

Rev. Amos A. Mullen, Pres.
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PASTORAL LETTER

This Pastoral Letter To Amos A.

TO THE

Plant, Allen Parkers House.

SIXTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In May AND *1837*

CONGREGATION

OF

PHILADELPHIA.

BY THEIR PASTOR, REV. S. G. WINCHESTER.



PHILADELPHIA:

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PASTORAL LETTER,

*To the Sixth Presbyterian Church and Congregation of
Philadelphia.*

"Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN: While wandering in these remote regions from the people of my charge, and often remembering you in my prayers and meditations, I have felt constrained by my anxiety in your behalf, and my ardent desire for your spiritual prosperity and happiness, to address to you a word of exhortation and counsel; believing that it will be received as from a servant of the Lord, however unworthy and unprofitable he may be.

Time and distance, instead of weakening the ties that bind us together as pastor and people, have but served to strengthen them; and absence, instead of begetting indifference to your well-being, has augmented my concern for you, and filled my mouth with arguments, in pleading your cause before the Hearer of prayer. My heart's desire and prayer to God is, that you may be blessed with all spiritual blessings in Heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and at last saved with an everlasting salvation. On the return of each Sabbath day, and of those evenings in the week, when you are accustomed to convene for worship, I delight to transport myself, in imagination, into the midst of your assemblies, that I may be with you in spirit, though absent in body. Our God is a God afar off as well as a God at hand, and at the same mercy-seat we bow our spirits, and unite our vows and supplications,

"like mingling flames in sacrifice." If I know my own heart, I have no higher joy than to see my beloved flock walking in the order and peace of the Gospel, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, by a holy and becoming conversation.

1. My first counsel, therefore, is, that as ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him. Walk worthy of your high vocation. Walk with God as did Enoch and Noah of old. Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of them are the issues of life. Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. If the good work has indeed been begun within you, guard and foster the germ of piety, protecting it from the chilling influence of a cold and wicked world, as you would the tenderest plant, from the blighting frosts of winter. Feed and guard the flame of undying life, as the vestal virgins cherished the sacred fire of their heathen temple, or as you would defend the flickering lamp, even from the gentlest breeze, if death were the consequence of its extinguishment. Stay not to parley with temptation, but resist it with the sword of the spirit, and you have the promise that the tempter will flee from you. Regard not with indifference, nor without alarm, the first risings or emotions of sin in the heart, but crush it in the bud, and "pray that the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Be jealous of your hearts. You know, from experience, that you cannot safely trust them: much of the remains of inbred sin still lurk within them. Always remember that you *can* backslide, and always fear lest you *may*. Say not with Peter, "I never *will* forsake the Lord," but pray that you never *may*. Next to the loss of your own souls, dread to be the occasion of the destruction of others. As professors of religion, you are in one respect the representatives of Christ. You are held up as specimens of Christian character. You are in religion, what experiments are in natural science. In the Bible, we have the theory of religion: in the Church, we are to look for its exemplification. You bear the name, and profess the spirit of

Christ. If, then, you fall, you fall not alone. How often has Christ been wounded in the house of his friends, and how many sinners have been ruined by the misconduct of professors! Weak Christians are induced to erect for themselves a low standard of piety, and often hindered from attaining even to one still lower. The anxious have become indifferent and at ease in sin. The careless have been hardened in iniquity, and the obdurate have become scoffers. Brethren! see to it, that ye be not thus guilty. Walk together in peace, and love one another with pure hearts fervently. "Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." I beseech you to walk "with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Then shall all men take knowledge of you that you have been with Christ. Then shall the mouths of wicked men be stopt, and they be constrained to glorify our Father who is in Heaven.

