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A Pastoral Letter  
by the  
Associate Presbytery of the Carolinas  
to the  
People under Their Care

1826

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A

**PASTORAL LETTER,**

BY THE

**Associate Presbytery**

OF THE

**CAROLINAS,**

TO THE

**PEOPLE UNDER THEIR CARE.**

—

'They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, peace, peace; when there is no peace. JER. 8. 11.

Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. II. TIM. 4. 2-3.

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**Charlotte, N. C.**

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1826.

## PASTORAL LETTER, &c.



DEAR BRETHREN :

IF peace among christians was the sole criterion of genuine piety, the number and the zeal of its advocates would set our minds at ease, and excuse us from appearing before you by a special address. But alas! other criterions as important, and without which, this is none, are, in a great measure, left out of view, and symptoms prevail, which, not merely excite suspicion that piety is declining, but furnish indubitable evidence of the fact: symptoms, which demand admonition, warning and reproof. And while we ask your attention to the remarks we make, it is not our design to furnish you with empty speculation, or idle amusement, but to call you to serious reflection and actual reformation. Imagine not that we are officious in this matter: we are accountable to our Lord and Master; we are under solemn charge to declare his message, to be faithful to his cause, and to "watch for your souls as they that must give account:" let this account then be given "with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." Not only does the command of God enjoin this duty; his promises also encourage us to expect his blessing, and invite us to the use of means. We have the divine promise, that, "when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." Though the Spirit of the Lord can repress the enemy by his immediate agency, yet when he arises to save, he employs the means, and without these, our hope is but presumption.

But are any ready to ask, What peculiar necessity exists at present for special efforts to repress the enemy? what evil symptoms prevail to excite alarm? We reply, the general decay of piety, its threatening symptoms, and especially that discouraging one, which prompts a belief—that all is well. Ease and contentment of mind respecting the cause of God, more usually betray indifference, blindness, and apostacy, than exhibit a prosperous state of the militant church. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion," is a warning, which should excite us to serious inquiry. But ease and peace are pleasing, and can be clothed in a specious garb. As Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, he sometimes appears as a champion for religion, a zealot for its cause; and covering his snares, he leads the van, and by his ignis fatuus, lights the way to perdition.

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Many who are not his willing servants, who would shun his service, are, however, deceived by his snares : ignorant of his wiles, they adopt his measures, and by their practice and their sentiments, promote his cause.

If such are Satan's snares, it may be asked, How shall we discriminate between his dictates and those of the spirit of God ? We reply, not by flattering ourselves, as many do, that it is little difference whether we have divine authority, or not, for what we believe or practice ; that it is little difference whether we be mistaken, or correct in our religious sentiments ; that it is unnecessary to be religiously careful to obtain correct knowledge of truth and duty ; that if we live in peace and love, all is well, whatever comes of divine truth ; that sincerity is a sufficient substitute for conformity to divine truth, institutions, and commands ; that if we endeavor to serve God, it is little matter how ; that if we seek heaven sincerely, by any means, we shall obtain it. These are parts of Satan's torch to allure and deceive the church ; and a torch which many bear and many follow. But we ought not to be "ignorant of his devices," "lest he get an advantage." II. Cor. ii. 11. The rule of knowledge and duty, however, is plain ; it is an high-way ; "To the law, and to the testimony : if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Let this forever put the seal of condemnation on every method of knowing our duty and our condition before God, which may be substituted for holy writ ; and on every such method of promoting piety, or of judging of its state.

Piety, manifested by a holy practice, is the christian's proper garb, his answer to the calumnies of infidelity, his unanswerable defence of christianity, and his evidence of his own interest in eternal life. But he, who supposes that piety is flourishing at present in the church, that there is no occasion to be alarmed for the cause of God among us, for the loss of divine ordinances, for the withdrawing of the spirit of God, and for the decline of truth and piety in the rising age—he, who supposes that God is not calling us to consider our ways and reform, is ignorant of the present condition of the church and of its threatening symptoms ; or he has not the knowledge of the truth himself, nor spiritual discernment and taste to receive the things of God. To justify this assertion, it is sufficient only to ask, Will the piety of the church, and of individuals, generally, at present, bear a comparison with that of the saints of God, recorded in the holy scriptures ? with the piety of the prophets and apostles ? Or is it supposed that these examples of piety are inimitable by us ? surely they are not ; they were not set for angelic tribes, but for man. But will the piety of the present age, bear a comparison with that of our reforming forefathers ? And if not, the question is worthy of our serious reflection, What is the cause ? Perhaps the neglect of truth and discipline has a weighty

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influence on this decline. But, as many at present, esteem our forefathers as narrow-minded, enthusiastic zealots, we ask, Will the piety of the present age, bear a comparison with scripture evidences, scripture requisitions, exhortations, and promises? Or, if it be supposed that piety is not under a decline, why are divine ordinances attended with so little profit? "is the Lord's hand shortened that it cannot save?" Why so often, and so generally, are divine ordinances, both public and private neglected, even by the professors of religion? is it not, because those, who neglect them, have not enjoyed the spirit's presence in them, have not tasted that God is good, and have not a desire for the presence of God, nor reverence for his commands? If piety be not under a decline, why is there so little knowledge of divine truth among professors of religion? why do so few count the word of God sweet, and make it their meditation? why so many known and positive transgressions of the law of God; so many aberrations from truth and duty, by neglect and perversion? why are so few trembling at the word of God? why so few instances of the subduing of iniquity in the hearts of church members, manifested by their reformation? What do these things indicate but a deep decline of piety? "Is the spirit of the Lord straightened? are these his doings?" Mic. ii. 7.

Piety, if it exist, must reside in the heart. Piety in the church, must reside in the hearts of individuals, and be cultivated there. If cultivated there, it will prove itself in practice, and shine in public. If not, though some of its symptoms may for a time be substituted for itself, yet these must gradually lose their evangelical lustre, and decline to open impiety; as the plant without sufficient root, must wither and die. Be not deceived; the Holy Spirit withdraws, when his institutions are neglected, or perverted; when his truth is denied, or contemned; his authority disregarded, his grace despised; when sins are indulged, and his commands disobeyed; and by these the decline of piety is evidenced and hastened.

We propose, at present, to notice some of those leading sins, which are at once the cause and evidence of the Holy Spirit's withdrawing from the church, and of the decline of piety, that you may see your obligations to reformation, and be persuaded to return.

And here, though intemperance is a usual subject of animadversion, we must not pass it unnoticed. Though nothing new is to be expected in depicting and reproofing this sin, yet we must bring it to view, as a melancholy mark of the actual state of religion at present, and urge our admonitions respecting it.

That intemperance is prevalent at present, none can deny: that we are declaiming against a distant enemy, when we reprove this vice; conjuring up a phantom, as a subject of censure, none can plead: no; society is groaning under its paralyzing and destructive

hand ; the church itself is sinking under its weight, wasting under its blasting influence : it has entered her doors ; sullied her beauty, and injured her purity, by actual contamination. That certain degrees of intemperance have become popular, at least are not counted shameful, is the disgrace of society itself, were the church out of view. That too great freedom in the use of spiritous liquors, is accounted polite, liberal, and open-hearted, is too true ; and this has become a successful bait.

But in vain shall we inveigh against this sin, by painting its baseness and odiousness, with all its appalling effects ; the heart, under its influence, is generally too callous to feel, and sensibility weakened, is a feeble defence against its temptations. Such are the discouraging, heart-sinking effects of this vice, that its votaries are too deaf to hear admonition, generally too irritable, acrimonious, and absurdly suspicious, to submit to reproof, or even the most affecting advice. Or if, for the time, they hear, and submit, they are too feeble in their resolutions, and too much infatuated, to reform, and resist the bewitching insinuations of this prevailing pleasure. It lays too deep a hold on the sensual appetites, and too much benumbs the moral feelings to admit persuasion to forsake it. Yea, under its infatuating influence, the conscience becomes so benumbed, as not to reprove, or accuse ; or its voice is too weak to be heard amidst the syren music of the cups, and the soul degrading charms of the society of intemperance.

Might we not here expostulate with him, who is commencing a course of intemperance, courting infatuation, and sporting with the fetters of this degrading tyrant ? You hear the sot replying to your admonitions, that he cannot resist his inclination to intemperance ; and will you not resist your commencing and growing propensities, till you find yourself in his wretched condition ? Granting that there is some truth in his argument, does not your present inclination, which you are unwilling to resist, prove that you are walking in his steps, and approaching his state ? How dreadful the gulph ! Why therefore do you not now evade the snare, while there is hope ? Are you displeas'd with us for reprov'g your incipient intemperance ? do you charge us with censoriousness in reprov'g your small, though frequent failings on this point ? Christian brother, excuse the tenderness of our feelings on this subject : they are not tender without cause. It will be poor consolation to us, when you are reduced to the necessity of giving the sot's reply, that you cannot resist your propensities ; and a poor compensation for our false delicacy, that we must accept such an answer, and give you up in despair.

But though from the infatuating effects of this vice, which should alarm the intemperate, and stand as a solemn warning to those, who find themselves exposed to its temptations, though, from these re-

fections, our confidence in the influence of moral reason is low, yet duty requires us to warn and reprove. It will require no elaborate discussion to shew, what the prevalence of intemperance indicates, respecting the state of piety at present. Real piety cannot prevail in the church, when church members yield to such indulgence, and where they are permitted, under such indulgence, to profane the hallowed things of God's sanctuary. If this is consistent with a flourishing, happy state of piety, let religion be banished from our country. It is scarcely necessary to assert, that vital piety cannot govern that heart, which is so lost to the fear of God, and to the love of holiness, as to indulge in this sin. But that we may bring the conscience more closely to the test, and lay it under a ray of divine light, let us very briefly compare this vice, and its effects, with the scripture representations of real piety.

Remember then, that true piety includes the gift of the heart to God: Prov. xxiii. 26.—it is a life of faith on Christ: Gal. ii. 20.—it is a purifying of the heart by faith: Acts xv. 9. 1st Pet. i. 22.—it is to be spiritually minded, not walking after the flesh, but after the spirit: Rom. viii. 1. 6.—it is a crucifying of the flesh: Gal. v. 24.—it is to avoid worldly conformity: Rom. xii. 2.—it is to lay aside every weight, and the sin which easily besets us: Heb. xii. 1.—it is to set the affections on things above: Col. iii. 1, 2. But how does indulgence in intemperance, correspond with these characters of piety? The fear of God departs, under its influence; reverence for the authority of his commands, is lost; a delight in God and in his service, wears off, and changes to a delight in sensual pleasures; the mind becomes carnal; wisdom's ways are no longer pleasantness; duties are a burden; the mind is alienated from the thoughts of death, and even from the pleasing anticipations of heavenly enjoyment:—"wine, and new wine take away the heart." Hos. iv. 11. Intemperance is not among the fruits of the spirit, but the works of the flesh: Gal. v. 19. 23. It is permitting sin to reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof; and yielding your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, with all its baleful consequences: Rom. vi. 12, 13. 16. It is deceptive, and it is consummate folly: Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. Prov. xx. 1. It is attended with unhappy temporal consequences: Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine. Prov. xxiii. 29, 30. The curse of God is pronounced on this vice: Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them.—Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink. Isa. v. 11, 22.; and consequently, the curse



is on *their* temporal enjoyments, who indulge in this sin. It has the threatening of damnation: Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators—nor drunkards—shall inherit the kingdom of God. I. Cor. vi. 9, 10. Such are the scripture representations of this sin, and of its consequences.

