

OPEN COMMUNION:

A DISCUSSION.

BY

REV. ARTHUR E. COX, A. B.

PASTOR OF FREE BAPTIST CHURCHES AT LITTLE FALLS AND WINDHAM
CENTER, MAINE. LATE OF RICHMOND, VA.

"But having the same spirit of faith, according to that which is written,
I believed, and therefore did I speak; we also believe, and therefore also
we speak."—2 Cor. 4: 13.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

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ERRATA.

On p. 4, 17th line from top, for "qualifies" read *qualify*.

On p. 20, last line, for "subsequent" read *consequent*.

On p. 19, 10th line from bottom, for "rights," read *rites*.

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Among the body of Christians called Baptists there has arisen a difference of opinion as to what persons may properly be invited to the Lord's Supper. Open communion designates the practice of those Baptist churches that welcome to the Lord's table all true believers in Christ. Opposed to this is close or strict communion, practiced by those Baptist churches who restrict their invitation to the Supper (1) to baptized, i. e., immersed believers, or (2) to members of churches of their own order, or (3) to members of the particular church where the Supper is observed.

* 2 Cor. 4: 13. † Eph. 4: 15.

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OPEN COMMUNION.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

Religious controversy may be so conducted as to produce more harm than good. When the great idea is to advocate the tenets of one's own sect rather than to unfold the teaching of God's word, partisan feeling obscures truth. But there is a right kind of religious controversy. The same principle which impels us to speak on the great fundamentals of Christianity, viz., the fact that we believe them,* should impel us to speak sometimes on minor points; for, while these may not directly affect anyone's salvation, they do affect the completeness of Christian doctrine, the correctness of Christian practice, and, frequently, the progress of Christian truth. We must bear in mind, however, that in discussing minor points we often oppose the views of other Christians,—those who in their lives bring forth the fruits of righteousness, and whom God has sealed with the Holy Spirit; and while the piety of such persons does not render them incapable of mistakes, it may safely be presumed to free them from intentional error. One right and safe path opens to the religious controversialist. It is to follow the apostle's precept about speaking the truth in love.† I shall strive by Divine aid to obey that precept in the following pages.

Among the body of Christians called Baptists there has arisen a difference of opinion as to what persons may properly be invited to the Lord's Supper. Open communion designates the practice of those Baptist churches that welcome to the Lord's table all true believers in Christ. Opposed to this is close or strict communion, practiced by those Baptist churches who restrict their invitation to the Supper (1) to baptized, i. e., immersed believers, or (2) to members of churches of their own order, or (3) to members of the particular church where the Supper is observed.

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The dispute between close and open communion is not of recent origin. In the seventeenth century, John Bunyan, a Baptist minister of Bedford, England, the celebrated author of the "Pilgrim's Progress," advocated open communion views. The gifted and eloquent Robert Hall, near the dawn of the present century, defended, in the camp of English Baptists, the practice of open communion. Of course these men met with opposition, but the issue of the controversy is that to-day the vast majority of Baptist churches in England have adopted the views held by Bunyan and Hall. A different result has been realized on this side of the Atlantic. The larger body of American Baptists support close communion, though many of their members protest against the dogma. The denomination known as Free Baptists take the open communion position. Though comparatively few in numbers, they are increasing. They have churches in New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and several of the Western States. Other open communion Baptist bodies are found in different parts of the South and West.

But the history of the controversy, whether in this country or in England, can not decide the question for candid minds. An appeal must be taken to the Bible, and to its crucial test all views on this subject must be submitted. "To the law and to the testimony! if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them."^{*}

I propose to consider, in two chapters, the arguments for close communion, then to vindicate the open communion position, afterwards to notice some objections urged against open communion, and finally to call attention to its practical advantages.

CHAPTER II.

ARGUMENT FOR RESTRICTING THE COMMUNION TO IMMERSED BELIEVERS CONSIDERED.

It is the belief of all Baptists that there is but one Scriptural mode of baptism, and that immersion. This view seems to them supported by the meaning of the original word for baptize, by the use of the term in Holy Scripture, and by the descriptions of New Testament baptisms. This belief of the Baptists the present writer decidedly indorses. Not because of the name, but because of the Scriptural truth in his view represented by the name, he wishes to be considered a Baptist.

The fundamental position taken by close communionists is

^{*}Is. 8: 20. R. V.

claimed to be a consequence of these views in regard to baptism. "Baptism," say they, "is prerequisite to communion, and since immersion is baptism, it follows that immersion is prerequisite to communion, and none but immersed believers can properly be invited to the communion table." It is manifest, however, that this argument brings in a new idea not involved in our committal to Baptist views concerning baptism. The assertion that baptism is prerequisite to communion must be legitimately proved, before it can be said, in the phraseology of our opponents, that close communion is close baptism. That many regard this as already proved, I have no doubt; but a little careful inquiry may help them to think otherwise.

In the first place, the Bible nowhere states the *necessary* priority of baptism to communion. And, though our opponents hasten to reply that we can not expect a "Thus saith the Lord" for everything, but must receive some truths as the result of fair inference, reasons occur to us why we might expect explicit teaching on this point. We are dealing with positive institutions. The duty of baptism, and the duty of observing the Lord's Supper, are not arrived at by reason. They are not deductions from some fundamental principle of Christianity. The obligation to observe these ordinances rests solely upon the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This being the case, is it not likely that any necessary relation between these two positive institutions, if it existed, would also be a matter of express command? Our Saviour gave us baptism by commandment.* He gave us his memorial supper by commandment.† So it seems probable that had baptism been an indispensable qualification for the observance of the Supper, it also would have been declared by commandment, and not left to be traced out as a matter of inference.

