

A

PASTORAL LETTER,

OF THE

PRESBYTERY OF LEXINGTON,

ADDRESSED

TO THE CHURCHES;

UNDER THEIR CARE.

Written by Geo. B. Dexter D. D. Prof in U. S. S.

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PASTORAL LETTER.

ADDRESSED BY THE PRESBYTERY OF LEXINGTON TO
THE CHURCHES UNDER THEIR CARE.

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OCTOBER 20, 1827.

DEAR BRETHREN,

BEING appointed to watch for your spiritual interests, we think it our duty at this time to address you in a pastoral letter of more than usual length. The churches in our presbytery are mostly in a languishing state. While other regions are visited with frequent revivals, and stirred up to a diligent practice and a vigorous promotion of the gospel, we have fallen into a general coldness, and have experienced a long suspension of divine influences. In some places, death, emigration, and apostacy have diminished the number of church members more than the means of grace have increased it. In short, some of our wisest and most experienced men think they see amongst us the symptoms of a long and fatal decline. Still, however, we rest on one ground of hope and consolation. Our churches, we believe, contain many sincere children of God, who have an interest at the throne of grace, and daily supplicate the Father of Mercies for a blessing on our public ordinances, and for an effusion of the spirit upon our churches. Therefore, we trust that we shall not be finally deserted; though we may suffer a severe chastisement for our abuse of past favours and present privileges.

Judging from the history of former ages, we apprehend that the two most alarming symptoms in a church are: 1. the omission or negligent performance of duty; and 2. a departure from sound doctrine according to the scriptures.

1. The omission or negligent performance of duty weakens the pious feelings of the heart; wounds, and then hardens the conscience; opens the door for temptation and delusion; offends God, and grieves his Holy Spirit; and, when it becomes general in a church, brings on a crisis which must soon terminate either in a revival of penitence and zeal, or in a fatal breaking up of the church. Remember our Saviours warning to the church of Laodicea.

2. A departure from sound doctrine however, appears from history to be yet more dangerous. While the pure and sanctifying truths of the gospel are retained, there still exists a principle of life, from which a decayed piety may be restored to health and vigour. But when the truth itself is materially corrupted, and the gospel of the Son of God turned into a system of human inventions, religion is poisoned at the fountain-head. Few, if any instances are on record of churches having recovered after drinking deeply into the spirit of error.

Whether our churches are most in danger from lukewarmness, or from error, we shall not undertake to say: but we would earnestly admonish our beloved flocks to be on their guard, as those that watch for their lives, against both the evils we have mentioned.

We are persuaded, brethren, that our church in her public standards, professes the pure Christianity of the Bible. We pretend not that every expression in those standards is precisely correct, as if given by inspiration. We claim not a popish infallibility for our judgments; nor for those of the reformers, of blessed memory, whose system of doctrines we hold unchanged. But our belief of these doctrines is confirmed not only by our examination of the word of God, but by the experience of their efficacy for three hundred years, in keeping up a sober and practical piety wherever they have been sincerely professed. No opposing system of doctrines has for ages maintained so steady and so purifying an influence over the human mind. Other systems have lead either to empty formalism, dark superstition, or wild fanaticism; while the system of Luther, Zuinglius, and Calvin, as professed by the Presbyterian and other churches, has always overcome the temporary influence of formalism, superstition, and fanaticism; except where, in the reckless pursuit of novelty, men have abandoned the system itself.

Yet no form of Christianity, perhaps, has had to encounter such obstinate prejudices, and such violent attacks from all quarters. In our own age and country, and within the bounds of this Presbytery, we have witnessed what would seem to be a concerted and resolute effort to destroy our church. Means, both open and concealed, both ordinary and extraordinary, have been put in requisition to render us odious and unpopular. At least, several things have lately occurred, and are likely to occur again, which seem to manifest a spirit of implacable hostility against our doctrines and institutions.

