

S E R M O N,

Before Receiving the

H O L Y S A C R A M E N T.

By the late Reverend JOHN WILLISON,
minister of the gospel at Dundee.

Cor. 11. 27. *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*

THE apostle having heard of several abuses that had crept in among the *Corinthians* with respect to their partaking at the Lord's supper, does severely rebuke them; and, for their amendment, lays down the platform of Christ's institution to them, from the 23d to this verse; and, having done so, comes to draw a conclusion or inference, from the doctrine he had been teaching them, in the text; *wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, &c. q. d.* seeing it is so that this great ordinance is of Christ's appointment, and he has left it behind him as a memorial of himself, seeing by it we shew forth the Lord's death then certainly the unworthy and unbecoming celebration of such an ordinance, which is of so great concern, must be a very heinous crime, and a great reflection on the author of it, which he will infallibly resent.

In the words we have two things:

1. The sin itself proposed: *Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily.*—i. e. Whatever man approaches Christ's table, and partakes of these sacred symbols of Christ's

body and blood, having an irreverent, irreligious unworthy and unfit carriage of heart, is guilty of a great crime, as reflecting not on the elements themselves, but vilipending them which they represent. And, to aggravate it, he calls it the *bread and cup of the Lord*. Tho' it were but common bread and wine, to use it unworthily were a crime; but it is the bread and wine of the Lord, instituted by him for his glory and our salvation; and therefore it is a far greater crime to use it unworthily. This unworthiness respects not the person of the receiver so much as the manner of his receiving: the apostle speaks not of a worthiness of the person, but a worthiness of the action; for he says not, *Whatsoever unworthy person eats, &c.* for then he had excluded every man, for we are all unworthy. Moreover, the apostle words it thus, to be a caveat even to believers, and regenerate as well as natural persons, that people do not partake of the Lord's supper either in an unworthy state or unworthy frame. So he insinuates that even regenerate persons may communicate unworthily, which here does note the want of a right gospel frame and disposition of soul.

2. The guilt of this sin; *shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*; i. e. shall either be guilty of an egregious profanation and contempt of Christ's body, seeing any abuse of the king's picture is reckoned an abuse of himself; or they shall be ranked in with the *Jews* who actually crucified him, pierced his body, and shed his blood.

Hence we observe, That unworthy communicating is a sin of great guilt and hazard. And therefore in further discoursing on this subject, we shall endeavour to show,

- I. What we are to understand by unworthy communicating.
- II. Wherein consists the guilt and danger of it.

perfect purity and spotless or untainted holiness does not make a person an unworthy communicant. If these imperfections be regretted and mourned over: or what mortal can say that he has cleansed his heart, and that he is pure from sin? *Prov.* 20. 7. Neither, 2. does the want of great knowledge. Tho' a man understand not the nice debates and abstruse scholastic disputes in divinity. yet, if he know the fundamental principles of religion. he may be a worthy communicant. Nor, 3. doth some measure of weakness of faith, attended with many doubts and fears, render one an unworthy communicant: for Christ says to his disciples, *O ye of little faith, yet doth he not reject them; and he received that man, Mark* 9. 22. who had but a very weak weaverling faith, and soon after cried out with tears, *I believe, Lord, help my unbelief*. Nor yet, 4. doth the want of sensible joy or comfort in or after communicating hinder a person from being a worthy partaker: for there may be a lively acting of the graces, while yet there is no great sense of God's favour.

But, *positively*, unworthy communicating at Christ's table, is, 1. When a person communicates more for custom than for conscience sake; when men come to the table of the Lord because it is the fashion of the country where they live. and because all their neighbours do so, and they must go along with them for company's sake. and that it would not be lucky for them if they got not their sacrament with their neighbours; but still have no sense upon their spirits of Christ's command. nor of the designs, the usefulness and comfort of this sacrament. Let us tremble and consider their hazard.

2. When a person communicates without understanding his necessity of Christ, and the nature and ends of this ordinance; when a person knows not the need of a Redeemer to recover him out of his

ruined natural state, or of his blood to cleanse and heal his wounds, and his righteousness to cover his nakedness. This ordinance is a contract betwixt God and sinners: you can never go about it worthily, unless you understand the nature of the covenant and the terms on which you engage: you must know yourselvess to be poor and naked, sick and wounded, under the curse of the law, the corruption of sin, and the power of *Satan*, and Christ's fitness and suitableness to recover and help you, otherways you cannot discern the Lord's body aright.

3. When a person rests on the bare ordinance without looking to Christ in it, and on the naked signs and elements for pardon and justification.