In the second place, regarding the alleged necessary priority of baptism to the Supper as an inference, it seems to us hastily and superficially drawn. Our opponents seek to support it from the wording of the great commission, and from the narrative about the Pentecostal converts. Matthew 28: 19, 20 gives the former: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." It is inferred that the different duties included in this comprehensive command are binding in the order in which they are named; so that obedience to the first is a necessary qualification for the observance of the second; and obedience to the first and second, a necessary qualification for the observance of the third. Or, in other

* Matt. 28: 19. † 1 Cor. 11: 24, 25.

words, to become a disciple qualifies for baptism (which incidentally is true, as taught in Acts 10: 47*); and being a baptized disciple qualifies for observing the things commanded, among which is the Lord's Supper. A similar argument is constructed on Acts 2: 41, 42: "They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." These verses record the practice of the first converts under the apostles' ministry. What they did, close communionists state about as follows: (1) They received the word, (2) they were baptized, (3) they observed the Lord's Supper, for the expression "breaking of bread" most probably refers to this ordinance. Similar inferences are drawn from this passage to those founded on the wording of the commission; viz., that receiving the word qualifies for baptism, and that receiving the word and baptism qualifies for observing the Supper.† From the two passages quoted the argument is essentially the same. The inference that baptism along with conversion is a qualification for observing the Supper, is what now concerns us.

The first objection to this inference is somewhat obvious. One can hardly help noticing the partiality with which it is stated. If the inference be legitimate, baptism is prerequisite not only to communion but also to many other Christian privileges and duties. The Pentecostal converts after baptism "continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." Hence the full conclusion by inference here would be that unbaptized believers are cut off from pastoral counsel, from Christian sympathy and help, from commemorating the death of their Saviour, from the privilege of concerted prayer. To an unbaptized believer no Baptist minister must venture any word of edification, no Baptist member must manifest a feeling of brotherly kindness, no Baptist church must extend an invitation to the Lord's Supper, no Baptist prayer-meeting must offer the privilege of joining in their supplication to God. The inference from the wording of the commission, when fully stated, is even more comprehensive. "Go ye therefore and make disciples . . . baptizing . . .

* Inferences of the kind under consideration may sometimes yield a truth, and yet be unsafe to rely upon as a means of ascertaining truth.

† I am not sure but that close communion brethren would here bring in the idea of church membership, and from it draw an additional inference making reception of the word, baptism, and church membership the qualification for communion. That this is the position of some of them I know, but I am not clear that I have ever heard it argued from this passage. I should think an inference of equal integrity with the others might be drawn from the statement, "there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls." The consideration of the church membership qualification I reserve to a later point in the discussion.

teaching them to observe *all* things whatsoever I commanded you." The "all things" includes a great deal. It includes the Lord's Supper. It includes the new commandment, "Love one another." It includes Christ's directions concerning the proper treatment of an erring brother. In short, it includes every precept which our Lord uttered. If, then, an inference is drawn from the order of words in the commission, baptism becomes prerequisite to every other duty enjoined in Christ's teachings to his disciples. Hence those precepts of the Master which tend to build up Christian character and to promote Christian love, unbaptized believers are disqualified to receive. It is thus implied that a formal and ritual expression of our faith in Christ, as well as the possession of that faith, is necessary for appreciating the spiritual teachings of our Saviour.

To realize the exclusiveness of this position, we must give it a practical application. Who are unbaptized believers? From our stand-point, all Christians that have not been immersed. The majority of Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and other pedobaptist bodies, not having in our view formally obeyed the law of baptism, we must regard as unbaptized. It would follow, therefore, according to the inference deduced above, that we must exclude these Christian bodies from all fraternal relations. In no department of Christian work, in no general meeting for prayer, by no interchange of pulpits, by no sitting together at the Lord's table must we associate with them; for, being unbaptized, they are disqualified to discharge any of these duties. This, it seems to me, is the legitimate outcome of the inference that makes baptism a necessary prerequisite to communion. But can this be the right position? Because we differ from others in regard to baptism, is that a reason for our ostracizing the whole Christian world outside of ourselves? The majority of close communion Baptists answer, "No; we will recognize other evangelical denominations as Christians, we will unite with them to a degree in meetings for prayer and Christian work, but we will be careful to exclude them from the Lord's Supper." This seems to us very inconsistent. They arbitrarily retain one part of the inference, and reject all the rest. If baptism is prerequisite to the communion, it is by the same argument prerequisite to all other Christian duties and privileges.