Justice to ourselves, and faithfulness to what we believe to be the cause of truth and piety, call upon us at length to break silence; to lay aside false delicacy; and to expostulate frankly with our chief opponents. You too, brethren, we must affectionately warn of these attempts, and endeavour to fortify your minds against them.

Most of you, from your knowledge of facts, already understand that we allude to a society whom, as Christians, we would love, but against whom, as persevering assailants, we must at length defend ourselves; we mean the Methodists. But we wish you and them to know that we complain

not of any fair arguments which they have used against our doctrines: we complain of the line of policy which they seem to have adopted, which certainly they have too often pursued respecting us.

Harmony and fellowship cannot subsist between two religious denominations, unless they treat each other with decent respect, argue their differences candidly and temperately, and pursue towards each other an open, fair, and friendly line of conduct. We often hear friendly professions from the Methodists; sometimes we experience friendly acts, and rejoice in them. We have wished to live with that society on terms of mutual forbearance and reciprocal kindness. But how frequently, in the midst of their charitable professions, have even their pulpits resounded in various places, with severe denunciations against us; representing us as a set of hypocritical formalists, as holding doctrines which came from hell, and lead to hell! Have they not, times innumerable, reviled our ministers as avaricious hirelings? Have they not taken up scandalous statements against ministers, elders, and people of our church, and circulated them in a printed form, with all the zeal of a Tract Society? Statements too, which bore marks of the author's injustice and malignity on the face of them? Can we move in brotherly concert with a society whose professions of friendship are mingled with acts like these?

We allude not to these things for the purpose of provoking an open rupture, and an angry controversy. Our aim is, if possible, to prevent such a deplorable issue by a candid exposition of our sentiments. May we not hope that the more liberal and considerate portion of that society will, when they hear of our wounded feelings, exert a salutary influence on their brethren; and check a course of conduct which, if continued, must lead to consequences that every good Christian should deprecate?

But if our well intended remonstrance have no such desirable effect; if that society are resolved to prosecute hostilities; then our next wish is that it may no longer be a war in disguise, but that our remonstrance may produce from them an open declaration of their intentions respecting our church. If they have wrought themselves into the opinion that the Presbyterian and other like churches, must be put down, in order that they may substitute a better form of religion, let them boldly say so at once. We shall then know both how to estimate them and how to meet them.

We shall know how to estimate them. As matters now stand, we are doubtful what to think of their character and designs; holding out, as they do, at one time and place, the right hand of fellowship; at another, the sword of battle. If they candidly declare their intention, under a sense of duty, to destroy our church, though we may think their views illiberal, and their measures harsh, we can nevertheless give them credit for honest intentions and fair dealing.

Then, too, we shall know how to meet them. We shall go without hesitation, and without complaint, into the field of fair controversy; and

either prove that our doctrines and institutions are more scriptural than theirs, or consent to give up the cause, and let Methodism rule the world.

They owe it not only to us, but to other denominations, to explain their views. The frequent appearance of double dealing in their policy towards others; the proselyting spirit which they often manifest; their exultation when they make a breach into other churches; their constant attempts to form societies in the heart of congregations fully supplied with the means of grace; their apparent eagerness to swell and magnify their numbers, and the exceedingly easy terms on which they enrol members; the occasional boasts made even in their public assemblies that the Methodists will "take the world;" these and other things have infused a general suspicion of their harbouring ambitious designs. Nothing short of a disavowal of such designs, and a correspondent change of conduct, can remove the suspicion. We do not, by these remarks, mean to accuse them of aiming at universal domination in spiritual affairs: we mention suspicious circumstances in order to give them occasion for explanations.

While they pursue a doubtful and unfriendly course towards others, the general cause of religion suffers: jealousies, heart-burnings, and collisions, disturb the harmonious movement of the Christian world against the common enemy. This consequence of the sectarian spirit, we believe many of their own pious members wish to avoid. Once more, then, we say, let there be candid explanations, and an undisguised line of policy on their part. Our sentiments and conduct have been open and easily understood. We desire peace while it can be justly maintained; and Christian fellowship with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Having thus frankly declared ourselves on a very disagreeable subject, we shall proceed to another purpose of this letter, which is to furnish you with a brief explanation and defence of some doctrines of our church, which are most frequently assailed and grossly misrepresented. It would not be possible in the compass of a letter to notice all the points of controversy in the case; but we hope a few words on the subject may not be unprofitable.