Permit us, a little farther, to address the intemperate; and for sake of brevity, we shall propose a few questions, which we leave with him to be often considered, and answered seriously by his conscience. And though it would be worthy of his serious consideration, yet we shall not wait to state in detail, the consequences of intemperance to his character, his influence in the world, his health and comfort in this life; to his estate, and the domestic circumstances of his family; to his family connections, who are most anxiously and painfully concerned for his temporal and eternal welfare; nor the consequences to society, if all would act as he does; and the wounding reflection, that he is dependent on the sobriety and morality of others, for supporting the dignity, the morality, the peace, and the safety of society, and for walking over him as a nuisance, or at best, as a child in helpless infancy. But we ask,

What shall be the consequence of intemperance to your eternal interest? compare the question with Deut. xxix. 19, 20. And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The Lord will not spare him; but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. What shall be the consequence to your practical piety? Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart. Hos. iv. 11.

What shall be the consequence to the family committed to your care, but led into sin, and ruined by wretched example and neglect of education? And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Eph. vi. 4. This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings. Ps. xlix. 13.

How shall you render your account to God, for the pernicious influence, which your intemperance may have on the cause of God, and on his church, with which you are connected? The harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe, and wine are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands. Isa. v. 12.

What are your prospects of meeting death; your hopes of peace and comfort at that time, and of your willingness then, to leave your pleasures, to which you are now attached, and exchange them for holy enjoyments, for which you have but little relish now?

surely your hopes are not founded on Ps. xvi. 8-11. I have set the Lord always before me—Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope: for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

But if you shudder at such consequences, and flatter yourselves that you will reform at some period, when will you effect this reformation, if not now? They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. I will also choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spoke, they did not hear. Isa. lxvi. 3, 4. In the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us. But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble. Jer. ii. 27, 28.

Is there any other reason for your delay at present, but love to sin, and hatred of God?

But what will induce you, at another period, to forsake this sin, which you have not as an inducement now?

When shall you be better prepared for such a resolution, and for fulfilling it? when be more willing than now, if you continue to indulge your sinful propensities?

Will not your propensities to this sin increase by indulgence? Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong. Isa. xxviii. 22.

Whether will a sense of the evil of this sin, a sense of your duty, and the power of your resolutions, become stronger, or weaker by indulgence?

Or is it your hope, that God will allow you to indulge in sin for a time, and then in mercy bring you back? He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. Prov. xxix. 1. Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone. Hos. iv. 17.

But what is the reason that you are not recovered from this spiritual disease? "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Jer. viii. 22. "Is the Lord's hand shortened that it cannot save?" Isa. lix. 1. "Is the spirit of the Lord straitened?" Mic. ii. 7.

Or, are the promises of God insufficient? or is your faith dead, that it cannot shew itself by works? or do you judge faith in Christ an insufficient scheme of salvation from strong propensities to sin? or are such exercises of faith and self-denial disagreeable? be alarmed, for under such impressions, you have not faith.

But, brethren, we hope you are desirous to obtain deliverance from this sin ; that you see it to be ruinous to yourselves, detestable, and offensive to God. Would then, the offer of a complete deliverance be a welcome message ? Such an offer you have in the following texts : Ezek. xxxvi. 25-27. Titus ii. 14. I. Cor. i. 30. Rom. vi. 14. Rev. iii. 20. These are a specimen of the encouragements given you in holy scripture. Embrace the offer ; be free ; you have the power, the grace, and the veracity of God for your confidence and comfort. Why lose the opportunity of deliverance ?

But, brethren, as a farther proof of the decline of piety at present, in the church ; as a lamentable evidence of the irreligion and insensibility of professed christians, let us turn your attention to sabbath-profanation in our country ; yea, sabbath-profanation, even by professors of Christ's name. The spirit of the world is obviously marked by the prevalence of this sin ; the spirit of piety is obviously succumbing under its influence.

Here, we do not intend to take up the question, whether the sabbath is still morally binding on the church ? we take it for granted, that this is acknowledged by all, whom we directly address. But though this is acknowledged, few appear to understand the nature and design of the institution, or to recognize their obligation to observe it.

God has adapted his ordinances to the sinner's necessities ; the duties which he imposes, are for our sakes, and designed to be our enjoyment, rather than our burden. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Math. xi. 29, 30. He, therefore, that observes them in another spirit, shews the spirit of a slave, and not of a son. God has given us his word for our direction in faith and holiness ; he requires of us secret prayer, by which we may cultivate piety, and maintain a correspondence with heaven ; he requires that our piety be cultivated also in social religious exercise, in families, and in voluntary assemblies, and societies of his people : but lest all these means should be insufficient, lest the world should engross the heart, by its enjoyments and its cares, and induce neglect of our eternal interests, he appointed the sabbath as a rest from the cares of the world, as well as from its works, and as a time to be appropriated to our spiritual concerns. Thus God has given us six days for our worldly employments, and the seventh for the peculiar interests of our souls. Thus, "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Mark ii. 27. Since such was the design of the sabbath, its exercises must be correspondent ; it requires heavenly contemplation, self-examination, the devotion of the heart to God, and communion with him in his ordinances ; and consequently, the

laying aside of our worldly pursuits, and the rejection of worldly conversation, and worldly thoughts. That such is the design of the sabbath, consider its appointment: at first, a memorial of God's finishing the work of creation; now, a memorial of Christ's resurrection, and of his finishing the work of redemption. These designs are clear, and unambiguous intimations of the nature of sabbath exercise. Farther, consider how the apostles employed the sabbath. They met together for religious exercises: Acts xx. 7. For the same purpose, consider Isa. lviii. 13. If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasures, nor speaking thine own words. From this passage, we learn what things are forbidden, as contrary to the design of the sabbath. We are forbidden to *do our pleasure*; our worldly pleasure; we are forbidden to *find our pleasure*; our worldly delights or amusements, however lawful on other days. This prohibition necessarily includes worldly thoughts, plans, or contemplations. We are forbidden to *do our own ways*, or *speaking our own words*. This respects worldly employments, and conversation. The same passage also teaches us positive duties belonging to the sabbath. We are required to *call the sabbath a Delight*. This enjoins a delight in the sabbath, and in the exercises that correspond to its appointment. We are required to acknowledge the sabbath as the *holy of the Lord*, and as such, account it *honourable*. Such is the design of the sabbath.

But, brethren, what a melancholy contrast with this, do we find among professors of religion at present!! How few love the approach of the sabbath, and desire its presence because of its exercise? How few give evidence that they delight in it, by abstaining from their own pleasures, their own ways, and their own words? Who can apply such a passage of holy writ to himself, and say he is clean? How often do we find even the sanctuary of God profaned by worldly conversation on the sabbath! How many indulge in this, apparently without restraint, without remorse, or a sense of guilt! How often do we find, that even the solemnities of divine ordinances, cannot procure so much veneration for the sabbath, as to restrain such conversation during the intervals of divine worship! We have a melancholy, but incontestible inference to draw from such a practice, on comparing it with our Lord's maxim, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." If worldly conversation on the sabbath prevail, a carnal unholy heart must be its spring: worldly thoughts are the beloved exercises of the soul; and holy affections are not its habit, or delight. If piety prevailed in the heart, the sabbath would furnish at least a happy opportunity for that holy conversation, which it would dictate.

But is it said, in justification of those liberties, which we reprove, that such precision is too much to require, and more than we can attain? So, many of Christ's nominal disciples said, when he spoke of their spiritual food, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" John vi. 60. These requisitions are too high for the natural man, or the carnal heart; but not too high for the approbation of the renewed soul. The plea is a challenge on God's law, and a justification of ourselves, in trampling on its authority in obedience to the dictates of our depravity; it is making our carnal affections and depraved taste, the rule and measure of our duty, instead of the holy oracles. Men appear to forget that a change of heart is necessary to an acceptable service of God, and in order to our preparation for heaven; and that their disrelish for sabbath exercise, is a decisive evidence of their depravity, of their aversion from God, and of their actual unfitness for heavenly enjoyments and exercises. The prevalence of spiritual indulgence and worldly mindedness, the customary neglect of veneration for the sabbath, we fear, have left the minds of multitudes ignorant of its true design, and insensible to their obligations. Thus, by unworthy observance of the sabbath, irreligion is encouraged, spiritual ignorance and indolence are flattered, and the true service of God, and genuine heart piety are, by custom, presented to the mind, as gloomy, austere, superstitious, and disagreeable. Many judge the divine requisitions to be more than they can observe, and they flatter themselves that they are justified by custom in their neglect. These baleful sentiments are perverting the rising age, and involving us in awful responsibility. Christians, remember you are accountable at the tribunal of God, where custom shall be no justification, and indisposition for a holy obedience, shall be a condemning plea.

But the most glaring evidence of a decline of piety, and of that sabbath-profanation, of which we have been speaking, we have yet to mention; it is the public breach of the sabbath by secular employments, and especially by travelling. This is a melancholy, and a glaring evidence that sabbath sanctification in heart, is not understood and practised; it is a fruit of sabbath profanation in secret. The tree is known by its fruit, and by this rule we are compelled to judge here. If this sin were confined to the profane world, to professed infidels, we would not be surprised at the fact; their conduct and profession would be perfectly consistent: but that professors of the name of Christ, should be found so grossly betraying his cause, trampling on his authority, despising the institutions of his grace, and mocking their obligations, is beyond excuse. Many excuses are alledged in justification of this breach of duty. But to those who are disposed to follow their supposed temporal interests, at the expense of religious duty, excuses will not be wanting.

It would be too much deference paid to those excuses, to detain with enumerating, answering, and rejecting them : it is unnecessary. Veneration for the command of God, love to him and his service, knowledge of truth and duty, and experience of heart piety, will effectually answer and refute every such excuse to the conscience.

We would only ask, In such engagements, are you *remembering* the sabbath to keep it holy ? Are you shewing due regard to divine authority ? Are you setting a worthy example before others ? Are you exercised as God requires you on his day ? To say you are, is mocking God and conscience. See Nehemiah's judgment of the very same kind of conduct, for which we reprove you, the profanation of the sabbath in secular employments, trading, &c. Neh. xiii. 15-22. Had they not the same excuses which you employ ? were they sustained ? On this subject examine Jer. xvii. 19-27. and Ezek. xx. 12-26. But, brethren, can piety reside in that heart, which, for a trifling consideration, would trample on a known command, and would seek an excuse for neglecting a season of communion with God ?

Consider the amount of this species of sabbath-profanation. You are denying God's providential care, and seeking your temporal provision contrary to his law ; you are virtually denying your dependence on him, when you do not acknowledge his law in your pursuits ; you are ungrateful for his goodness in granting you a sabbath of rest, for yourselves, your servants, and your beasts ; and for granting you this, as a safe repose from worldly cares and employments, in which you have opportunity, under providential care, of attending to your eternal interests, without prejudice to your worldly concerns. By this species of sabbath profanation, and also by those, which are more secret and refined, such as we have noticed, you are giving the preference to worldly enjoyments and possessions, and accounting the interests of your souls of less value ; you are setting an unholy and ensnaring example before the rising age, to whom you ought to teach the laws of God by precept and example ; you are giving an occasion to the enemies of religion to reproach, weakening the cause of morality and piety, giving vice a triumph, contradicting your profession, and destroying the life of piety in your own souls.

Can piety flourish where the sabbath is neglected ? Look around ; where are the fruits, or evidences of piety, where the sabbath is not religiously observed ? Is it not obvious that experimental heart piety, and a holy observance of the sabbath, will be found together ; and on the contrary, that impiety and sabbath profanation walk hand in hand ? That individuals may possess piety, under mistaken views of the sabbath, is possible ; but that it can long exist, under known abuse of this holy institution, is a false and un-

founded hope. Yea, that piety can continue, or the true church exist, through successive generations, under a neglect of the sabbath, even though it be broken in ignorance, we must deny : for God will make known his sabbath where he will promote piety ; and that heart, which will despise the sabbath, will, when occasion suits, trample on every law of God.

