

ACT of the ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY of Pennsylvania, for a PUBLIC FAST.

At Philadelphia, the seventh Day of November, one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four Years.

WHICH day and place, the Presbytery having seriously deliberated, on the alarming state of public affairs, the affecting condition of the present generation, and the manifold causes of the Lord's controversy with us, find it highly incumbent on us, and the people under our inspection, to essay fasting and humiliation; and agree that the following particulars be exhibited as reasons for this exercise.

The minds of mankind, are generally destitute of regular and abiding convictions of the existence, and perfections of God. Few consider in a practical manner, that there is a God who is infinitely holy and just, —as merciful and gracious, whose all-seeing eye observes the several transactions of the heart, equally as the open actions of the life; who weighs all his creatures and all their actions in unerring ballances; to whom we must give an account, and by whom we will be judged at the great day. Most people say in their hearts, *There is no God*, and of course behave as if they were lawless beings. *God is not in all their thoughts*, it is not their care to know him, as he has revealed himself in the word, nor is attention to the discoveries of his will, ever an object of their concern: The terror of his majesty as a revenging judge, and the riches of his grace as a great forgiver, are topics they will not permit to penetrate their consideration: Hence they are not impressed with obligations to duty, nor affected on the account of sin, nor do they contemplate in a solemn manner the important realities of the eternal world.

Divine Revelation is the object of peculiar disregard, and contempt. The heavenly original of the scriptures is discarded by many as a fiction, and the person who cordially believes it, is rarely to be met with. Few are sensible of the obligations which arise from those precepts which the *oracles of God* enforce, alarmed by the threatenings which they denounce on the impenitent, or allured by the demonstrations of infinite mercy which they exhibit to the view of all. The reading of the word, and meditation upon it are objects of general aversion. Some never consult it in secret, others do not read it in their families, not a few forget or are ashamed to carry it with them to public ordinances. Among the professors of religion, few are careful to submit to the determinations of the word as to what is their duty, but in this are under the influence of their own fancy. This sacred book is intollerably perverted, and egregiously misapplied to support erroneous and heretical principles, and even to defend, or at least to extenuate profane and irreligious behaviour. Many furnish themselves with jests out of the word of God; and profane its heavenly style, by their impious drollery. Though God, out of infinite kindness, has written to us *the great things of his law*, the most of us like Ephraim, reckon them *strange things*.

Ignorance of our holy religion greatly prevails. Multitudes are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Though

it is the privilege of professors that their lines are fallen to them in the valley of vision, yet spiritual darkness covers their minds. They resemble the *ostrich whom God hath deprived of wisdom*, and are like the horse and the mule *that have no understanding*. Means of knowledge abound, but few are concerned to improve them. Many who in point of religious profession are on the side of the *reformed*, are surprisngly ignorant of the principles which constitute that character, though they are clearly exhibited in the word of God, summed up in those excellent tests of orthodoxy, *viz.* our Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Directory for Worship, and Form of Presbyterian Church Government, sworn to in our Covenants national and solemn league, and witnessed for in the judicial act, declaration, and testimony. Yea, many are grossly ignorant of the leading truths of Christianity, and so have need of instruction in the very *first principles of the oracles of God*.

The *Gospel of Jesus Christ* is much despised. Though the revelation of a method of salvation be an invaluable blessing to a lost world, yet nothing is treated with greater disrespect. Sinners do not regard a gracious God, though in the gospel he addresses them with all the affection of a parent, invites them with all the kindness of a friend, beseeches them as if he was their inferior, and to give them the highest demonstration of his infinite concern for their welfare, promises and swears out of the abundance of his grace, that all happiness shall be theirs who believe in the name of his Son. Though the complete righteousness of *Inmanuel* is exhibited to sinners and eternal life through it is offered to them without distinction; though the fountain of atoning blood is opened, and a full indemnity is published to the guilty; yet the most part continue entirely unmoved, and freely indulge themselves in contemning the grace of God. Few put to their seal to the gospel record while numbers make the God of truth a liar, not believing it, for he that believeth not the record of God hath made him a liar. The salvation which the gospel brings near is despised, because it is a salvation from sin, which sinners do not incline to be delivered from. This despising of the glorious gospel is the chief reason of the Lord's righteous displeasure with us at this day.