The doctrine which seems to have been most obnoxious, and most violently assailed, is that of **THE DIVINE DECREES**, comprehending the **DECREE OF ELECTION**.

As to the decree of election, the argument seems to be condensed into a very narrow space by the question of the Apostle Paul, "Who maketh thee to differ, or what hast thou that thou hast not received?" Or in other words the whole argument seems to resolve itself into this question, whether the real, efficient power of converting sinners be in God, or in creatures? If God converts the sinner, we presume it will be admitted that he knew beforehand, or that he knew and determined from all eternity whom he would convert: and this would constitute the doctrine of election. The argument, then, is brought to a speedy close, if it be admitted that God, and God only, can convert the sinner; and we certainly

supposed that all Christians admitted this. For if God does not convert the sinner, who does convert him? Do the preachers convert him, or does he convert himself? We believe that if a person should go to any church in this country, proposing to become a member of it, and tell it that he had experienced no religion or conversion, but what had been produced by himself, or by preachers, or some other men, that church would immediately inform him that it could not receive him as a member, nor consider him as a Christian. And if all Christians are so fully united in the opinion that God, and God only, can and does convert the sinner, why are there any objections to the doctrine of election? God certainly foreknows and foreordains his own acts. He certainly predetermines whom he will convert; and this is what we mean by the doctrine of election. But perhaps some may attempt to evade the argument by saying that God has revealed his word, and offered his sanctifying grace to the world; and that the sinner who is willing to accept the offer shall be saved. To this statement we fully agree. We believe that wherever the gospel is preached, every sinner who is willing to accept the offers of the gospel will be saved. But this does not change the ground of the argument: the question still returns upon us, who makes the sinner willing to accept those offers? That all men are not willing to receive the gospel when preached to them, is matter of constant and lamentable experience. And has any man, or set of men, discovered any way or means, within the reach of human power, by which sinners can be made willing to receive the gospel? If they have, they have made the greatest discovery in the world; or rather, they have made a discovery infinitely more important, than all other discoveries in the world put together. But there has been no such discovery. This willingness to receive the gospel, or to apply to God for his sanctifying grace, is the beginning of religion; and nothing but the sovereign grace of God does or can give it. Will it then be asked, since God converts sinners, why does he not convert all sinners? This is a question which it behooves all Christians who acknowledge and pray for the converting grace of God to answer as much as us. But we cannot answer it. God Almighty has reasons worthy of himself for every thing he does, and for every thing he omits to do. But what those reasons are, we often cannot know: and particularly, why it is that he converts some, and leaves others unconverted, is not for us to determine.

Having now, as we think, briefly established the doctrine of election, we shall proceed to make some observations on the general doctrine of the divine decrees. By the divine decrees we simply mean that plan which the infinite wisdom of God had in view when he created the world. We trust it will not be said that when God created the world he had no plan in view. We believe that no rational being ever undertook any important work without a plan. There was some end to be answered, some purpose to be accomplished, or some consequence to be effected by every important work that was ever undertaken by any rational being: and of course, to deny that God had a plan in view when he created the world would seem not only to deny his possession of infinite wisdom, but even of common rationality. We trust, therefore, that no person can be found who will deny that God had a plan in view when he created the world. Now this plan is the divine decrees; and the only question which remains, is, whether God had sufficient wisdom and power to execute his