Brethren, if we would inquire into the ground of the Lord's controversy with his church, why should we overlook this sin as constituting a part ? And if he has begun his controversy for our sins, if we have evidence of this in his withdrawing from ordinances, leaving his church to the influence of ignorance, error, and a worldly spirit, shall we expect his hand to be removed, and that he will return, while we continue in the sins, which provoked him to withdraw ? Can we expect his return for the revival of real piety, while we cherish impiety in the abuse of his institutions ? When God will return, he will reform his church. If you would seek his return, seek a spirit of reformation : seek a reformation respecting the observance of the sabbath. Let the sabbath be your delight ; keep it holy in your hearts. An external observance only, is sabbath profanation ; it is changing religion from the power to the form, from the life to the shadow.

But, dear brethren, to cultivate that piety, in which you may enjoy the testimony of a good conscience; you are not to rest satisfied with a negative holiness, nor yet with the secret exercises of religion ; you are called to social and relative duties also. Amongst these, the education of children, though much neglected, holds a most important rank. The proper discharge of this trust, is of the first importance to the church, and to the interests of piety.

By some, indeed, objections are offered against this duty ; and by some it is boldly condemned. Its importance, however, is the true reason of the opposition raised against it. We do not intend to detain you with a formal refutation of arguments on this subject, at present, while we trust you acknowledge your obligations to give your children a religious education. There is something, however, peculiar in the opposition made to this duty, which is worthy of notice. Divine authority for it is left unnoticed, in their opposition, and a single text of holy scripture is not arrayed against it ; the opposition is wholly supported by theoretic speculation. But farther, our opponents do not themselves conform to their own sentiments : they either teach their children by some means, or they neglect the appearance of piety altogether. Thus the outcry against the religious education of children, is only a farce played off, in order to obtain a quiet introduction of a system of error, while they amuse others with their arguments and pretences.

But family education is an ordinance of divine institution, and

therefore demands our observance, both on account of its authority, and its wisdom. This duty was strictly enjoined on the church of the Jews: Deut. vi. 6, 7. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. This injunction has never been repealed. The same promise, which was connected with this command of old, is continued to the present church. The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Acts ii. 39. The same command is consequently continued, being moral in its nature, and connected with the promise. It was the commendation of Abraham, that he would command his children and his household after him: Gen. xviii. 19. And it was Joshua's resolution to keep this ordinance: Josh. xxiv. 15. This duty will include instruction, counsel, command, warning, reproof and correction.

This duty, we would urge on parents, from various considerations. The divine command, we have noticed; farther arguments may be drawn from the natural condition of mankind, as under depravity. Children partake of this depravity: they are by nature "dead in trespasses and sins." Their minds are, therefore, inclined to mistaken views of God and of his will, and to disobedience to his law. Nothing more is necessary then, in order to insure their impiety and perdition, than to leave them in native ignorance. If God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, their destruction is not more effectually insured by any measure, than by neglecting their education in youth. The heart without knowledge and uncultivated, is a vineyard grown over with thorns. The mind without knowledge has not the seed of the word, which the Holy Spirit will bless for its sanctification. Without instruction the child knows not the duty of prayer, nor how to perform it; it knows not its dedication to God, nor how to acknowledge this; it knows not its own necessities, the character of Christ, nor the nature of the gospel; how then shall it love Christ, or believe in him? Such is the importance of instruction to the child itself.

But farther, children are the hope of the church: they are to arise in their fathers' stead, to praise the Lord, maintain his cause, and shew his truth and works to the succeeding age. Children untaught, are the dupes of error; their good education is, therefore, a necessary means of supporting the cause of God, of maintaining his truth and institutions against the ingress of error and innovation. There is nothing, which Satan, or his emissaries in the world, have more to fear, than the proper education of children; nor is any measure in the church more favorable to Satan's interests, than the neglect, or partial performance of this duty. For the introduction



of error must ever be easiest, where ignorance and irreligion prevail; and divine ordinances are easiest perverted, where their importance is not known. Where the heart is not fortified, the enemy obtains an easy admission. The progress of error, the success of innovations, the rage for novelty, and aversion from whatever is old, which often prevail in the church, may generally be traced to the neglect of family education, or to its partial performance. That youth may profit by public ordinances, it is necessary that they have a religious education. To the ignorant, the doctrines of divine truth are often unintelligible; and divine ordinances are insipid and barren. To the ignorant, the poison of error is more palatable than the wholesome food of divine truth.

Parents, consider your obligations to this duty; and the high importance of the work committed to you. You are to "bring up" your children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." If you neglect their instruction, who shall perform it? To you God has committed their guardianship and education, that you may educate them for him, that you may fortify their minds against the insinuations of error and vice, and that you may employ the means for their salvation. Remember then your accountability. If your children be seduced by the errors, or misconduct of the professed church, or by the snares of the world, through your neglect, will not God require it at your hand? You have the motives of both duty and affection. Be faithful to your trust.

Many, however, educate their children without seeing the happy fruits, for which they had hoped. But though the parent cannot confer grace, nor make his utmost endeavors effectual for the child's salvation, yet, too often may the child's errors, or impiety, be traced to the parent's fault. "Train up a child in the way he should go," is a command, which, if properly observed, would more usually than it is supposed, be accompanied by the connected promise, "when he is old, he will not depart from it." To give preceptive, or doctrinal lessons, is not sufficient to constitute that training which is required; it is necessary also, that parents endeavor to impress the young mind with a sense of divine truth, and of its importance. This is included in that diligence, which is required; Deut. vi. 7. For this purpose, parents ought to converse with their children frequently, seriously, and on the most solemn, practical subjects of religion: this is included in the diligence required. Parents should not perform the work as a task, in which they find but little pleasure, or take but little interest. The diligence required here, we grant is burdensome to the carnal mind, but piety cultivated in the heart, is the best method of attaining to the proper discharge of this duty. Parents should also be careful to impress on the minds of children, at an early period, certain principles of divine truth, and their obligation to certain duties; such as

their natural state of condemnation ; their natural depravity ; the freedom and riches of divine grace ; the nature and perfections of God, and their obligations to him ; the truth and authority of the holy scriptures ; the duties of secret prayer, reverence for God's word read or heard, the sanctification of the sabbath and their obligations to keep it holy ; their baptismal obligations, and consequent duties. Such doctrines and practices are calculated to make useful and deep impressions on the minds of children ; and impressions which are likely to govern their conduct and principles thro' life. These are doctrines and practices also, of which their minds can early form some ideas ; and which may early influence their hearts. At this, we may expect the infidel's scoff ; but would you be inconsistent, would you deny your profession for the empty sneer of Satan's emissary, and the enemy of God and your souls ?

But, not only should parents instruct children in their duties, and exhort and encourage them to the performance ; they should enjoin these duties on them, and, as far as practicable, see that they perform them. This would correspond to Abraham's character as an instructor of his family : Gen. xviii. 19. Parents should also watch over their children's morals, and lay due restraints on their amusements, so as to guard them against vice, and impress their minds with the fear of God.

But, not only should parents labour in the education of their children by careful instruction, and by authority in watching over their morals ; they ought also to be diligent in prayer for them. If they accept the promise of God made to themselves and their children, and on this ground, give them to God in baptism, they ought to plead the promise for them. Not only should they pray for them, but with them, and thus instruct by example, as well as precept. As they would desire their children to believe they are serious and earnest in their instructions, let them prove their sincerity by a consistent example. Let this sincerity be proved by a uniform, christian example in all holy obedience, and especially in prayer and other family devotions.

To this part of family education, and branch of christian duties, too much neglected, we solicit your particular attention. Its neglect is none of the least symptoms of the decline of piety in the present age. We need not question, whether piety can flourish in that heart, which chooses to evade this duty, or in that family where it is not performed ; where such a spiritual repast is appointed, but disrelished and rejected. Obedience is the mark of love to Christ, and where this love reigns, his commands are not grievous. Can he, who usually neglects this duty, evade the inference, that to him Christ's commands are grievous ? or the consequent charge, that he has not the love of God ? That this duty is much neglected, needs

no proof; the conscience of the greater number of church-members is our witness. While there are some happy instances found, in which it is regularly, conscientiously, and profitably performed; yet many perform it but occasionally, and many neglect it altogether.

Let none plead the want of authority, for family devotions, in holy scripture, as an excuse for their neglect; the duty is, in substance, enjoined by Christ. The particular form, or order of exercises, is not prescribed; nor for this do we contend. But if the following things are acknowledged as of divine authority, let them be observed and our point is gained—That we are authorised to sing God's praises, and the praises which he has prepared and instituted; to read his word; to call on his name in prayer; that all these should be performed by families; and that they be performed daily, morning and evening. This comprehends all we ask. And since these duties are reasonable, positive institutions of form and order, were not so readily to be expected; and consequently, holy scripture informs us of the divine will in this matter, by recommending examples, by reproving neglects, by warnings, threatenings, and exhortations.

The *matter* of this duty being plain and obvious, we detain only to notice authority for the *time*, and the *manner* of its performance. That it is to be performed by families, we have evidence. David returned to bless his house: I. Chron. xvi. 43. Joshua resolved to serve God with his family: Josh. xxiv. 15. Job sanctified his family, and this did Job continually: Job i. 5. Abraham was commended for his fidelity in this matter: Gen. xviii. 19. Noah built an altar for his family: Gen. viii. 20. The patriarchs built their altars wherever they resided: Gen. xii. 7. & xxxv. 1-3-7. But holy scripture is not silent respecting the neglect of this duty: "Pour out thy fury on the heathen that know thee not, and on the families that call not on thy name." Jer. x. 25. Would such a denunciation have been uttered for the neglect of family devotions, if God had not required the performance?

That this duty should be performed daily, morning and evening, we have evidence, from the appointment of the morning and evening sacrifices and services of old. Though the ceremonies of divine worship have been changed, the worship itself has not. Former institutions of divine worship, remain in full force in their substance and spirit, the ceremonial and typical form only, being abolished. The appointment of morning and evening for divine service, was not typical, it was moral and substantial: Ps. xcii. 1, 2. The appointment of the sacrifice at the temple, was not a substitute for the moral service of the people, but a requisition of it throughout the tribes of Israel, in their families: Luke i. 9, 10. I. Kings viii. 37-40. Observe, therefore, and revere the scripture admo-

nitions on this subject ; imitate in your practice, the examples recommended ; and you will find conformity to these, and family devotions the same thing.

Consider your obligations to this duty. You have family mercies ; you have family acknowledgments and thanksgivings. Can you be grateful for these, and not acknowledge them to God ? or can you gratefully acknowledge these gifts, and not desire that your family should acknowledge them with you ? You have family wants, which intimate your obligation to family supplications. Mutual interests require and produce mutual care. Shall the members of a family feel a mutual interest in their earthly enjoyments, and ought they not to feel it, and shew it in their eternal concerns ? Let such a mutual interest and care be manifested by mutual family supplications. Remember the danger to which every member of the family is exposed, of being captivated by the world's enjoyments, pursuits, and pleasures, and of forgetting their eternal interests. Remember the daily need they have of divine support and care, and their need of the daily communications of divine grace to their souls. Let such considerations incite you to diligence in this duty.

