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Pastoral Letter

Of the Concord Presbytery to the Churches under their care.

DEAR BRETHREN: The responsibility connected with that relation which we sustain to you, not only justifies, but demands the utmost fidelity in enquiring over your spiritual welfare. To become indifferent to danger which threatens your happiness, or to suffer a false delusion to restrain you from kind and reasonable warnings against practices which we believe to be wrong, would be alike inconsistent with the vows which we have assumed on your behalf, and the concern we feel for your highest interests.

Permit us, then, to rely on your confidence and affection, while we unitedly and solemnly speak the language of admonition, in reference to certain irregularities which have prevailed to a lamentable extent, among some professors of religion.

The first evil to which we invite your attention, is that of Dancing.

This, by many, is called an innocent amusement. We feel bound to regard it as a *criminal indulgence*, and, as such, to warn you against its ensnaring influence. In estimating the guilt or innocence of any practice, it is a safe rule to regard its direct and uniform moral tendency. Whatever tends to give fresh attractions to mere personal display, to cherish a worldly spirit, to prevent or stifle serious impressions, and to draw of the thoughts and affections from God and Eternity, cannot be innocent to those who have professed the religion of Christ, and wish to comply with its injunctions.

Let the mind become engrossed with this fascinating amusement, and what are the effects produced? Much valuable time is not only wasted, but spent in forming habits, and contracting associations, which operate strongly against its proper improvement, when the scene of amusement is forsaken. Much expense is uselessly incurred. This might be a small consideration, if the claims of justice and the calls of benevolence were not often left unanswered, to meet the demands of extravagance. But what is worse, evil affections are excited. The objects uniformly met with, in such places, are those naturally calculated to create vanity, to foster envy, and lead to animosity. Those who excel in ornament, or attention, are under a strong temptation to pride and vain glory. Those who are excelled, are equally tempted to envy, resentment, and calumny. In proportion as persons become vain of the accomplishments which secure admiration in such scenes, they are tempted to neglect the improvement of their minds, and the cultivation of their hearts.—Necessary attainments and important engagements become insipid and painful to those who crave this kind of excitement. When attraction of manners, or superficial embellishment, becomes a cover for want of intelligence or want of principle, no wonder that the ranks of dissipation should become crowded. The danger is, that the contagion will be imbibed, before it is perceived. It is a law of our nature, when pleased with society to partake of its spirit, and conform to its tone of feeling. The joy of social intercourse lays open the heart to the impressions communicated. The mind becomes unarmed to the approach of evil, when pleased with the objects with which it is connected. The dread of danger subsides, as familiarity with the dark features of vice increases. Thus, by the power of sympathy, which all feel who mingle to please and be pleased, this captivating amusement tends directly to assimilate the minds of those who crowd after its pleasures into one mould of sentiment and feeling, and this, unfortunately, with a stamp directly in opposition to the holy design and unchangeable requirements of the Word of God.

But consequences still more serious result from this practice.—It disqualifies the mind for the exercises of devotion. The Bible, as a lamp to the feet, will be laid aside. The closet, as it awakens painful reflections, will be forsaken. Meditation on God will be forgotten. Intercourse with the pious will be dreaded. The Holy Spirit will be resisted. Reason will be enlisted to defend what the heart is unwilling to forsake. When means of grace are thus resisted, the only source of help and hope is forsaken. Nothing is more easily acquired than a worldly spirit, and nothing serves more directly to prevent intercourse with God, and of course to destroy the very life of true religion. It requires all the watchfulness and energy of the Christian, under the most favorable circumstances, to curb its power. What, then, must be the peril of rushing into the very scenes where it abounds, and of engaging in the very employments which leads to its dominion? No Christian can safely appear where it leads to presumption to pray for the presence of God to shield him from temptation. Can that be right which he cannot ask God to bless to his edification or comfort? Who was ever known to prepare his mind for the ball-room, by humble supplication and reading of the Scriptures? Who was ever known to retire from such a place and to bless God for the exercises, and pray that they might rebound to his salvation? The reflecting mind becomes shocked by a supposition so wicked.