plan, or decrees; or whether his plan has been defeated? If the divine plan has been defeated, when, and by whom, was it done? Was it defeated by the first introduction of sin and misery into the world? But upon this supposition every subsequent scene of sin and misery brought into the world was another defeat; and of course the divine plan has been the subject of violation and defeat in innumerable instances. Here is matter for the most serious consideration. If the plans of God have been so repeatedly defeated since the creation of the world, that is, in the course of six thousand years; how may these defeats be multiplied in the infinite course of our future existence! Is not the supposition dishonorable to God? Does it not unsettle our confidence in the management of his affairs, and destroy all the hopes of the Christian? Does it not, in fact, render every thing unsafe, both in Earth and Heaven? Angels fell from Heaven. If the introduction of sin on earth defeated the counsels of the Almighty, the sin of angels was also a defeat. The truth is, once admit that the plans of God have been, or can be defeated, and there is no end to the consequences resulting from it; consequences both dishonorable to God, and destructive of the hopes of the Christian, and of all the fundamental principles of religion. We do not say that our opponents admit these consequences. We believe they do not admit them. But the consequences naturally arise from the case, and show the extreme danger of denying the divine decrees.

It is thought by some that the divine decrees must destroy the moral agency of man. This we do not admit. We believe that man is a moral agent; that his will is free; that the offers of the gospel are freely made to him; and that he possesses every power necessary to make him justly accountable for his actions. We are, in fact, willing to carry the free will or moral agency of man, as far as they can be carried, without defeating the counsels, or violating the plans of God; and farther we cannot consent to go.

We trust that this exposition will relieve the doctrine before us from much of the misrepresentation under which it has laboured. The divine decrees do not suppose that if a man be born to be saved, he shall be saved, let him do what he will. They do not make a man a machine, or destroy his moral agency. The proper question respecting our view of the divine decrees is this: whether free will or moral agency be of such a nature as necessarily to put it in the power of creatures to defeat the counsels or break the plans of the Deity. If such be the nature of free agency, it no doubt destroys the divine decrees: but it destroys, at the same time, the sovereignty of God, the hopes of the Christian, and all the motives and principles of religion: in fact, it renders every thing insecure, both on earth and in Heaven. Moral agency will doubtless exist in Heaven; and if it can break the plans of God, it can break his promises: so that the Christian is not only uncertain of reaching Heaven, but should he arrive at that happy world, must be uncertain of his continuance there. For this moral agency may produce as many revolutions in Heaven, contrary to the divine will, as those who deny the divine decrees must suppose it has produced on earth.

It may be difficult, or indeed impossible, for us to understand how the Divine Being can govern a multitude of moral agents, so as to preserve his own wise plans from violation without restricting their moral agency. But because we cannot understand how this can be done, shall we pronounce it impossible for God to do it; and assert that because the human will is free, the plans of God are continually liable to defeat? We shall take one illustration out of hundreds which may be found in the sacred volume, to show that God can govern moral agents so as to accomplish his own wise purposes without restricting their moral agency. Joseph's brethren maliciously took him into custody, and put him into a pit, with the design of preventing the accomplishment of his prophetic dreams. But the plan of God was to fulfil those dreams. Here their plan was directly opposed to the plan of God. And yet, without restricting their freedom of action, God made their conduct directly instrumental in accomplishing his plan, and defeating theirs. With this example before us, we feel warranted in believing that God can use the free actions of men so as to accomplish his purposes, even when those men are most directly opposed to his purposes.

It is asserted in our standards that "God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass." This expression is objected to, as implying that God decrees the existence of sin. When we use the expression that God decrees sin, we simply mean that God determines to permit sin to exist; and not that he tempts, much less that he forces or impels any one to sin. When God made man at first, he made him holy, and gave him sufficient power to perform his duty. But God foresaw that man would sin, and did not determine, unavailingly, to prevent his sinning. He determined to permit sin to take place; and his thus determining to admit the existence of sin as a part of his plan is all that we mean by his decreeing sin. In the same way we believe that God foresaw every tendency to sin that ever would arise among his creatures. Many of these tendencies to sin he restrains or defeats: but in some cases he permits the sinner to take his own course. It is thus, as we believe, that he "makes the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he restrains." And we do not see how it is possible to view the subject in any other light, without limiting either the foreknowledge or the power of God in such a way as would make it impossible for him to govern the world. Shall we say that God foresaw the existence of sin and determined to prevent it, but could not? Or shall we say that he did not foresee it, and was, therefore, taken by surprise? We believe that no Christian would be willing to make either of these assertions. It seems, therefore, necessary to believe that God foresaw sin, and for wise reasons, unknown to us, determined to permit man to abuse his liberty and commit sin.