Consider also your obligation to promote the comfort, knowledge, and piety of your family, as an excitement to diligence in this part of religious service. A consort is perhaps sighing for such an opportunity of cultivating knowledge and piety, of obtaining communion with God, and of preparing for an eternal state ; or perhaps has already fallen into indifference through your neglect. Your children know nothing of God's will, or of his service, but as they are taught ; and to you their education is committed. Their piety must be reared by the vigilant hand of laborious culture, if it would grow. The natural bias of their minds is to hate God, and neglect his service. They need no false instructions to be mistaken in their views ; no incitements to vice to be vicious ; no unholy examples to cherish their irreligion ; you have but to leave them without the means of grace, in order to prepare them for the service of Satan, and for eternal misery. The vessel needs not the impulse of oars to glide down the stream. But in vain may you expect to correct the immoralities of children by reproof alone ; in vain may you expect to give them correct principles, improve their religious sentiments, or influence their hearts to piety, by precept without example. Man is naturally imitative, and formed to receive impressions, and direct his conduct by example and experience, rather than by precept, or theoretic instruction. God has adapted his ordinances to this disposition of the human mind. Piety therefore is to be cultivated in society, as well as in secret ; mankind are to be educated in families ; children are committed to their parents, that they may be taught by example, as well as precept.

As then, children will learn by example, be careful of what character your example is. You cannot take a medium in this matter. If you do not set before your children an example of the fear of God, your example is a want of fear; if it be not an example of obedience and piety, it is an example of disobedience and impiety. Then let your children see that you fear God, that they may fear him with you; let them see that you love God, that they may join with you in this love; that you are grateful to God for his mercies, that they may join with you in gratitude; that you acknowledge your dependence on God, that they may acknowledge theirs also. Let them be taught to pray, by your praying with them. Let them have this opportunity of knowing their wants, and of putting up their petitions, before they are able to frame any for themselves. If your children perish through your impiety and neglect, your condemnation is double.

Remember also your obligation to set a holy example before your neighbour. Since you profess the name of Christ, shew a correspondent practice. If your unbelieving neighbour see your worldly spirit manifested by neglect of practical religion, you give him a false conception of its principles and influence; you embolden him to suppose that his hopes of happiness are well founded, seeing his practice is equal to yours; or if he be induced to make a profession after your example, it is only to make it in hypocrisy, and to flatter himself in a false hope.

Since such are your obligations to this duty, let no excuse for its neglect, be sought, or entertained. Excuses for neglect in this matter, however plausible, are only indications of a spirit of indolence, worldly affections, aversion from God and his service, and of a hypocritical profession of religion.

Do not excuse yourselves in neglecting this duty, on account of ignorance. This is only making one sin an excuse for another. Ignorance cannot excuse you, when you enjoy the means of knowledge. But are you too ignorant to read God's word for your instruction; to sing his praise for your edification; to supplicate a throne of grace for the blessings of salvation? If so, what is the real condition of your soul before God? and where is your hope of salvation? and why do you profess a hope?

Or does embarrassment in the presence of others, deter you from attempting this duty? Summon your souls to reverence for the majesty of God, to a deep sense of your necessities, to earnest desires of a gracious hearing, and to faith in the promise of God through Christ; and servile fear will be substituted by the fear of God, and embarrassment removed by earnestness.

Or do you fear lest your thoughts will desert you in attempting this duty? Make the attempt in obedience to the divine command, and in reliance on promised grace: none that put their trust in him

shall be ashamed ; they who distrust him and disobey shall not experience his promised aid. But farther ; do not suppose it necessary to be prolix, or formal. Offer up the petitions that occur to your mind, and conclude : but do not indulge in negligence. Diligence and experience will furnish you with matter : sincerity and earnestness will find expression.

But do you excuse yourselves from the performance of this duty, because of the time it would employ ? Though this excuse is perhaps as common as any we have mentioned, and perhaps even more generally employed than any other ; yet as the principles which dictate it, are so gross, and so thinly covered, we shall not honor it with a tedious refutation, nor treat it with much tenderness. Are we not warranted to assert, that surely your business is irregular, your economy defective ; that you are but little master of yourselves, and of your concerns, if you cannot afford ten or fifteen minutes morning and evening, for the service of God, from whom you receive your life, comforts, and prosperity, and whose blessing makes rich ? If your minds are so harrassed, have you time for remembering the sabbath, for improving the word of God, which you read or hear, to the advantage of your souls, or for examining into your condition before God ? An answer is unnecessary. But do you say, necessity obliges you to suspend this religious exercise, on account of worldly enjoyments ? If this is true, God requires no impossibilities. But are such occasions common ? If so, your arrangements are criminal, and have not been made with good counsel, nor in the fear of God. But the true reason of this excuse is, that you are more impressed with a sense of temporal, than of eternal necessities. Why did not your sense of spiritual necessities, rather prevent your attention to your worldly concerns ? We feel the liveliest interest in those things, which appear to us of the first and highest importance. Does not this universal principle, applied to your neglect of this duty, on such an excuse, intimate without ambiguity, that you prefer your temporal, to your eternal interests ? Ask your conscience before God, are you sincere in this excuse, and also in your profession of religion ? Are you conscious of no dissimulation before God, in seeking and framing such an evasion of duty ? Is your treasure indeed in heaven, when your heart is wholly on the earth ? Is the love of the Father in him, in whom the love of the world reigns ? How are you prepared for heaven, when your hearts are set on temporal enjoyments and pursuits, which you must leave, and are averse from communion with God, which must constitute your eternal enjoyment, if you be forever happy ?

But, brethren, slumber not in neglect of duty, nor in servile obedience to worldly affections. Do not flatter yourselves under excuses for neglect. The heart is deceitful, and your souls are in

danger. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Give attention to this important duty, which we have laid before you, which promises utility to your own souls, to your family, and to the church of God. Let a sense of its importance, and of your obligations to its performance, be impressed on your hearts. Let practical piety be your attainment. Let your hearts delight themselves in the Lord, and such a service will become an enjoyment; excuses will not be sought for evasion; the mists, which darken your way, shall be dispelled; and difficulties will vanish, or be found surmountable. The snares of the world, the temptations of Satan, and the depravity of the heart, present difficulties in your way. If you consult these difficulties, and neglect your duties, till your minds are satisfied, you take an ensnaring path. Your difficulties will increase, and duties be forever suspended. Let this duty then, of family devotions, be fixed in your minds as important, and imperious. Let it not be suspended on the condition that the world allow you time, or that all difficulties be removed; for thus it will be prevented, and you will rather seek excuses for evasion, than opportunities for performance.

But, brethren, in connection with our admonitions on the subjects of family education, and family devotions, permit us to lay before you other obligations, no less imperious on *those*, whose circumstances involve them—your obligations respecting your slaves.

Here, we do not detain with admonitions to feed and clothe them; we are happy to say, that the necessity of such admonitions is precluded, as far as our observation extends. Nor is it our admonition at present, to set them at unconditional liberty, under present circumstances.\* Nor is it our present design to discuss their natural right to liberty; or the absurdity of the supposition, that this was ever forfeited by their suffering theft, or even sale, by a barbarous conqueror; or the impossibility, that a pecuniary compensation, to one, who never had a *moral right* over the person and liberty of the slave, should ever procure *such a right* to the purchaser; all which, we hope, we have no occasion to urge. Our present design is to urge, what the law of God and sound reason testify, and your own conscience must acknowledge, to be a duty, a present, an imperious, but much neglected duty—the religious education of your slaves. A classical education, or such an education as may be useful, or necessary for freemen in the common spheres of life, we do not ask for them in their present circumstances; we ask no more than instruction in religious knowledge.

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\*That it is your duty to encourage a spirit of regular and well conducted emancipation, through the organ of civil government, or otherwise, we do assert.

We are aware that we may be met with objections and arguments against this requisition by many, though brethren, we hope not by you. Some of these objections, which are urged, we may briefly notice, though, as is usual with pleas against duty, they are more specious than solid, and magnified because excuses are desired.

It is objected against the religious instruction of slaves, that some of those, who have been so favored, have proved themselves hypocrites in their profession, unworthy of their privileges, and worse servants than if they had been retained in ignorance. If this objection were valid, as a reason why servants should not be taught, then let religion be banished at the will of a Voltaire, a Gibbon, a Hobbs, or a Hume. The infidel has long employed this objection, in substance, as a triumphant argument against christianity, in reference to those who have enjoyed citizenship, in reference to Europeans, as well as Africans; let not the argument be reiterated by the professed christian. If this were a valid objection against the religious education of slaves, it would be equally strong against the education of freemen. But, christian, if this objection were valid, why did not the apostle warn Timothy and others, to use their influence that slaves should not be taught, instead of laying down rules of christian conduct towards them, and for them?

It is objected, that slaves are unsusceptible of instruction. This is far from being universally true. The same objection may be raised in many cases, with respect to the children of our citizens; would this be a sufficient reason for the universal neglect of education? or even a sufficient reason for neglecting the education of the more indocile among them? We grant that habits of servility, in many cases, fetter the genius, deprave the taste, and render the mind averse from elevated thought; and this is, without dispute, a difficulty in the path of those, who would perform their duty to their slaves. But remember, that this is not so much the fault of the slave, as the unhappiness of his circumstances. Truly it is hard, that their unhappiness, which they owe to the injustice of others, should be charged as their fault, and plead as a justification of our barbarity towards them. It is hard, that the smallest favor, which we can ask for them, in the stead of justice, should be denied them.

It is objected, that many of them are unwilling to learn, and choose to be ignorant. But what can you expect but unwillingness, when they have never known the value of knowledge? What can you expect but disrelish, when they have never tasted the sweets? The same objection, however, is applicable to free children. Will the parent not be guided by the child's wish, while, as a master, he will yield to that of the slave? If your servant refuse to perform his appointed labor, do you yield to his unwillingness? Why yield in the one case, and not in the other? But the same induce-



ments are not held out for the education of slaves, as for that of the heirs; such as the disgrace of ignorance, the pride of education, and its advantages. The want of these, and the want of love, in the case of slaves, with the trouble of teaching them, and the time, or expense requisite for doing it, give weight to arguments, which are light as wind, and magnify mole-hills to mountains. Indolence, reluctance, and a low sense of obligations, we fear, are the real reasons of neglect.

That masters are under obligations to give their slaves a religious education, is obvious from both scripture and reason. Many refer to Abraham, as a slave-holder, in order to prove their right to possess slaves. Though we do not recognize this case as a proof of the right in question; yet, as we do not intend to discuss this point at present, we dismiss the argument. But we find in Abraham's case, a proof to our purpose. In his household, were included his servants; but these he was under obligations to educate: Gen. xviii. 19. Yes, in the commendation there given to Abraham, the household are distinguished from the children, and recognized as subjects of religious education. The conduct of Abraham's servant, recorded in Gen. xxiv. shews the education which he had received. If any then, will refer to this Patriarch's practice, as a warrant for holding slaves, let them at least refer to his example, as a warrant for the duty of slaveholders.

It is also argued as a warrant for slavery, that it was practised by the people, among whom the apostles planted churches, and that the abolition of slavery was not required. Still it is not our object to answer the argument on this point at present, but to refer those who use it, to the apostle's instructions, and to the examples of those christian churches, to learn the duties of masters to their servants, respecting a religious education. Take not their authority for warranting slavery, (if it were a warrant,) without observing their example and authority for the duty of slaveholders. From Titus ii. 9-12. we learn that practical piety was required of servants as well as of their masters, and consequently the requisition implied a religious education. The apostle's instructions, Col. iii. 22-25. I. Tim. vi. 1, 2. prescribes religious duties to servants, and imply a religious education. The apostle, Eph. vi. 5-9. prescribes the duties of master and servant, and contemplates both as under the same gospel privileges.

