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## A PASTORAL LETTER

OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
TO THE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF ITS CONGREGATIONS  
IN THE CONFEDERATE ARMY.

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*The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America sendeth greeting to the Ministers and Members of our Churches, and the Young Men of our Congregations in the Armies of the Confederate States, wishing them grace, mercy and peace through Jesus Christ:—*

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DEAR BRETHREN—Assembled as the Supreme Judiciary of your Church during these troublous times, which the providence of God hath sent upon us, our minds have been turned with irresistible solicitude towards our friends and brethren who have forsaken the endearments of home, and the privileges and blessings of the sanctuary, for the tented ground and the battle field. We have been called on to witness the desolations of the land, and to mourn over the wastes of Zion, created by the havoc of war; and from all of our churches we hear the report that the ranks of the armies of our national independence are crowded with the noblest of our brethren and with the choicest of our youth, who have rushed to the rescue of the Republic, driven by the impulses of patriotism, and in obedience to the calls of God and our country. In the midst of all your trials, privations and sufferings, you have our deepest sympathy and a constant place in our supplications. From every family

altar throughout our wide denomination, in every social prayer-meeting, and at every assembly for public worship, our Ministers and Christian people pour out their souls unto God, interceding with Him that his gracious blessing may rest on you, and that all of you may become partakers of his grace. During the sessions of this Assembly, we have set apart the first half hour of each day as a season of special prayer for you. Be assured you are not forgotten. Your fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, your ministers and brethren in Christ cannot cease to remember you. We have called you brethren, and brethren ye are. Some of you are brethren in the ministry of God's dear Son—many of you are brethren in the fellowship of the gospel—multitudes of you are brethren in the consecrated hopes of the baptismal seal—and all of you are brethren in the common infirmities, the common trials, the common sympathies, and the common hopes of our race, sprung from the same original head, and candidates for the same tomb. Would to God you were all brethren in Christ, possessing an interest in the great salvation which that gracious Saviour hath so freely provided. But, alas, we fear—we know, this is not the case. Wherefore, in the discharge of the great trusts committed to us as the overseers of the flock of Christ, and as those who must watch for souls, we feel it incumbent on us to address you this pastoral epistle, whereby we may assure you of our sympathy, and may speak a word of encouragement, exhortation, and warning, thus stirring up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

You are surrounded with many temptations. The very fact that you are absent from home, bereft of the genial influences of the family and restraints of female society, is a source of manifold evils and temptations. But, besides,

the nature of the duties devolving on you and the companionships you are compelled to keep, is such as to cause a weakening of religious restraint, and an abrasion of the moral sensibilities, which may result in leading you far astray from God and his church, to the destruction of your souls, unless by the help of the Spirit, you are able through watchfulness to overcome.

Those of you who are ministers of the gospel of Christ, have great responsibilities resting on you. You occupy positions which may make you eminently useful, if you prove steadfast and faithful, but which will render you the instruments of great evil if you come short of duty, or stumble into sin. Whether you are officers, soldiers, or chaplains, remember in every case that you are ambassadors for God, and that the eyes of the impenitent and the scoffer are on you. Your actions and words are strictly scrutinized—and multitudes will form their estimate of the truth of our Holy Religion, by the judgment they reach as to the sincerity of your professions, and the constancy of your lives. And here we rejoice to tell of the good report which comes to us from every part of the army, pertaining to many of our brethren who have gone to share the privations and dangers of the camp and battle field. Some indeed have fallen in the midst of the conflict, showing in death the power of the grace of Christ. Many other honored brethren there are whose precious lives God has yet spared, we doubt not to become blessings to the army. But alas, we have been overwhelmed with sorrow to hear that all have not proved thus steadfast. Brethren, let us, in all faithfulness, exhort you to watch. Be much in prayer. Avoid every semblance of evil. With Christian courage and zeal, admonish the young, the wayward and the tempted—and

strive to do good. We honor you for your self-denial and patriotic zeal—we would love to see you become the honored instruments in God's hands in leading sinners to the Saviour. Brethren, "be faithful unto death, and ye shall receive a crown of life."

Those among you who confess the name of Christ, and profess to be his followers, sustain responsibilities of proportionate magnitude. God has placed you in unusual circumstances of trial, and surrounded you with new opportunities of usefulness. The great duty which Jesus Christ enjoins on all his disciples is, "to let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." You now probably occupy a position, where you are more closely observed than ever before. "A city which is set on a hill cannot be hid." Not only would we urge on you that careful circumspection over your conduct which the Saviour enjoins—but would exhort you to seek opportunities of usefulness. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."—Give no countenance by word, look or gesture, to wickedness or immorality. Show that reverence for God and holy things which the Christian feels, by the uprightness of your lives and the purity of your conversation—and as God shall give you opportunity, speak the word of reproof, encourage the feeble and the wavering, and aim to win souls. Thus you may at once establish yourselves in the faith, becoming courageous soldiers for Christ, and add stars to that crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, hath in reserve for all them who love His appearing.