2. Another counsel which I would offer is, cultivate the spirit of prayer, in the closet, in the family, and in public worship. Prayer is the christian's breath: "restraining prayer, we cease to fight." It may be laid down as a general rule that spiritual declension commences in the closet. The new convert may run well for a season; but unless the spirit of secret devotion be cherished and maintained, as the very vitality of religion, he will soon become infected with the benumbing influence of the world, ensnared by temptation, and led captive by his passions and appetites, and then have scarcely any thing left, but the form of godliness, and a name to live. The first surrender to the world and to the flesh, of the claims of religion, will be that of habitual secret prayer. But this will not be a formal and immediate dereliction of duty. This would be a resistance to conscience and to a sense of duty, too sudden and too violent, to be endured with any peace of mind. But the duty begins to be carelessly performed, and being regarded

as an irksome task, it is irreverently hurried over, leaving only the burden of a form. Then it begins to be irregularly performed, and neglected with an increasing frequency, until it is omitted altogether. Remember that your strength to resist temptation is diminished in proportion as you yield to it; and one omission of duty prepares the way, and renders fearfully certain, an hundred more. You must narrowly watch, and prayerfully guard against the first encroachments of the world upon your hearts, and steadfastly resist the first temptation, however slight, or however artfully disguised it may be. If, then, you would not become formalists in religion, and backsliders from God, habitually, conscientiously, and devoutly observe the duty of stated secret prayer, accompanied with serious meditation, and a diligent study of God's word.

As professors of religion, you are supposed, as a matter of course, to attend to the duty of family devotion. If any of you neglect this habitually, you have backslidden much farther than he who has merely given up secret prayer, and still prays in his family: for I presume that it seldom or never is the case, that he who neglects family devotion, does at the same time habitually pray in secret. But the omission of either of these duties naturally tends to the neglect of the other, and the omission of one is generally the consequence of the omission of the other. If you have forsaken your closet, it will not be long before you abandon the domestic altar. And this will be done by degrees, and just as soon as you can succeed in framing such excuses and palliations, as will satisfy a slumbering, if not seared conscience. A careless and irregular attendance upon the weekly social prayer meetings, will be the next sign of your downward course. These will no longer afford you pleasure, and your presence will seldom add to the number of the "little flock," who turn aside for an hour, from the business of the world, to praise and supplicate the God of grace. The public sanctuary, and the sacredness of the sabbath will next begin to lose their charms for you. From other motives you may continue outwardly to observe these public ordinances, but that observance will be heartless

and unprofitable. The world will have taken possession of your hearts, and become enthroned where grace should reign without a rival. Thus you will become the real slaves of the one, while you are the professed subjects of the other. Dearly beloved brethren, when judging of yourselves by these marks of a backsliding course, do your hearts condemn you? or have you confidence towards God, that you have not so learned Christ, but that you are still kept by his mighty power, through faith in the blood of his son, and in the promises of his word? Are you making progress in the divine life? Do you, forgetting those things which are behind, press towards the mark for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? If indeed you are his, you assuredly have his spirit, and he is ever praying, and interceding for you, in the holy of holies not made with hands; and can you be silent and restrain prayer before him? Are not the motives derived from his life, from his death, from his mediatorial work, and from your own necessities, sufficiently powerful to urge you to the cross? Is not each insult, each pain, each wound, each groan of the Saviour, adequate to persuade you to duty, and to shame and reprove your neglect of it? Let the love of Christ constrain you, and no longer tarry by the way, but press onward in the path of life. Pray without ceasing. Be instant in season and out of season. By the way and by the fireside, as well as in secret, and in the social circle. Pray against temptation, pray while tempted, and pray after you are delivered from it. Pray before worship, that your hearts may be prepared for the solemn service. Pray during worship, that your thoughts and affections may be properly directed and immoveably fixed. Pray after worship that you may derive profit from it, and that the good seed may take root and bring forth fruit an hundred fold, to the glory of God. In a word—"Put on the whole armour of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto, with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel." Yes,

brethren, pray for me; I need your prayers. Through the mercy of God, I hope to be again in your midst, with renovated strength of body. My disease, I trust, is gradually disappearing. But Christ is the great Physician, without whose blessing, all means are ineffectual. I beseech you to remember me in your daily supplications, that, in due time, I may be restored to you in health, prepared for duty, and laden with the rich experience of his goodness.

In all your supplications remember Zion. Let the language of your heart be, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy." The church needs your prayers, from the weakest believer up to the most established saint,—all need your intercessions.

Forget not the impenitent, in your approaches to a throne of grace. The spirit of God alone can convert and save them; and this is given in answer to prayer. Remember what Christ has done for you, and be unwearied in your efforts to bring others to the knowledge of the same Saviour. If any part of your conduct has been such as to render the impenitent careless, or to harden them in sin, how powerful is the motive which should lead you to pray for them! This injurious effect may have been produced on sinners, without its ever having come to your knowledge; and that very conduct which you suppose to be known only to yourself, may have been the occasion of it. At all events, you are liable thus to be the means of injuring others. Oh! let this consideration urge you to bear up unceasingly to the mercy-seat, on the arms of your faith, however feeble, those around you, who are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity.