The *Decay of Religion* is very observable. The power of godliness is found among few, and they who have experienced it, are in a great measure become unconcerned. This is a time in which not only the foolish virgins, but also the wise are generally asleep. Many professors are pleased with a mere form of religion, they have ease in their minds if they observe the externals of duty, not considering the necessity of having the heart seriously engaged therein. Very important duties are much omitted; secret prayer is entirely neglected by multitudes, others rarely practise it, and the most of those who observe it with punctuality are yet very careless performers. The omission of family worship is a very

very common sin among professors; they call their families together to eat and to drink, but never or seldom do they assemble them to shew forth the Lord's loving kindness in the morning, and his faithfulness before their repose in the night. The sin of neglecting family worship is the more highly aggravated, when persons have solemnly before God and his people engaged to perform it, and yet live in the neglect of it. Melancholy instances of such persons are too common. Private meetings for social worship and Christian conference are very unfrequent, yea, people generally seem to have peculiar aversion to them; though they are excellent means of propagating knowledge, and cherishing the vitals of religion; and where such meetings are erected, it is to be lamented that members do not give a serious and constant attendance. Public ordinances are much improved in a most affecting manner. It is the fashion of many to appear seldom in the house of God, the most trifling incident, and slightest indisposition will detain others from it; and the greatest part of them who do attend, do not conduct themselves as if they believed that they are in the presence of that God who will be *sanctified in all them that come nigh him, and before all the people he will be glorified*. Few join with their hearts in public prayers, or ever consider that such conduct is their indispensable duty. Many hear the word preached with inattention, irreverence and impatience, and they are rarely to be found who seriously reflect upon, or afterwards converse one with another, about the truths which were delivered in the name of the Lord Jesus. These are very little regarded, while the preachers address, and other circumstances are objects of critical attention. People are ordinarily very unsuitably exercised while the ordinance of baptism is administered. Many will gaze, on such an occasion, but few are thereby excited to remember the solemn obligations their baptism laid upon them, so as to reflect with sorrow and remorse upon their manifold violations of them; and are disposed to fly to the Lord Jesus for pardon and sanctification, the necessity of which is pointed out by a very lively symbol in that holy sacrament. Many live contentedly in the neglect of coming to the Lord's table, while others approach it with little solemnity. Many communicants are quite careless as to the previous duty of self-examination: While they partake of this holy ordinance, they do not consider as they ought, that the consecrated signs of Immanuel's body and blood are in their hands, and that unworthy communicating is a sin peculiarly aggravated. When the solemn action is over, they do not duly reflect on their conduct, nor are deeply concerned to demean themselves, in every part of their future deportment, consistent with their character, and the profession they made at the table of the Lord. Very few essay secret fasting and humiliation, though it is a duty the Lord has remarkably countenanced, to the unspeakable satisfaction of many who have been seriously engaged in it. And if this is the case with regard to individuals, it may be easily judged that this duty is generally omitted by families. It is affecting to consider how unmoved people generally are, on days appointed for public fasting. Few are concerned to behave on these occasions in a manner that is adapted to their real design;—inspecting