How many are there who thus content themselves with *Elijah's* mantle, without asking for the God of *Elijah*? They take the shell for the kernal, and the shadow for the substance. Many think, if they get their communion as they call it, tho' it be nothing but a bit of bread and a tip of wine, they are well, they are out of all danger of hell and the devil; and thus they make it a mere charm.

4. When a person continues in habitual and frequent breaches of known commands, unrepented of; or in the omission of known duties, such as family worship or secret prayer; for those who forget Christ all the year long are not likely to remember him aright at a communion-table: or yet when one continues in the commission of known sins, such as drunkenness, swearing, uncleannets, covetousness, sabbath-breaking, &c. or lyes in any secret sin unrepented of, such as revenge, or malice at his neighbour. The heart that is a habitation for any of these kind of devils, is not a fit temple to receive Christ. O sinner, wouldst thou invite Christ into that chamber where all his murderers are lodged? Not, certainly, unless thou hadst a design to crucify him over again.

5. It is to communicate without any previous preparation, and serious pains, by prayer and self-examination. If you would communicate worthily, you must use all endeavours to train your hearts and sack your souls in order to entertain the master of the feast, Christ saith to every person who intends to partake of this sacrament as *Samuel* said to *Jesse's* sons, *1 Sam. 16. 15. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.* Remember what a rebuke Christ gave to the man who came to the feast, and was not at pains before to put on the wedding garment, *Matth. 22. 11. 12.*

6. It is to communicate without remembering Christ or his death, which is the great design of the ordinance, *Luke 22. 20.* And this is not a bare speculative or historical remembrance, but a practical and a grateful heart affecting remembrance, such a remembrance as a man hath when he sees the picture of a dear friend who is deceased or absent from him: he not only remembers his person, but the mutual love that was betwixt them, and the many good offices his friend hath done for him. Well, if ye would communicate aright, ye should remember Christ's painful death and bitter agonies; how he hung on the cross with his body torn and bleeding all over; how heaven, earth and hell, justice, men and devils, set upon him at once; how he was broken and bruised by his Father in the day of his great wrath, how the thorns pierced his temples, and drew deep furrows in his face; and how he suffered all this for sinners, and in the midst of all still maintained a vehement and constant love to them. He had no sin of his own; and all his sorrows, cries, groans, agonies, wrestlings and strugglings, were for us, O communicants, take a view of these things to-night, and ye will be fitter to remember them to-morrow.

7. It is to approach without that awful dread and reverence of God which we should have on our spirits. O careless sinner, who can approach God's table as unconcernedly as if you were going to sit down at a common feast. tremble, for you will eat and drink unworthily. You must approach with a reverence of the holiness and justice of God, who hath died for sin so much, so vehemently, that he could stand by while his dear son was suffering for it, yearning and struggling in the cruel pangs of death among the hands of bloody murderers, and that without any relenting of heart. What earthly father but would account the sufferings of his son as the rending of his bowels? *Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief.* Isa 53. 10. This was a greater evidence of the inexorableness of his justice, than if he had hurled the whole world full of men and angels into hell. Therefore, when we approach to eat and to drink at the table of the Lord, we should be filled with a reverential adoration of the justice of God, and also of his purity, and of his all-seeing and piercing eye that is beholding us at the time of communicating. If men had the recent impressions of this, would they eat and drink so unconcernedly and irreverently? They would touch this bread and this cup with the same awe and reverence that the woman with the bloody issue touched the hem of Christ's garment, and that was quaking and trembling, *Mark* 5. 33.

8. It is to sit down with a cold heart, wanting love to Christ. O communicants, this is a love-feast, and it is with love you can entertain Christ. If you be an enemy to him, you have nothing to do at his table; this is a feast for friends only, *Cant.* 5. 1. *Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly. O beloved.* Whatever be wanting, love must not be wanting; for love is the spring that moveth all the graces, faith, repentance, delight, &c. An

extended Saviour requires an enlarged heart; and nothing is more becoming than that love should be recompenced with love. O sinner, here you may see God bringing his Son from heaven to earth, from the earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, and pouring out his blood, to keep us from bleeding. Remember that without love there is no worthy communicating, to benefit by the sacrament, no communion with God. *John 14 21. He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and ver. 23. We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* O sinner, why therefore wilt thou not love Christ? Go home, and secretly take a view of Christ and his love, and regret your want of love, and say, 'Lord, I have a cold heart; O do thou inflame it. How can I look on a Saviour who had his hands nailed, his head picked, his sides pierced, his heart grieved, for my sins, and not love him? Can I behold the arms of the Son of God open on the cross, the spear reaching his heart, his affections streaming out to us in blood, when we were enemies to him, and still be so cold and indifferent.'