3. My third counsel is, maintain and cultivate an habitual sense of your entire dependence on God. This will beget humbling views of yourselves, and tend to inspire exalted conceptions of your Maker and Benefactor. It will make you jealous of yourselves, and destroy all confidence in the flesh. In moments of doubt or despair, it will suggest to you the only and

all-sufficient source of help and deliverance. 'In days of darkness, it will point you to the light of life. In times of perplexity and embarrassment, it will lead you to your great Teacher and Counsellor—the source of all wisdom and knowledge. And when afflicted or distressed, it will bring to your remembrance the consolations of the gospel, and remind you of the promises of Him who wept with Mary at the grave of Lazarus. For we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for He was tempted like as we are, yet without sin. A sense of need and dependence will encourage a spirit of prayer. It will repress the risings of spiritual pride, and cause him who thinketh he standeth, to take heed lest he fall. Let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord, for without Him ye can do nothing. A devout and humble sense of dependence honours God, by acknowledging our helplessness and unworthiness, and our consequent necessity of his grace and help. It leads us to ascribe all praise and glory and thanksgiving unto Him, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever. It rebukes that spirit which prompts us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think; and teaches us to think soberly, and to demean ourselves accordingly. But lest I should swell this letter beyond due bounds, I hasten to the remaining counsel, which is,

4. Receive not the grace of God in vain. If you are the subjects of this grace, let it be manifest to all around you; Hide not your talent, nor conceal your light under a bushel. Let it not be in vain to the church and to the world, that you are the children of grace, by inactivity and slothfulness, but be diligent, zealous and prompt in your master's service. Be not content to live in the church as an isolated being, possessing the secret of eternal life, and refusing to reveal to those who are sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death. Be not satisfied with your own salvation merely, but labour to bring others into the ark of safety. Let your Christianity be seen and felt by others, as well as enjoyed by yourself. Go not to Heaven alone, but endeavour to be the means of bringing others there. Covet not only a crown of rejoicing but also a galaxy of stars to adorn it.

Receive not the countless favours of God's providence and grace, without suitable returns of gratitude, and corresponding exercises of penitence and contrition. Receive not the unnumbered mercies of Jehovah without a prompt and faithful improvement of them. You are blessed with the means of grace. You enjoy the stated preaching of the gospel, and the administration of the holy ordinances of God's house. You have a tabernacle dedicated to the True Jehovah, wherein you may sit under your own vine and fig-tree, with none to molest, or make afraid. You have the word of God as a lamp to your feet, and a light to your path. You enjoy the rights of conscience, of property, and of personal prerogative, the invariable concomitants of liberty and equal laws. Receive not these favours in vain, and to no profit. Correctly value, and diligently improve them. But beware of abusing them, and turning the grace of God into licentiousness, by using your liberty for an occasion to the flesh, either for the purpose of gratifying curiosity, or of encouraging a love of novelty and variety. I trust you have not forgotten my parting counsel on this subject, delivered when about to leave you for a season. Let me entreat you again, with affectionate sincerity, to be always found in your proper places, both on the Sabbath, and at the weekly social meetings for divine service. This, dear brethren, is my earnest request. By complying with it, you will encourage the hearts and strengthen the hands of those whom the Lord has placed over you in spiritual authority, and whom he has made your servants for Christ's sake: and you will set an example worthy of imitation, and enjoy more fully the ordinances on which you wait. But if this counsel be disregarded, you can neither foresee nor calculate the evil consequences that may flow from it both as it regards yourselves and others: for it may be safely affirmed that by pursuing the course against which I would affectionately caution you, you will seldom, if ever, secure spiritual good for yourselves, and you will unquestionably injure others, by exerting over them the influence of an unwholesome example. As God is a God of order, He and his blessing are most