It has often been asserted, and we think, with propriety, that when the divine decrees are rightly understood, they produce no more difficulty as to our conceptions on this subject than divine foreknowledge. Foreknowledge undoubtedly supposes the fixedness or certainty of events. If God foreknows that a thing will take place, that thing certainly must take place: and all the difficulty lies in reconciling the certainty or fixedness of events with the moral agency of man. To evade this difficulty, however, Mr.

Wesley and others, have told us that foreknowledge does not properly belong to God; that indeed the knowledge of God is infinite, comprehending all events; but that he does not view things in succession as past or future, but as continually and eternally present; that with God all times are an eternal now. Whether this notion of the eternal presence of events to the divine view be correct or not, we shall not stop here to inquire. But certainly this doctrine accomplishes nothing in the present argument. For according to this doctrine, the divine mind viewing all things as present at all times, must at this moment view as present the condemnation of every sinner who will be condemned at the day of judgment, although many of those sinners are not yet born.

Dr. Adam Clarke, a commentator, too much followed by our opponents, has resorted to another subterfuge, in order to avoid the difficulties attending this subject. He has denied the complete foreknowledge of God altogether. He believes that God could have foreknown every thing, if he had chosen; but that he determined not to foreknow certain things; and that this determination afforded the occasion for the introduction of sin and misery into the world. This scheme, as it appears to us, is the most erroneous and dangerous that has ever found admittance into any respectable part of the Christian church. Other schemes may impute weakness and ignorance to the Deity; but this scheme seems to impute to him direct criminality. The plain meaning of it is that God Almighty imposed a voluntary ignorance on himself in the management of his own affairs, and that this voluntary ignorance has been the cause of incalculable ruin among his creatures. Now God is the governor of the world. But in human governments, voluntary ignorance or neglect is a crime, of which the guilt must be measured by the consequences resulting from it. We cannot pursue this scheme any farther: we feel as if we were touching upon blasphemy whilst handling this subject; and we leave you to determine with what feelings the scheme ought to be rejected.

We are persuaded that it would not be possible to give a full explanation of the divine decrees in the compass of a single letter. Our attention has been directed principally to two points: in the first place, to shew that the decrees of God are not inconsistent with the moral agency and accountableness of man; and in the second place, that when the doctrine of the divine decrees is properly understood, it cannot be denied without supposing the divine plan so completely liable to frustration and defeat as would make the standing of the Christian entirely uncertain, both in this life and the life to come. This last proposition is, we think, fully made out by the preceding observations; and it presents an alternative on the denial of the decrees, in which we believe that no pious man can acquiesce.

We shall next notice a part of our church regulations, on account of which we have been exposed to many severe, unfriendly, and as we think, unjustifiable attacks from the Methodist denomination. We mean that part of our system which relates to the support of the gospel ministry. We believe that reflecting men of nearly all denominations agree that unless a gospel ministry be supported, the gospel cannot be generally

preached: and therefore to persuade any people to give up the support of their ministers is to persuade them to assist in the destruction of their own church. The Methodists are as fully aware of this fact as any other people; and no people in this country provide more punctually, or more liberally for the maintenance of their preachers than they do. The manner of their provision, indeed, makes it less sensible, but not less substantial. They assign a sufficient maintenance for the preacher himself, for his wife, and for each of his children; and this provision is often continued for many years after the preacher's decease, and taken altogether, is a better support for a large family, than most of our ministers enjoy.

