your own Turns,
 and pleading your own Privilege, whereby you may
 have the Advantage of letting them hear your pub-
 lick Re grate, and Bemoanings of their offensive Cour-
 ses and Disorders, for which ye cannot join with
 them; whereby also much Contention and Irritation
 may be prevented, and mutual Affection convincingly
 entertained, notwithstanding of Differences; which,
 that it may obtain with the Blessing of the Lord, shall
 be the Prayer of

Your Welwisher,

and Companion in Tribulation,

ALEXANDER SHIELDS