My reply to the above question is decidedly a negative. Our views on baptism do not require us to withdraw fellowship from the rest of Christendom. Jesus Christ himself has instructed us how to test the sincerity and worthiness of professed Christian brethren. "By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth

forth evil fruit.”* By this test pedobaptists are abundantly shown to be worthy of our respect, our fellowship, our love. They certainly bring forth the fruits of righteousness. Years, decades, and even centuries have attested their “work of faith and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” What Baptist, loyal to his Saviour, can fail to rejoice for the strong Christian characters that Presbyterianism builds up, or for the many converts that Methodist zeal attracts to the cross of Christ? Do not many of us hold in affectionate regard the names of Christian heroes and martyrs among the unimmersed? Their lives show that their intentions were equally pure with our own. Had they been convinced that immersion is the true and only mode of baptism, they would have obeyed the ordinance. Perhaps pedobaptists have been and are a little blinded by education and prejudice; but can we say that there are no points on which we have some such bias? Such defects will probably continue in this imperfect state of existence, though we should strive to our uttermost to overcome them and to diminish their number. While they remain, we should not speak of them in a way to produce alienation among brethren, but carefully distinguish them from intentional error. Wherever we find the unmistakable fruits of a Christian life, we must in obedience to the teaching of Christ recognize its possessor as a fellow disciple and brother in the Lord. Since, then, the inference that baptism is prerequisite to every other Christian privilege and duty would lead us to violate our Lord’s instructions, the inference must be wrong. And since the argument for restricting the communion to immersed believers rests on a special and choice statement of that inference, that argument is unsustained.

Another objection to the inference that baptism *must* precede the communion, is that that inference apparently ignores some facts connected with the first observance of the communion. Christ’s apostles partook of the Lord’s Supper at that time when most likely none of them had received Christian baptism. The Lord’s Supper was first observed on the night of the betrayal. † Christian baptism was commanded after the resurrection. ‡ Some of the apostles were doubtless baptized by John the Baptist, for some of them had been his disciples. § Others of them may have baptized one another, for we know that they did baptize. || But it is hardly possible that any of them could have received the baptism that the risen Lord afterwards commanded for his followers, as he stood on the Galilean mount. That baptism recognized Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. John’s baptism, according to Paul, recognized a Messiah to come. ¶ The baptism practiced during Christ’s ministry in Judæa, ** the only recorded

* Matt. 7: 16, 17. † 1 Cor. 11: 23-25. ‡ Matt. 28: 19. § Jn. 1: 35-37. || Jn. 4: 2. ¶ Acts 19: 4. ** Jn. 3: 22; 4: 2.

observance of the ordinance under our Lord's preaching, probably recognized a Messiah that had come. It was one of the distinctive features of Christian baptism, that it recognized the Holy Ghost, as an incident in the life of Paul abundantly shows. In the course of Paul's missionary labors he "came to Ephesus and found certain disciples: and he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed? And they said unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost was given. And he said Into what, then, were ye *baptized*? And they said, Into John's baptism."* Christian baptism would have taught these men of Ephesus at least something about the Holy Spirit, in which respect John's baptism failed. Now, since Christian baptism involved a recognition of the Holy Spirit, it would seem appropriate to reserve the command for Christian baptism until the coming of the Spirit was nigh at hand. So far as the Bible informs us, this was our Lord's course. We have no record of his mentioning Christian baptism till after his resurrection. Luke, in narrating Christ's directions to his disciples in regard to the work of evangelizing the world, records an accompanying admonition, "Tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high."† This doubtless checked for a few days the carrying out of the command to baptize, as well as other parts of Christ's commission. Hence it is almost certain that not until the Pentecostal blessing came, and the Holy Ghost had begun his gracious work, was anyone baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Then the apostles who sat at the first communion table on the night of Christ's betrayal had not received this baptism. This strong probability is a protest against inferring as an unbending principle the *necessary* priority of baptism to communion.

The third and last objection to the inference under consideration is that it assumes, as a principle, an idea which our Lord's own teaching shows to be incorrect. Suppose for a moment we confine our thought to our Lord's commission, and to the statement about the Pentecostal converts. How does it follow that, because in each case baptism is referred to before the Lord's Supper, therefore baptism is a necessary prerequisite to the Lord's Supper? The implied answer is that all the positive commands of Christ *must* be obeyed *in the order* in which Divine inspiration states them. Of course we do not question the assertion that all the positive commands of Christ *must* be obeyed. We challenge simply the latter part of the declaration, which affirms that they *must* be obeyed *in the order* in which Divine inspiration states them. We are certainly bound by *what* Divine inspiration states in reference to Christ's commands. Are we equally bound by *how* it states them? Let the follow.

* Acts 19: 1-3. † Luke 24: 49.

ing incident from Christ's life help us to decide. The appointment of the twelve to be with Christ, i. e., to be in his company, involved a positive command. So also did their appointment to the work of preaching the Gospel and casting out devils. Never could they have found out, by reasoning from general principles, that duty required them to forsake their employments, go after Christ, and engage in labors so new and strange. Notice then the order in which the inspired writer states these positive requirements. "And he appointed twelve that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out devils."* Now, was it the case that these commands *must* be obeyed *in the order* in which they were stated? For example, was following in Christ's company indispensably prerequisite to casting out devils? John, who was one of the twelve, apparently thought so and acted upon this opinion; but what did Christ say? "John said unto him, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, *because he followed not us*. But Jesus said, Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us."† Doubtless it would have been appropriate for this unnamed man to have attached himself to the Saviour's company before casting out devils, but the very best authority declared that it was not indispensably prerequisite. Strange this may have seemed to John. It clashed with his theology, and did not coincide with his own experience. But it was the truth from the Master's own lips, and could not be gainsaid. This proves to us the incorrectness of the assertion that all the positive commands of Christ *must* be obeyed *in the order* in which Divine inspiration states them. Thus the assumption underlying the inference that baptism *must* precede the communion is disproved, and the inference shown to be unwarranted.