Our plan is a very simple one, and perfectly open to the knowledge of the world. When the settlement of a minister is contemplated, an estimate is made of the sum necessary for his stipend. This sum is raised either by voluntary subscription or by pew-rent. Some members of the congregation, as trustees, take the subscription into their own hands for collection, and guarantee to the pastor such an amount out of it as can be safely promised. Here every thing is perfectly voluntary and open. And if it should sometimes happen that the trustees, rather than violate their promise to their pastor, should be obliged to coerce the litigious to comply with their voluntary engagements, this, although it seldom happens in church affairs, is nothing more than what frequently occurs in all the free transactions of our country.

The Methodists have made severe attacks upon this plan; but we doubt whether their own plan, or any other which can be devised, be not equally open to objections. In the Methodist church, the expense necessary for supporting the gospel is often unequally distributed. Members particularly situated are often taxed to a great amount by means of their hospitality; and we have heard some high estimates of the sums annually expended in this way. We have also heard great complaints against that part of the Methodist plan which taxes their slave members a dollar a year. It is true the sum is not large; but thirty or forty years' membership at that rate might draw from a poor slave more money than he should equitably contribute. But we shall not dwell upon these things: and indeed, we only mention them to shew that whilst our opponents are attacking us without mercy, they are also liable to attacks at home. We think that the itinerant plan of the Methodists, considered as a missionary system, is in the main a good one. But then we think a mere missionary system not competent to the entire edification of the church. It causes their clergy to ride too much and study too little to promise an enlightened ministry. And indeed, the Methodists themselves, in cities and other places, where they are numerous, have fallen into the method of supporting their ministers by subscription, or perhaps by pew-rent, in the manner of other denominations. This, we think, makes it the more strange, that we should receive so much abuse for a plan known to be imitated by their own church, when in circumstances to justify the imitation.

But at any rate, if our plan be wrong, the people have the power of correcting it. Our church government is not despotic. The people possess

the power of choosing the ministers, elders, and all other officers of the church; and of course they can apply any amendments to the method of maintaining their pastors which time shall discover to be necessary.

A doctrine has lately sprung up in the world, or if anciently professed, it was only by the wildest sectaries, against which we would affectionately warn you. We mean the doctrine of sinless perfection in this life. We are aware that the New Testament writers sometimes use the word perfection; but at the same time they exhibit a marked difference between Christian perfection and sinless perfection. The propagators of the doctrine of sinless perfection in this life say that it is not only attainable, but necessary to salvation. Christians who believe them must, then, be in danger either of despair under a just sense of their imperfections, or of delusion and spiritual pride. They must be tempted to exclude their improper thoughts and deficient performance of duty, from the catalogue of their sins, and to substitute the workings of blind enthusiasm and fanatic zeal for the pure fervours of divine love, and strict obedience to the precepts of the gospel. But the principal reasons why we consider this sinless perfection as manifestly contrary to the word of God are in the following :

In the first place, the man who claims sinless perfection must entertain a very different opinion of himself from what the most pious men, who are held up as examples to us in the word of God, entertained of themselves. Job said, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Isaiah said, "wo is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips:—for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." St. Paul, in the last stage of his Christian course, said that he had not attained, neither was he already perfect: "he forgot those things which were behind, and reached forth unto those things which were before." When Paul was a Pharisee he thought himself perfectly without sin, and "as touching the righteousness of the law blameless; but when he became a Christian, his views of the divine law and of himself, were entirely altered. In the second place, the man who claims sinless perfection is disqualified for using the Lord's prayer which our Saviour taught his disciples, and of course required them all to use. For in that prayer there is one petition in which we must pray continually for the forgiveness of our trespasses. But in the third place, the Apostle John decides the whole question of sinless perfection in a very serious manner. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." This determines the point with all who duly reverence the bible. It shews us that the man who professes to be so much superior in holiness to Job, Isaiah, and Paul, is actually under a delusion, which excludes all proper knowledge of saving truth. John indeed, elsewhere says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;" or literally translated, doth not make a business or trade of sin. But as this applies to that deliverance from sin which even the weakest Christian obtains the moment he is regenerated, it gives no support to the doctrine of sinless perfection in the present life.