likely to be found, where his providence and your own choice have made it your duty to be present, for his public worship. And when tempted to absent yourselves, or to change, for the occasion, your place of worship, remember the admonition which Jonathan gave to David, "thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty." (1 Saml. xx. 18.) Besides, the habit of wandering from church to church, as if we had no fixed abode, and of gratifying a desire to hear a variety of preachers, whether driven by prejudice from the one, or drawn by curiosity to the other, always has a tendency to beget a captious spirit. It gives to the world an occasion for gain-saying, and to the church an occasion of mourning or of stumbling, according as your influence and standing are inconsiderable or otherwise. In the judgment both of the world and of the church, it either reflects unfavourably upon your own character for discretion and discernment, or throws suspicion upon the character and ministrations of him on whom you turn your backs. Such a habit engenders dissatisfaction, and unfits the mind and heart to derive much good from the accustomed ministrations of your regular pastor. Brethren! I suggest these thoughts with a heart burdened with anxieties and desires for your spiritual prosperity and happiness. I dread the existence of any sin, especially the practice of a known evil, and the indulgence of a pernicious habit, by the people of my charge, because it is contrary to the gospel of Christ, grieves the Holy Spirit, and tends to mar his blessed work upon their hearts. Suffer me, therefore, to exhort you to take heed both *how* ye hear and what ye hear, that in nothing ye may give offence, either to God or man. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

I cannot conclude this letter without addressing something to those who have, as yet, no interest in the justifying righteousness of our Redeemer.

Dearly beloved friends, your case weighs heavily upon my heart. I cease not to remember you in my prayers to Him who died for sinners, and who promises to cast out none that come unto Him. Your great danger of everlasting destruction awakens my warmest sympathies, and excites in my bosom the deepest concern for your safety: the more so, in your behalf, because the warnings and instruction which you have so often heard from my lips, must be to you either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. If the latter, my own ministrations will rise up in judgment against you, if they have been faithful, and against myself, if they have been otherwise. This circumstance creates a peculiar and affecting relationship between us. You know, and our common Judge is the witness, that I have long and often warned you of your danger; declared to you your real situation and guilt, and exhorted you to fly from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on the hope set before you in the gospel. Constantly have I taken your case before God, and plead for your salvation. Often have I sighed and mourned over your continued impenitence, and exclaimed, "Who hath believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" But you are still in your sins: perhaps less inclined than ever to consider your ways and turn unto God. It may be, that whereas the Gospel once affected you in some degree to serious thoughtfulness, it is now heard with increasing indifference, and regarded as a tale that is told. Your sins have multiplied with the days you have numbered. Your guilt has accumulated with the opportunities you have misimproved, and with the offers of mercy you have rejected; while, at the same time, these opportunities are diminishing in number, and you becoming less and less disposed to embrace them. While in a state of alienation from God, each rising sun that calls you from repose to your daily avocation, and each of the countless mercies that are strewed in your path, without af-

fecting your hearts, bring with them, through your neglect and delay, additional hindrances to the work of turning unto God, and additional responsibility to Him who lengthens out your days, and crowns them with his favours. How awfully solemn and critical is your situation! Once more, dear friends, though far distant from you, I point you to the Saviour. Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. His blood cleanseth from all sin. It is a faithful saying, and worthy of your acceptance and belief, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the very chief of sinners. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Yes, my friends, we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are all guilty, and need his atonement to redeem us, and his righteousness to justify us. Christ hath borne our sins in his own body on the tree. He was made a curse for us, that he might redeem them that were under the curse. You are all under the curse, for cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the Law to do them. Who of you can plead innocence in the matter of the divine commandment? Who of you can plead guiltless to the charge of repeated transgressions? Yet it is written "he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all." If you could be justified by your own innocence, or your own obedience, then had not Christ died. His death would have been an unnecessary and unmeaning infliction of the severest sufferings. But there is no other name under heaven, given among men whereby you can be saved, but the name of Christ. There remaineth no other sacrifice, if his be rejected. Come, then, I entreat you, to this all-sufficient Saviour. Come unto him all ye that are weary of the yoke of sin, and heavily laden with its burden, and ye shall find rest. Take upon you the yoke of Christ, for it is easy, and his burden, for it is light. The way of transgressors is hard; and there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. But wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness,

and all her paths are peace. In Christ you shall have joy and peace, and at his right hand there are pleasures for ever more. Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to these waters of life. Come freely—without money and without price. The Spirit and the Bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and whosoever will, let him come and take of the waters of life freely. Come as you are. Delay not till a more convenient season, for now is the accepted time and the day of Salvation. Do not idly dream of future fitness, no such fitness is required, no such fitness is attainable. "All the fitness he requireth, is to feel your need of him." Him that cometh unto me, says Christ, I will in no wise cast out. Here is both your warrant and your encouragement to come. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Oh! let me urge you by the mercies of God, by his long suffering and patience, by his warnings and providential visitations, and by the sufferings and death of Christ, let me urge you to hasten to the cross without delay, and there by faith receive Jesus Christ as your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, and your redemption.