their hearts, surveying their deportment to find out their sins of omission and commission with their aggravations, and resolving in the strength of grace, to return to the Lord from whom they have deeply revolted. They are not many who with believing and contrite frames look upon him whom they have pierced and who improve the all-glorious atonement for pardon and sanctification. Hence it is that when the time is past, it cannot be known by the conversation of people that such a duty was essayed, so untender and unguarded are they.—Mutual love little prevails, professors are often at variance one with another, and engaged in quarrels and unnecessary law-suits, to the scandal of religion, and the offence of every serious thinker. Characters are not supported; especially ministers and inferior church officers are shockingly reviled; and that often by those who are under their immediate inspection. Many indulge themselves in defaming, backbiting, whispering, and tale-bearing, which inflame and detract all society, religious and civil. That zeal for the cause of Christ which is opposed to a neutral and a furious temper, is almost vanished. Private interest is preferred to the concerns of Zion. The doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the Lord's house, are in these degenerate times shoved aside with contempt. Relative duties are greatly superceded. Those who are in authority are influenced by too little integrity in taking their measures, and putting them in execution; and much undutifulness prevails among those whom providence has put in a state of subjection. It is to be feared that the greatest part of parents very much neglect their duty to their children: They do not after the example of faithful Abraham *command them to seek the good ways of the Lord, nor do they study to make them particularly acquainted with the principles of our holy religion, nor are careful to set a good example before them for their imitation, but while they provide for their temporal felicity, are entirely unsolicitous about their eternal welfare*. Little dutifulness to parents is found among children; many of them entirely disregard paternal authority, will not improve either by religious direction or example, but blindly follow the dictates of their own corruption, being resolved to break through all restraints. Some masters treat their slaves with great barbarity, and most are quite careless about their souls; if they get the drudgery of these poor heathens they care not whether their souls are saved or damned. Much undutifulness is found among servants; few of them demean themselves conscientiously; influenced by a sincere regard to the glory of God, and their masters interest. The religious duties which respect the conjugal state are very much neglected; husbands and wives are either entirely regardless of the spiritual welfare of each other, or too remiss to promote it, though they are among the nearest of moral relatives. Much untenderness obtains among ministers in these degenerate times: few of them are deeply solicitous to know experimentally the truths which they deliver to their people, and to essay the performance of all the duties which they inculcate on others: They are not impressed as they ought with the worth of immortal souls, the importance of eternal things, the weight of their office, their own insufficiency to act for the glory, and the certainty

tainty of their appearance before the tribunal of their great master, to give an account of their stewardship. People are too thoughtless of their ministers: They pray too little for them, and are not concerned as they ought to be, to receive the word at their mouth, not as the word of men, but as the word of God: And there are too many who do not endeavour to support their character and families.

Floods of gross Immoralities overflow. This is a time when open iniquity abounds in a most affecting manner. Swearing is a very fashionable abomination. The *glorious and dreadful name* of the Lord our God is shockingly profaned, by the unnecessary, irreverent, and blasphemous using of it; by the unhallowed appeal made to him in ordinary conversation; and by the terrible imprecations many load themselves and others with. Many being ashamed to swear as abandoned profligates, yet allow themselves to swear by heathen idols, men, faith, conscience, and have minced oaths familiarly in their mouths. The Lord's day is unaccountably disregarded: It is profaned by unnecessary journeying, carnal converse, diversions, sloth, prosecution of worldly business, and many other ways. Uncleanness makes a dreadful progress, and incentives to it are cherished with astonishing keenness, such as promiscuous dancing, vain and indecent apparel, lascivious gestures, books, pictures, songs, talk, and theatrical entertainments in our cities. Drunkenness is a very common vice: We have multiplied occasions of seeing people intoxicated to a degree that unfits them for the performance of any duty, makes them an easy prey to every temptation, and depresses them into a condition far below the brutal state. And many who are ~~assumed to be~~ found chargeable with such shameful abuses, indulge themselves in perpetual tipling, and greedily embrace opportunities of gratifying their intemperate lust. Open scoffing at every thing sacred and serious, fraud, gaming, injustice, oppression, theft, rapine, murder, and many other scenes of open wickedness in our land.