But besides the scripture authorities quoted, and correspondent with these, consider your obligations to perform the duty we are urging. Your slaves have indeed been taken from a land of moral darkness to a land of gospel light; but with what advantage to them, if, in the midst of light, they walk in darkness? Are they contented without gospel light? If they are, so are your children, so are all mankind by nature; but by the means of grace and the

blessing of the spirit, the unwilling are made willing. You cannot expect to find them willing in ignorance. Imitate then your Lord and Master, who seeks the lost sheep. If you have the gospel, and have tasted that the Lord is gracious, would you monopolize such a favor? Would not you be ready to say even to your servant, "O taste and see that the Lord is good"—"Come"—"I will teach you the fear of the Lord?" Would not love to Christ induce you to extend the means of grace, which you have enjoyed, in order to gain souls to him? Have you seen the value of your own soul's salvation, and do you not set a value on theirs? How do you address one of them on a death-bed, too ignorant to understand you, too ignorant to receive the consolations of the gospel? How can you then put up a petition for them to a throne of grace, and expect a gracious hearing, when you have withheld that knowledge from them, which the Holy Spirit would bless for the salvation of the soul? How can you see them approach their dreadful end, ignorant and impious; affording no ground for the most enlarged charity, which the Holy Scriptures will warrant; about to launch into eternal misery, incapable of receiving instruction, or consolation? How can you reflect on this, without remorse and horror; remembering that they were committed to your care for instruction and government, but that betraying your trust, you had employed them only for your temporal interests, without giving them even an opportunity of knowing their danger, or their ground of hope? What pangs must such a consideration inflict on an awakened conscience! what pangs to think that for these you must answer! that their blood must be on your head! that the means of their salvation were put into your hands; but that you had withheld them! and that you have no apology, but common custom, adopted in a declining state of piety in the church! Brethren, ponder well these realities. Try these things by the word of God, and see what verdict conscience must return. The final Judge will not make common opinion, or common custom his rule of judgment. The custom of the age, often as false as corrupt nature can suggest; the snare of the unsuspecting; the retreat of the indolent from the stings of a guilty conscience, will not justify a neglect of divine injunctions.

Nor yet will good works misplaced, atone for neglects. Many are displaying their philanthropy for the heathen abroad, but neglecting justice, as well as mercy, to the heathen African at their own gates. Distribute your charity first at home, where the necessity is as great, where the means are as likely to be successful, where the objects are more immediately accessible, and give more unequivocal proofs of a true christian spirit. Do you through love to souls, distribute your charity to heathen abroad, and neglect them at home? preposterous!! This you ought to perform, and

not leave the other undone. Where is your sincerity? or is it buried in the mistakes of common custom? Where is your self-denial? It is easier to give a sum to promote the works of charity, than to engage in the actual performance of religious duties. The gift of the heart to God, is our most costly gift, and that which we are most indisposed to make.

But consider, lest the curse be on your basket and your store for your parsimony in this part of the service of God. Beware also lest a heavier curse be lying on you; not only a curse on your temporal comforts, but on your spiritual privileges; a withholding of the blessing on the means of grace from yourselves, and also from your children in the religious education, which you attempt to give them. Can you expect that God will bless your endeavours for your children's education, while you, in carelessness, and disobedience, neglect that of your servants? Besides, are not your children in imminent danger from the irreligion, and the vices of the untutored slaves, to whose company and influence, they are unavoidably exposed? But, brethren, does piety flourish, or can we expect it to flourish, in our families and churches, where the neglect of this important duty is such a notoriety?

That the education of slaves is attended with difficulties, we grant. Their state of servitude, their degradation of mind, the influence of others, are real obstacles; the trouble, the perseverance, the energy, and the economy, necessary to attain such an object, are real difficulties, though surmountable. But while we speculate, consult our ease and inclination, and do not attempt our duty, we paint difficulties in our imagination, as much greater than we find them on experience. To people ignorant of the benefits of education, and accustomed to raise their children without it, the pains, the loss of time, and the expense attending a course of instruction, appear forbidding obstacles; but to you accustomed to give such instruction, and deeply impressed with its importance, though difficulties appear, they are surmountable. Make the attempt in the case of slaves, under a conviction of its importance, and of your obligations, and difficulties will diminish in your view, and your path will open before you.

But the means should also be chosen with good counsel. To advise you to employ a sabbath-school for the purpose of teaching your slaves to read, and of excusing yourselves from the performance of your duty, we dare not. Why employ the sabbath to give that instruction to your slaves, which you account the proper employment of the week for your children? why do so, unless to save time and expense? is it not liberality with what is not your own, and criminal parsimony with respect to what God has given you? committing sacrilege to save your coffers and your labouring time? Leave such a use of the sabbath for the education of slaves belong-

ing to the infidel and the men of the world, who do not name themselves christians. Nor has it escaped us, that we are here touching on a delicate point, on which the christian world are sensibly alive; on which they are up in arms at the slightest signal, and hurling their anathemas, before they well know the occasion. But stay christian, misconstrue neither our intention, or our words; and hear without perturbation. There is a possibility of deception in popular objects. Satan often hides his snares under a mask of piety, by which the believer himself is often deceived, and the hypocrite always flattered. Surely Satan has some treasure here, when investigation will not be permitted. Our reproofs are not directed against those, who instruct the ignorant and needy in sabbath-schools, where such a measure is necessary; their conduct we commend; but against those, who render such a measure necessary by their neglect of duty at home; against those, who employ such a measure, either to avoid expense, or to excuse themselves from the personal and faithful discharge of their office in their family. To these this measure is sabbath-profanation, impiety, and sacrilege. We are understood by the judicious. But permit us to inquire, why might not professors of religion especially, and others also, unite in forming a school for children of colour, on the same plan of their common schools, and employ their early years in obtaining a little information? The expense would not be too great for those who are able to keep them; nor more than duty would require of those who have them; nor more than a due sense of obligations would induce them to do for those committed to their care. Such an education could be easily and profitably improved, in future years, by family instructions. And could not means also be employed for the instruction of those servants farther advanced in life? such as reading to them the Holy Scriptures, on many occasions, and especially on the sabbath; catechising them, instructing them in the doctrines of divine truth, and respecting their duties? Make the religious instruction of all a family duty. No substitute should be adopted for this ordinance of God. Worship God in your family, and call in your whole household to engage in this exercise. Some of you do happily set the example of compliance with this requisition; but some, alas many, neglect it. How preposterous, to see one part of the household engaged in the worship of God, and another employed in labour, or amusement, as though not interested in the exercise!! Seriously reflect, can such worship be acceptable to God? Is it not mockery?

Do you complain for want of time? this excuse has been answered already? Have you time for your immediate family to worship God, and not for your servants? We fear, if the necessity of labour called your family to the field, the same excuse would be pled for their absence also. But do those, who call in their ser-

wants to family worship, suffer in their estate by such a sacrifice? point at the instance where they do; no; it is a chimera, a figment of the imagination, which a sense of your obligations would easily banish. The whole difficulty, of which you complain, would be removed by economy. And remember, christian, that when you neglect this, you neglect an important part of your duty in the religious education of your servants; and manifest an unbecoming, and unchristian reluctance in the service of God.

Do not judge it hard that such exertions and sacrifices are required. May we not argue,—If you partake of their carnal things, is it not to you, a light matter that they should partake of your spiritual things? And, are *you* offended with *them*, because of *their indolence in your field?* may not *God* be offended with *you*, for *your indolence in his vineyard?* Do you complain that *they* perform but eye-service? and are *you* not afraid of the same charge from a *higher Judge?*

Brethren, if there be reality in these reflections, have we not much to amend? Have we not reason to fear the withdrawing of the Holy Spirit from the Church, under such provocations? And when such evils are detected, and such reluctance to duty discovered, can we doubt that piety is low, or wonder why it is so? But are these evils too great to amend? then farewell to piety, welcome the form of godliness instead of the power; cling to the world; at last give up the name of christians, and leave posterity a prey to irreligion, ignorance, and the spirit of the world. You love to have these things so, and what will you do in the end thereof? You now have peace and plenty; you love your ease, and you slumber, indulging the vain dream that these things shall continue. You are saying, “Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep;” but remember the warning, “so shall thy poverty come like one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.” It is the sluggard that “saith there is a lion in the way, I shall be slain in the streets.” Remember a refusal to comply with the divine requisitions, is provoking to God; and his sentence is real, though the execution be delayed. But while you refuse, the spirit is withdrawing, piety is declining, your love is waxing cold, and your insensibility is increasing. The evil is not yet past remedy. Arise while it is day; the night cometh, wherein none can work.

But, brethren, after this view of your private duties, permit us to turn your attention to those, which are more public;—to the abuse of the public ordinances of divine worship, which prevails, and to the necessity of reformation.

We do not, however, intend here to descant on the abuse of divine ordinances, by the substitution of human institutions for divine, or by the partiality in the law of God, of which we might complain;

but only to notice very briefly, the external neglect, and individual perversion of the spirit of public ordinances of the gospel, which we find prevailing, and threatening the existence of true piety.

Absence from public worship, for trifling causes, as well as neglect of private duties, proves the irreligion of the heart. We need no farther proof than this, that the mind is carnal; insensible to the wants of the soul; and that it disrelishes the enjoyment of communion with God, notwithstanding all pretensions to the contrary. If you love the Lord, you will not only keep his commandments from a spirit of obedience, but you will obey from a spirit of love; you will desire his presence and communion in the opportunities which his ordinances afford; a trifling circumstance will not satisfy your minds, as an excuse for absence; you will endeavor to remove obstacles or surmount them, rather than seek apologies for neglect.

To the same principle of disrelish for spiritual enjoyment, may in general be attributed the procrastination, too common among the youth, of joining in the commemoration of the Lord's death, and of making a profession of their faith. When the delay arises from disrelish for spiritual religious exercises; or from an unwillingness to renounce the sinful pleasures of the world, and to separate yourselves so far from its society, it is nothing less than the result of a choice, made for the time, of rejecting Christ, and of embracing temporal enjoyments in preference to those which are eternal. Seriously reflect; can you exculpate yourselves from the charge of rejecting Christ through unbelief; or evade the dreadful inference, that you are not in a state of peace with God? under such a choice, are you prepared to receive the summons of death? By neglecting this solemn ordinance, you reject your baptismal obligations; but remember, you do not free yourselves from them; you renounce the authority of the moral law, but you do not free yourselves from its obligations, or evade its sanction. By your delay on such principles, you only betray your secret aversion from Christ, and your willingness to escape from the demands of a law, which you cannot evade. Do you excuse yourselves by saying, you fear the solemnity of the ordinance? We ask, Is it more solemn than death, which you cannot evade? But as we would not be prolix, we leave you with these reflections.

But though the open neglect of divine ordinances is common with many, though it demands much warning and reproof; yet passing this part of the subject with the remarks offered, we proceed to call your attention to the secret abuse of these means of grace; a sin as prevalent as the former, more secret and deceptive, but no less pernicious in its influence on the soul. And for this purpose, consider the design of public institutions of divine worship. They were appointed to warn against error: II. Tim. iv. 1-5.; to administer reproof; to convey instruction in the truths of God, and the duties

required of us; and to excite to duty by exhortation: II. Tim. iv. 2. They were appointed to effect and promote the unity of the church in faith and knowledge; in fidelity to the cause of God; and in the spirit of love under the influence of divine truth: Eph. iv. 11-16. They were appointed to produce and promote faith: Rom. x. 17. as means of effecting the salvation of the soul; I. Cor. i. 18. 21. Eph. iv. 13. and as means of communion with God: Math. xviii. 20. Rev. iii. 20. Ps. xxvii. 4. It is now unnecessary to ask, with what spirit, or for what purpose we should attend these ordinances? Your attendance must correspond to the design of their appointment, or you abuse them, and deprive your souls of profit. Since God has appointed them, for the purpose of reproof, warning, and instruction, should we not attend them with reverence and submission? Since he has appointed them as means of grace, of producing and promoting faith, and of cultivating communion with God, what contempt for divine grace; what disregard for your own souls' salvation and comfort; how preposterous the conduct; what consummate folly, to neglect them, or to attend them from any trifling or unholy motive! Shall not those, who attend divine ordinances for the purposes, for which they were appointed, obtain the blessing? If God is "found of those that sought him not," surely he will also "meet him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember him in his ways:" Isa. lxiv. 5. But will the blessing be obtained, if we attend in a contrary spirit, and from contrary motives? You are not to be informed, however absurdly any of you may act, that God never appointed his ordinances, for the trifling, and unworthy purposes of gratifying your curiosity, of furnishing you with amusement, or of passing away in indolence, or worldly pleasure, an hour otherwise dull and tedious; that he never displayed his sovereign love, his holy care, his heavenly compassion in providing divine ordinances to gratify your unholy propensities. Your service under such principles and motives is a "vain oblation, an incense, which is an abomination to God," "a smoke in his nose, a fire that burneth all the day."