In rejecting the inference that baptism *must* be prior to the communion, I do not reverse the natural order of these ordinances. That baptism appropriately precedes the communion I concede, for baptism is one of the first duties after conversion, and should not be willfully neglected or needlessly delayed. But this is very different from saying that baptism *must* precede the communion. The former statement recognizes the practice of New Testament Christians under ordinary conditions; the latter proposes to regulate God's ordinances by a human law. The former statement authorizes us to follow a certain order of observing the ordinances, and to *encourage* the same in others; the latter requires us to follow a certain order of observing the ordinances, and to *demand* the same of others. We ought certainly to urge young converts to be baptized soon after their

* Mark 3: 14-17. † Mark 9: 38-40.

conversion. We should speak of baptism as appropriately antecedent to the communion and other Christian duties. But we have no Scriptural right to reject from the communion, simply on the ground that they are unbaptized, any sincere believers in Christ. The Bible does not make baptism a necessary prerequisite to communion, and we must not make it such.

Let it not be thought that I undervalue the quality of obedience as showing fitness for partaking of the communion. We can possess no real religion until our wills are given up to obey Christ in all things. A willingness to obey in baptism is therefore necessary. But many persons, who from our stand-point have not formally obeyed this ordinance, clearly manifest the spirit of obedience in the faithful performance of many other Christian duties. Their not being immersed they explain by saying that they do not consider immersion necessary to baptism, but think that they have obeyed the Lord's ordinance in another way equally acceptable to him. Of course we, as Baptists, cannot indorse the sentiments expressed in this explanation, but we can recognize the evident sincerity with which it is made. Taken in connection with the good deeds and devoted lives of these Christian brethren, it proves their willingness to obey the Lord in baptism as they understand his requirement. If they do not actually obey, it is due to a misunderstanding of what baptism implies. But as they show actual obedience in the general tenor of their lives, and the spirit of obedience in this particular, we should certainly do wrong to class them as disobedient disciples, and for this reason unit to come to the Lord's table. While urging the importance of obeying Christ in all things, and considering a purpose to do this prerequisite to the communion, we should recognize that in the case of many Christian people, who hold a different view of baptism from ourselves, the failure to be immersed does not show a disobedient spirit.

CHAPTER III.

ARGUMENTS FOR SECT COMMUNION AND CHURCH COMMUNION CONSIDERED.

Although the argument discussed in the preceding chapter sets forth the fundamental position of close communion Baptists, it does not exactly represent the general practice of their churches. From that argument we should expect them to invite to the communion all baptized (i. e., immersed) believers. I have understood that some close Baptist churches in the West do give that invitation; but more generally close Baptists in-

vite only "members of sister churches of like faith and order," thus passing by immersed believers belonging to pedobaptist churches, and also open communion Baptists. This being the case, the claim sometimes made, that close Baptists are no more exclusive about the communion than Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, can not be sustained. For, though it may be true that those denominations would require, as prerequisite to communion, an act that they regard as baptism, they most certainly do not make membership in their own particular sect a prerequisite. Each of the three denominations mentioned invites to the communion Christians belonging to other folds.*

The argument for sect communion involves the idea that membership in an organized church is a qualification for observing the Lord's Supper. If this is held as an inference drawn from Acts 2: 41, 42, where the three thousand Pentecostal converts are first said to have been added unto the number of the disciples, and then to have observed the communion among other duties, it has practically been answered. Such an inference is open to similar objections to those urged against the necessary priority of baptism to communion: (1) Jesus Christ gave no commandment requiring the priority of church-membership to communion. (2) Membership in an organized church is no more a qualification for communion than for several other Christian duties,—such as following apostolic teaching, living in Christian fellowship,† engaging in social prayer. (3) The apostles who partook of the communion when it was instituted, were not members of an organized church. (4) The assumption that all the positive requirements of Christ must be obeyed in a particular order of time, can not be sustained. That membership in an organized church appropriately precedes the observance of the Lord's Supper, I agree; but that it is a necessary prerequisite, I can not find in the New Testament.

The argument for sect communion asserts that conformity to the faith and practice of one denomination, assumed to be most perfect, is prerequisite to the observance of the Lord's Supper. Close Baptists, while admitting that many persons outside of

* Close Baptist churches that invite to the communion all baptized believers, might rightly make the claim referred to, but not those that restrict the invitation to their own "faith and order." The claim, however, would amount to nothing in the way of proof. If, as we have tried to show, the New Testament does not make baptism prerequisite to communion, the views of all who regard it thus must be erroneous. Although we respect the views of other Christians, we do not regard them as a guide for us. God's word is our only and our sufficient guide.

† Let us be careful to distinguish membership in an organized church from membership in the body of Christ. The former represents and approximates the latter, but is not identical with it. The latter is, of course, prerequisite to every privilege and duty of the converted state. There is no conversion without it.

their body are real Christians, consider all other religious organizations so defective as to debar the members of them from the communion. No matter if they be believers who have been truly buried with Christ in baptism, yet belonging to open communion or to pedobaptist churches, they are regarded as abettors of evil things, and disqualified for observing the Lord's Supper. Our close Baptist brethren seek to justify their position in this respect by quoting Paul's admonition in 2 Thess. 3: 6: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us." Immersed believers not belonging to close Baptist churches, it is held, commit this offense of walking disorderly. But if we read the passage in its connection, we shall find that Paul refers to indolent persons who lived on the labor of others. The eleventh verse of the same chapter reads: "For we hear of some that walk among you disorderly, that work not at all, but are busybodies." These qualities can hardly be said to characterize either open communionists or pedobaptists. Our opponents explain their meaning to be that Christians who hold Baptist principles and do not belong to a close Baptist church are as appropriately designated disorderly walkers as those who eat other men's bread for nought. This, however, is an arbitrary comparison, which is only a little better than an arbitrary interpretation.