To such as may be under serious convictions of guilt, and anxiously inquiring what they must do to be saved, let me say—Escape for thy life, and tarry not in all the plain. Death and destruction are close upon you. Decide at once for Christ, and no longer halt between two opinions. If the Lord be God, serve him and enter upon his service at once. Close in with the overtures of peace without delay. Seize the golden opportunity while it is within your reach, for now is to you emphatically the accepted time, now is the day of your salvation. Fly from temptation as you would from Hell itself. Rest not in convictions. Rely not upon your tears or your prayers. Stop not short of an entire surrender of your heart to God, and of a cordial turning unto Him. Grieve not the Holy Spirit, either by stifling his convictions, or doubting his declarations. Harbour no misgivings as to the willingness of Christ to receive and save you. Hesitate not to expect a welcome to his bosom. He who *invites* and *commands* you to

come, will neither reprove you for presumption, nor reject you, for unfitness. That I may not exhaust your patience, by the outpourings of a heart filled with concern, and distressed by fears for your safety, let me earnestly entreat you, one and all, to read with prayerful attention, "James' anxious Enquirer," a work to be found in most of the book-stores.

To the youth of my charge, whether careless or thoughtful, let me say a concluding word. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." Your age, and the circumstances in which you are placed, invest you with an interest more easily felt than described. You are the subjects of many hopes and fears, and the objects of as many prayers. The most of you, early trained in the Sabbath-school, have not altogether lost the impressions which you received from your teachers, and from the exercises of the school. Frequently are these impressions awakened and renewed by the preaching of the Gospel. The world and the flesh combine to efface them, and to draw away your minds from the consideration of those things which make for your eternal peace: and unless you are watchful and prayerful, they will be but too successful. Youth is the season of susceptibility. The enemy of your souls, aware of this, strives to make false and ruinous impressions on your hearts and minds. Your Christian friends, aware of this truth also, labour by prayer and instruction, with exhortation and reproof, to make such impressions as may issue in the salvation of your undying souls. Which of these antagonist parties will you encourage and assist? Whom will you favour with your regards, the friend or the destroyer of your souls? It cannot be denied that your age renders you at present more susceptible of serious impressions, than you will be at any future period; and it is equally true that the circumstances in which you are placed are more favourable to the reception and cherishing of such impressions, than any in which you are likely hereafter to be placed. The present is your auspicious moment. Seize the opportunity before it be forever lost, and before the hopes entertained by the church and by friends, be buried with your own soul, in irretrievable

ruin. Be not deceived by the vain show of the world, nor allured by its promises of pleasure or gain. What will it profit you, if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul? You cannot serve two masters. If you love the world and seek after its vanities, you cannot serve God and promote his cause: for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and, all these things shall be added unto you: for Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of the life that is to come. Let me entreat you, as you value your souls, and dread their destruction, at once to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me urge you by the prayers and tears of anxious parents and beloved friends—some of whom have gone to their reward, while others still linger on the earth to counsel and persuade you with prayer and supplication for your salvation. Let me urge you by the solicitude and intercessions of the church, by the snares which surround your paths, and the dangers which threaten you on every side, by the shortness and uncertainty of life, and the hasty coming of death and retribution, by the agony and bloody sweat, by the death and burial, and by the glorious resurrection and ascension of our Redeemer, by each and every consideration, let me urge you to accept without delay, the gracious offer of pardon and salvation, through the atoning blood of the cross.

“Finally, brethren, farewell! Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind; live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever—Amen!”

So prays your affectionate pastor,

and unworthy servant in the Lord,

28 JAN 1858 S. G. WINCHESTER.

TUSCUMBIA, Alabama, Jan. 18, 1837.

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Permanency of the Pastoral Relation.

BY J. AMBROSE WIGHT.