But, brethren, have we not reason to fear, yea, is it not obvious, that divine ordinances are so perverted among us? This is too forcibly proved, to admit denial or apology, by the very profession of many, who visit various assemblies of professed worshippers. The reason they give for their conduct is, that they "had curiosity to see and hear." The existence of this profanation of divine ordinances, is clearly proved by the worldly conversation, which prevails on the sabbath, before, and after divine service; by the common and easy neglect of divine worship; by the little practical fruit attending the means of grace; by the low state of piety at present; by the ignorance of church members; by the progress of error in the church; by the general itch after novelty, and by the low re-

gard to divine authority, which prevails, whether respecting the word, or institutions.

By such abuse of divine ordinances, the God of grace is mocked; his salvation despised; piety banished and forgotten; religion turned into a form, and divine institutions into a farce. We therefore, solemnly warn you, and tender our affectionate call, that, as you revere the great and dreadful name of the Lord our God; as you would acknowledge his grace and love; as you value your souls' salvation, and would be prepared for death; that, as you would deprecate the infidelity, the irreligion, and the perdition of posterity; as you would desire that God should delight to dwell among us; so, you would "remember whence you have fallen, repent and do the first works," that you would attend divine ordinances with reverence, faith, and a spirit of obedience; that you would seek God's presence in them, and communion with him. Let not your attendance be like that of Ezekiel's hearers: Ezek. xxxiii. 30-33. Let the language of your hearts always be in divine ordinances, as that of Cornelius: Acts x. 33. "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

On a review of the evils prevalent in the church, of which we have given but a specimen; and on comparing them with the holy scriptures, or with the piety of our forefathers; it may readily occur to the serious inquirer to ask, Why are these things so? "these are not the Lord's doings." What is the cause of this decline? "is the spirit of the Lord straitened?" Nor are these questions impertinent. These evils have a cause. And to reprove sins, while we encourage the secret influencing principle, or refuse to correct it, is but to polish a sepulchre in order to cleanse it, or to prune a tree in order to effect its death.

It is not piety of *every* description, that discriminates the child of God, from a child of Satan; that promotes the glory of God, and a holy practice in the church; it must be piety as taught by the word of God. "If that, which ye have heard from the beginning, shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father—and *even as* it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." I. John ii. 24. 27. Real piety never took its rise in any soul, nor was promoted there, but by the truth of God. Without this truth, religion is but a solemn farce; an advantage taken of human depravity, to deceive the church, under the appearance of safety. Satan can encourage any religion, which is not founded on the word of God, nor directed, or supported by it; yea, it is the interest of his kingdom to do so, lest the soul under the light of divine truth, unsheltered by even a shadow of defence from a profession of religion, should be alarmed and aroused to inquiry.

Though the truth of divine revelation be acknowledged, yet if its



authority be set aside, or its influence weakened ; if its doctrines be denied, or its light obscured, the foundation of true religion is then taken away, the means of sanctification lost, and depravity and impiety are encouraged. These artifices *are* practised, and impiety is the consequence ; we feel their deadly effects. At these causes we ought to strike, if we would promote a reformation. To prove that error does exist, and is progressing in the church, would be quite superfluous ; to prove that error encourages those artifices, of which we complain, as far as it extends, would be unnecessary ; but to shew that these artifices are encouraged and employed, where the truth is not openly denied, may require the detection of some erroneous, but plausible and popular sentiments and practices in the church.

One of those popular sentiments, by which the light of divine truth is obscured, its influence weakened, and its authority set aside, is, That we should not disturb the peace of the church by contending for divine truth and institutions. This sentiment is urged with much vehemence and apparent christian zeal, and followed by a correspondent practice. If, however, the zeal expended for this sentiment, were employed, without its attendant acrimony, in defence of truth, it might be useful. There is, perhaps, no one error, so fatal in its consequences as this popular principle, because, not only may every error, however gross, be introduced under its shield, but it takes away the church's weapon of defence. The sentiment is plausible, but neither the dictate of divine authority, or of sound reason. To shew that it flatly contradicts the holy scripture, it is sufficient only to ask, Did the prophets, apostles, or our Lord himself act on this principle ? or did they teach it ? Did not Elijah contend for pure worship, and ordinances ? Did not Josiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others contend for God's truth and law ? and were they not under express injunctions to do so ? Who can read Ezekiel's instructions, chapter 33, without surprise at the popularity of the sentiment we oppose ? Did not our Lord himself warn and reprove ? did he not maintain, against opponents, the perfection of the divine law, and the purity of divine worship ? for an example, see Mark vii. 1-13. And do not all the apostles warn, and reprove, and enjoin this as a duty on all gospel ministers ? Did not Paul reprove Peter himself, and that openly ? Did he not forewarn Timothy, that the time would come, when they would not endure sound doctrine, but would with itching ears, heap up to themselves teachers ? Was not this his time to warn Timothy not to reprove error, if such silence had been a christian duty indeed ? But on the contrary, his solemn charge, was to reprove, rebuke, and exhort ; to watch in all things ; to endure afflictions ; to make full proof of his ministry : II. Tim. iv. 1-5. And again, of what spirit are the last admonitions of Christ to the churches of Asia ? But time would

fail in *noting* authorities. The holy scriptures give no instructions to gospel ministers, if injunctions to warn, admonish, and reprove, are not given.

Connected with the above sentiment, it is urged, That an error introduced, or held by a professed believer, should be spared ; that charity requires forbearance respecting his mistakes. But error is seldom introduced into the church by any other. It is not generally the professed infidel that makes the innovation. It was not such that introduced and supported errors among the Galatians, and became the objects of Paul's severe reproofs. It is not the professed infidel, that shall, according to prophecy, in the latter days, give heed to seducing spirits : I. Tim. iy. 1. Nor was it the professed infidel, whom Isaiah had commission to warn and reprove : Isa. lviii. 1. Cry aloud, spare not ; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. But is it said these were notorious sinners, and under gross apostacy ? not more so, than many, who are found at present, pleading for this silence. Give the former their claims, which are as well founded as the latter. Are those whom we reprove, church members ? so were the objects of Isaiah's reproof. Do our opponents wear the appearance of piety ? so did they. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God : they ask of me the ordinance of justice ; they take delight in approaching to God. Isa. lviii. 2. Or whom did our Lord, when on earth, reprove with severity ? were they not the professors of religion ? members of a church of high and ancient privilege ? But an end is put to all contention for truth, and such injunctions of holy scripture must be unmeaning, or inapplicable and useless, if the doctrines and institutions of God's word, must not be supported, when they are neglected, or opposed by professors of religion. Besides, Satan has nothing to do, in order to introduce any error, with which he chooses to subvert the church, but to employ a professor of religion for this purpose. He can thus introduce it with impunity, when it is sheltered from the reproofs of holy scripture by its patron ; and with more plausibility and efficiency for the purpose of deception ; because it is clothed with the appearance of sanctity, and protected by the name of piety. Nor is it unworthy of notice, that if all this plea for unconditional peace were well founded, our reforming forefathers were most uncharitable, narrow-minded, and unchristian in their spirit, in contending against Popery, Prelacy, Arminianism, and Socinianism, and we should yet have been enveloped in the darkness of the 15th century. No excuse for their conduct is possible, if the objection, which we oppose be admitted. They opposed a church of the greatest antiquity, and boasting of numerous saints ; they continued their opposition, under the severest charges

of a spirit of division, of irreligion, and a want of charity. If we only contend for the truth, and against error, charges against us, of illiberality and want of charity, are of the same spirit with those against our forefathers.

Another popular sentiment urged to the prejudice of truth, is, That though we may oppose essential errors, we should not contend about the non-essential. This distinction of the truths, which we should maintain, or of the errors, which we should oppose, is utterly unfounded on holy scripture. Are we ever taught that an error, which may be held by a child of God, is without danger; or that it should not be reprov'd, because damnation does not always follow such an opinion? Must the character of its advocate protect it? But farther, how shall we agree on the distinction between the great and the small, the errors which are essential, and those which are non-essential? We cannot act in unison without this agreement. Have the church yet agreed on this point? Definitions have been given, but never generally adopted. Nay, agreement on such principles is impossible; and the amount of the whole scheme, is a plea for the indulgence of error, and a measure for undermining the whole system of divine truth. It is to make a vague, and ever varying distinction, and as soon as any one shall choose to call his errors small, or insist, as all will, that they are consistent with piety, opposition and reproof must cease; and as errors progress, the non-essential shall become more numerous, till they absorb the whole, when every error must be admitted without opposition. Thus, this sentiment, if followed, must finally involve the church in total ruin. But since we are not only warranted, but enjoined, by holy writ, to contend for truth, why are the abettors of error unwilling to bring their doctrines to the light, and try their value in the crucible of controversy? If their doctrines be true, they should contend for them; if they believed them they should not, yea, they would not fear the light.

It is urged against contention for truth, and reproof for error, That such measures are inconsistent with christian charity. If so, then without dispute, the charge lies against the prophets and apostles, yea, against our Lord himself. What farther evidence do we need, that the charity pled for is deceptive? But is it true charity to see a brother sin and not rebuke him? Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Lev. xix. 17.; or is it a breach of real charity, to warn another of his danger? But surely there is but little genuine charity in the heart of those, whatever their profession may be, who charge us with enmity against our neighbour, because we reprove him for his deviations from truth and duty. And is not the plea, we are now opposing, weakening the influence of divine truth, and setting aside its authority? is it not a plea for the indulgence of error?

It is also argued, That controversy engenders strife and displeasure amongst christians. Let those who introduce innovations in doctrine, or practice, feel the weight of this objection. The charge will not be laid, by the final Judge, against those, who contend for his truth. The woe is pronounced against those, by whom the offence (stumbling-block) comes, but not against those, who are displeased at the perversion of truth, or duty. This objection is further urged by the argument, that contention among christians, presents religion in an unfriendly, unengaging aspect to the world. We grant the truth of this ; but still we reply, let those who make disputes necessary, by innovation and error, feel the weight of the charge. The question, however, comes to this, Whether shall truth, though maintained under contention, or peace, without the truth and ordinances of God, be most efficient in gaining souls to Christ? But it is worthy of notice, that, under the principles which we are opposing, want of charity, a divisive spirit, are not charged on those, who introduce error, or innovation : these are justified in disturbing the peace, and injuring the purity of the church ; yea, they are commended as examples of liberality and christian charity, and the charge is always laid against those who oppose them. The defenders are accounted the aggressors, and the innovators, the peaceful suffering innocents. Might not an unbiassed mind suppose that religion was turned to comedy? Why is this, if not from a general tendency, in the present age, to licentiousness?