The idea that conformity to the faith and practice of one denomination is a necessary qualification for the communion, does not harmonize with the New Testament. We do not know that New Testament Christians differed on the subjects that have been the occasion of more modern controversy. We have no record of any disputes by them on the extent of the atonement, the meaning of election, or the subjects and act of baptism. Presumably, the personal instructions of the apostles would obviate doubt concerning these matters. But some differences of opinion and practice existed in the apostolic churches, and because of these a policy of forbearance was urgently advocated. Some converts from Judaism held that circumcision was required even under the Christian system, and that Gentile believers could not be saved without it.* The apostles decided otherwise concerning the Gentiles; but, recommending a tolerant spirit, allowed the Jews to retain their own custom.† In the church at Rome there were differences of opinion in regard to the lawfulness of eating certain kinds of food, and in regard to the sanctity of certain days. The brethren were warned against rejecting one another on the ground of these differences. "Let not him that eateth set at nought him that eateth not; and let

* Acts 15: 1. † Acts 15: 19-21.

not him that eateth not judge him that eateth; for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest the servant of another? to his own lord he standeth or falleth."* These instructions seem to me to affirm the principle that where conscientious differences of opinion do not prevent Christians from being accepted of God, they should not prevent Christians from being accepted one of another. We are not taught to indorse the doctrinal views of others. We can not indorse what we do not believe. We are required to recognize their piety by receiving them, and receiving them must mean manifesting Christian fellowship or brotherly sympathy. In the absence, then, of any New Testament precept making identity of faith and practice a necessary qualification for the Lord's Supper, and in the presence of this requirement teaching us to receive devout Christians that conscientiously differ from us, can sect communion, with any safety, be maintained? Does not the idea of sect communion beckon us away from the teachings of the Word? It may be said that we can "receive" brethren in other ways and at other places than the communion; but should we do right in making an exception of the remembrance feast without the authority of our Lord?

I pass now to consider a third argument for close communion. Certain brethren in the close Baptist body claim that the Lord's Supper is in a particular sense a church ordinance. They give to the word "church" its usual meaning in the New Testament; viz., a body of baptized believers worshiping in one place. They assert that the proper observance of the communion is by this local church. If a church entertains an association or convention, it would be improper at such a time to spread the communion table. If at the regular time of observing the ordinance visiting brethren from another *close Baptist* church are present, good order forbids their partaking of the emblems. This position seems to have an advantage in placing other close Baptists upon the same footing as other Christians. Our brethren may thus claim that they are no more exclusive towards open communionists and pedobaptists than they are towards members of other churches of their own faith. However, as the exclusiveness becomes less discriminating, it becomes more extensive. A greater number are refused the privilege of communion. But do the Scriptures sanction this course? Do they support this extreme view of the independence of the local church? The right of the individual church to self-government is implied in the New Testament, but at the same time the duty of uniting in benevolent work is set forth. Gentile churches contributed to the support of the poor saints at Jerusalem, and *together* appointed a man to travel in the interest of this enterprise.† And

* Rom. 14 : 3, 4. † Rom. 15 : 26; 2 Cor. 8 : 18, 19.

if individual churches united in giving alms, why might they not unite in commemorating Christ's death? The interest that Christians have in the Lord's broken body and shed blood, is independent of their particular church connection. The Lord's Supper appears to be more a Christian rite than a church rite, in the narrow sense in which the term church has been defined. It must be admitted, too, that the New Testament sometimes uses the word "church" to designate the Christians of a certain territory,* or to embrace the whole number of believers on earth.† It can hardly be safe, therefore, to apply, in a restricted sense, the term church to our Saviour's ordinance. To my mind, a single incident in the New Testament overthrows this idea of church communion. It is Paul's partaking of the communion at Troas, recorded in Acts 20: 6-11. The apostle was on his way to Jerusalem, returning from his third missionary tour. He, with his companions in travel, came to Troas, and tarried there a week. On the Sunday when the disciples met to observe the communion, Paul met with them, preached to them, and partook of the Lord's Supper. Notice that Paul was at Troas as a visitor. His church membership, at this time, was most likely at Antioch.‡ For he has before been spoken of as being "in the church that was there" (Antioch),§ by the Antioch brethren he was ordained to the foreign mission work,|| and to Antioch he returned at the close of both his first and second missionary tours.¶ The three different periods that Paul stayed at Antioch are described as "a whole year, "no little time," and "some time."** On the other hand, what we know of Paul's connection with Troas precludes any reasonable idea that he held local membership there. There are but two mentions of Paul's being at Troas prior to the time under consideration, and each records a hasty visit made in passing from Asia to Macedonia.†† Hence we conclude that Paul was once a member of the church at Antioch, that he seems to have retained his membership there while laboring in other fields, and that no good reason exists for thinking that he was ever a member of the church at Troas. Now, if Paul, a member of another church, probably Antioch, partook of the communion at Troas, should not this overcome any scruples that modern Christians may have about observing this ordinance, in a church of which they are not members? Is not any theory

* Acts 9: 31. R. V. † Acts 9: 31, R. V.; Eph. 5: 22-32; Hebrews 12: 23.