Upon all the rational enjoyments and lawful pursuits of life, we may ask the blessing of our Maker. But to rush into an element, from which vital freshness is uniformly excluded, is only to tamper with temptation and provoke His displeasure. To suppose that this practice is consistent with the vows and promises of Christians, is to mistake entirely the nature and design of true religion. It is not a system to screen our persons from punishment and leave our hearts wedded to iniquity. Neither is it a mere code to correct our understandings, without regulating our wills. But its great object is to purify the affections of those who embrace it; and in this way to make their conduct holy and their condition safe. It gives spiritual life to the soul. It imparts to the mind the love of God, and this overcomes the love of the world.—Nothing short of that holiness with which carnal enjoyment is incompatible, will meet the desires or secure the tranquility of the true Christian. Vain amusements will be renounced, as not only unfriendly to the peace, but unsuitable to the taste.

We are commanded to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; To keep the body under, and bring it in subjection; To redeem the time because the days are evil; To abstain from all appearance of evil; To watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation; And to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. And to enforce these divine injunctions, we are assured, by the same authority:—That whoever will be a friend to the world is the enemy of God; If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him; Ye cannot serve two masters; If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. The fact ought not to be concealed, that such improper compliance with worldly customs, instead of rendering religion more lovely, will only stain her purity and impair her strength. Worldly men may love to be kept in countenance by profession of religion, but they will despise the motives which lead them to dishonor their profession.

Instead of being drawn nearer to Christianity by such conformity to their course, they will be driven farther from it. They will conclude that there is no truth in religion, or if true, so low and powerless and changing a reality as deserves but little attention. In either case, the salvation of men will be hindered and the glory of the gospel tarnished.

Those who thus degrade religion, from the rightful authority, expose themselves to imminent danger. Their sincerity will be doubted, their consistency denied, their peace wounded, and their influence lost. The friendship of the ungodly can never be bought by imitating their follies. To pretend that this practice is sanctioned by any thing contained in the Word of God, is to manifest the most glaring ignorance of its meaning, or the most reckless contempt of its authority. In every instance in which dancing is presented to

our view in the Bible, it is in connection with true or idol worship, or as a vain amusement associated with impiety and destruction.—The declaration of Solomon, that there is, a *time to dance*, cannot be regarded as a *command*. Neither can it be a *permission*, for the discharge of what is necessary or morally right. In either case a neglect to dance would be a departure from Christian duty, which no serious mind can believe.

The meaning evidently is, that depraved as men are, and in a world of temptation, there is a time when they will dance, as there are times also in which they will hate, and make war, and kill, without justifying at all the feelings which lead to such things.

The following extracts from decisions of the Synod of North Carolina, and the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, will convince you, Dear Brethren, that we are not assuming new or untenable ground on this subject, but acting in accordance with the highest Judicatories of our Church:

The Synod of North-Carolina, at Poplar Tent Church, October 1820, decided as follows:—"Resolved, That in the opinion of this Synod, attendance on Balls, and other associations of a similar nature, ought to be considered and treated, as unsuitable amusements for Christians; and, as a further direction on this subject, it is hereby enjoined on Presbyterians, Church Sessions, and individuals, to govern themselves by the sentiments contained in a Pastoral Letter published by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1818; and also, by a resolution passed by the late Synod of the Carolinas, in 1789."