As the best security against error and danger of every kind, we would earnestly exhort to diligent and sincere self-examination. This is a duty often inculcated in scripture; and it is of indispensable necessity to all Christians, but more especially important to those who are just commenc-

ing a religious life. The time when a person first indulges the hope of the gospel is, in general, the most important period of that person's existence. If that hope be built upon a wrong foundation, or admitted upon insufficient evidence, it is seldom dissipated until it is forever too late. It is a dangerous matter to suppose that mere joy, preceded by what may be thought religious distress, is sufficient evidence of religion. Religious comfort, when genuine, must be accompanied with sincere watchfulness against sin, and with all holy resolutions, desires, and practice. We must look more to the habitual purpose and tendency of the mind than to mere feeling, in order to ascertain our title to the favor of God.

“Itching ears; heaping to ourselves teachers;” or hearing the word of God from mere curiosity, is another evil against which the Apostle warns the church, as a thing extremely injurious to religion. We would not altogether condemn what is called occasional hearing, or the hearing of other denominations; but we believe that hearing the gospel from mere curiosity, without that reverence and close personal application which duty requires, is one of the greatest evils of the church in the present day. And just in proportion to the extent of the evil, and the injury it is effecting, is the difficulty of applying a remedy. General evils are so fortified by example as to keep themselves in countenance; and we are unawares led into the most offensive criminality, whilst we imagine that we are performing our duty. We believe that the kind of hearing just described is often carried so far as to subvert all the ends of the public ordinances of religion.

We are afraid that two important duties are much neglected in the present day; and that the church greatly suffers in consequence of that neglect. We mean the sanctification of the Sabbath, and family religion. If professors of religion are in the habit of making unnecessary journeys on the Sabbath, or spending a part of it in unnecessary visits, they are greatly guilty of the violation of their duty and the neglect of their privileges. The due sanctification of the Sabbath is necessary to the maintenance of family religion: and without family religion, which includes the pious education of children, the church will not prosper. Families are the elements of all societies, whether civil or ecclesiastical; and if pure religion do not exist in families, it cannot be expected to exist in the church. We would earnestly recommend to Christian families to meet together on every Sabbath evening, and spend some time in catechising and reading the word of God, or some other book of religious instruction. We believe that such exercises ought not to be excluded, in common times, even by the desire of multiplying the public meetings of religion. Religion often receives a sanction in young minds from parental authority and example, which cannot be obtained from any other source.

Finally, brethren, we must observe that the spirit of slumber which pervades our churches seems to have fallen upon us at a most unseasonable juncture. The Christian world is at present greatly moved. In innumerable places, Christians are active, both in maintaining the cause of religion at home, and extending its influence abroad. The time seems to be approaching, if it have not already arrived, when the Head of the

church will collect his true followers into an efficient body, and employ them effectually in multiplying the victories of the cross. It is also true that in the present day, the cause of irreligion and vice is advancing. If the good seed of the word is sown extensively, we know that wherever the church is asleep, the enemy also sows his tares. It would seem that the kingdoms of light and darkness are both collecting their forces for some mighty conflict. And in this war, there can be no neutrality. "He that is not with me is against me," is the maxim of our blessed Saviour. Perhaps few churches in Christendom are more loudly called upon by the voice of Providence than our own. Not only are our spiritual concerns languishing at home; but we are surrounded by a large region of desolation, where "the people perish for lack of knowledge." The interests of our own families unite with those of more distant friends in calling upon us to awake out of sleep, and act our part as the friends of Zion. May the spirit of the living God enforce the admonition; and excite us to act as a people feeling that "we are not our own, but are bought with a price," even with the blood of the everlasting covenant.

"And now, brethren, we commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified."

SAMUEL HOUSTON, MODERATOR.

FRANCIS MFARLAND, STATED CLERK.