‡ While it is probable that local churches, in the early days of Christianity, were not so distinct in their organization as now, yet I think we have reason to believe, that even in apostolic times there was such a thing as local church membership. Paul's reference, when writing to the Colossians, to "Epa'hras, who is one of you" (Col. 4: 12), and his allusion, when writing to the Romans, to "Phæbe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchræa" (Rom. 16: 1), help to establish this view.

§ Acts 13: 1. || Acts 13: 3. ¶ Acts 14: 26; 18: 22. ** Acts 11: 26; 14: 28; 18: 23.

†† Acts 16: 8-11; 2 Cor. 2: 12, 13.

proved incorrect, that logically condemns the unquestioned practice of an inspired apostle? For my part, I shall feel justified by the example of Paul to partake of the Lord's Supper with a sister church, whenever opportunity offers.

CHAPTER IV.

OPEN COMMUNION POSITION VINDICATED.

Having considered at some length the arguments for close communion, I proceed to discuss the other side of the question, and to present reasons for the practice of open communion. We must regard the Lord's Supper as a sacred and solemn rite. None but Christians are proper subjects for it, for no others can appreciate its significance, or derive benefit from its observance. The New Testament makes it the peculiar privilege of sincere believers in Christ.

This ordinance looks back to Calvary, and helps to keep in our minds the great fact of a vicarious atonement. It points not so much to the life as to the death of Christ. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come."* The communion reminds us that our salvation was secured through agony and blood. But a man who has no part nor lot in the matter, to whom "Christ crucified" is a stumbling block, or foolishness, or something of no concern, is manifestly unfit to partake of the memorials of our Saviour's death. This ordinance looks forward to the second coming of Christ. "Ye proclaim the Lord's death *till he come*," is the statement of the New Testament, with respect to the communion service. We commemorate the death of him who is to come again and receive us unto himself. Surely, then, only those who have "confessed that they are strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and "who wait for Christ," are prepared to receive the ordinance. If it be said that the traitor Judas partook of the communion at its first observance, I reply that that is not certain. It is not clear, from the narratives of the four evangelists, whether Judas left the company before or after the Lord's Supper was instituted. If he partook, he gained no benefit from it, but added another hypocritical act to help fill up the measure of his iniquity. Our Lord's own words decide that the Supper was designed for true and loving disciples. "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new *with you* in my Father's kingdom."† Christ welcomed to his table men whom he recognized as heirs

* 1 Cor. 11 : 26. † Matt. 26 : 29.

of glory. The 11th chapter of First Corinthians teaches that Christian character is essential to a right observance of the Lord's Supper. "Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body."* From these verses we learn (1) that to partake unworthily of this ordinance is possible, (2) that to partake unworthily is a great sin, (3) that the sin consists in not discerning Christ's body, which results from having no real faith in him. To guard against the commission of this sin, every communicant is taught (4) to prove or examine himself before partaking of the bread and the cup. This teaching makes a genuine, personal trust in Christ, the essential qualification for the communion. As this heart qualification for the communion is strongly emphasized, and as the New Testament does not state any formal or ritual qualification, shall we not do better to abide by the teaching of the Word, than to launch out on uncertain inferences? Is not Divine revelation a sufficient guide? Do not the Scriptures make the man of God "complete, furnished completely unto every good work"? Then let us guard against being wise above what is written.

In this 11th chapter of First Corinthians we find a direction pertaining somewhat to the manner of observing the Lord's Supper. The thirty-third verse reads: "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, wait one for another." It was not right that one should eat before another, just as hunger might dictate. Besides turning a Christian rite into a means of satisfying physical wants, this course failed to express one idea in the ordinance; viz., that of brotherhood among Christians. That this is the principal idea in the Lord's Supper, I do not claim; but that the thought is conveyed in the ordinance, I believe, on the authority of the following passage of Scripture: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body; for we all partake of the one bread."† It seems to me that this language explicitly teaches that Christians, in the communion, declare their common dependence upon Christ, and, by consequence, their union one with another. If we sincerely partake of Jesus Christ by faith, we become so closely connected with him as to be called members of his body; and the members of the body must have sympathy one for another. This I understand to be symbolized in the communion, according to the teaching just quoted. It

* 1 Cor. 11: 27-29. † 1 Cor. 10: 16, 17.

may be suggested that the expression, "we, who are many, are one bread, one body," refers to the local church at Corinth, and by parity of reasoning to other local churches in their individual capacities. Such a view gives a very narrow meaning to the word "many," a meaning which does not comport with the comprehensive ideas of the apostle to the Gentiles. Hardly can this be the thought of him who elsewhere wrote: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye *all* are one man in Christ Jesus."* Paul's conception of the union of many into one was much broader and grander than this interpretation allows. Besides, the use of the personal pronoun "we" includes Paul, as well as the church members at Corinth. Hence, the idea of applying this beautiful passage simply to the local church, must be abandoned. We understand that it applies to all Christians, and that the idea of Christian union is embodied in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. If the ordinance represents this idea, Christians, as far as practicable, should express it by uniting in observing the ordinance. The basis upon which this can be done to the greatest extent, is to make Christian character the only qualification for communion. I have tried to show that that is the only qualification for which we can, with assurance, claim Scriptural support. Hence, to follow the teachings of the Word, and to gain the fullest meaning for the ordinance, we must invite to the communion all "that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." This invitation implies that there must be an attachment to Christ, that issues in a life of obedience. It is appropriate for baptism and church membership to be attended to before one comes to the Lord's Supper; but we have no Scriptural warrant for making them a specific part of the qualification. Order is a good thing, but order must not interfere with the emphasized principles of the New Testament.