From the Pastoral Letter of the General Assembly above referred to, the following is an extract:

"With respect to dancing, we think it necessary to observe, that however plausible it may appear to some, it is perhaps not less dangerous on account of that plausibility. It is not from those things that the world acknowledges to be most wrong, that the greatest danger is to be apprehended to religion, especially as it relates to the young. When the practice is carried to its highest extremes, all will admit the consequences to be fatal; and why not, then, apprehend danger even from its incipient stage? It is certainly in all its stages a fascinating and intoxicating practice. Let it once be introduced and it is difficult to give it limits. It steals away our precious time, dissipates religious impressions, and hardens the heart. To guard you, beloved brethren, against its wiles and its fascinations, we earnestly recommend that you will consult the sobriety which the sacred pages require. We also trust that you will attend, with the meekness and docility becoming the Christian character, to the admonitions on this subject of those whom you have chosen to watch for your souls."

The Resolution of the Synod of the Carolinas, above referred to, is as follows:—"Overture—Whether those who practice dancing, revelling, horse-racing, and card-playing, are to be admitted to sealing ordinances?"

The Synod, taking into consideration these and other things of a similar tendency,

"Resolved that they are wrong, and that the practitioners of them, ought not to be admitted to sealing ordinances, until they be dealt with, by their spiritual rulers, in such manner as to them may appear most for the glory of God, their own good, and the good of the Church."

We call your attention, in the second place, to the neglect of Family Worship.

We have reason to believe that many families, within our bounds, who have professed to obey the commands and follow the example of Christ, and who have vowed, in the most solemn manner, to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, live in the habitual neglect of family prayer. There is an awful departure from the pious example of our forefathers on this subject. In many instances the children of praying parents have no marks of religion in their houses. Why, dear brethren, should a duty, in itself the most solemn and clothed with example of the wisest and best of men in every age, be wilfully neglected? Why should the privilege of having our wants supplied, our corruptions checked, our souls satisfied, and our happiness secured be spurned from our dwellings? Prayer to God, is not as some suppose, a distinct and solitary exercise, which may be neglected without interfering with other spiritual duties. It is the sacred bond which unites all the graces of the Christian life. It is the very exercise which brings the soul to rely upon God as the fountain of life. Without it, neither faith, love, joy, humility, repentance, or hope can flourish.—Without it, neither the temptations of the world, nor the snares of Satan can be properly resisted. While continuing to neglect it, we may wear the form of religion, but cannot cherish the spirit of devotion; we may be in connexion with the Church, but cannot live in connexion with God.

In addition to these considerations there are many special reasons in favour of our family prayer. God separates the human race into families, and one great design manifestly is for the preservation of religion.

He should, then, certainly be worshipped in those domestic circles which he has formed to bind men to himself and to each other. It is a first and becoming acknowledgement of his authority who is the author of all their blessings and the foundation of all their hopes. Nothing can constitute more directly to the order, submission, obedience, affection and confidence essential to the peace and prosperity of families, than the daily worship of God at the domestic altar. It lends with indescribable force to give reverence for proper authority, obedience to necessary commands, tenderness for the failings, and love to the persons of the different members of the household, and to land them together in the discharge of their relative duties. Family worship, properly conducted, with God's blessing, leads not only to the knowledge, but practice of religion. The great Baxton regarded it as one of the most powerful means in the conversion of men. The contempt shown to the worship of God in our habitations, is no doubt one source of the abounding iniquity in our country. Let religion die in families and no efforts or means can keep it alive in Churches. At home is the place to begin both in restraining vice and in cultivating piety. Those who are willing to forfeit the unspeakable advantages of this practice, should remember that a fearful penalty attends the neglect of it. That Holy God who bleaseth the habitation of the just, has declared that his curse is in the house of the wicked. Jeremiah makes no distinction between families without worship, and the heathen who knows not the Lord. Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know the not, and upon the families that call not upon thy name.

A great and good man has remarked, that a family without prayer, is like a house without a roof; exposed to every storm. The exposure here lamented is not to the rains that descend, or the winds which beat upon that house; but of the souls of the family to the wrath of the Almighty. Masters of families, who would so far neglect the suitable means as to leave their children and servants without bread to eat, and without raiment to wear, might well shudder at their cruelty. Can it be kindness to their souls not to seek for them the bread of Life, and the garments of Salvation? Can it be right to toil for their bodies and leave their immortal minds going down to the chambers of death?