Erroneous Principles every where abound. There are many who will not give the divinity of the Lord Jesus a place in their creed. The imputation of Adam's first sin to his posterity, and the universal depravity of human nature, are discarded as fictions of designing men. The imputation of Immanuel's righteousness is plainly stated, or cunningly shoved aside, while the sufficiency of our natural powers to manage the business for eternity, is celebrated in the pulpit, defended in the press, and is too much admitted into the private house. The absolute necessity of regeneration in order to eternal happiness is ridiculed by many as whim, and the whole series of practical religion with which it is connected, is invidiously distinguished by the name of *Enthusiasm*. Some deny the morality of the Sabbath, and others err as to the day of observing it; while not the first day of the week, but the seventh is acknowledged to be holy time. They are to be found who deny the torments of the damned are eternal, and please themselves with the impious hopes of an universal redemption of devils and men. These provinces are crowded with those whose regard to the holy scriptures is only a piece of pretended respect, while the light within is cried up as the rule which they

walk by. The holy sacraments are denied also, and not a few who acknowledge them err as to the objects of their administration; while they are denied those, who by the word of God have a right to them, as baptism to the children of believing parents; or are dispensed to those who by the authority of Christ are excluded from them, as the openly wicked and profane. And they are also greatly profaned by mixing with them the inventions of men. The worship of God is greatly corrupted, by introducing into it superstitious and uncommanded rites, which are very dishonouring to him, and hurtful to the souls of men. The sacred office of the ministry, as a trust committed to men, regularly called and ordained, is vilified, while the impious intrusions of enthusiasts is celebrated as an institution of Jesus. The government of Christ's church is by some extended beyond scriptural limits, and it is confined by others within unscriptural boundaries. A latitudinarian scheme is generally adopted; by which the faithful exercise of ecclesiastical discipline is rendered impracticable, and men of corrupt minds are emboldened to propagate their errors as they please. The obligation of the solemn covenants of our native lands is denied, even by those from whom better things might have been expected; and great pains are taken to persuade people that their consciences are quite free from these sacred ties. Declension from the reformation attained to in former times, is accounted unsuitable matter for a public testimony in the present. Some acted by injudicious zeal for our glorious reformation, have run into the pernicious extreme of casting off the present civil government;—*despising dominion, and speaking evil of dignities.*

Spiritual Judgments which are the ordinary prefaces of temporal calamities are very common. Blindness of mind, fearfulness of conscience, hardness of heart, and vile affections, and strong delusions abound. The Lord frowns on the churches, and has divided them in the day of his anger. Many of his servants and people maintain mutual variance and opposition, and few lament these melancholy distractions. Ordinances are greatly discountenanced by our offended God: we have provoked him to deny his presence, and to suspend the influences of his grace. The times of holy services are very seldom in our days, times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Few consciences are awakened, and instances of conversion are very rare. Among those who apprehend they are converted, too many evidence by their temper and conduct that they are deceiving themselves. Spiritual indisposition is universal. Professors are generally secure, though the Lord is evidently threatening to come out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity. A black cloud at present hangs over the British empire. Our native lands and the American colonies, whose interests are inseparably connected, are likely to become a mutual scourge to each other.

All ranks have offended. The throne is guilty, aggravated sin may be found in the palace as well as in the cottage: The overturning of our glorious reformation, and the barbarity exercised against the people of God, by the two last kings of the family of Stewart, who raised the royal prerogative above all law, and made their dominions groan under the yoke of tyrann-

ny, have never been duly confessed and lamented; on which account the throne is unpurged to this day. It is to be lamented that encroachments are made on the liberties of mankind by such as should maintain them inviolably. *The foundations of the earth are gone out of their course.* That Antichristian superstition which murdered our religious progenitors, is not only countenanced in many parts of the British dominions, but now has the sanction of king and parliament, by an establishment in Canada. No proper endeavours are used to reform our armies and navies, who on account of the great wickedness that prevails among them, are in a manner associations against God. Few great men are religious: too many of them think that religion is below them; they do not make it the object of their study, nor are concerned that it flourish in their families. It is to be lamented that too many vested with the office of magistracy, are not terrors to evil doers, but commit those vices which they are bound by their office to suppress.