9. It is to communicate with unbroken hearts for sin. O sinner, a whole heart and a broken Christ will never suit together. This passover must be eaten with bitter herbs; ye can have no comfort in his ordinance without it; ye must sow in tears if ye would reap in joy. Therefore come humbly and mournfully, acknowledging that all these strokes that were laid on Christ were due to us, and that the tragedy that was acted on him should have been acted in us; we should have been the mark of all the arrows of God's vengeance; it is on us that all the visits of wrath should have been poured out. When he was bruised for our iniquities, we should have been bruised down to hell under the millstone of God's wrath; when he groaned on the cross, it was we that should have roared with the devils to all eternity.

It is our sins that have done all: O cursed sin! If ye would not be unworthy communicants, ye should come here with a great mourning for sin, for all your bypast sins, and for your breaches of vows since the last sacrament, for crucifying Christ over again, and causing his wounds to bleed afresh. O is your heart whole and hard, go home and regrete it, and cry to God, That you are afraid of unworthy communicating, and darest not approach his table with such a heart. And endeavour to be as much affected in time of communicating as if you heard every piercing groan of Christ in the garden, and numbred every drop of blood that trickled down from him, and had been present and saw the soldiers driving in the nails and stabbing in the spear. Did the rocks rend, the sun veil himself, and the heavens mourn in black, and will your souls remain unaffected? Look upon him till your hearts be set a-mourning *as one mourneth for his only son. and be in bitterness as one is in bitterness for his first-born, Zech. 12. 10.* Let all the springs of sorrow be opened and gush out.

10. It is to communicate with loose wandering hearts, that are thinking on the world when they should be fixed on Christ's dying. Will any venture to come here and sit down to-morrow with the world in their hearts, and their thoughts roving about it, and not to much as give any notice to Christ's dying groans, more than it were the death of some *East-India* prince they were hearing of. What have you to do with the world at Christ's table? It will make him abhor you. O go home this night, and take pains to cleanse and empty your hearts of all the rubbish of vain imaginations; bring no worldly thoughts to this place to-morrow, but say to the world and all things thereof, as *Abraham* said to the young men, *Gen. 22. 5. Abide you here till I go and worship yonder.* Endeavour to come here with

as serious and solemn a frame as if thou wert going to lay down thy life. Call in all your affections, unite all your thoughts, contract all the beams of your soul, and let them be set on the object before you. Cry mightily to heaven this night, " Lord, pity my worldly heart. O banish away the devil, who will be ready to cast in vain thoughts, and let me think only on a dying Lord."

11. It is to communicate without any thankfulness of heart, or wondering at redeeming love. If we would communicate worthily, our hearts should ascend, like *Manoah's* angel, in the smoke of thanksgiving and elevation of spirit. *Judg.* 19 20 we should have the high praises of God in our mouths, and be inviting the angels and all creation to assist us in praising him. We should bless God for sending his Son, and Christ for his dying love, in drinking up that bitter cup that we should have drunk for ever. O sinner, canst thou not get a thankful admiring heart? Travel then into the mount of *Olives* where Christ prayed and wept. Enter into the garden, where he groaned and struggled in an agony: see how humbly he went bearing his cross; and will not your affections warm?

12. It is to eat and drink without spiritual hunger and thirst. You cannot partake of this feast without an appetite. It will be a shame to you to come to this full feast, and leave your stomachs at home. The hearts of many are glutted with the world; and the full soul lothes the honey comb. It is only the hungry and thirsty soul that Christ will make welcome. When the earth is sore parched with drought, it greedily sucks in the rain; so will you very eagerly embrace the mercies offered in this sacrament, if you be suitably disposed. Can ye sit down at a communion table, and have no hunger for the bread of life, no panting for pardon of sin and for a sight of Christ's face? Will ye not be lay-

ing, " Will Christ indeed come to this feast? Sad will it be for me if I miss him " When desires opens the heart widest, then God opens his hand largest. *Psal. 81. 10. Open thymouth wide, and I will fill it.* O go home and cry for a hungry heart; " Acrumb, Lord, from thy table, else I starve and die."