Another plea for weakening the influence of divine truth, and indulging error without opposition, is, That every man must answer for himself, and therefore it is officious to trouble ourselves about the mistakes of others, or to reprove them. It would be trifling with the understanding of readers to ask, if this sentiment be founded on holy scripture. If it were, it must at once have silenced prophets and apostles, respecting errors or sins ; it must condemn all their warnings and contendings. The spiritual watchman is now under the same obligation to watch over the interests of his charge, as the prophets or apostles were of old. Nor is the commission of any ambassador of Christ, confined to any particular circle or class ; his reproofs, warnings, and exhortations, are to be given to all who hear. But have they, who use the plea, forgotten that mankind are in society, and not in hermitage? that they stand in relations to one another, which require relative duties? that God has appointed duties suited to their social condition, of which one part is to exhort, warn, and reprove respecting duty and sin, and thus express their mutual love? II. Tim. iv. 2. Lev. xix. 17. Besides, errors are not intended to be of private influence, nor are they taught for this purpose ; therefore God has required this mutual care for the safety of the church : Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old

leaven, &c. I. Cor. v. 6, 7. Their word will eat as doth a canker : of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus ; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection has past already ; and overthrow the faith of some. II. Tim. ii. 17, 18. Besides, we are imperiously bound to extend our care to the interests of posterity, to instruct them in sound doctrine, and to preserve the truth and pure ordinances for them. Walk about Zion, and go round about her : tell the towers thereof : mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces ; that ye may tell it to the generation following. Ps. xlviii. 12, 13. How shall they be guarded against a general apostacy from divine truth, if we be silent, and indifferent, while error is triumphant ? Had our forefathers dealt with us, as many would have us to deal with posterity, we must have still been enveloped in Popish darkness, or where many would have us, in infidelity, ignorance, and total neglect of divine ordinances.

There is another plea, for setting aside the authority of holy scripture, advanced with much assurance, That it is little difference what our sentiments be, if our practice be correct. We ask, in reply, What will promote a holy practice, without divine truth ? Can error be holy in its effects ? or can the practice be correct, if the principles of faith be incorrect ? If you practice according to incorrect principles, the practice is sinful ; if you practice contrary to your principles, you are a hypocrite ; where then is your piety, or even morality ?

To the same purpose, it is argued, That if we be sincere, it is little difference what our faith, or principles are. If this be so, a sincere Pagan, Mahometan, Jew, Socinian, Universalist, and Calvinist, are all equally acceptable to God : and indeed the liberality of many at present, would grant this. But more, on this principle, if the professor of religion, sincere, but ignorant, should hate some character of God, the true character of Christ, the purity of the divine law, and the sacred truths of the gospel, he is accepted, and God has no rule of judgment, but the depravity and caprice of men ! Alas ! the state of knowledge and piety, when such sentiments are current ! This is an easy method of salving the conscience, too indolent to inquire, and too depraved to obey.

To the same purpose it is argued, That it is little difference what religious profession we make, seeing all hope for heaven. The argument as applied to Papists, Universalists, or Socinians, is too gross to require our notice at present ; it is principally intended to apply to churches much nearer to you in principles and in practice, and in which, it will be no stretch of charity to be believe there are true christians. But if the argument were good, then our own salvation should be our primary, yea our whole object, and our own opinion, our rule, instead of the law of God. If the argument be correct, we are to be under no concern, whether, by our profession,

we encourage the ignorant and erroneous in any error, or sinful practice ; nor are we to hold ourselves under any obligations to warn others against errors, or sins by doctrine, or example. If the argument be correct, we need not be under any concern respecting danger of corruption in sentiment ourselves ; nor are we to fear any injury to the rising age, by the errors, or innovations, to which we thus expose, or lead them by example ; and our obligation to instruct and warn the rising age, by both precept and example, is now nothing. But can such sentiments be held by any, who know their duty, and are impressed with a sense of their obligations ? Was such a sentiment ever adopted on serious and careful inquiry, and supported with *knowledge* and *piety* ?

Another popular sentiment for indulging ignorance and error, is, That a particular and explicit profession of religion, requires more knowledge than we may expect to find with the greater part of church members. We grant, that it requires more than is usually found ; but must the existing state of knowledge, be the measure of the church's requisitions ? if so, she must indulge and flatter the indolent and careless, in ignorance ; and as ignorance becomes more common in the rising age, she must relax her laws. Thus ignorance and irreligion must lead the way, and the church with the Bible in her hands, follow submissive and obedient. This prevalent ignorance, and the indulgence which the church grants to it, are dangerous symptoms of the state of religion at present. If errors, or sinful practices prevail, is it too much to require such knowledge of truth or duty, that those snares may be shunned ? But the amount of the whole argument is, to find a salve to the conscience of the careless, and an excuse for indulging in ignorance and indolence. It may however be inquired, Are church members in the present age, incapable of acquiring that knowledge of truth and duty, which our reforming forefathers possessed, if they only possessed their piety, and their love to the truth of God ? The question needs no answer, nor is the inference far fetched or dark, that a want of real piety in the church at present, constitutes the difference. It is true, many boast, that the piety of the present age, is greater, more enlightened, and more efficient, than that of our forefathers. It is but a conjecture, however, dictated by natural pride, and actual ignorance. That the present age possesses more refinement, yea, more science, than the age of the reformers, we grant ; but religious knowledge, and practical piety, do not always keep pace with these advances. It is not Bible knowledge, nor experimental piety, that has filled the religious world at present, with its spurious divinity, and its religious notions and maxims, which are undermining the word of God. With some exceptions, it is difficult to find, in applicants for communion, as much knowledge as justifies the church in granting admission. The state of genuine doctrinal and practical

knowledge, is low, and therefore divine truth is undervalued, and errors find an easy admittance.

Another popular sentiment urged for the purpose of setting aside divine authority, and weakening its influence, is, That it is impossible to obtain an agreement among professed christians; and we are, therefore, not to expect it, but to admit to the communion of the church, those, whom we, in charity, judge to be christians, whatever their religious sentiments may be. The difficulty of obtaining agreement is granted; but does it follow, that it is our duty to encourage disagreement? to indulge all in error, and without reproof? to flatter them in their mistakes, because they will not receive the truth? Or is it any removal of the evil, of which we complain, to unite in name, but disagree in sentiment? to yield the truth, because others will not submit their inclinations to it, nor judge it of sufficient importance to give it a careful examination? to flatter others in error, because we cannot convince and persuade? Is it better to expose the cause of God, neglect our duty of maintaining the truth, and endanger the rising age, by exposing them to the influence of error and customary negligence, than to reprove and censure the erroneous and careless, though they should be displeas'd? Is not this, in effect, to yield the cause of God to the enemy at last? to refuse to employ the means of knowledge and salvation, which God has appointed, because men are unwilling to receive them? to make the opinion and the wish of every individual, the measure of the church's duty, instead of the word of God? But errors and divisions never arose, but by deviations from the word of God; and they can never be removed, but by recurring to it again. Is it said, This is granted? Why then forbid the church to employ the word for this purpose, in reproof and warning? and why forbid her to employ discipline, according to divine direction, for the purpose of reclaiming the erroneous and careless? If there were as zealous endeavours to attain an agreement in sentiment, by instructing the ignorant, and censuring the erroneous and careless, as there are to effect a liberal indulgence of error and negligence, we believe agreement would not be so rare, nor reformation so improbable. This liberal indulgence in error and negligence, is an unauthorized, yea a forbidden, and consequently, an unholy and deceptive method of church communion.

The argument, that we ought to admit those, whom we judge to be christians, is plausible, but unfounded on holy scripture, yea contrary to its plainest dictates. That man is to be admonished as a brother, whom we exclude from communion: II. Thes. iii. 14, 15. Grace in the heart, neither is, nor can be the rule of admission. By such a rule, the door is set open for every deceiver, as well as for Christ's own people; the *purity* of the church is denied to be an object of her regard; and the way is opened for the introduc-

tion of every error. By such liberal terms of admission, the gospel minister is under necessity, either to reprove errors and sins from the pulpit, which he has indulged in admission to communion, or to prove unfaithful to his trust, by keeping back part of the counsel of God. Where truth is neglected and forgotten, piety must decay. Not only is truth the support of piety, but love to the truth is a necessary evidence of it. How often does the Psalmist speak of his love to God's truth, and of his delight in it! But is it consistent with a holy love to divine truth, with a knowledge of it, and a sense of its importance, to neglect or yield it, because our neighbour loves it not, or does not believe it? We would not judge the politician, or statesman, a genuine lover of his principles, who would yield them on account of opposition, or for a neighbour's wish. "But the children of this world, are wiser in their generation than the children of light." The greater body of the professed church are acting, at present, on these liberal principles. Presbyterians and Independents, Calvinists, Arminians and Hopkinsians, are holding communion promiscuously, and on the principles of refusing to contend with decision, for any truth denied, or against any error held by any of the parties. What must be the consequence in the progress of this liberal scheme, but ignorance and rejection of divine truth; disregard and neglect of divine institutions; and at last the demolition of the church itself, under the reign of irreligion? Needs it to be told those, who believe the doctrine of human depravity, that in such a mixture of opposite sentiments, under such an indulgence as must, and does, in such a state of things, take place, that under such indifference for truth, and unfaithfulness in the church in her officers and members, the worse will prevail; that truth will yield to error, and holy obedience, to neglect of duty?

But look around; what have been the general effects of this liberal scheme? If some, who, under mistaken views, have been its advocates, have proved themselves to be the children of God, the general tendency of the measures has been far different. Has not ignorance become prevalent, have not indifference for truth, and disregard for divine authority become common, and has not active piety declined, under its indulgence?

But observe its reception with the world, and judge of its spirit. Do not infidels and the men of the world, with one consent, approve of this liberality? would they approve, if it were not friendly to the interests of Satan's kingdom, and agreeable to their inclinations? Are any ignorant of divine truth? they approve of the church's wisdom and mildness in not contending for that, which they esteem of little value. Do any hate the truth, or the strictness of the divine law? they compliment the church for her forbearance. Are any careless? they are pleased with the indulgence



granted. Are any impious? they are gratified with the church's flatteries, as far as she bestows them. Are any so depraved that they would not approve of this measure? Did Christ, or his doctrine meet with such a reception, and from such characters? Nay, it then roused their resentment to hear the reproof, "This people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men—Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Mark vii. 6, 7. 9. We are bold to assert, That there is no church, a true church of Christ, but as far as she contends for the truth. She still holds and teaches some truth, in opposition to existing errors, or she has rejected all, and left the true foundation. Christ builds his church on the truth, on the foundation of the apostles and prophets; and if this be so, it is hard to see how a neglect of any truth can be a beauty, and not a blemish in the church of Christ; how it can be an honour, and not a dishonour to the church's Head. We clearly conclude, that the church is conformed to Christ and his instructions, in proportion to the truth that she contends for, and maintains.

From such a view of sentiments and practices popular and prevalent in the church, is it not evident that irreligion is secretly encouraged under a show of zeal for God? that, by these, divine authority is rejected, and human maxims substituted; that divine truth is forgotten, or its influence weakened? You cannot then be surprised at the increasing progress of vice, the actual violations of God's law, the neglect of duty, the ignorance and coldness of church members, which prevail; or hesitate, to what cause you should attribute these evils. When it is asked, "Why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" it is not to be answered, There is no balm in Gilead, there is no Physician there; but, that the balm and the Physician are rejected. Under such measures, as we have noticed, the charge is plain and inevitable, "Ye have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly."