The common plea urged by Heads of Families, that they have no time for this duty, is a mere delusion. What have they time to do, if not to worship their Maker and prepare for Heaven? What business on earth can be more important than the salvation of our souls? Christ says, *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God*. Out of twenty-four hours no family but can find time enough, morning and evening, to read God's Word and pray for his blessing.

Others plead their inability. This is only a cover for unwillingness to perform the duty. Those who cannot pray may soon learn. Let the heart be properly affected and out of its abundance the mouth will speak. Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God. If blessed with common sense, we can make known a sense of our wants to him who helpeth our infirmities and maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The third evil against which we wish to warn you, is the violation of the Holy Sabbath.

The Sabbath is not only a Divine Institution, but one which strikingly manifests the wisdom and goodness of God in providing for our happiness. To remove all doubt that the law of the Sabbath calls for obedience from all men, it was written by the finger of God among the *Ten Commandments*, the moral obligation of which will never be abolished. Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. It was intended to afford to men in all ages the opportunity of commemorating the perfections of God, engaging in his worship, and securing his friendship.

Amidst the cares and pleasures of the world, the great end of life would be overlooked, if some fixed portion of time were not set apart for the worship of Jehovah. The proper observance of the Sabbath evidently calls for a suspension of the common business of life, and the consecration of our time to the public and private exercises of religion. It cannot be overlooked, Dear Brethren, that this day is much profaned by many who have named the name of Christ. Professors of religion too often spend their time at home, and even at the church, in talking about the seasons, and crops, and markets, the news of neighborhoods, the political questions of the day, and the fashions and follies of their fellow-men. In too many instances they are seen commencing or prosecuting journeys, visiting for pleasure, reading books of amusement, writing letters of business, and even driving their waggons to or from market. Such conduct not only covers up the line of distinction between the church and the world, but prevents true worship, disqualifies for important duties, hinders the growth of piety, and defeats the great object of the Sabbath. When common business or amusements are suffered to make small encroachments on this sacred season it will be difficult, if not impossible, to stop or limit its profanation. Every violation of the Sabbath prepares the mind for others more gross, and multiplies temptations to continue the abuse. Few, perhaps, among the most abandoned Sabbath-breakers, will but confess that they entered the path of ruin by slow and hesitating steps.

Those who love their families, their country, and the Church, should watch and toil to preserve the purity of the Lord's day. It stands in immediate connexion with every thing we love as sacred or hope for as desirable. Without it God would be forsaken, his word slighted, his worship lost, the sound of salvation hushed, and the souls of men borne down together in wretchedness and ruin. We cannot conceive of any desolation over which evil spirits on earth and evil spirits below would raise a more piercing note of exultation, than the universal desecration of the Christian Sabbath. And we mourn to reflect how widely spread is that influence which members of the Church exert towards a catastrophe so much to be dreaded. When they trample upon this holy day, who will observe it a-right? When they openly violate its obligations, who will stand up to defend its claims?

If any thing valuable was to be gained by such a prostitution of this day to secular purposes, the pretext for it would be more plausible. But in this, as in every thing else, we believe strict and uncompromising obedience to the laws of God to be the most substantial prosperity.

The venerable Judge Hale, of England, after fifty years experience in public life made this declaration: "Whenever I have undertaken any secular business on the Lord's day, that business never prospered or succeeded well with me." He farther said "that always the more closely I applied myself to the duties of the Lord's day, the more happy and successful were my employments the week following." We intreat you, Dear Brethren, *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it Holy*.

P. J. SPARROW, Moderator.

SAMUEL WILLIAMSON, Stated Clerk.

From the Philadelphia.

NOT NOW CONVENIENT.