13. It is to communicate without exercising faith, and laying hold on Christ by the arms of faith. If you communicate aright, you seal a marriage covenant and bargain with Christ. And you must take Christ intirely on his own terms. You are unworthy communicants if you think of halving it with Christ. Embrace him not only as a priest, but as a king; not only to be saved by him, but to serve him, and live for him, and cleave to him, come death, come life. Do all this with full deliberation and resolution, so that all the threatnings of devils, the pleasures of sin, the allurements of the world, shall never perswade you to part with your precious Christ again. O go home this night, and take another view of this bargain and covenant, and the vast priveleges of it; and come to-morrow fixedly resolved to embrace it and adhere to it.

14. Those communicate unworthily who do not communicate with strong and unakerable resolutions against sin as the mortal enemy of Christ and of their precious soule. There are many that cast by their gross sins, such as drunkenness and swearing, and resolve to be holy, and to pray, for the time of a sacrament; but when it is over, they become just as they were. If there be any such here, I warn you of your danger, that you will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. O it is a sad thing; to appear as Christians at a communion table, and to live like divels afterwards. I tell thee, O man, to come with a heart resolved to go on in impenitency, is to be worse than *Judas*, who was struck

with remorse at the beginning of Christ's sufferings. Did that vile traitor's heart relent for his treachery when he saw Christ ready to suffer, and shall we have thoughts of sin and betraying of Christ, when we see his sufferings fully executed? O what is this but to be murderers of Christ, and to turn the table of the Lord into a shambles and an *Aceldama*? Let us therefore come with deep considerations of the cursed nature and demerit of sin, firmly resolv'd to fight against it to our last breath, and to revenge the blood and death of precious Christ on it. If we have been drunkards, swearers, sabbath-breakers, neglectors of prayer, &c. ye must resolve to be such no more.

II. I proceed to the Second place, to show wherein consists the guilt and danger of unworthy communicating. It is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. A great guilt indeed! A dreadful charge, to be reckoned among the *Jews* and soldiers who embrued their hands in the blood of Christ!

1. It is a mocking of Christ. Your coming to his table is a pretence of love to him, that you come here to remember his death and unparallell'd love, and to proclaim what obligations ly on you to love him, and to hate sin that used him so; and therefore when you come away to embrace temptations as readily as ever, you plainly declare that you was sitting with Christ when you came to his table. It is a solemn mocking of him. You act *Judas's* part, and say, *Hail, master*, while you are playing the traitor; the soldiers part, saying, *Hail, king of the Jews*, when you design to crucify him. O what a guilt this must be?

2. It is a base undervaluing and contempt of the body and blood of Christ. yea, a regarding it as the blood of a malefactor. It is impossible that an unworthy communicant can regard it as the blood of an innocent man, tho' this were bad enough, in deny-

ing the efficacy of it, but he must needs regard it as the blood of the highest malefactor that ever was in the world. If ye do not own it and accept it as the blood of God, ye charge Christ as a greater criminal than *Judas*, as the greatest cheat and imposture that ever was, in the declaring himself to be the Son of God. By disregarding this sacrament ye are guilty of the greatest affront to Christ that can be offered. What greater affront can be offered than to throw the picture of a prince into a nasty jakes or dunghill? Can you disparage the covenant of grace more than by unworthily using the seals of it? Can you affront Christ more than by coming to his table covered over with your sins? Should a beggar who was wallowing in a puddle intrude himself in that filthy condition into a prince's company, sit down at his table, and dip his betmeared hands into the same dish with him? It is as if ye should say that the body and blood of the Redeemer was only fit food for dogs and swine.

3. It is an implicate consent and approbation of the *Jews* murdering of the Lord of glory. He is supposed to consent to the death of an innocent person who sets light of it, and is no ways affected by it, or entertains and abetts the murder. So who so ever hath slight thoughts of Christ's death, and is not grieved for his sins that were the cause of it, or lodges them still with delight in his heart, is accessary to the murder, and so is guilty of the blood of Christ. O my friends, is this a small guilt? To be guilty of the innocent blood of any person is a dreadful crime: but what must it be to be guilty of the blood of the Son of God? O profane sinner who has not a mind to leave thy sins, come not to the table of the Lord; thou wilt embroc thy hands a-tresh in the blood of Christ, the glorified Son of God: thou wilt be his executioner, and not his guest. Therefore part with all your sins this night, and bid

Christ's traitors adieu for ever. You may as well profess openly at Christ's table to-morrow your love to the nails that pierced him, and the spear that ran into his side, and adore them for such an action, as come here with a love to these sins which were more bitter to him than the nails and spear. The *Jews* or *Romans* had no more power over him, had it not been for our sins: yea, I may say, this will exceed the sin of the *Jews* in some respects; they crucified Christ ignorantly, but you wittingly, they reckon'd him guilty and a blasphemer, but you do it to an innocent and your Redeemer; they did it in his state of humiliation, while in the form of a servant, but you do it when he is exalted at his Father's right-hand. O tremble at such aggravated guilt.