Here do not suppose, that we charge all who encourage such measures, with Satanic designs: by no means. If none supported measures, which favour Satan's interests, but his designed friends, truth would have fewer opponents, the path of duty would be plainer to all, and the snares of Satan would be more easily detected. But it is a most difficult task, to persuade professors of religion that the believer himself, can sometimes be found engaged in Satan's interest, and promoting his cause; instrumental, by his sentiments and practice, in opposing the cause of God, and in promoting measures for the destruction of the church of Christ; and all this without designing to produce such effects. He, however, who would deny that these things may be found, has much to learn respecting Satan's wiles, of which he should not be ignorant. But so abhor-

sent are such representations in the view of many, that they charge with rashness, impiety, and want of charity, any one, who would venture to detect those deceptions, as though such detection were fixing on the faulty church member, the charge of utter hypocrisy, and enmity to God. Thus they most ungenerously, ignorantly, and falsely, charge him, who is faithful in his duty, with a spirit of bitterness, and want of charity; excite false opinions of his character, actions, and motives; and destroy the whole intention, and utility of his warnings: they stop the ears, and ease the conscience of those, who are unwilling to hear, and desire to be at ease. Thus Satan's snares prevail, when he employs the unsuspecting believer himself to aid his cause, and to be a screen to hide, and protect his destructive measures. But, brethren, however harsh the sentiment may appear, in the view of some, we must assert, and warn you, that Satan's schemes against the church, are in sure and rapid progress, under such measures, as we have noticed; for by these, the authority of divine truth is virtually rejected, and its influence destroyed: and as divine truth is the only support, and rule of true religion, if he can destroy this foundation, he can make sure and speedy work in demolishing the fabric.

After these reflections, we do not hesitate on the question, whether piety is, at present, under a decline or not; and as little can we doubt that this decline of piety, and its fruits prove that the Holy Spirit has, in a great measure, withdrawn from the church; for "these are not his doings." It now remains to inquire, what is our duty in such a state of things. If we continue in the same sins, which caused the Holy Spirit to withdraw; if we are insensible of his absence, careless and impenitent, he will not return. If he do not return, he will leave the church, at length, to become a synagogue of Satan, without the fruits of piety, or even his gospel ordinances. Do you flatter yourselves on the consideration, that God will preserve a church for himself? it is but flattery to the indolent. God will indeed preserve a church, but it may not be with us. If we do not reform, our candlestick must be taken out of its place. And since it is our duty to reform and mourn, on whom does this obligation lie? surely on all. The mark of safety, in the time of Israel's apostasy, was to be set on all those, who sighed and cried for all the abominations, that were done in the midst of Jerusalem. Ezek. ix. 4. If we do not mourn and reform, are we not approving of the apostasy? And is not our silence, our insensibility, and our want of inquiry, virtually a rejoicing at the Spirit's absence, and a consent that he should remove and leave us to ourselves? And are not those who forbid us to admonish, warn, and reprove, virtually forbidding us to mourn, or to take any measures for a reform? On which side of this question

will you take your stand? It is not now time to sleep, or to take your rest, when word and providence are calling you to immediate action. While we delay, the enemy is advancing; the cause of truth and piety is losing ground; and reformation becoming more difficult.

But are you ready to say, if all these duties be required, if all this strictness be necessary, how shall we conform to these requisitions, and prove ourselves the obedient servants of Christ? We reply, that acceptance with God, preparation for heaven, and the true character of the christian, are not to be obtained, by indulgence in sin, conformity to custom, and careless indifference; not by rioting in vain dreams of happiness and sin; but by faith in Christ, and in a holy obedience, with conformity of heart and conduct to the law of God. Are you ready to say, these things are more than is generally practised at present? We acknowledge they are. You are then prepared to say with us, that piety is much beneath the standard of the law, and that a reform is necessary; for surely you will acknowledge, that you should bring the conduct of the church, and the spirit that prevails, to the law and testimony, to be tried: and not reverse the order, by bringing the law and testimony, to the tribunal of the church's practice.

But are you not reconciled to such strictness of obedience, and such active piety? then pretend not to the name of the followers of Jesus; your spirit of disobedience has found you out; to you his commands are grievous. Faith is more than a profession; christianity is more than a name; piety is more than a form. Permit your faith, and the reality of your piety, to be tried by the test of holy writ. But does this religion, so spiritual and holy, appear hard and burdensome? We reply, that this objection is a dangerous evidence of the soul's condition, and of an unrenewed heart. We dare not, we cannot, make the requisitions of the law casier. Nay, the cheering proposals of the blessed gospel, offer no relaxation of the law of God; this would be unholy; but they require and offer a change of the sinner's heart, and reconciliation to God. We dare not propose a service of God, which is easy and pleasant to the natural man; this would be only deceiving his soul, dishonouring God, betraying our trust, and bringing wrath on ourselves. We wish the natural man to know, that he is unreconciled to God, and that nothing less than a radical change of his heart, is necessary, essentially necessary, to his salvation. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We fear that many have forgotten this declaration of Christ, and flattered themselves, that a religion, which will not require a real change of heart, but only some amendments of life; which will not convince them of total

heart depravity, nor require love to God, and delight in him, will be sufficient.

Is it objected, that such strict requisitions, are not calculated to gain the sinner to a profession of Christ's name? We reply, though we desire to see sinners giving their names to the church, in a profession of religion; yet we desire the salvation of souls, and the promotion of God's glory, which are not to be obtained by deception and flattery. It is not our object, nor our commission, to gain sinners to a hypocritical profession, a profession without the practice; to flatter them with hopes of heaven, without reconciliation to God or his law. Alas! this temporizing scheme is the bane of the church, in the present age. While open infidelity is slaying its thousands, this principle is slaying its tens of thousands. Let this scheme be eulogized, and glossed as it may, in its details; in sum, and in effect, it is encouraging men in their natural enmity against God, and in a total rejection of Christ. It is kissing Jesus by a profession, and betraying him in practice.

In all these requisitions, we are demanding no more than the law of God demands. Consult the pages of holy writ, and judge for yourselves. Where is your apology for disobedience? The holy scriptures demand no more than our duty, no more than God requires as acceptable to himself; they did not make demands of others, which they do not make of us. Or do any suppose that God is pleased with less piety now than formerly? Are not less piety, and less submission to God; less piety, and more unholiness, the same? Or is the customary neglect of duty, among professors of religion, any justification of our neglect? Has God granted us a dispensation to sinful indulgence, and encouraged us to hope for heaven, without holiness? or have attachment to sin, and aversion from duty, become consistent with heavenly enjoyment and love to God? O! christian, be wise: be sober. Death, with all its awful realities, is approaching: we must stand at the holy tribunal of God, to be judged, not by our customs, or wishes, but by his law: heaven or hell is our eternal lot. All these are realities, as described in holy scripture; they are the same to us, as to the prophets, apostles, or to our reforming forefathers; and why are not the means of preparation, the requisites of faith and holiness, the same? For the sentiments and practices, prevalent in the church at present, which the holy scriptures condemn; for the indolence of church members; for their coldness respecting truth and duty, no reason can be assigned, but ignorance of God, and decline of piety.

Dear brethren, you are deeply concerned in the condition of the church, and in her prospects. You are either partakers in her sins, or you oppose them. You are bound to inquire into your obligations, as church members, and to fulfil them. You are under obli-

gations to remember what God has done for us, and to make known to the generations to come, the praises of the Lord, his works, his testimony, and his law. When Israel, of old, rebelled against God, they were charged with the sin of forgetting his works and his wonders: this charge shall be equally against us, if we neglect his law, and forget his providential favours. Not only have we his word; we have his ordinances, and the purity of truth defended, and transmitted to us by our forefathers. Divine providence in this matter, should not be overlooked, nor our obligation forgotten. Men of piety and fidelity, were raised, as instruments for effecting and promoting a reformation. They not only suffered reproach in this cause, but they delivered to us the purity of divine truth and ordinances, the cause of God, sealed with their blood. They suffered martyrdom, that this cause might not be lost to posterity; that they might leave the truth and ordinances of God, in their purity, as a precious legacy to generations then unborn, of which we are now a part. Should we now betray our trust, and deal worse with posterity, than our forefathers dealt with us? They formed the Westminster Confession of Faith, Catechisms, &c. after various previous steps of reformation; and adopted these as their confession. They also entered into solemn public covenant engagements to God, to maintain these truths, and the ordinances of divine institution, pure and entire, as stated in these symbols; they by covenant engaged, that they would not yield to carelessness respecting the cause of God, or to the plausible seductions of the world, or of any professed christians, to drop any truth; that they would give themselves and their posterity to God, and take him as their covenant God in Christ. Did they right, or did they wrong? If they did right, can we perform our duty, by undoing what they did? by laying aside our profession, by yielding to the seductions of error, by refusing to contend for the truth, and to bear the reproach of the world, and of uninformed minds, when our forefathers endured the flames of persecution, that they might not yield the same cause? If we yield to carelessness respecting the truths and ordinances of God, we virtually yield the cause of God, at a time, when it is opposed and mocked, as at present; and we betray our ignorance of it, our want of love to it, our ingratitude to God for his gospel favours, and our spirit of covenant breaking. God blessed the measures, to which our fathers were led, for the production of a cloud of witnesses in the church; he blessed their principles and their measures, for the salvation and consolation of thousands, and that righteousness might run down like a mighty stream; and shall we expect that he will bless the contrary principles and measures now? that he will bless a liberality respecting truth and duty, which is condemned by holy scripture and sound reason?

Follow then, the good example of your forefathers ; an example supported and recommended by divine authority, and attested by abundant fruits of holiness. Prove that you, not only accept the legacy, which, in the Providence of God, they bequeathed to you, but that you value it. Let not the lamp go out in your hands ; the lamp of a pure profession, after long darkness, lighted up amidst the flames of persecution. Remember your obligations by profession and covenant, not to yield to indifference in the cause of God. The prevalent indifference is covenant breaking. Faint not under reproach. Reproach you are taught to expect : and if you be reproached for Christ's sake, happy are you. With the apostle, rather rejoice that you are counted worthy to bear reproach for his name. Remember that of them, who are ashamed of Christ, will he be ashamed, when he comes in his glory. You are called to be soldiers for Christ : prove yourselves worthy of such a Captain. Learn his laws and discipline. Abide by his standard ; and put on the whole armour of God. Guard the sacred deposit of a pure profession, for posterity. Teach them the truths and ordinances of God : he has left these with you under this charge : Ps. xlviii. 12, 13. and lxxviii. 4-8. Consider the danger of losing the truth ; the temptations, to which posterity shall be exposed ; to which the rising age are exposed to forsake it ; and the influence of bad example, and ensnaring custom. — You must watch over their religious education, with a jealous care ; instruct, admonish, warn, and restrain them. Let them see by your example, that you believe what you teach. Watch over their conduct, and guard them from temptations to error, or mistaken impressions of duty. You may lose your labour, defeat your endeavours, and disappoint your hopes, by indulging their thoughtless vanity and idle curiosity. Might you not shudder, to think that your offspring should fall into the snare of Satan, through your neglect, and the influence of surrounding temptations ; and that in the course of two, or three generations, they should cast off all fear of God ? Reflect on this in time. And remember you have no time for indolence, or inactivity. The enemy makes progress, while you sit still : and if you be insensible of his advances, and ignorant of your duty ; if you be silent and inactive, while you are in the church militant ; shortly you must be removed, when your voice shall be no more heard, though the enemy triumph in victory. Your responsibility is high and solemn. Your duties indeed are arduous ; but neither made easier by our silence, nor rendered more difficult by our admonitions. Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light : seek experience of this, not by neglecting duty, but by engaging divine strength in a cheerful obedience. You have divine encouragement ; “ My strength is made perfect in weakness.” You alone, can know the joys of the gospel, who employ the grace

and strength, which it provides. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

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### ERRATA.

- Page 3, line 3d, for *was*, read *were*.  
 " 9th from the foot---after *prompts*, read, *the question*—a belief that all is well.
- Page 7, line 1st, for *reason*, read *suation*.  
 8, 18th, for *walking*, read *watching*.  
 19, 5th, for *have*, read *owe*.  
 21, 23d, for *enjoyments?* *If this is true*, read *employments?* *It is true*  
 24, 11th from the foot—for *prescribes*, read *prescribe*.  
 39, 13th from the foot—for *measures*, read *measure*.