CHAPTER V.

OBJECTIONS TO THE PRACTICE OF OPEN COMMUNION CONSIDERED.

The design of this chapter is to notice two objections urged against open communion. The practice is sometimes charged with looseness. Some claim that it admits unworthy persons to the Lord's Supper. Some have even asserted that it welcomes worldly people to this sacred rite. This idea is very erroneous. Open communion Baptists recognize emphatically the necessity

* Gal. 3: 28.

of a change of heart for a right partaking of the communion. Unregenerate persons, in some instances, may have deceived us and approached the table; but we do not sanction their act. Such deception is liable to occur also under close communion practice. Our usual invitation bids to the feast all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Sometimes we state, and always imply, that no others have a right to come. It seems to me that this invitation is in one sense more strict than that usually given by close Baptists. I regard it a better conservator of the sacredness of the ordinance. Close Baptists are in the habit of inviting to the communion "members of sister churches of like faith and order." This directs the attention of the communicant simply to his formal connection with a church. It tends to give him the impression that his belonging to a close Baptist church is a sufficient qualification for partaking of the emblems of Christ's broken body and shed blood. Though he be an unconverted man, having under false guise crept into a church, or though he be a backslider, having left his first love, still, by the wording of the invitation, he is welcomed to the communion. To avoid this, some close Baptist ministers invite "members of sister churches, of like faith and order, *in good standing with their churches.*" But, even with this added restriction, the invitation does not probe deep enough. It welcomes any close Baptist member to the communion, provided he is not under discipline. Rather should the possession of real, heartfelt love for Christ be emphasized as the condition of one's coming to the ordinance. It is not enough to know that we pass current with men; we must be right in our own hearts and toward God. The New Testament lays upon every communicant a solemn, personal responsibility. "But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup."* The invitation to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, calls upon people to search their own hearts. Following it I have seen a weeping and a sorrowful turning away from the table, for fear of not being worthy to partake. And I think it must always be true, that by faithfully urging the New Testament qualification for communion, we shall most effectually preserve the sanctity of our Lord's ordinance.†

The other objection is that open communion logically leads to open membership; that if we invite all sincere believers to the communion, we must welcome all sincere believers to mem-

* 1 Cor. II: 28.

† Some open communion Baptists invite to the Lord's Supper "Christians in good and regular standing in *evangelical* churches." I think, though, that the invitation to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity is much more frequently used. I do not recall that I have ever heard the former invitation given. It is liable to some of the objections urged against the close communion invitation. Still, its intent is substantially open communion.

bership in our churches. In replying to this, I must refer again to a twofold use of the word "church" in the New Testament. We have seen that that word designates both a body of baptized believers worshiping in a particular place, and the whole company of Christians on earth.

For convenience, we distinguish the former as the local, the latter as the universal, Church. Admission to the universal Church requires identically the same qualification as admission to the communion; for its members "are enrolled in heaven,"* and so it includes all who have spiritual union with the Lord. The universal Church is the mystical body of Christ, which, according to the Scriptures, may not yet have attained unity of faith, but may be growing towards it under the nurture of Gospel influences.† Now, while we cannot speak of our *admitting* persons to the universal Church, for He alone does that who "hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth," we claim that our open communion practice *recognizes*, both logically and actually, every true believer as a member of the body of Christ.

But it is said by our opponents, that as we invite all sincere Christians to the communion, we ought also to receive such persons to membership in our *local* churches. At first thought there appears to be some force in this assertion; but let us consider the nature of a local church. It is a human approximation to a Divine ideal. Its mission is to build up Christian character through the instrumentality of Divine truth. To it is intrusted a certain degree of management and administration.‡ In the exercise of these functions, while it seeks the good of man, it must also rightly assert the Word of God. Paul calls the church "the pillar and ground of the truth,"|| and the connection shows that he refers to the local church. It follows, from these observations, that the members of a local church must to an extent be agreed. Concerning the preaching of the Gospel, the observance of the ordinances, and the government of the church, there should be substantial unanimity of opinion. Otherwise, confusion in the divinely-appointed work of the church will be liable to ensue. But no confusion results from inviting all Christians to the Lord's Supper. That ordinance is not designed to guard all the Christian doctrines and practices. So far as it teaches doctrine, it is specific, pointing to the atonement of Christ. The Scriptures do not say of it, as they do of the church, that it is the pillar and ground of the truth.

Here, then, I enumerate four reasons for open communion. (1) New Testament principles favor it. (2) No New Testament precept forbids it. (3) The inferences adduced against it are superficial. (4) The objections that brand it as loose in

* Heb. 12: 23. † Eph. 4: 11-13. ‡ Acts 6: 5; 18: 27; 1 Cor. 5: 13. || 1 Tim. 3: 15.

practice and in tendency can be met. To these considerations should be added its practical advantages, to which I call attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES OF OPEN COMMUNION.