"It is not now convenient for me to attend to the subject of religion," says the sinner. Well, what if it is not convenient? Is that a good reason why it should be neglected, and the soul exposed to danger? Is nothing to be done on the subject of religion that involves inconvenience? What then does the Bible mean, in requiring self-denial as a condition of discipleship to Christ? "Deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow me," is the command of him who died to save men; that is, see to it that you overcome the inconveniences that lie between you and the religion of Christ. It is a settled point that you never can become a Christian conveniently; you must become a Christian, if ever, by overcoming the greatest inconveniences that you can contend with. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Away, then, with the convenient delusion, that has ruined the souls of thousands, and summon resolution and decision of character, and press into the kingdom of God. But, perhaps, you say, it is not convenient for me to attend to religion now, though being convinced of its importance and truth, I mean sometime to secure its benefits—its hopes—its consolations. My dear friend, you are reasoning in a manner that forebodes your ruin! If it is not convenient to attend to religion now, what evidence have you that it will be at any future time? It is as convenient for you to be a Christian now as ever it will be. We assure you that this is true, from the fact that religion demands self-denial, and is always inconvenient to the carnal unsanctified mind: and not only so, but we assure you that it is less inconvenient to become a Christian now than at any future time. The difficulties that now keep you away from Christ are constantly increasing, and the future convenient time to which you look forward, instead of being a reality, is a delusion, leading you into difficulties so great that you will not be able to break away from them. Wait a little longer, and all your hopes will be blasted for ever, as you look back to a world of mercy from that "lone land of deep despair," where the Spirit of God never enters, and the sound of redeeming mercy is never heard.

"Now is the accepted time"—"now is the day of salvation." And so says the Christian—it is not convenient for me, amid the demands of active, revised Christianity. Need I reason a moment with you to show that you, should be at once of a devoted and animated spirit, however inconvenient, while sinners around you are despising the grace of God and are ready to perish? What has there ever been accomplished in this world of sin and self-indulgence, for the advancement of religion and the honor of God, without meeting and overcoming difficulties and inconveniences? But suppose, disciple of Christ, that your Master, when the world's redemption was under consultation in heaven, had brought forward your plea—"It is not convenient for me to leave the worship of angels and the glories of now surround me, and go into that distant and insignificant world of rebellion, and there veil my Godhead in human clay, and be mocked, and despised, and put to death, after all my efforts to do the world a benefit."—what would now be your condition, if your plea of inconvenience had been preferred in heaven? The Savior came, though inconvenient, that you and I might be saved from sin and hell, and brought to imitate his example, from the possession of his Spirit, especially of self-denial. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his."

From the North Carolina Biblical Recorder.

WAKE FOREST INSTITUTE.