4. The occasion whereat unworthy communicants crucify Christ makes it a heinous guilt: it is while he is displaying a banner of love to you; it is while he is making a rich feast for you, yea, and offering his flesh and blood to save your poor souls from perishing. Would it not be counted a horrid monstrous crime, in a poor beggar, who is lying starving by the way side, if some hospital man should be moved with compassion to him and take him in, and make a great feast for him, and in the meantime, while he is entertaining him, and beseeching him to eat heartily, that he should stab the master of the feast? And will you come to Christ's table, where he has prepared all spiritual and heavenly dainties for you, and in saying to you, *Eat, O friends; drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved;* and yet will ye cruelly stab and murder the Master of that blessed feast? Lord, save any of you from such dreadful wickedness and barbarity. To be guilty of blood is terrible: but O what must it be to be guilty of that blood which is inconceivably more precious than the blood of all the kings or men that ever lived, more precious than the life of all angels and the whole creation!

APPLICATION.

1. Hence see what a malignant devilish nature sin hath. It turns wholesome food into poison, the waters of the sanctuary into the waters of *Mara*, a cup of salvation to a cup of damnation. How stupid and insensible does it make the heart! who could think that sinners could ever become so barbarous and hard hearted as to stab and murder the Lord of glory, who hath already, to the astonishment of men and angels, laid down his life to save them?

2. Hence be astonished at God's patience and long suffering, that he should suffer such horrid and barbarous murderers to live so long; that he should suffer so many wretches to approach his table, and stab him over and over again, when he hath flames and vengeance at command to consume and destroy them. O wonderful patience! O riches of forbearance! O sinners, bless God, that ye have yet an offer of that blood which alone can cleanse you from the guilt of shedding it?

But have not all of us reason to lament our unworthieness? Who among us can say, that he never contracted any thing of this guilt of the body and blood of Christ? Did we never sit down at Christ's table with our minds wavering, our hearts cold, our affections languishing, our spirits, that should have been in heaven, sunk in the earth? Alas! alas! *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness* may be the cry of every one of us, as it was *David's Psal. 51.*

14 How often have we wounded him who delivered us, and killed him who saved us, trampled on that blood which must sprinkle and cleanse us? O we have all of us reason to weep over a crucified slain Lord, and to make this a place of *Bochim*.

3. What care should we all take of preparing ourselves to come to Christ's table with the wedding

garment, that we be not unworthy communicants, and so be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord? Venture not to come without examining yourselves, your sins, your graces, your wants and your designs: and let this be a praying and wrestling night with you. O careless sinner, darest thou approach Christ's table without prayer and repentance, and thus be guilty of Christ's blood? Thou runnest a great risk of it; and it will be a wonder if you escape God's vengeance. What if God break out upon you, as in *Nadab and Abihu*? What if he should strike you dead with a thunder-bolt on the very spot, and make you a monument of his wrath to all around? You will be only obliged to God's patience if it be other-ways: but sure I am thou wilt draw down vast loads of wrath on thy soul, and it will be a sad reckoning at the long run. O remember what became of the first unworthy communicant, (if *Judas* was one): he was immediately given up to the possession of the evil, who entered into him with the sup. If the evil were let loose, what havok would he make among unworthy communicants? He would soon revenge the blood of Christ, and make the communion table a *Golgotha*. O sinners, will you be guilty of shedding the blood of a dear Saviour, who is dying to save you; will you offer to make a new attempt on his life? If you dare be so barbarous, I tell you, heaven and earth will be a witness against you; that very blood which you profane and spill cry aloud to heaven for vengeance upon you: it will be a witness against you. The saints and angels, who behold you profaning his blood, will be witnesses against you; the communion table and cups will be witnesses against you.

Are there any among you trembling, and fearing that you communicate unworthily, and so be guilty of Christ's body and blood? To such let me say, you would receive worthily, O come with your hearts

burning and your souls thirsting; abhor cursed sin, which was the cause of Christ's sufferings; cast yourselves in the arms of a crucified Redeemer; wash your souls in his blood; humbly plead his merits before God, and believingly apply them; and he will satisfy your souls as with marrow and fatness, and your mouth shall praise him with joyful lips.

F I N I S.