None of us are innocent. *We even we have sinned with our fathers, and have done wickedly. With us even with us, are to be found sins against the holy One of Israel.* We are actually guilty of many of the sins above mentioned, and such as we are not directly chargeable with, have not been duly lamented for by us. Indifference and lukewarmness greatly prevails; and under the covert of a profession, too many conceal irreligion. Few are concerned to make themselves acquainted with that testimony which they have solemnly espoused, or endeavour to act a part becoming their witnessing profession. A sad decay of zeal for the cause of God, and love to one another seems to prevail. Little tenderness of conscience and circumspection in practice appear. The secret duties of religion are much neglected, and many who observe them are quite formal and superficial. Many are buried in worldly-mindedness, which is very prejudicial to vital religion. Few of us are concerned to receive the Lord Jesus into our hearts, and to improve his word and ordinances; yea, some have fallen into gross acts of wickedness. Our practice in many respects does not keep pace with our profession, and thus we make the way of the Lord to be evil spoken of: While we profess adherence to our solemn covenants, we are not duly concerned to prosecute the design of them. We testify against the sins of others; but are too heedless of our own. Very little of a heavenly favour is to be found about our words and actions: And conformity to the world is more affected than conformity to Jesus Christ. Should the Lord mark iniquity against us, none of us could stand. We have reason as well as others to cry out with the lepers, *Unclean, unclean.* Justly may we roll ourselves in the dust, and with the deepest humiliation, say to God, *We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.*

For all these and many other obvious causes, particularly specified in the judicial act, declaration and testimony in the acknowledgment of sins prefixed to the bond for renewing our solemn covenants, and in former acts

for fasting passed by this presbytery. The presbytery do hereby earnestly call beseech and obtest all under their inspection to humble themselves deeply before the Lord, and to afflict their souls by fasting.—Praying with the eye of faith fixed on our glorious Redeemer, and the gracious promises of forgiveness, that the Lord would turn again, heal our backslidings, subdue our iniquities, and cast all our sins into the deeps of the sea, that he would remove the causes of his righteous controversy with us, and be pacified towards us, for all that we have done; that he would open the eyes of all ranks in our native lands, and in these provinces, to see the evil of their ways, and return again to himself, from whom they have deeply revolted; that he would raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen, close up the breaches thereof, raise up its ruins, and build it as in the days of old; that he would revive a covenanted work of Reformation, and check the progress of error, delusion, and immorality; that he would sanctify the peculiar dispensations of judgment and mercy to these colonies, and make them happy occasions of exciting people to consider and reform their way; that he would graciously bless the administration of gospel ordinances, whether more ordinary or more solemn, giving testimony to the word of his grace, and filling his house with glory; that he would bless the associate synod, and inferior judicatories subordinate thereto, and particularly this presbytery; countenancing and prospering his work among our hands, and leading us in a plain path, because of observers; that he would graciously bless our sovereign king George, the queen, the apparent heir to the crown, and all the branches of the royal family; that he would grant wisdom to his majesty and his counsellors, to manage in the present critical juncture of affairs; that he would remove the unhappy misunderstanding that presently takes place between Great-Britain and her colonies, and overrule the present confusions for advancing the interests of religion and true liberty; that he would hasten the overthrow of Mahometan delusion, with the final destruction of Antichrist, and bring in the Jews with the fulness of the Gentiles; that he would spirit up many to espouse the cause of truth, and animate the zeal of such as have already embarked in it; that he would provide for the many desolate corners of his vineyard, and bless the occasional waterings which they receive.

The presbytery appoint, that Thursday the 16th of March 1775. be accordingly observed as a day of solemn fasting, and humiliation, and prayer, in all the congregations and vacant communities under their inspection; and that this their act be duly intimated by the several ministers belonging to this presbytery, and by our probationers in the vacancies where they then are, the Sabbath day immediately preceding; with suitable exhortations.

Extracted by

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