BROTHER MEREDITH: Taking it for granted that you would be pleased to learn some of the particulars of our operations here, I have taken it upon myself to give you a brief detail of our internal movements, and, I might say, eternal movements; for never was a set of fellows kept so constantly on the go. I will begin at the dawn of day, when the loud peals of the bell arouse us from our sweet repose. We are allowed about fifteen minute to dress ourselves and wash, when the bell summons us to prayers. At this second sound of the bell, the whole plantation seems alive with moving bodies; a stream of students is seen pouring in from every direction—some, while on the way, adjusting the deficiencies in their dress, which they had not time fully to arrange while in their rooms—some with vests wrong side out—some with eyes half open—and all in haste to reach the chapel in time to answer to their names. Prayers being over, just as the sun raises his head from behind the distant forest, the Virgil class, to which I belong, commences recitation. Other classes are reciting at the same time. At half past seven, the bell rings for breakfast; a few minutes after which, study hours commence. Every one is now kept at the top of his speed; some in reciting, and others preparing for recitation, until 12 o'clock, when the bell announces the dinner hour; and almost immediately after this we start on the same mental race. This is kept up through all the classes until three o'clock, when the bell rings long and loud for the toils of the field. While the bell is ringing, the students assemble in the grove before the dwelling house—some with axes, some with grubbing hoes, some with weeding hoes, and some empty-handed, all in thick crowd. You must now imagine that you see Mr. Wait in one place, Mr. Armstrong in another, and Mr. Dockery in another. Mr. Dockery, tho' a student, frequently takes the lead of one company. Now the roll is called, when, as their names are called off, the students take their appropriate stations around their respective leaders, axes with axes, hoes with hoes, and then we start, each one following his chief. Those with axes make for the woods, where they fell the sturdy oaks, and divide them into rails: the grubbers take the field, and sweat with heavy blows over the roots and shrubs that have been encroaching upon the clear land.—Those with weeding hoes find much variety in their employment; sometimes they cut down cornstalks, sometimes they rake up leaves, and now you may see them in the barn yard piling up manure. We students engage in every thing here, that an honest farmer is not ashamed to do. If we should draw back from any thing here that is called work, we should feel that we had disgraced ourselves.—Those who are empty-handed make up the fences, and harden their shoulders under heavy rails. The fact is, we are always busy—always ready for recitation, always ready for work. We are cheerful and happy—merry in a joke and hard to beat in a hearty laugh. We are sometimes tired when we quit work, but never so bad off that we cannot outstrip a common fellow when the supper bell rings. I am attached to the mauling corps, and know but little about the other companies. Mr. Wait leads out our company—when we reach the woods our coats are laid off, and we set to with a good will and hard blows. Our chief sets the example:—"Noc non Aeneas opera inter talia primis Hortatur socios, paribusque ascingitur armis."

Blistered hands we consider here as scars of honor, and we show them with as much pride as Marius exhibited his scars to the wondering multitude.—That you may form some idea of our execution, I will state, that two of our corps yesterday mauled one hundred and twenty-seven rails in two hours and a half, and that the fence corps led on by Mr. Armstrong, in two evenings, made a fence and staked it near a half a mile in length, and most of the rails were carried on the shoulders at least three hundred yards. You now see that we are not afraid of hard work. A little bell calls from the field—we enter the chapel for prayers, and immediately after take supper. We now have about half an hour for amusement, when the bell again calls to study. There is no place like Wake Forest at night. The stillness of the grave yard possesses the whole out door establishment. It is now night—the pale face moon is shining beautifully, and all without is absolute solitude,—save when a solitary student is heard winding his way with a pitcher in his hand to the well—soon again all is silence. O what a place for meditation!—how calm, how still—nothing but the gentle breeze stealing among the dead leaves as they hang upon the trees. But hark! there sound the deep notes of the bell,—'tis nine o'clock. Now listen—how soft and melodious are the tones of those flutes—how beautifully do they harmonize with those of the violin,—the sharp hissing sounds are from the Dulcino. Moon light and music!—but enough. There's no place like Wake Forest! Good night. G. W.

Consolation to a Sportsman.—A gentleman, who was a bad "shot," went out sporting one day with an Irish servant. He fired several times, but without bringing down a single bird. The Irishman, however, consoled him after this manner: (Shot the first)—"Och botheration, yer honor, did you see the little jintleman drop his leg as he went off? Sure and sure he'll never stand on his tin toes agin. (Shot)—There agin! by de powers! off they go, like a tief with Darby O'Carroll's pig; there they go! But didn't yer honor hear the shots rattle among them like paes aginst a winder!—Sure and they'll pray never to see yer honor agin on this side the country. (Shot)—Och, murder! They've caught it; blest if you didn't hit the wing of the old 'un, and you've frightened the rest into highstricks; divil a bit o' sheep they'll git this night. (Shot)—Ah! burn the pleasant, he's scaped it!—That feller'll carry away more shot than would set up an ironmonger at Ballyshannon. (Shot)—Murthuration! you've done it. No, bother the baist, he's taken to fly away agin. Never mind, sir, he'll wake to-morrow morning with a lumba-go in his saft head!"