No observed benefits growing out of open communion practice should *of themselves* persuade us to adopt it. In this, as in all other religious inquiries, the question, "What is right?" fitly precedes the question, "What is useful?" But having tried in the foregoing pages to show a Scriptural foundation for open communion, I may now with propriety set forth its practical advantages. These confirm the open communion position.

Open communion, by teaching that Christian character is a necessary, and baptism an appropriate, antecedent to the observance of the Lord's supper, clearly distinguishes between essential and formal requirements in religion. The value of such a distinction is implied in Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees' teaching. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done and not to have left the other undone."* In this language our Lord rebukes not merely the sin of partially observing God's law, but also the sin of observing a lesser requirement to the exclusion of a greater. Such a reproof plainly shows that men are expected to distinguish between greater and lesser duties in religion. The Pharisees ought to have recognized that the heart qualities of judgment, mercy, and faith, transcended in importance the outward act of paying tithes—and this, not because the paying of tithes was not obligatory, but because it would not be an acceptable service to God unless prompted by a right state of heart. All rights sustain an inferiority to Christian character. The former depend upon the latter for their value. But undue prominence given to any rite will incline men to value it as equal with Christian character; and so, frequently, their obedience to the rite will be followed by a feeling of complacency that prevents growth in grace. Herein is one danger of making baptism a *qualification* for the communion. To speak of baptism as *expressing* the fact of a believer's regeneration is well. Inspiring to every Christian must be the ideas symbolized by this ordinance; viz., that our sins have

* Matt. 23 : 23.

been buried in the Saviour's tomb, and that we have consecrated ourselves to live a new life by the "power of his resurrection." But manifestly the things expressed are greater than the expression. And while we honor the divinely appointed symbol, we must give chief attention to having the heart and life right. In the clear subordination of an outward form to the inward Christian life, I discern one of the advantages of open communion.

Again, open communion impresses upon Christians their oneness in Christ Jesus. Does anyone assert that this oneness does not exist, and in support of his statement cite the diversities of faith among Christians? In replying to such an objection, I must again refer to Paul's teaching on this subject. He speaks of Christians as the "body of Christ." And while he teaches that unity of faith will signalize their full growth and complete development as a body, he does not deny to the unestablished, differing believers, the term body. The ministry, Paul says, were appointed "unto the building up of the body of Christ; *in* *we all attain* unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* Now if Christians, notwithstanding their diverse views, constitute the body of Christ, that body, however immature, is still *one*. The apostle states this in the chapter to which reference has been made. "There is *one* body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling."† If, then, God's Word declares that between all real Christians, notwithstanding their different views on some points, there exists an essential oneness, it is exceedingly important for us to recognize this great truth. Our blessed Lord prayed that we might be one, as he and his Father are one.‡ That prayer followed a discourse in which he had three times emphatically commanded his disciples to love one another.§ We that believe in strict obedience to the requirements of Christ, must not ignore the plain duty of recognizing the oneness of God's people. The fellowship of saints strengthens individual piety. The better acquaintance of sincere Christians with each other tends to eliminate radical notions, and to bring about more harmony of belief, even as regards minor points. I know of no better place to recognize our oneness than at the ordinance which celebrates our Saviour's death. Here, in symbol, we have brought to our memories the foundation of our common hopes, the gateway of our common heaven. And I regard it one of the practical benefits of open communion, that it authorizes us to join with other evangelical Christians at the Lord's table, in expressing our common dependence upon Christ's death and our subsequent oneness in him.

* Eph. 4: 12, 13. See also v. 14. † Eph. 4: 4. ‡ John 17: 21.
§ John 13: 34; 15: 12, 17.

Lastly, open communion indicates *to the world* the oneness of Christ's Church, and so enforces the divine reality of his mission. Jesus taught that the union of Christians would have an influence upon the world, and such an influence as to dispose it to recognize his claims. His prayer for the Church of coming years was "that they may all be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: *that the world may believe that thou didst send me.*"* He told his disciples that their love, one for another, would prove to men the sincerity of their Christian profession. "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*"† In the light of these teachings it is no surprise to find men, where Christian hearts are united, inclined to religion, and where division and strife abound, repelled from it. Some may think it enough that the members of each local church should live in union; but, as a matter of fact, the spirit that prompts us to love those belonging to our own church prompts us to love the entire body of Christ. As a rule, the individual church most clearly recognizing in practice as well as theory the oneness of the Christian body, will be the most free from internal dissensions. Love is a quality too divine in its origin, too noble in its character, too intense in its exercise, to be confined by ecclesiastical limits; and it is the manifestation of this love among Christians that inclines unconverted men "to declare that God is among us indeed." If, then, we desire to advance the kingdom of Christ on earth, we should embrace every proper opportunity to express our oneness with all his people. The Lord's Supper furnishes an excellent opportunity. By partaking of that ordinance with Christians of different names, we emphasize the fact "that we, who are many, are one bread, one body."‡ A uniting in this ordinance will help men of the world to see that Christians, in spite of their differences, are animated by the same spirit and devoted to the same Lord. On the other hand, a refusal to unite, however conscientious the reason for the refusal, tends to cast a stumbling block in the way of the unsaved.

And now I must bring this discussion to a close. From my readers I ask a kind and candid consideration of the ideas presented. May God grant that this little work may in some way serve to advance his cause and to promote his glory; and to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be everlasting praise. Amen.

* John 17: 21.

† John 13: 35.

‡ 1 Cor. 10: 17.