But our hearts turn with especial solicitude towards the noble youth of our congregations, who have gone from our midst to this bloody contest for national life and indepen-

dence. For you we have labored and toiled. Our prayers have ascended to the mercy seat on your behalf; and during the years that are past we have anxiously waited to see you come out on the side of Christ. In you are wrapped up all the hopes of our church and country. With the solution of the question, what are you to become, will be determined the problem of our national glory or shame, and that of the success and usefulness of the church in our beloved land. We tremble for you, as we see you drawn away by the duties of patriotism, from the constant use of the means of grace and the divine influences of the sanctuary. We sympathise with you as you endure the life-struggle on the sanguinary field, and as you consecrate everything dear on earth on the altar of patriotic duty. And oh, when we contemplate your many temptations, how do our hearts yearn over you. As your pastors, we can no longer be heard by you. But we would fain address you these words of affectionate admonition, in the name of the Great Master whom we serve, and on behalf of our brethren whom we represent. Listen to us, we beseech you, while we warn you against the prevailing vices of the camp, and present before you the gospel of eternal life.

The awful and prevailing sin of our people is *profanity*.—The name of God is taken in vain in the wicked curse and the rude joke—yea, fearful as the statement is, our own ears bear testimony to the fact that the Great Name of the majestic Jehovah has become a by-word, a jest and a mockery by the dissolute and profane on our public thoroughfares. This is our crying national sin, which with many others has brought down on our land the wrath of offended Heaven. This international strife and all the dreadful havoc which this war is making are doubtless sent on us as

judgments from God on account of our sins. How can we expect the blessing of God if we thus dishonor Him, treat His name with irreverence, and speak of His authority and judgments with levity and derision? Soon all of you must stand up in deadly conflict with our enemies, and many of you will doubtless receive your final summons. The issues of the battle as well as of life and death are with God. If you are to be successful, and to stand safe from the fear of evil, it will only be because God becomes your shield and buckler. How unseemly then that He should be mocked and insulted, and His holy name taken in vain! But we are pained to know that this is one of the most common sins of the army. We fear that officers and privates alike transgress in this particular; yea, that those very officers who are required by the army regulations to suppress profanity, not only fail in this important duty, but set the evil example before the men of their commands, which is only too frequently imitated. We desire, beloved friends, to warn you to shun evil example; to abstain from every mined oath as well as from more gross profanity, and in all things to reverence God. While we would respect and love you for banishing the fear of man, we would beseech you ever to cherish the fear of God, which the wise man, taught of inspiration, tells us is the beginning of wisdom.

The *desecration of the holy Sabbath* is another crying sin of our land, which we fear abounds in our army. We are aware that this is a matter which is not wholly under your control. But we would guard you against the prevailing tendency to trample down the barriers of religion which surround that sacred day and its consecrated objects, and would entreat you to remember it in its true spirit so far as you possibly can in your present circumstances. You

are denied for the most part the regular services of Sabbath worship which you enjoyed at home. But still you have the Holy Bible, or New Testament, you have a throne of grace, sometimes you attend religious worship, and God is every where present. As you stand in the constant presence of death, make the Sabbath day, as far as possible, an occasion of preparation for it. And be encouraged by the fact that God's people are every where engaged in solemn and earnest supplication for you. Thus the Sabbath will prove a blessing, and you will avert from your heads the wrath of God that comes on the land because of the dishonor we as a people have placed on the day which he calls his own. Therefore, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

In like manner we would warn you against the prevailing vice of *intemperance*. Besides the moral defilement which it always causes, wherever it prevails, the evils of this particular vice has manifested itself in a most striking manner during the progress of this war. We are rejoiced at the vigorous measures which the Government is using to eradicate this evil from the army. We would fondly hope that all of you will yield a cheerful acquiescence in these wholesome requirements, not only from that sense of manly duty which animates the true soldier, but through a regard for your present respectability and happiness, and your everlasting welfare. Intemperance is that fell destroyer which carries to the grave more victims than war, pestilence and famine, all combined; it makes the wife a widow and children fatherless; it spreads misery and woe in its pathway, and death and hell follow in its train. Some of you have families—others have left plighted vows of love—all of you indulge in hopes of future happiness in the family relation,

should God spare your lives. But this fiend of intemperance, which makes its insidious advances in the absence of the restraints of home, and while you are surrounded by reckless companions, can and assuredly will blast all these bright dreams of happiness, will dash the cup of bliss from the lips of beauty and the hands of tenderest love, and will leave you and them in the midst of wreck and ruin, to eke out the bitter remnants of life. But this is not all. God, in whom you believe, and by whom you must be judged, has solemnly declared that no drunkard shall enter the kingdom of Heaven. Doubtless you think there is no danger of your coming to the drunkard's grave, and the fearful doom with which God has cursed it. Nor is there, if you only resist all temptation. No one of the millions who have died from intemperance, ever suspected when he drank the first glass, that such would be his end; nor would it have been, had he not tasted that first glass. Therefore resist this vice, in all its insidious forms; and tolerate not the thought of returning to those you love with your youthful comeliness marred by the bloating effects of alcohol; or if you are to perish in the strife, brook not the thought of going to the drunkard's grave and the drunkard's doom.

Another vice which has heretofore been confined in our country to the saloons of dissipation, we are sad to believe, has become very common among the young men of the army. We refer to *gambling*. Besides the moral turpitude and sin of gambling, the taking from your fellows that which is theirs without a just return, this vice creates a morbid thirst after speedy gains, and a spirit of reckless extravagance, which usually go together, injuring the moral character, rendering a man restless, dissatisfied and unhappy, and generally ends in his temporal ruin. A practice

which produces such results is necessarily evil. "By their fruits ye shall know them," is the Saviour's rule—and here is a tree whose fruit is bitter. Beware of this vice, however enticing may be its enchantments: Shun every approach to it. Rather send your gains from your professional services back to your homes for the aid of your parents in these times of straitness, or otherwise for investment for your own future emolument, than thus throw them away in a manner injurious to your moral integrity, destructive of your happiness, and ruinous to your souls.

All these points which we have considered are very important; and unless God shall give you grace to overcome these temptations and many others which we might mention, those bright hopes which we have pictured for you must prove themselves illusive. To resist temptation, to overcome sin, and to escape from the allurements of vice, requires more than human fortitude; and the external observance of the commands of religion and morality is not enough to make us fit for the grave, and to prepare us for everlasting happiness. But the blessed Bible is full of precious promises to those who seek the favor and salvation of God. Beloved Friends and Brethren, seek that salvation now; for "why will ye die?" "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life." Then there is salvation in store for you, if you will only come to Jesus. You are invited to come to Him without money and without price, on the simple conditions of repentance and faith. Do you ask what is repentance? The evangelical prophet shall answer: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord that He may have mercy on him, and

to our God that he may abundantly pardon." Then, repentance of sin, is a forsaking of it in thought and action; a turning away from it with hatred, and a returning unto the Lord. Do you ask what is faith? It is needless to enter into theological discussion of this subject. The practical exercise of faith is what concerns you—is what deeply interests all. When the publican stood in the temple, and smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he gave utterance to the faith that was in his soul. When Peter began to sink in the waters, he cried out, "Lord save me," and thus gave expression to his faith.—Then, dear friends, do you not feel yourselves to be sinners? Do you not know yourselves to be lost, ruined, undone, without an interest in Christ, neither fit for life nor ready for death? Then go to Jesus and ask Him to save you.—And whenever you are able by God's grace to forsake sin with a godly sorrow, and can pray from the heart to Jesus Christ, "Be merciful to me a sinner," you have exercised that repentance and faith which is unto salvation. Oh, how needful is this salvation in your present circumstances. No one of you can tell what a day may bring forth. You are standing on the verge of eternity, with its surging waves ready to surround and overwhelm you. Are you ready? You answer, no! Then we come to you as the ambassadors of God, and assure you that there is room, Jesus is ready and waiting to be gracious. And saith the Scripture: "Behold, now is the accepted time—behold, now is the day of salvation."

How precious are these hopes to those of you who are lying on beds of suffering, pining away from disease or lacerated with wounds. Doubtless you have the skillful care

of the physician, and the daily and nightly watchings of tender hands to nurse and soothe you. But truly you need a more radical medicine and a more enduring balm than earthly skill can supply. For, after all the body *must* die, and the cold ground must become its habitation. But the soul may be saved and live forever. For there is Balm in Gilead and a Physician there. Wherefore let us tenderly plead with you to seek this Great Physician, who can heal both soul and body; yea, and who is become both resurrection and life, to His people.

But, brethren and friends, beloved, we must bid you farewell. Many of you shall no more see the faces of your ministers and brethren in Christ in the flesh. The clash of war and the shock of battle cannot happen without results from which our hearts recoil with anguish. But God is a great Saviour and a glorious deliverer—and He is our refuge and strength, and a very present help in trouble. We would joyfully feel safe under the shadow of His wing; and we would gladly see you all nestling beneath that covert which He spreads out. Then, come weal and woe, as to earth's temporal kingdoms, all shall be well with us.—Wherefore live close to Christ, stand steadfast in your place of appointed duty, quit yourselves like men, and God shall bless you. But, brethren, by the great grace of Christ, we shall meet again. It may not be here, in the midst of the afflictions and trials of life—it may not be until we are summoned away from this world of sin and strife. But Jesus has gone to prepare mansions for us, and no one of his children shall be absent from him in glory. If we are his people, if we turn to him with our whole hearts, we shall meet in His presence where there is fulness of joy,

and at His right hand, where there are pleasures for ever more. May God bless and keep you until that day!

By order of the Assembly:

J. L. KIRKPATRICK, *Moderator,*

J. R. WILSON, *Permanent Clerk.*

Attest:

E. T. BAIRD, *S. Clerk.*

MONTGOMERY, ALA., May 5, 1862.

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*Presbyterian Committee of Publication, Richmond, Va.*